



Improved Reading Culture: A Panacea for Sustainable National Development

Chukwudum M. Jegbefume

chukyrem@gmail.com

F.C.E (T) Gombe, Gombe State

Gayus S. Yaji

yajigayus@yahoo.com

F.C.E (T) Gombe, Gombe State

Hassan S. Dala

hassansalamadala@g9.com

F.C.E (T) Gombe, Gombe State

Abstract

This paper identified reading as the ability to obtain meaning from words. Reading culture refers to the habitual and regular reading of books and information materials. It also identified national development as a specified state of growth. The benefits of reading culture through the use of conventional books and ICT are also discussed which are meant to improve reasoning skills, creativity, vocabulary etc are highlighted. Constraints on reading culture and strategies for improving it in Nigeria such as exposure to different practices of reading and reading materials, training teachers, book fares, use of ICT, etc, are discussed. The solutions to the problems of reading culture were discussed and conclusion made.

Keywords: Reading culture, ICT, Sustainable development, Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

Reading is a total integrative process that starts with the reader and includes the effective, perceptual and cognitive domain, (Rubbin, 2002). Okebukola (2004) affirms that, through reading, humans have the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation. It allows one to listen to wisdom and people of all ages. Douglas (2000) asserts that every child must become fully competent in reading to succeed in school and discharge responsibilities as a citizen of a democratic society. Reading is the only form of entertainment that is also an essential life skill. Reading is a skill that must be nurtured from a child's earliest years. Once children know how to read, they still need the needed support to reach their full potentials as readers. The habit of reading should begin at an early stage and should be imbibed throughout one's lifetime, (Tracy, 2008).

Reading is not just for school, it is for life. Reading in all its variety is vital to being better informed, have a better understanding of us as well as others. It makes man to be a constructive contributor to a democratic and cohesive society. Leading world nations pride themselves on their promotion of reading. In the case of Nigeria, it acts as an effective barrier to our development and international competitiveness. The economic, social and political health of our nation today depends on building literate citizens that are able to read widely and apply it practically for development. Reading is the ability to obtain meaning from words (Sisulu, 2004).

2.1 Literature Review

2.2 Reading Culture and National Development

Developing reading culture fosters love for reading and habit of reading among

learners. Habit is a tendency to repeat an act again and again. Habits are a regularly repeated behavior that requires little or no thought and is learned rather than innate (Encyclopedia Britannica). Reading habit can be inferred to mean the ability to read and understand printed or written words with little or no thought. The habit of reading can only be cultivated through constant or regular and dedicated reading of information resources by children and young adults for acquiring knowledge which will be applied practically for development (Ozo-eson, 2012). According to Gbadamosi (2007), reading culture evolves when an individual habitually and regularly reads books and other information materials that are not necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career. Reading culture is the process of building up positive reading attitude among students and children over a period of time (Nssien, 2008). This is the kind of culture that imbibes reading and studying as the basis of growth and development. It is that type of culture that sees continuous and dedicated reading of information resources by pupils, children and adults for knowledge acquisition (Gbadamosi, 2007).

National development is a specified state of growth or advancement. This is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is termed as developed when it is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. Nigeria, in the last fifty years has been battling with the problems of development despite huge human, materials and natural resources in her possession.

Gboyega (2003) captures national development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in the materials well being of all citizens. Development also means that people should be able to read and write. In Africa, this is the problems as most people are still

illiterates. Investment in educations is a productive venture because an educated labour force is a source of blessing for national development which is an embodiment of sustainable development (Nssien, 2006).

2.3 Benefits of Reading Culture

Ogwu (2010) posits that education in its largest sense is an act that has a formative effect on the mind, character and the physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society or a nation transmits accumulated knowledge skills and the values from one generation to another. The benefit of imbibing reading to the individual and society cannot be overemphasized. Divya (2008) and Isaac (2007) listed the following as benefits of reading:

- *Reading improves reasoning skills:* it helps a contractor with the idea of a feasibility study before embarking on a project
- *Gives something to talk about:* reading a lot of books equips one with the ability to make meaningful contributions during discussions
- *Learn anywhere:* books are portable and can be read anywhere, as well as learn anywhere.
- *Improves creativity:* by reading more books and being exposed to new and more complete information, one's creative idea is enhanced.
- *Improves vocabulary:* while reading books especially the challenging ones, it exposes one to too many new words that wouldn't be otherwise.
- *Reading is an active mental process:* unlike television; books make one to use his brain, by reading, one thinks more and become smarter.
- *Building self-esteem:* it helps an individual to become better informed and more of an expert on the topic

read. This expertise translates into higher self esteem.

- *Improves writing skills:* reading does not only improve one's vocabulary and critical thinking, it makes one a better writer. Regular reading no doubt improves writing skills.
- *Reading can help break slump:* to be in a slump is uncomfortable. A slump is simply lack of ideas; books are great source of ideas.
- *Can change your life:* It helps to open one's eyes to a new way of thinking. It helps to chose a life pattern and set the reader free from old habitual pattern.
- *Decreases mistakes:* when the deep and wide wisdom that books can provide is utilized, the tendency to make mistake is reduced.

2.4 Benefits of Reading Culture at the National Level

At the national level, the benefits of reading cannot be overestimated; Literacy is a basic tool for national development hence the federal government of Nigeria has concentrated its effort on providing basic primary education for its citizens. The importance of literacy is usually tied to the needs of the nation. The circumstances of modern life demand the development of good reading culture for the actualization of national goals (Iloeje, 2014). The place of reading and learning in educational development is vital. Reading facilitates and deepens the learning activities and effective learning, results in high academic, moral and skills development. Highly intelligent and informed society then becomes the watershed for progressive and innovative ideas which is capable of transforming the entire society for growth and development.

The ability to read is an act capable of transforming life and society. No society and

nation can dream of meaningful development if its citizens cannot read. Educated citizenry can easily be mobilized for political, social, economic and technological development. Tella and Akande (2007) and Uhegbu (2007) noted that reading and information are critical ingredients for national development. Reading therefore is the bedrock of national transformation and development.

2.5 The role of ICT in improving reading habit

It is evident that reading culture among Nigerians is gradually diminishing. Nifade (2012) noted that many students never borrow or read a book from their library throughout their stay in school. University library users' statistics present overwhelming evidence that the number of students who use the library increases or reduces with examination periods and the records of many university libraries shows a decline in borrowing facilities by readers. No wonder that many books in libraries remained untouched for a long period of time. Furthermore, the poor performance of students in examinations shows that they don't give attention to reading. The advent information community technology was seen as a solution the slow reading culture in the society.

According to Blurton (1999) Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage information. According to Ayodele (2001) information and communication technologies (ICTs) is an electronic based technology that are used to store, process, and package information as well as provides access to knowledge. More also ICTs comprises of pieces of equipment, and networked infrastructure that are used for creating, manipulating, transferring and using information and knowledge. Writing on effect

of ICTs on the reading habit of children Igwesi, Chimah and Nwachukwu (2012), described ICTs as facilities and audiovisual resources which are vital sources of information and knowledge to children. According to Dike (1993) who further explained that audiovisual resources are “those materials which do not depend solely upon reading to convey meaning. They present information through the sense of hearing, as in audio-resources, or through the sense of sight, as in visual resources, or through a combination of senses”. These resources create a spirit of joy, fun, adventure and imagination in children and help to associate reading with pleasure. They play vital roles in engaging children and adult in learning activities especially in their developmental age and offers a wealth of reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help young children learn how to read for lifelong learning. Children have different reading needs at different stages of their lives, but they need to have access to enjoyable reading materials from the very beginning. The use of picture books helps to offer clear illustrations, words, diagram and pictures which help to captivate the attention of children. Most children fail to imbibe good reading culture when the reading materials are so abstract. Hence, reading should be associated with pleasure.

The use of ICT facilities and audiovisual resources will help in bringing abstract concepts into reality thereby helping children to identify things in their real life environment. Also, Ajayi, Shorunke, & Aboyade (2014) posit that ICTs comprises of electronic resources also known as e-resources that are accessed electronically and are on different subjects. Electronic resources can be a bibliographic of full text database that allows you to search for relevant articles in your subject area. E-resources includes electronic journals, online databases (Agora, Jstor, Ebscohost, Ajol, Hinari etc), electronic

books, locally loaded database, website, CD-ROM, electronic text, e-abstracting and indexing databases such as MEDLINE, E-news, E-images, E-music etc. These electronic resources are used mainly for reading and research purposes. Some of the electronic resources are in closed-access which the institution concerned pay for access fee to enable their student's gain-access to the online resources.

Amori (2003) opined that e-resources such as e-journal, e-books, CD ROM databases, online databases and web-based resources when effectively utilized constitute an important input in the information services in libraries and they help in providing relevant information required by students, which if properly utilized can help in improving reading culture and improve academic excellence. Therefore, these categories of ICTs that use audio and video technologies to disseminate information and enhance access to recorded knowledge have been particularly identified as vital tool among students for the promotion of reading culture.

3.1 Constraints on effective reading culture in our society

Many factors are responsible for the decline in reading culture in our society. Some of them are explained as follows:-

- Distraction by the fallout from technological innovation in the world today such as the advent of home videos and entertainment media, games, gambling, etc has diverted the attention of youths and children away from reading.
- Inadequate funding of educational institutions including funding of libraries, laboratories, workshops and computer units. A visit to many of the libraries shows that the collections of libraries are obsolete and irrelevant books that does not meet the needs of

- the contemporary reading society. Poor economy and low standard of living makes the government and other bodies to give less attention to library development.
- The acceptance of examination malpractice as an acceptable norm in schools and the society at large makes children not to give much attention to serious reading. As a result the children often encounter many problems in life because they have not imbibed reading culture at an early age.
 - The increasing cost of publishing makes it difficult for school children to have access to books, magazines, journals and news papers. Sanders (2007).
 - Literacy apartheid and slavery. Most of the bookshops in the country prefer shelving foreign authors. Even when Nigerian authors approach them to sell their books, the bookshop owners often turn them down. This is not acceptable for a developing country like Nigeria.
 - ICT literacy in our society is still very low. In this post millennium age, you still find many people even among the youths that cannot handle ICT and therefore; the ability to improve their reading culture with ICT leaves much to be desired.

3.2 Strategies for Enhancing Reading Culture in Nigeria

In order to achieve the set goals of inculcating reading habits in the Nigerian populace and in particular among children and youths, there is a need to have a deliberate strategy in achieving it. This can be done through the following:-

1. Children should be exposed to

different practices of reading and reading material: This will help broaden their imagination and engage in the practice of regular reading. In other words, the provision of classroom libraries to the pupils expose them to a wide range of books, magazines and other print and non-print materials through these activities pupils are likely to become more exposed and encouraged to develop reading culture.

2. Nalusiba (2010) emphasized that the best way of promoting reading is the use of informal methods of reading rather than formal methods, informal methods stimulate desire in the child to read. He noted that this was done through storytelling and reading by the teacher and by consulting books to find out things so that children could associate books with pleasure and usefulness.
3. Book fairs, exhibitions and book talks expose pupils and teachers to a variety of information materials. These can be carried out in the school environment whereby teachers and pupils introduce each other to favorite part of the story and teaching others why the books was enjoyable and later on encouraging swapping of books to boost pupil's morale to read.
4. Training of teachers: teacher needs to be trained to teach pupils how to read. These teaching methods change the student's perception of reading as school work. This is important because it is believed that a reading culture could not flourish if reading is seen as something that pupils are obliged to do but do not enjoy doing. Children should be taught to see reading as enjoyment so that it could

be a part of all aspect of their everyday life.

5. Introducing books to children at their early stage in life: Redford (2011) opined that the most effective strategy to develop reading culture is to introduce books to the children at an early stage in life. When a strong foundation is laid both in the school and at home by the parents, the nation will surely metamorphose to a reading society.
6. Promoting reading as a pleasurable activity: Rosenberg (2003) opined that reading should be promoted as a pleasurable activity, which means that pupils must start to read for fun and not just because they have to prepare for examination. Teachers should use more suitable teaching methods as a means of promoting a reading culture.

Recommendations

The responsibility of improving and developing reading culture in Nigeria is for all. This ranges from the family, teachers, librarians, philanthropists, the media, religious bodies, non-governmental organization to the government, etc. this can be done through:-

1. Provision of suitable reading materials and comfortable reading spaces in the schools
2. Provision of more public libraries in all nooks and crannies of the country where reading can take place making books and libraries easily accessible. Where it is not possible to build a library, mobile library services should be provided by the public libraries.
3. Government support to indigenous publishers and authors. The cost of producing books should be subsidize by the government to make it

accessible to the populace at a subsidize rate.

4. Donation of books and funds to public and school libraries by philanthropists, corporate organizations, social clubs etc (e.g. TETFUND)
5. Revitalization of the university press. Many years ago, many Nigerian universities used to have printing presses for the production of tertiary books. This has subsequently died down. Revitalizing such projects will go a long way in producing tertiary books for higher institutions and subsequently improving reading habits of students who are the future leaders of the country.
6. Establishment of school libraries in primary schools which is the foundation of lifelong reading habit.
7. Inclusion of reading and writing skills and information literacy in the school curriculum
8. Parents should be active readers and establish libraries at home where early reading culture can begin. This should be done along religious instruction in schools since Nigerians have a high regard and value for religious instruction.
9. Formulation of enabling policies by government would enhance and encourage reading culture in our society.
10. Parents and teachers should set out time for watching TV, playing video games, chatting and browsing to avoid distractions from reading.
11. National and public libraries in Nigeria should embark on aggressive readership promotion campaigns. Nigerian citizens should encourage everyone to endeavor to read a book a

day.

12. The various levels of governments should provide the desired infrastructure such as ICT facilities like computers, audio visual materials, stable power supply and e-resources that will improve and enhance reading culture among the Nigerian populace, particularly among children and youths who are the leaders of tomorrow.

Conclusion

Reading culture is a social development that is essential and critical for the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is termed developed when is able to provide qualitative life for its citizenry. National development can be described as the overall development of a nation. Reading is power and reading makes a man. Teach a child to read and you have made a king. The place of reading in the general development of man and his society is of great importance. The economic, social and political health of our nation today depends on building literate citizens that are able to read widely and apply it practically for development. It is therefore a necessity to make the present generation more aware of the benefits and importance of reading and ensuring that they have the literacy skills required in the modern society. This can be done through making a deliberate effort in inculcating reading culture particularly among the youths who are the future leaders of this country. This can be done by parents, teachers, non government agencies and governmental agencies through the use of libraries, formal and non formal education agencies, religious bodies, etc. the use of ICT will also go a long way in improving the readings skills in our society.

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