

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AS AGENT IN IMPROVING THE READING CULTURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IMO STATE.

BY

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Abstract

Reading culture has drastically dropped among secondary school students especially those in the public schools. This fall in the reading culture calls for greater concern as students do not see the relevance of reading nor using the library. This study investigates the school library as agent in improving reading culture of secondary school students in Imo State. The researchers adopted survey research design for this study. The population of the study consisted of the Teacher Librarians and the Assistants which gave a total population of 42. A structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Data collected were analyzed using Mean statistics. The study revealed that students visited the library but in low turnout, and some library services that attracted the students to the library were not properly carried out. It was also revealed that lack of professional librarians, and inadequate funding to acquire the necessary resources hindered the library from functioning as expected. The researchers recommend amongst others that professional librarians should be employed by the school management and government to manage the school libraries. The school managements should endeavor to acquire current and relevant information resources, (print and non-print) to attract student to effectively use the library. The library environment should be made conducive for students to read. In conclusion school library is very vital to improve and encourage reading among students hence every effort should be made to actualize the function of the library in improving reading culture among the students.

Keywords: School libraries, Reading, Reading culture

Introduction

Reading has always been regarded as an attractive activity especially among those that are involved in the reading campaign. There is need to continue to inculcate and foster the reading habit and interest among the younger generation by helping them to develop reading skills. Only when readers have the various skills needed for successful reading will they be inclined to read. Reading is the process of looking at, and comprehending the meaning of written and printed words from the visual representation of symbols. It involves recognition and sometimes verbalization of symbols, which represents sounds in human speech. Hence comprehension is at the centre of reading. Reading facilitates the teaching and learning process and have saved human race over the years in learning advancement. Joe-Kalu (2015) opines that reading is a process that requires the use of complex thought procedures to interpret printed symbols as meaningful units, and comprehend them as a thought unit, in order to understand a printed message. Reading involves the giving of interpretation of written symbols mentally.

It is a fact that functional and qualitative reading culture is an instrument for the development of societies and nations. The success of fostering such reading culture at the Secondary School level is directly related to the availability of functional libraries with requisite resources and services of professional librarians. These libraries are libraries found in pre-tertiary institutions such as Secondary Schools, Teachers' Training Schools, Primary and Nursery Schools. According to Aliyu (2007) a school library is a collection of relevant instructional, learning, and teaching information resources properly organized and housed by trained librarians for adequate dissemination to teachers and pupils. This summarizes reading culture as the art of inculcating reading habit and interest into the learners, through conducive reading environments and copious activities. Developing reading culture foster love for learning the habit of reading among learners.

Reading culture is one of the valuable assets which boost human generative powers of thinking for new innovations, development and natural endowments. Okebukola (2004) states that through reading, human have the tool to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation, it does allow one to listen to the wisdom and people of ages. It is worth knowing that reading culture evolves when an individual habitually and regularly read books and other information materials that are necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career. Reading is informative and becoming a skilled adaptive reader enhances the chance of success at school and beyond. Reading is for life, it is believed that people who read always find the solution to the mysteries of life. Knowing the importance of reading to a person, community and nation, the researchers emphasizes the need of the school library forming and inculcating this importance aspect of life in every school child from that early stage of education.

Objectives of the Study

The researchers formulated five objectives to guide the study which include:

- 1) To ascertain the reading culture of students in post primary schools under study.
- 2) To ascertain the library facilities in the school libraries under study
- 3) To determine the library services to students in the schools under study.
- 4) To identify the effect of school library on the reading culture of students in schools under study
- 5) To find out the problem affecting reading culture of students in the schools under study.

Statement of the Problem

The dwindling rate of reading culture among secondary school students is very alarming. The effect of this dearth of reading culture manifest in their social and academic works, leading to increase in examination malpractices, poor performance in internal and external examinations, poor communication in English and even letter writing. Days are gone when students compete on how many books/novels one can read in a day or week to how many social networks one knows and uses. The problem of poor reading culture has made students not to spell words correctly instead words are abbreviated during writing. This has caused more harm in the society. One of the objectives of School libraries is to promote reading habit/culture, to achieve this, there should be a good library building/environment, stocked with adequate and current information resources coupled with recreational material like novels, magazines, newspapers and managed by a qualified and motivated librarians who have love for books and knows how to handle children at this level of education. It is on this basis that the researchers investigated on how School libraries could revamp reading culture/ habit among Secondary School students in Imo State.

Literature Review

School libraries are libraries that are found in pre-tertiary institutions such as nursery, primary, secondary teachers training colleges, with the mission of contributing to the intellectual development of pupils and students. It involves collection of books and other learning materials organized by professionals for the use of the students and teachers.

The objectives of school libraries are to acquire and make available to pupils and students, a wide range of books and audio-visual materials to supplement and enrich the teaching and learning situation in schools, other objectives includes encouraging the development of skill in reading. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA), the school library

provides information and idea that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge based society. The school library equips secondary school students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens. The manifesto is categorized into mission, funding, legislation and networks, goals, staff, operations and management. Thus to develop their reading culture students need access to books that they like, on topics in which they have interest and books that reflect their academic pursuit, (Friese,2008). Access to school libraries would improve students reading. Students need access to efficiently staffed school libraries with large and diverse collections.

Need for Reading Culture

To know and understand the world and its environment, a child helps himself/herself through reading books, newspapers and other information materials. Once the child has been taught to read and write and has developed the love for books, he can explore for himself the wealth of human experience and knowledge through reading. Through reading, the individual is able to build or fix things, enjoy stories, discover what others believe and develop ideas or beliefs of their own. Reading provides the key to all forms of information necessary for our day-to-day survival and growth. Azubogu,(2018) observed that the importance of reading cannot be over-emphasized and continued to stress that inculcating reading culture is a sustained regime of forming the habit of reading both textual and non-textual materials from within and outside one's course of interest. Furthermore, a student who reads has the capacity to actively participate in the continuity of learning. Development through reading is more progress engendering, lasting effective and beneficent to mankind when held in reading culture. It empowers, emancipates citizens, and brings people together. Reading is the foundation of much of the enjoyment the individual gets in life and is closely related to vocational efficiency, with reading you travel far beyond your environment. Okusage,(2008) opined that reading is the only form of entertainment that is also an essential life skill. Reading doesn't just happen, it is a skill that must be nurtured from child's earliest years and that once children know how to read, they still need gentle coaxing and support to reach their full potential as readers. Our children need help to develop their ability to read so that they can comprehend subjects better at school. This is true because children with learning disabilities have problem with reading and related language skills.

The importance of reading to the individual and to the society cannot be over emphasized as Kalu,(2011) outlines some virtues of reading to include; provision of individual welfare, social progress and international understanding, the provision of skills, knowledge and the right attitude that frees one from idleness or

boredom. Reading is not just for school but also for life and it enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. Reading is an indispensable tool for learning in various hierarchies of modern educational set up which facilitates the leaning process and effectively promotes intellectual development in the learners. According to Obi (2001) reading broadens a child's understanding of life; afford him/her the tool to explore his/her talent while learning about himself and his society. The vast majority of world's information today is not digitize; they are in print form, mostly books. Therefore the imperativeness of reading cannot be overruled among the youths. In the area of reading awareness Dako-Ampem(2004) states the need to promote effective reading habit among the general populace in Nigeria beginning from the school pupils. Reading has been receiving attention from organizations such as the National library of Nigeria, the Reading Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Book Development Council. Since 1981, the National Library of Nigeria has been sponsoring the Readership Promotion Campaign in the country. This is done as part of strategies to ginger up reading culture in Nigeria. It is important to observe that the National library alone cannot carry out this campaign and on this note Alegbeleye (2010) suggests that the above observation notwithstanding, the library can in a number of ways play important role in promoting reading habit among Nigerians.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. The area covered by this research is Imo State. It is divided into six education zones namely: Okigwe Zone I & II, Orlu Zone I & II and Owerri Zone I & II. Twenty-one (21) Public Secondary Schools were randomly selected from each of the Zones. The population of the study consisted of all the Teacher Librarians and their Assistants. Data collected was scored using a 4-point modified likert type scale, and were analyzed using Mean statistics. Tables were used in describing the Mean distribution of various data collected. Selected sampled schools are: 1.Anara Community Secondary School; 2.Community Secondary School Okigwe, 3.Ezoke High School Nsu; 4.Modonna Science Secondary School Ihette-Uboma; 5.Uboma Secondary School Ikperere; 6.Okwuohia Community Secondary School Obowu; 7.Aquia Secondary School Aquia, 8.Egbuoma Secondary School; 9.Egbema Secondary School; 10.Atta boys Secondary School; 11.Young Scientists College; 12.Obazu Girls Secondary School Mberi; 13.Mbaise Secondary School; 14.Nguru Secondary Technical School Nguru Mbaise; 15.Ezinihitte Secondary School. 16.Army Day Secondary School Obinze; 17.Nekede Secondary School; 18.Secondary Technical School Irete, 19.Ihioma Girls Secondary School, 20.Ntu-eke Secondary School, and 21.Okpala Secondary School Ngor-Okpala.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Research Question 1: How is the reading culture of the students in your school?

Table 1: Reading Culture of students in the schools under study.

Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total response	Total score	Mean score
Excellent	12	18	60	3	42	93	2.2
Very good	28	30	5	40	42	103	2.4
Good	32	72	14	3	42	121	2.8
Poor	44	69	16	0	42	129	3.0

Analysis of the Table 1 reveals that the reading culture/habit of the students in the schools under study indicates the following: Excellent 2.2 mean score, Very good 2.4 mean score, Good 2.8 mean score and Poor 3.0 mean score respectively. It is obvious that the students reading culture as expressed by the respondents were poor. This could be attributed to lack of using the library and/or poor library orientation.

Research Question 2. What are the library facilities in the schools under study?

Table 2: Library Facilities in the schools under study.

Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total response	Total score	Mean score
Furniture/reading tables, chairs	68	75	-	-	42	143	3.4
Adequate lighting/ fans	-	30	64	-	42	94	2.2
Air conditioners	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Shelves	80	66	-	-	42	146	3.4
Good building	16	21	44	9	42	90	2.1
Adequate space	20	18	62	-	42	100	2.3

Table 2, presents library facilities available in these school libraries in ranked order. Furniture like reading tables, chairs and desk, shelves and fans ranked highest with 3.4, and 2.5 respectively, while adequate lighting, good building and adequate space ranked least with 2.2, 2.1 and 2.3 respectively. The respondents did not respond to air conditioners as it was obvious that the libraries do not have such facility. This means that, the library had a lot to do in the area of facilities to make the library attractive and conducive to the students. It was observed that only four (4) schools had separate building for the library, while others were one room class that was used as library with old tables and desks in the schools under study.

Research Question 3: what are the library services renders to students in schools under study. Table 3: Library services to students

Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total response	Total score	Mean score
Library orientation	-	-	70	7	42	77	1.8
Reading competition	-	45	54	-	42	99	2.3
Library hour	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Library exhibitions	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Current awareness services	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Borrowing of books	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Spelling competition	40	33	24	7	42	104	2.4

Table 3 indicates the services the school libraries should provide for the students to enhance their reading culture. Unfortunately these expected services were not adequately provided and in some cases were not provided at all in all school libraries studied. This reveals the secret behind the low patronage of the library by the students as indicated in table 3, because there is nothing to attract their interest and attention to the library despite the resources stocked for them..

Research Question 4: What are the library resources and their effect on the reading culture of the schools under study?

Table 4.Library Resources and their effect on the reading culture of students in the schools under study

Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total response	Total score	Mean score
Texts books help students to do their class work	76	69	-	-	42	145	3.4
Dictionaries help students to learn words and their meanings	64	78	-	-	42	142	3.3
Literature exposes students to literally works	52	87	-	-	42	139	3.3
Newspapers expose students to news and events around the world	-	57	42	2	42	101	2.4
Magazines helps student for research	-	33	46	8	42	87	2.0
Audio-visuals help students to learn visually though the schools under study do not have audio-visuals.	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Computers enhance their knowledge in ICT.	-	51	40	2	42	93	2.2
Atlases/maps help students to know directions.	52	75	8	0	42	135	3.2
Encyclopedias	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Light reading Materials/story books.	40	96	-	-	42	136	3.2

Table 4 reveal that, the school libraries under study provided, textbooks, dictionaries, literature, atlases/maps and light reading materials or story books to enhance their student reading culture as their mean scores ranged from 3.2 to 3.4 respectively. Newspapers, magazines computers were not provided in some of the school libraries as their mean scores ranges from 2.0 to 2.4 while audio-visuals and encyclopedias were not seen in any of the school libraries under study. From the analysis one can deduced that school libraries have a lot of effects on students ranging from helping students to do their class work; using the dictionary, newspapers; magazines, computers and developing their reading culture. The finding agrees what Firese (2008) which opined that students need access to books of their interest and which reflects in their academic pursuit. This helps them to have interest in reading since they have access to the book they want. On the problems affecting reading culture of students in the schools under study. The respondents were asked for their opinions on this issue. From their responses it was observed that the following problems were hindering the use of the library by students.

- Lack of financial support by individuals and government,

- Inadequate infrastructure and equipment.

- Unavailability of adequate and current information resources.

- Low level of information technology development.

- lack of professional librarians in secondary schools.

- Lack of interest by the students, they prefer their handsets to reading

- Family background/upbringing

The problems stipulated by the respondents as the problems affecting the students use of the library was of the same view of Tella and Akenve (2007) where they stressed that the reason for decline in reading culture is poor exposure to school libraries in their schools and lack of adequate information materials. This also could be attributed to lack of library infrastructure in schools. They also pointed lack of professional manning the libraries and advised that professional librarians should be employed to school libraries and they should give students orientation on how to use the library. The importance of reading and using the library both for academic and leisure purposes should be explained to the students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The practice, which was common among secondary school students in the past, is gradually eroded, that was the days when students compete with one another on how many novels one is able to finish reading in a day or two, and also learning or developing their vocabularies. This is in comparison to this period where reading is only taken as part of the school curriculum to pass examination and not taken as part of life or way of living. To ensure that reading culture thrives in secondary

schools, concerted efforts would be required to improve the social and reading infrastructure and orientation of students on the need for them to use the library across the primary and secondary schools. School curriculum upgrade on reading hours and reading extension services should be encouraged in all schools. Good reading broadens ones understanding, experience and knowledge. It also provides the children with the necessary information needed for the progress of commerce and industry, Good reading makes a child to be recognized and be great in future.

Recommendations

The researchers made the following recommendations:

- 1) To ensure that reading culture thrives in secondary schools, governments should put more interest in school libraries through the establishment of good library structure and adequate information resources that attract students to use the library.
- 2) Professional librarians who have love for books and desire to encourage students to read should be employed to manage the school library as they will use their wealth of knowledge to carry out those services that will inculcate reading culture in the students.
- 3) Provision of relevant information resources. Books that deal with subjects that are relevant to the students' daily lives and reflect their environment should be considered when stocking school libraries.
- 4) Provision of information technologies in our school libraries is expedient because children need to be exposed to more effective teaching/learning strategies and resources as a means of acquiring relevant skill, and habits for survival in a modern world.
- 5) There is need to acquire instructional resources in the schools to enable pupils and students have a clearer understanding of what they are taught in schools.

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