

READING CULTURE AMONG THE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA: A CHALLENGE TO SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The paper attempt to discuss the reading culture among the children/adolescents in Nigeria, looking at school libraries as a major source of encouragement to them. The paper highlighted on the role of school libraries in promoting reading culture in primary/secondary schools. It further examines the challenges associated with reading culture in Nigeria. Also, the way forward was carefully proffer to promote reading culture among the children/adolescents. The paper concluded with emphasis that, school library being an important tool for development of reading culture must be given priority by educational planners in Nigeria. Furthermore, school libraries must be provided with relevant and adequate resources that can attract and motivate reading culture for the development of the children/adolescents education and the nation at large.

Keywords: *Reading, Children, Adolescent, School, Libraries.*

Introduction:

It is a widely accepted fact that, the purpose of education is to train the child mentally and physically so that he/she will become a useful member of the society. To social psychologist this objective can only be achieved when a solid foundation is laid from the cradle which is Primary/Secondary School level, and a Solid Foundation cannot be laid without supporting resources this is why school libraries have become so important now than ever before. Libraries according to Liman (2012) cannot be separated from education at all levels, improving the standard of education at any level can only be achieved when the value of libraries have been fully understood, apprehend and supported with adequate facilities to promote reading among Children and adolescent.

Therefore Libraries can be described as one of the most important educational Services. Alalare (2006) described the library as an institution that preserve knowledge, select, organized documents and made information available for use. In the same Vein, Liman (2012) sees the Library as a social institution responsible for systematic selection, acquisition, organization and dissemination of recorded on-line information resources, kept for reading, study, research, references and consultation. This means that a Library plays a very great role in achieving educational goals of any society when is well established and developed with adequate resources for utilization. The objective of school Libraries according to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) is to “introduce children to the world of knowledge inculcate in them the love of reading as a lifelong habit, broaden their intellectual horizons and develop critical senses”. Therefore it means that the establishment and developing Libraries in schools is not just enough to achieve excellence in education but the use of the resources through reading.

Reading according Liman (2012) can be considered at various levels and discussed from different standpoints, for the beginner reading is concern with learning to recognize the printed symbol, which represents speech and to respond emotionally or otherwise, to sound

and meanings of words. For more of a matter of reasoning, involving the meaningful interpretation of verbal symbol such as words, (phrases and sentences) all types of thinking, evaluating, imagining and problem solving. Similarly Adedeji (1982) in Anie(2011) described reading as not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is the belief of educators and applied linguists that a child who is interested in reading will learn. Furthermore, Omale and Ladan (2011) is of the view that, reading culture can best be explained as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written words and such practice can be acquired by reading books, journals, magazines, newspapers etc. having a reading culture has become very necessary for everybody so as to be relevant in our world today.

It is so sad according to Liman (2012) looking at a growing rate of failure among primary and post-primary school students. The most disturbing aspect is the poor performance recorded in both National Examination Council (NECO) and Senior Secondary School Examination (SSCE) in the recent times, which one tend to believe can be attributed to lack of reading among the students. Reading is necessary for learning yet reading culture among children/adolescents in Nigeria is tragically deficient in comparison to other Western nations. It for this reason that Omale and Ladan (2011) stressed that, having a reading culture has become imperative in the 21st Century for everybody especially the children/adolescents who are the future of the nation. The declining interest in reading exhibited by the Nigerian children/adolescents is a cause for alarm and a challenge to all including parents, teachers, libraries and the government. Reading culture can be promoted through using the library that is well equipped with relevant materials which entices the users.

The Role of School Libraries in Promoting Reading Culture

There is no nation that can attain an excellent academic achievement without the support of a standard and well equipped library, it can be argued that all the nations that have recorded tremendous achievement in the world heavenly relied on the instrumentality of education through a well-stocked and electronically connected library to improve and elevate its citizens to the enviable status of the well-educated which should be the aims of well and responsible government. Jiagbogu,(2011) described school library as a library attached to and managed by a school to serve pupils and students who are within the primary and post primary levels of education. They further reiterates that it should be well equipped and organized with journals, magazines and text books on various subjects, audio visual materials like films, recorded sound and other relevant media and materials. School libraries should provide a wide range of library materials to all children from pre-school years to adolescent. It is very clear that school libraries have a significant role to play in the provision of functional education and successful implementation of laudable objectives of schools. That is why school library provides children with their first experience in using the Library, when children begin early in life to learn to use the library it helps them develop good reading habits. Shabi and Udofia (2009) describe reading as a springboard on which learning takes off.

The establishment of school libraries is a positive venture toward developing education at school level, because it exposes the students to good learning resources and makes them to be more skillful in finding solutions to problems through reading, thus reading helps the children to know more about the world around them. Anie (2011) stressed that school library is the institution which enables the education system to thrive. Therefore school libraries should be up to the task of providing the children and the adolescent with required services such that it will motivate them to patronize the library that will promote the development of reading skills and encourage long term learning habits, for such learning habits, for such learning habits form the key to continuous success in school.

Similarly Isa (2002) attested that school library gives the children awareness of the range of knowledge available thereby stimulating their desire to search investigate and collect information relevant to their general and special needs. Moreover Anie (2011) noted that, the primary objectives of school library is to provide the children with relevant materials, and inviting library environment, an intelligent sympathetic service and cultivate in children the love of reading, discriminating taste in literature and judgment. It is therefore the function of the library to support the school curriculum by providing up to date information to keep the staff and students abreast of new development.

The school library has a role to play by ensuring that the children does not limit themselves to what the teachers teaches in the class but can read and make discoveries on their own. The school library and it resources, therefore afford the children/adolescent the opportunity to make independent study and self-development. Jiagbogu (2011) stressed that, the objective of a good education system is to equip individual to be able to play his/her role in the society and a school library attempts to advance this objective. The school library is thus an important tool for reading habit as it gives every student the opportunity to learn, to enjoy reading and to create new knowledge and understanding, because many of the activities of ordinary life requires the ability to read. The importance of reading whether among children/adolescents or even among the adults cannot be over emphasized.

State of Reading Culture in Nigeria

The main objective of cultivating and promoting reading culture according to Otikey (2011) is to make reading a habit that is appreciated and loved by citizens. Reading culture is meant to be a process of building up positive attitude among children and students over a period of time. Liman (2012) believed that, children who are introduced to reading at an early stage tend to read faster than those who are introduced to reading at later stage, and that is the belief of many people. Lack of reading therefore can be disastrous, because it is the most efficient way of gaining knowledge.

The development of any nation depends on the development of its people through education. It must be for this reason that the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1991 came out with a National policy on education which also stressed that government will ensure that all schools are properly equipped to promote sound and effective teaching and in particular that suitable textbooks and libraries are provided for schools. In many instances the schools are neither properly staffed nor the school Library stocked with relevant resources and they are hardly closely related to the school instructional Programs and because of such attended bottlenecks, the libraries have not been able to fully provide the required impact on the total educational encounter Shuaibu (2001).

There is generally a poor reading culture in Nigeria. Ogugua et.al (2015) stressed that, development of reading culture is faced with several challenges like, language interference, poor funding of education and poor economy. Similarly, Abdulyassar (2018) stressed that, many public affairs analysts and educationist are pointing accusing finger unrelentingly at poverty, corruption, poor reading environment, and lack of books and death of libraries as a serious impediment to the formation of reading culture. In Nigeria people are all witnessed to the repeated cry for fallen standard of education of which the government of Nigeria is being blamed for the problem.

There is lack of planning and implementation even when the planners are there in the education sector in Nigeria. Anie (2011) in his own contribution noted that, there is crisis in the education sector which according to him includes unprecedented increase in the school population without the necessary planning and training of personnel which has led to decline in education. Also we are all aware of what is happening in Nigeria where unqualified people, were employed to teach in primary and secondary schools because of god fatherism,

all these and other problems has affected the reading culture among the children/adolescent and the Library is hardly in way to help the situation. Malgwi and Tony (2009) stressed that, effort by government to promote education and literacy in Nigeria has failed because there was no provision for school libraries in the implementation of new educational policy otherwise known as 6-3-3-4 educational structure.

The selfishness of those in authority has also affected the development of education. Children's are not encourage to read further than where they found themselves, the teachers themselves don't improve on their output and therefore cannot encourage the children to read further. Another thing is that, the economic realities of many poor parents who could not send their wards to schools, this could have been sought of problem that cannot make the children to have an opportunity to read, especially the northeastern region of Nigeria where boko haram has cause so much damage to life and properties.

Most of the Libraries in government public school are under staffed with the right caliber of personnel and are stocked with outdated books which are not commonly used by the children. If the books are current they are not the type of books that could stimulate the reading habit of children and thereby affect the children interest.

Another problem according to Egwin, Jonathan and Emrole (2007) is that, most Nigerian homes do not have books not to talk of libraries or reading rooms as a result most children's first contact with the library is usually their school library. It is therefore necessary that school Libraries provides available reading facilities and materials in order to enhance reading culture among the children/adolescent which in turn will sustain their educational process.

It is because of the poor reading culture in Nigeria that a former chairman on local and foreign debts committee Senator Shehu (2017) pointed out that the decline in reading culture is not just among young people but also among the political leaders, which is evident in the low quality of their intellectual discourse, lack of reading has embarrassed many people in our society today. The world is changing fast and Anie (2011) opined that, new things are happening beyond the common man's imagination especially in relation to education, the school libraries should not be left behind but rather must keep up to date with the trends of happening, for that will encourage Nigerian children to develop the habit of reading to face the challenges of life with boldness and perform better in their educational development.

The Way Forward

Having looked at some of the challenges facing reading culture in our school among the children/adolescent, there is that urgent need for Nigerians to rise up to salvage the problems of reading culture not only among the children/adolescent but even among the adults. Abimbola (1979) in Busayo (2005) explained reading as basic to learning and its process is not only tedious and gradual but also endless. He further stressed that whilst reading is basic to learning, learning itself is also basic to survival hence the lack of reading is disastrous because it is the most efficient way of gaining knowledge a commodity which is free in places like Libraries.

In this 21st Century people are pre-occupied with their busy work life that they do not have any time to spare for anything not to talk of reading. The fact that reading is so important, it should not be neglected in our society today. Busayo (2005) made us to understand that reading is an activity which helps to develop the mind and personality of human being's, that is to say it mould character when reading the right types of materials, that lead us to the fact that school Libraries should provide relevant materials that can help to develop the young ones with good character.

In view of the importance of reading in the educational development of an individual, there is need to revive the reading culture of the children/adolescent in particular for better

future of the nation. It is therefore necessary that school libraries should be well equipped and organized with relevant textbooks, magazines, journals, audio-visual materials, films, recorded sound, media materials etc. to motivate and encourage the children/adolescent to read and achieve better in their academic and self-development. Therefore the government of Nigeria should as a matter of seriousness makes a huge financial commitment to develop school libraries so that relevant resources can be provided to attract and encourage reading among the young ones in Nigeria.

The situation experienced in Nigerian school libraries towards developing reading culture among the children/adolescents can be improved upon if those concerns adopt the following suggestions.

1. Government should establish and equip school libraries with relevant resources and services in both primary/secondary schools, such that it will motivate the children/adolescent to read.
2. Government should allocate fund especially for school library development at all the educational levels
3. The ministry of Education at Federal and State level should look into establishing school library Inspectorate unit to inspect advice and guide school libraries.
4. Qualified librarian should be employed or teacher-librarian should be trained to man the school library for better services to users.
5. The curriculum planners, teachers, parents and the general public should work hand in hand to salvage the poor reading culture among the children/adolescents.
6. Librarians and teacher-librarian should try and come up with strategies that will make reading interesting among the children/adolescents since they are the future of the nation.
7. Schools should as a matter of seriousness include library period on all the school timetable to encourage individual development
8. Above all in this information age the school library of the new millennium should be computerized, and plan to apply information technology to its activities to facilitate information accessibility and retrieval, which will attract children to patronize the library better.

Conclusion

Reading cannot be separated from education, that is to say reading is very necessary for knowledge to be acquired. Therefore if children/adolescent can cultivate the habit of reading in their early stage, they will grow and love it and this will enhance their educational growth which will lead to the development of the nation. For reading culture to develop among the children/adolescent, school libraries must be given priority by our educational planners for overall development of our children/adolescents and our nation at large.

Although Nigerian government has given due recognition to libraries in schools, but it is only on paper, therefore there is need for the educational policies to be articulated by qualified, experienced and serious persons who should over-see and make sure the policies are implemented according to the set objectives. School libraries have an important role to play in reading culture, it's therefore very necessary to support the establishment of libraries in Primary/Secondary schools in order to achieve the objectives of education in Nigeria. This is because there can be no meaningful learning without reading and that means that the school libraries should be well stocked with necessary resources that can attract and encourage reading among the children/adolescent for better future of our generation.

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