

THE READING HABITS OF UNDERGRADUATES AS DEDUCED FROM THE USE OF THE LIBRARY: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ADO-EKITI, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the reading habits of undergraduates as deduced from the use of the Library. Different kinds of books make different kinds of contribution to a man's education. Utilitarian reading helps to pass examination and to obtain good results and certificates, while reading for pleasure (leisure) things like newspapers, novels, story books, etc, improves one's spoken and written English, as these books entertain, inform and educate.

A sample of 110 undergraduates, (male and female) reading in the Library, as at the time of this survey, was drawn for the study, out of which 97 responses, representing 88% were received and used. The study shows that undergraduates engage in utilitarian reading as 73 (75.26%) of the sampled population confirmed this. Eighty (82.47%) claimed that they use the library more during the session, an indication that undergraduates normally desert the Library the moment they are through with their examinations at the end of a semester or session.

Recommendations were made as to what could be read for pleasure to complement utilitarian reading and to cultivate the reading habit in our undergraduates.

INTRODUCTION

The reading habits of undergraduates, particularly at the University of Ado-Ekiti, as deduced from the use of the Library, showed that the Library is normally heavily used (densely populated) by readers when examinations are at hand. Some readers do not mind sitting on the bare floor when there are no seats during examination periods, while some normally pair up with their colleagues on a seat, practices which the Library frowns at and discourages.

Conversely, the Library is normally sparsely populated with readers when examinations are over and during vacations; an indication that undergraduates engage more in utilitarian reading than reading for pleasure.

THE SITTING CAPACITY OF UNAD LIBRARY

The University of Ado-Ekiti Library can conveniently sit six hundred and sixty (660) readers at a time. The various sections and the number of seats in each are as tabulated below:

S/N	SECTIONS	NO OF SEATS
1	Arts and Social Sciences	200
2	Law Library	152
3	Reference	68
4	Science and Technology	184
5	Serials	56
	Total	660

LITERATURE REVIEW

So many scholars have written on reading and the import of reading. Adediji (1983) opines that very few Nigerians read for pleasure and that the apathy to reading can be observed not only in adults and young adolescents, but also in children. Adediji thus observed that if people read at all, it is not for the pleasure of reading, it is because they want to pass one examination or another, hence, the books they read are prescribed texts. As soon as they have passed their examinations, obtained their certificates and are comfortably settled at their places of work, it is goodbye to reading of any sort.

Muhammad (1982), the then chairman of the National Library Board, Nigeria, said in his goodwill message on the occasion of the National Reading Week that reading is the key to discipline, self-reliance and national unity. He asserted that the dictum: "Reading maketh a full man" is relevant here in Nigeria. He also observed that in Nigeria, people only read when preparing for examinations or when their job demanded it inspite of the fact that books are available for innumerable uses – for information, knowledge, enlightenment and even for entertainment. In his view, it was the reason why, even though huge resources were invested on education, illiteracy did not appear to decline in the society.

Likewise, Usman (1982) while declaring close the ceremony of the National Reading week, as the then Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, observed that the Reading Promotion Campaign was aimed primarily at encouraging reading and inculcating the reading habit in Nigerians for

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purposes other than the sheer utilitarian ones of formal education or examination purposes.

The campaign according to Usman was also aimed at ensuring that enough reading materials in form of books and other reading matters were available to the average Nigerian in adequate numbers and variety and to make sure too, that what was available was relevant to cultural and situational needs.

Banjo (1982) observed that different kinds of books, make different kinds of contribution to a man's education. He opined that, if your ambition is to become an Engineer, books on engineering will help you to realize that ambition and consequently give you a good income. As a further consequence, you will be placed in a good social class. But you may turn out to be very good, and therefore quite a rich and comfortable Engineer while being quite a horrible human being, if all you ever read are books on engineering. You will be improving one part of your personality while neglecting another important part.

Abimbola (1979) remarked that reading, like all educational processes ends in the grave, that throughout life, one is a student learning to perform the one act at one time or the other. Abimbola thus observed that reading is basic to learning and its process is not only tedious and gradual but also endless. 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. It connotes "power" and distinguishes "those who know" from "those who do not know".

Busayo (1996) cited Bakare (1970) as saying that, in learning any school subject or any material, three stages of learning are usually distinguishable. First, there is the acquisition stage when the material is studied; that is, "taken in" or "absorbed" by the student. Second, there is the retention stage, when the material studied is stored and the third stage, which is the reproductive stage; that is when the materials studied and stored is produced (recalled) when required during tests and examinations. These three stages of learning are closely inter-related. If for instance, a school subject is poorly studied at the acquisition stage, it will be poorly retained and produced at the reproduction stage.

Fanoiki (1985) opined that the reading habits of Nigerians, generally, and Nigerian adolescents, in particular, should be a matter of great interest in our educational and other aspects of development, as a nation. Fanoiki noted that if we want to conquer poverty, hunger and disease in the world, we have to conquer illiteracy first, as it is the most serious handicap for economic, political, social and individual development. Fanoiki, in her survey, quoted Elujobade as saying that the Nigerian adolescent engages in "utilitarian reading" as opposed to general reading, which is reading for pleasure (a way of spending one's leisure) and this cuts across various subjects or disciplines.

WHAT IS READING?

Osunkoya (1985) quoted Gray as defining reading as "a highly complex activity including various important aspects such as recognizing symbols quickly and accurately, apprehending clearly and with discrimination the meanings implied by the author, reacting to and using the ideas secured through reading in harmony with the readers purpose".

This definition implies that reading for the development of one's intellect involves complex activities in which the eyes, the mind, the brain or the central nervous system collaborate in the process of perceiving, analyzing, reasoning, interpreting, integrating and problem solving.

WHY READING?

The importance (advantages) of reading cannot be over-emphasized. Reading has become an indispensable skill in the modern world, the more reason why great importance is attached to the skills of reading nowadays.

Commenting and emphasizing on the importance of reading, Adedeji (1983) observed that reading is needed for effective functioning in the society. She opined that it is a tool for learning and studying and that it is an intellectual activity which helps to develop the mind and personality of human beings. She reiterated that reading is an aid to language development, individual development, socialization and civilization and that reading has the following identified importance or values:

- i) Social values
- ii) Linguistic values
- iii) Moral and Intellectual values

SOCIAL VALUES OF READING

Reading makes an individual function effectively in the society – Adedeji (1983). Many of the activities of ordinary life require the ability to read, for

instance, in the big cities where simple activities such as finding one's way around, shopping and even the enjoyment of one's leisure may depend to a great extent on one's ability and willingness to read. Without reading the newspapers, one is completely ignorant of what is going on in the country. If one is able to read, he can derive the benefit of knowing about different countries, different ages and different cultures. Likewise, through the reading of different types of literature, one is able to appreciate the culture of one's own people as well as that of other lands.

LINGUISTIC VALUES OF READING

Reading enriches our understanding of how language can be used. Language is best learned in real situations. Books present us with situations in which language is seen or heard in use and for which language must be used. By reading we improve our spoken and written language, and its effect can be evident in the active use of the language by children and adults. This fact is not easily appreciated by pupils in schools whenever they are asked to read "wide" – that is, to read other things that are not directly related to their studies. The student of chemistry, geography or commerce cannot understand why teachers encourage him to read for pleasure in order to improve his use of the English Language. But reading does have a great effect on the reader's use of language for, consciously or unconsciously, the reader acquires language from what he reads and in that way develops his own use of the language.

MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL VALUES OF READING

Reading is an activity which helps to develop the mind and personality of human beings, it enriches their intellectual lives. It provides an insight into human problems. It influences the readers' behaviour and attitudes. Books can, and do influence our outlook. In the case of children, the ideas that they absorb from determining the kind of people they will be. In other words, reading helps to mould their character. This, of course, emphasise the need for reading the right type of books – books that entertain but which at the same time inform and educate.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

Reading, no doubt, makes a complete and adequate scholar. For one to be a total man, he must be found worthy in character and in learning – this, reading does. Therefore, reading for examination, and for pleasure should be seen as "twins". As such, the two types of reading should be seen as inseparable and one should not be favoured at the expense of the other.

This study is intended to find out the following information from the point of view of the undergraduates.

1. Why students (undergraduates) read;
2. The importance of Reading;
3. The advantages in reading for pleasure;
4. The materials often read;
5. The value attached to certificates;
6. The importance of the Library; and
7. The patronage (use) of library.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A fifteen (15) item questionnaire was designed and distributed to the undergraduate students (both males and females) who were physically present and reading in the University Library as at the time of this survey. One hundred and ten (110) copies of the questionnaire were administered on the readers out of which Ninety-seven (97) responses, representing 88% were duly completed, returned and used for this study.

The students (readers) were simply asked to tick (✓) either "Yes" or "No" to match their choice of answer in each case.

DATA ANALYSIS

Tables 1 to 7 show the results of the study.

Table 1: Why undergraduates read.

Question: The emphasis on paper qualification encourages me to read.

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	61	62.89
2	No	36	37.11
3	Total	97	Table 1 100.00

The responses in table 1 show that 61 (62.89%) of the sampled population read because the society places emphasis on paper qualification, while 36 (37.11%) claimed that they do not read for that reason.

Table 2: The importance of Reading

Question: Reading helps one to pass examinations.

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	95	97.94
2	No	2	2.06
3	Total	97	100.00

Table 2

Table 2 shows that virtually all the respondents appreciate the importance of reading as 95 (97.94%) of them agreed that reading helps them to pass examinations while only two (2.06%) disagreed.

Table 3: The advantages in reading for pleasure.

Question: Reading of newspapers and novels improves one's spoken English.

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	94	96.91
2	No	3	3.09
3	Total	97	100.00

Table 3

Table 3 stresses the advantages of reading for pleasure. Here 94 (96.91%) of the respondents agreed that reading of newspapers and novels improves one's spoken English while three (3.09%) disagreed with this claim.

Table 4: The materials often read.

Question: During examinations, I read only my handouts and the prescribed textbooks for my courses.

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	69	71.13
2	No	28	28.87
3	Total	97	100.00

Table 4

Table 4 seeks to know what students often read. 69 (71.13%) of the respondents claimed that they read their handouts and the prescribed textbooks during examination, while 28 (28.87%) of them said it wasn't so.

Table 5: The value attached to certificates

Question: I enjoy my reading more when I have an examination to write.

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	73	75.26
2	No	24	24.74
3	Total	97	100.00

Table 5

Table 5 clearly indicated that undergraduates attach importance to the ownership of certificates as 73 (75.26%) of the sampled population claimed that they enjoyed their reading when they have an examination (utilitarian reading) while 24 (24.74%) of them claimed otherwise.

Table 6: The importance of the Library

Question: The Library is a conducive place for reading

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	84	86.60
2	No	13	13.40
3	Total	97	100.00

Table 6

Table 6 confirmed the fact that silence is the golden rule in the Library, as 84 (86.60%) of the sampled population claimed that the Library was a conducive place for reading, while 13 (13.40%) claimed that it wasn't so.

Table 7: The patronage (use) of the Library

Question: I use the Library more during the session than at vacation

S/N	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES		PERCENTAGE
1	Yes	80	82.47
2	No	17	17.53
3	Total	97	100.00

Table 7

Table 7 shows that undergraduates use the Library more during the session, particularly, when examinations are approaching. Here, 80 (82.47%) of the sampled population confirmed that they use the Library more during the session than at vacation, while 17 (17.53%) of them claimed otherwise.

DISCUSSIONS

One can deduce from this study that undergraduates in our universities engage in utilitarian reading, because the society places emphasis on paper qualification as can be seen from Table 1. Table 2 also buttresses the fact that reading is very important because it helps one to pass examinations.

Table 3 shows that reading for pleasure (leisure) things like newspapers and novels improves one's spoken English, while Table 4 confirms that undergraduates read mainly for examinations, their handouts and the prescribed textbooks. Table 5 further clarifies that undergraduates read because they attach great value to certificates; thus, they engage in serious reading when they have an examination to write.

Table 6 shows that the undergraduates recognize the Library as a conducive place for reading. A place where silence was always maintained. Ironically, Table 7 confirmed that undergraduates use the Library more during the session and desert the Library during vacation when there was no examination write.

REASONS WHY THE LIBRARY IS HEAVILY USED DURING THE SESSION

The use of the Library resources is not limited to the undergraduates alone. For instance, the categories of people that are allowed by law to use the University of Ado-Ekiti Library as spelt out in the student's handbook (2001) are:

- i) Members of the University Council;
- ii) All Senior members of Staff of the University;
- iii) All Students of the University;
- iv) Graduates of the University of Ado-Ekiti, who may use it for reference only;
- v) Students attending seminars, conference or part-time courses in the University who can use the Library for reference only; and
- vi) Any other person permitted by the University Librarian

However, from the above-mentioned list of eligible Library users, the undergraduates form the bulk. Below are some of the reasons why the Library is heavily (densely) used during the session:

- 1. Eagerness to read and pass examination;
- 2. The rush for the limited seats available;
- 3. Availability of prescribed reading materials;
- 4. Consultation of past examination questions;
- 5. Opportunity of photocopying services;
- 6. Conducive reading atmosphere;
- 7. Reference services;
- 8. Limitation of peers (bandwagon mentality); and
- 9. Examination phobia which leads many to the Library.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reading, regardless of which trade or profession in which one finds himself or herself, has become an indispensable skill in the modern world. For instance, artisans, petty traders, and others in such categories, need to be able to read and write, how much more undergraduate students.

Our undergraduates, apart from utilitarian reading, should also engage in general reading, which is reading for pleasure (leisure) or recreational reading. Failure to do this will imply that one is improving one part of one's personality while neglecting another important part.

The following are therefore recommended:

1. The importance of reading must be stressed to undergraduates during their orientation program. This will immensely help to curb examination malpractices.
2. The University Counseling Center must inculcate in the undergraduates the habit of reading both for examination and leisure.
3. Lecturers must not favour their students unduly with marks or examination questions. Such indulgence can lead to laziness and half-baked graduates.
4. The Library should make reading materials available in diverse forms both for leisure and examination purposes.
5. The Library staff must not be harsh on the students but should not compromise either.
6. The library opening hours should be extended beyond 6.30p.m. daily, as this would serve as an extrinsic motivator to the undergraduates to read.

CONCLUSION

The importance of reading cannot be over-emphasized. Reading both for pleasure and examination complement each other, thus one should not be left to suffer at the expense of the other, as knowledge itself is dynamic. It is often said that the man who ceases to learn, ceases to live.

Undergraduates in our respective tertiary institutions should not play away their time during vacations, under the guise that examinations are over. They should engage in recreational reading rather than roam about the streets or join the multitude to do evil or some other unprofitable task. It is said that an idle mind is the devil's workshop, therefore, students should conquer illiteracy by cultivating the habit of reading not only for examination, but also for leisure (pleasure).

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