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Developing Countries and Challenges of Reviving Reading Culture in an ICT-Dominated Society: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

Education, no doubt, is the backbone of developed countries and there is no sustainable education without reading culture. This paper examines the present situation of the Nigerian nation as it relates to reading culture. The highlights of the paper are: the attributes of a technologically dominated society, the need for reviving reading culture, challenges associated with reviving reading culture in a technologically dominated society where the child of today prefers being on the social media to reading books. The paper identified the negative influence of technological facilities on the reading habits of the Nigerian child who is believed to be the hope of tomorrow. The paper argues that effort must be made by the various stakeholders in the educational sectors (parent, teachers and librarians) The conclusion drawn is that reviving the reading habits of the Nigerian child is a worthwhile investment in sustaining the future of this nation, hence this paper discusses the challenges of reviving reading culture in an technologically dominated society, recommendations were made in line with the identified challenges which include that stakeholders should strategize on how to draw the Nigerian child closer to the book if we are to safeguard the future of Nigeria.

Keywords: Reading Culture, ICT, Nigerian child, librarians

1.1 Introduction

Education has been acclaimed as the basis for rapid national development and reading is one of the platforms for sustainable educational advancement. The issues and implications of poor reading culture has become a serious concern to the various stakeholders in the educational sector, especially in this digital era where ICT has permeated every sector of human endeavour. The ability to read is at the heart of self education and lifelong learning (Tella and

Akande, 2007). Reading is essential to full participation in modern society as it adds quality to life, provides access to culture and cultural heritage, empowers and emancipates changes as well as bring people together (Igwe, 2011). In the vast technological advanced global village confronting man, reading remains the most relevant skills to unravel all the advances made by man and the promotion of reading culture has become very important for any society in the 21st century, especially the children who are the future

leaders of any nation. Reading culture is a kind of culture that imbibes reading and studying as the basis for growth and development (Udosen, 2011; Aliyu and Bilikisu, 2012).

Reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built and it offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary, word power, and language skills. It is a complex channel of communication which involves an interaction between the encoder and decoder (writer and reader) (Habibu and Oji, 2011; Adekola, 2012). It involves series of systems like eye to eye movement, training, moving along with hands while reading. Reading is an act which provides a human being with the foundation upon which to erect his or her understanding of life as well as the elements with which to build his or her world view. (Akanda, Eamin, Hoq and Hasan, 2013). Evidences abounds that the vocabulary and command of English language of students who read are different from those that do not read. Reading is recognized as a tool for acquiring knowledge, language, communicating, and sharing of information including ideas (Ilogho, 2015).

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Reading, to Ogugua, Emerole, Egwim, Anyanwu and Haco-Obasi (2015) is a unique human activity that is characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reader. It is the foundation of much of the enjoyment the individual gets in life and is closely related to vocational efficiency (Aina, Okusaga, Taiwo and Ogundipe, 2011). Akindele (2012) defines reading as a basic type of skill which is the cornerstone for a child's success in school, and indeed throughout life because without the ability to read properly, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will inevitably be lost. Reading is one of the language skills and a pivot for meaningful

development (Udosen, 2011). Reading is a crucial learner-activity in the learning process (Anyachebelu, Anyamene and Adebola, 2011). Reading to Otike (2011) is important because it empowers and emancipates citizens, it brings people together. Also, for reading to become a culture, the possession of the right skills that makes it possible is a necessity.

Reading culture on the other and refers to an act of reading both textual and non-textual materials for the purpose of broadening one's horizon both in one's chosen field and outside. Reading culture or habit describes a regular engagement in the act of reading on a continuous basis and it is an addition to read with provable, positive effects on addicts (Ilogho, 2015). Igwe (2011) sees reading culture as a kind of culture that imbibes reading and studying as the basis of growth and development. Aliyu and Bilikisu (2012) views reading culture as the cultivation of an attitude and possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and constant activity. From the above concepts, it is clear that reading culture is not an act; it is not just a passive attitude, it is an act that is practice over time which developed to positive attitude.

2.2 The State of Reading in Nigeria

The poor state of reading amongst Nigerian students is overwhelming. The society is being over-run by technological influences, it is hard to see the number of children in Nigerian that are not on the social network. The state of reading in Nigeria today is nothing to write home about. According to Adekola (2012), the reading level is very low in spite of the increasing volumes of materials that surface everyday begging for reading and comprehension. Nigeria according to Aina, Okusaga, Taiwo and Ogundipe (2011) cannot be regarded as a reading nation because the younger generation of Nigerians does not consider reading as leisure activity. Fasipe

(2012) deem its right to say that the reading culture is basically dead in Nigeria as most people are not interested in embarking on any activity that has no corresponding financial gain. Kolawole (2009) in his study of the state of reading in selected secondary schools in Oyo state concluded that nothing has changed significantly at the secondary school level in the state as far as reading is concerned and this to him is because the state of facilities such as libraries, books, journals and furniture that are helpful for developing a good reading skills and culture is low.

The state of reading amongst Nigerian students is completely low compared to the western world. Worst still is that the Nigerian society is being overrun by adverse technological influences, the Nigerian students instead of reading had formed a new culture tagged "chatting culture". With the influx of smartphones, ipads, tablets and other accessories that makes communication easy with little or no restrictions as to the distance provided the Internet connectivity is there, reading culture has become a serious concern to stakeholders in the educational sectors. The chatting culture no doubt is overrunning the reading culture. Besides, the influx of technology, the prevailing presence of social media tools like Facebook, Whatsapp, 2go, Twitter has forced the youth to become averse to reading culture and are thus prone to chatting culture. Out of every 100 youths, it will be rare to find 10% reading.

2.3 Negative Impact of Poor Reading Culture

There are many negative influences associated with poor reading culture and they are:

i. *Poor quality of research output:* the success of great nations like Britain, China, India, Japan etc was hinged upon breakthrough in research. It takes a reader time to develop a reading culture

which culminates into creative thinking before meaningful research can take place. The truth remains that the quality of research output in Nigeria is optimally low because the Nigerian students hardly reads.

- ii. *Slow pace of development:* Poor reading culture has an adverse effect on national development; no nation can easily develop beyond their reading level. It affects the country's national development because most of the countries that have experienced breakthrough both in technology and business were as a result of education and there will be no meaningful education without a reading culture.
- iii. *Underutilization of potentials:* The potentials of the child and the youths are likely to be underutilized if they don't know how to read. The truth is that the "drop-outs" that experienced breakthrough in science and technology were able to read. A child without reading culture has an extent they can go in their career. Is it possible to produce engineers, medical doctors teachers etc who were not able to read? I strongly believe that even the developers of these technologies that have negatively affected us could not have gone far, had it been they do not know how to read and write.
- iv. *Poor knowledge on one's environment:-* Those who have poor reading culture find it difficult to have full knowledge of their environment. How would they know when all they are to know are in a printed form?. Before one can proffer solution to the problem plaguing the society, you must have full knowledge of such problem either by experience or through reading

- v. *Low level of academic performance:* poor reading culture has a significant influence on the performance of Nigerian child in academic activity. The continuous outcry about the general poor performance of the Nigerian students in academic activities is traceable to poor reading culture.

2.4 The Necessity of Reviving Reading Culture

The standard of education is falling at an alarming rate. the rate at which students fail in contemporary Nigerian society especially in standard examination such as first school leaving certificate examination, senior secondary school certificate examination amongst others is such that we need to go back to the drawing board of education. The success of children in schools as pointed out by Oji and Habibu (2011) depends to a large extent on their ability to read and comprehend which is in turn dependent on the support we give in promoting reading culture. Adekola (2012) pointed out that the place of reading in the world is fast turning into a global village by reason of high technological advancement with reading intensively and extensively remaining as the sure way of acquainting ourselves with global realities.

Igwe and Uzuegbu (2013) pointed out that one of the major factors affecting the development of the educational sector is the poor state of reading culture in the country, especially among the youths and students at all levels of education. Society that does not have reading culture is not a developing society and such society will remain stagnant without developing in the field of technical know-how (Oribabor, 2014). The need for reviving reading culture was aptly captured by Fabunmi and Folorunso (2010) when they asserted that:

"Developed countries of the world were able to attain that height because, at a

point in their history, they were able to give themselves too much reading and research. Countries like Japan, American, and Britain etc, took to reading and research to achieve technological breakthroughs". p.455.

Reading to Tella and Akande (2007) is important for everybody in order to cope with new knowledge in a changing world- that of technological age. It is essential because it equips people with necessary knowledge and understanding, not only for building their own life but also for contributing positively in the socio-economic development of the nation (Akanda, Eamin, Hoq and Hasan, 2013). Reading is an essential competency required in the 21st century to survive the global system, be it economic, educational, political, and social and so on (Ilogho, 2015). Reading to Nwosu (2015) facilitates cross-cultural understanding because when a child reads books with foreign backgrounds, he begins to understand and appreciate the values of other societies other than his. Fasipe (2012) stressed that embracing a reading culture is vital to the individual and to the overall development of any nation and no country can dream of meaningful development if its citizens cannot and do not read books. To him, the absence of a widespread culture of reading is an effective barrier to political stability and economic prosperity.

Reading provides opportunity to develop children's minds and this helps them form enduring habits and character. It also reduces ignorance and increases one's self-esteem because, reading facilitates learning (Akindele (2012; Udosen, 2011). Reading for information is necessary in the life of every learner because it boosts academic achievement, facilitates knowledge for self reliance, equip individuals to function meaningfully and effectively in the scheme of things concerning nation building (Anyachebelu, Anyamene and Adebola, 2011). Reading enables creativity to blossom and it is a tool for the exploration of one's

talents while learning about oneself and the society. This must have informed Aliyu and Bilkisu (2012) assertion that Nigerians insecurity in entrepreneurship and massive development remains incomplete until they embrace a thorough reading culture.

2.5 Tripartite Role of Parents, Teachers and Library in Reviving Reading Culture

The parent of the Nigerian child, the teachers and the school library has a significant role to play in reviving the reading culture amongst Nigerian child. The home is the starting point of every learning activity and this point to the pertinent role of the parents in reviving the culture of reading. The crux of the matters is that the attitude of parents towards reading as a culture has to a great extent influence the reading culture of the people. The parents of the Nigerian child should as a matter of necessity provides the recommended reading literatures for the child at home; more so, they are expected to provide reading tables, chairs and re-chargeable lanterns that will enable the child to read comfortably. Besides, the conducive environment should be provided for the child. There has been instances when the child is willing to read but the environment is not there because the parent or siblings of the child is busy watching Nigerian movies, there by distracting the child. The unique role of school and public libraries is that they are fundamental to the development of literacy which is manifested in a viable reading habit lifelong learning process (Oji and Habibu, 2011). Tella and Akande (2007) contends that school libraries should create an environment conducive to reading so that the children feel at home and comfortable and school libraries should request teachers to encourage the students to read more books, magazines and newspaper regularly. According to Aina, Okusaga, Taiwo and Ogundipe (2011), the role of the libraries in promoting reading is

especially crucial in countries like Nigeria where education is emphasized in scientific, reflective thinking and creativity.

The teacher according to Tella and Akande (2007) are the next set of people children spend most of their time with after their parents and by implication should know the type of books children should enjoy reading. Akindele (2012) pointed out that reading culture and love of reading are developed in the home of the child and that cultivating reading culture in youngest readers should start right from the birth of a child and that the book should be considered as the third parent of a child. To him, great and positive changes will come to the nation if all parents are involved in the act of inculcating reading culture in their children early enough. Children are likely to adopt whatever lifestyle the teacher displays because they are seen as moderate. Their teacher who is always on the talking and chatting is like to set a bad precedent for the children thereby having a negative influence on the development of reading culture amongst students.

3.1 Influence of technology on Reading habits of the Nigeria Child

The handset has taken over the place of book in Nigerian society. Today, it looks as if there is a law that state “every child its handset” due to the proliferation of handset. The Nigerian child cannot do without handset the cardinal problem here is not that of having handset but that of underutilization and abuse of usage. Most smartphones can download e-books, e-literature, e-dictionaries that will help the Nigerian child to advance academically. The truth however, remains that instead of them using the handsets to read books, they use it to download “Nigerian movies” “African magic” and other pornographic sites. According to Tunde-Awe (2014), the television, computer, home video games, and particularly, the Global System of

Mobile (GSM) communication which can be used for diverse social networking on the internet contest with the love for reading books. The digital technology to her, is gradually taking over every aspect of human endeavours while reading is gradually disappearing to the horizon.

3.2 Challenges Associated with Reviving Reading Culture in a Technologically Dominated Society

- i. *Unavailability of books:* Actually the books are there but they are not affordable. You need to be in possession of book before you can read it. The situation of Nigerian economy makes it look like buying book is a luxury. The cost of buying books in Nigeria is high and this has contributed to situation where the children have nothing to read.
- ii. *Poorly equipped libraries:* Public libraries are essential component of the educational development of the Nigerian child. Beside the school libraries, the public libraries should be the next institution that should play significant role in the revival of reading culture; however, it is disheartening to note that most public libraries are poorly equipped with outdated and irrelevant information resources that are not in line with contemporary curriculum.
- iii. *Inadequacy of technological/audio-visual resources in school libraries:* Most school libraries are inadequately stocked with technological facilities as well as audio visuals that can be use in educational activities, in other words the Nigerian child are not likely to be attracted to the library let alone read the books in the library.
- iv. *Over dependence on audio-visual resources:* the truth is that audio visual resources were design to promote teaching and learning, however, over dependence on these technologies is having an advance effect on the reading culture as the Nigerian child tends to over rely on them as a substitute to conventional books. There has been situation where by children read passages but cannot identify letters and words in the same passage they read.
- v. *Language barrier:* There is need for us to revive the use of indigenous language in the primary and post-primary level. Using English as the lingua franca is posing a great challenge to the development of reading culture. Reading is more interesting when the language of presentation is appreciated by the readers. Oji and Habibu (2011) citing Nzealo (1984) pointed out that language obstacle is one of the major impediments which affects reading habits of individual, he argue that the main problem of acquisition of reading habits among children has been the problem of understanding, thinking and constructing in a foreign language.
- vi. *Negligence of parental role:* Nigerian as a society is being characterized by parents with parents that are always busy either with their careers or businesses with less attention to their children. The Nigerian child most times are left in the hands of already corrupted and polluted maids, who do all manner of things with phones in the presence of the children without care to the detrimental effects of their actions. The children who are always

- with these sets of maids/house help have no option but to copy the wrong thing. Most parents are not cooperating with the relevant institutions to instill the culture of reading on the Nigerian child as they hardly encourage their children to read.
- vii. *Existence of wrong applications/software in phones and laptops:* there are certain applications that should not be installed in phones and computers that children use. Granting them access to every application in the phones and computers will drift their attention from reading.
- viii. *Negative influence of teachers:* It is quite disappointing that teachers who are supposed to be torch bearers in the educational sector are the ones influencing the children negatively. Most teachers over use their mobile phone and the children ends up trying to emulate them.

4.1 Strategies for Overcoming the Identified Challenges

The strategies that can be adopted as measures for overcoming the identified challenges thereby improving the level of reading culture as follows:

a. *Introduction of compulsory reading hours in Nigerian schools:* There is an urgent need for heads of Nigerian schools especially at the fundamental levels such as the primary and post-primary to introduce compulsory reading hours in Nigerian school. The time table should be drawn for each classes/levels. During the time, all the students are expected to be in the library to read. When the child is introduced to the culture of reading at the early stage, it becomes easy for them to imbibe the culture unlike coming to tertiary institution to

force them to read.

b. *Compulsory holiday reading:* beyond attending holiday classes, the government and ministry of education should make “use of library” compulsory during holidays. This will make the children to develop love for books that will culminate in reading culture.

c. *One Week-One- book culture:* There is need to introduce one week-one book culture into our educational system. This system is about making it compulsory for the young ones to read at least one book a week and present the comprehensive summary especially those in the secondary school. This will not just keep them busy but also help in stimulating the reading habits amongst the children.

d. *Equipping of school /public libraries with relevant information resources:* The school libraries /public libraries should be adequately equipped with quality information resources relevant to the needs of the Nigerian child. The state governments in Nigerian can come up with modalities on how to build reading/information centres in the rural communities, where the Nigerian child in rural areas can have access to reading resources.

e. *Restriction on the use of cell phones by students /teachers during school hours:* if reading culture must be revived, it is pertinent that there should be restriction on the use of cellphones amongst the teachers and the students. Even in the homes, the parent of the children should as well restrict the number of hours their children spent making use of their handset

f. *Institutionalization of reading competitions/awards:* The various stakeholders in the educational sector should make effort to institutionalised reading competitions among children with attractive prize awards. This will help in reviving the reading culture amongst the children.

g. *Creation of educational forums that*

will be educational bases: Since evidences abounds that the Nigerian youths are always on the web, it is pertinent that we streamline our educational activities to be ICT inclined. In other words, there is need to create educational-based discussion forums on the social media platform, whereby the students will be expected to read educational e-books and other resources. This if effectively implemented with the collaboration of ministry education and heads of primary and secondary schools will help in inculcating the reading habits into the children. This should be directed towards reading for knowledge and not just reading for the sake of reading to fulfill all righteousness.

Conclusion

The paper has extensively identified the challenges associated with reviving of reading culture in an ICT-driven society. Contemporary society is being influence by the dominating force of ICT technologies, therefore, there is need to ensure the anti-academic behaviours such as spending of too much time chatting instead of reading should be discouraged among the youths. Te various stakeholders in the educational sector should join forces to curb the menace of declining reading culture in Nigerian.

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