

**READING HABITS OF STUDENTS IN
THREE PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OWERRI.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the reading habit of students in three private secondary schools in Owerri Imo State. Data was gathered using structured questionnaire, interview and observation methods. The study sample from a total of 150 students was obtained through random sampling method. Out of these 150 copies of questionnaire, 148 respondent representing 95.2% of the total population. The study revealed that all the three schools had libraries. From this study, 80% of the students agreed that they read mainly for examinations. The study identified how students spent their free periods and holidays. The study concludes that all stakeholders in the educational development of the students viz government, school authority, parents, librarians, mass media have roles to play in developing reading habit in students and they should not work in isolation.

INTRODUCTION

Nothing is more important towards achieving academic excellence than being a good reader. Also, it is said that readers are leaders, hence the need to acquire reading skills at a very early stage. Reading is basic to learning and it is hoped that if students learn to read, they will read to learn.

Education is the preparation of man for life. Therefore, it is necessary that a child needs education which can only be achieved through reading because reading is a programme that enhances educational excellence. Reading generally extends one's capacity in language. By reading, one could add the efforts of other writers to one's own thereby gaining perhaps greater powers of expression. It is the view of Adigun & Oyelude (2003) that a student's further education after secondary school education depends to a very large extent on the quality and quantity of reading. However, it is one thing to

acquire the ability to read, it is another to develop the urge for reading (Taiwo, 1990).

Reading habits connote the characteristics observed in students as they find their ways around libraries, interacting with book and non-book resources alike. Individuals develop and express reading habits through cognitive and affective domains from early childhood and formative years (that is when they are in the nursery, primary and secondary schools). The formal learning environment called 'school library' provides students the necessary resources and facilities to cater for and promote good reading habits.

Therefore it is pertinent to inculcate good reading habit in students as sound and qualitative education remains Nigerians surest and quickest route to all-round development and industrialization

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives;

- i. To ascertain how frequent students use the library and time spent in reading.
- ii. To determine the purpose of using the library by students.
- iii. To examine the types of reading materials preferred by students.
- iv. To identify the factors that promote the reading habit of students.

Methodology and Population

The methodology used was descriptive survey method. Questionnaire, interviews and direct observation constituted the instruments for data collection. The population of study constituted 150 students selected from the three (3) private secondary schools in Owerri under study viz; Rochas International Secondary School Owerri; Eternal Word Christian Secondary School, Nekede and Bethel Seminary, Nekede. The sample was 50 copies of questionnaire for each school, administered on both junior and senior classes; that is to say that 25 was given to junior class and 25 to senior class in each of the schools under study. Data collected was analysed using simple tables and percentages.

Review of Related Literature

Reading cannot be separated from learning or better still from knowledge acquisition. Although the youth of today have the privilege of learning through sight-seeing and audio-visual devices that abound around them, the fact remains that a sizeable part of knowledge is acquired through reading (Adigun & Oyelude, 2003).

Students should cultivate the habit of reading any text that comes their way because no knowledge is lost. The library should play an important role in the cultivation of good reading habit. Green (1983) pointed out that the only

means of encouraging students to form good reading habit is by the introduction of libraries in schools, and once introduced, there are many ways in which the librarian can promote his service to the children. The first is to get the children into the library by all means and secondly to encourage them to make use of the library resources.

The school library has a great role to play in improving the reading habits of students which will enable them to be grounded on a solid educational base, characterized by self confidence, self reliance, creativity and balanced judgment. Libraries are integral components of education which exist in order to provide varied information needs of their clientele. Madu & Ibeun (2003) asserted that the librarian should ensure that suitable reading materials are made available in the library. The collection should be relevant and up-to-date. They should include classroom texts and materials beyond what is necessary to the classroom. There should be good relaxation materials like periodicals (including newspapers and magazines), audio-visuals like television sets, video players, video films etc. There should also be games especially indoor games like ludo, cards, scrabble etc. All these provide a variety of relaxation and various forms of education to the students.

Several factors determine good reading habits. Okonta (1987) observed that the use of brain, but not the eyes promotes good reading habits because the eyes, indeed, are capable of reading the whole book at a glance. Ubahakwe (1984) posited that a library building oriented in such a way as to allow maximum cross ventilation, use of natural light, avoiding the direct rays of the sun from entering, promotes good reading habits among students.

On the factors that affect reading habit, Elaturoti (1990) also observed that students' reading habits were influenced by non-availability of good reading space, inadequate library materials and facilities as well as proximity of library buildings to their halls of residence.

Although ICT has contributed immensely to improving the quality of life, it is sad to note that its products such as the television, video CD players, computer games and the likes are arresting the attention of today's children and killing their interest in reading (Odu, 2008). The implication of this is that as the younger generation is no longer in constant touch with the written word, they tend to lose grip of the morphological and syntactic compositions of the words and sentences they hear orally. Parents on their own no longer buy books for their children apart from the recommended school text. Obviagele (2007) lamented that parents no longer give books as gifts to their children rather they buy gifts such as computer games, handsets etc stating further that the desire of people is what affects their lifestyle.

Adimorah (1986) writing on reading habits of Nigerians believed that every literate Nigerian read but often tends to read only job-related documents or examination related materials. He further stated that this particular attitude limits the reading scope of most literate Nigerians. However, a good reading habit is a requisite to a successful accomplishment in practically all areas of life and a student's performance may be poor because he/she failed to read effectively.

Analysis of Data and Discussion

As much as possible, the data were analysed based on the answers provided to the research questions raised in the study. The analysed results were interpreted and discussed as presented below.

The three schools under study have school libraries. Out of the 150 copies of questionnaire distributed, 148 were returned.

Table i: Frequency of Use of the Library and Time Spent in Reading

Use	Freq	%	Time	Freq	%
Daily	35	24	0-30 mins	49	33
Once a Week	24	16	30-1hr	59	40
During Library Hour	31	21	1hr-2hrs	27	18
Twice a week	10	7	3hrs and above	11	7
Not at all	48	32	No answer	2	1
	148	100%		148	100%

The table above shows that 48(32%) students do not use the library at all. 35 (24%) use it daily while 31 (21%) use the library during library hour. The implication of this is that students have not formed the habit of using the library as they should. And for effective and maximum utilization of library for reading and consulting, students should cultivate the habit of visiting the library daily.

On the time spent on reading, 59(40%) read for a period of 30- 1 hour, followed by 49(33%) who read between 0 -30 minutes. This shows that students do not spend much time in reading compared to time spent in doing other activities such as watching movies, playing etc.

Table ii: Purpose of Reading

	Freq.	%
Examination	119	80
Recreation	2	1
Homework	1	1
To Widen Knowledge	26	18
Prepare for Quiz	-	-
	148	100%

Table 2 shows that 119(80%)read mainly to pass examinations while 26 (18%) which is a lesser number when compared to 80% read to widen knowledge. This implies that if there is no examination , most students will not read, and this confirms what Adimorah (1986) wrote on the reading habits of Nigerians as cited earlier in this paper.

Question 6 sought to know where the students prefer reading. Only 49(33%) prefer to read in the library. Others prefer reading at home (15%), dormitory (18%), classroom (10%) and secluded corner (24%).

TABLE iii: Materials Preferred by Students

	freq	%
Textbooks	38	26
Notebooks	55	37
Fiction/Novel	21	14
Periodicals	3	2
Non-Books	-	-
All OfThe Above	31	21
	148	100%

On the material preferred by students, 55 (37%) students prefer to read their notebooks followed by 38 (26%) who prefer to read their text books. A very few number 3 (2%) read periodicals when they go to the library. This shows that students do not read to widen knowledge and for relaxation. None of the students ticked non -books. On observation, the researchers noticed that though there were few computers in the libraries of the schools investigated, but they were not functional due to lack of power supply. This shows that at this age of information and communication technology (ICT), school libraries are yet to embrace this trend and therefore students are not given

preference to the use of these materials. Hence they are missing the advantages that accrue from these technologies.

TABLE IV: Factors That Promote Reading

	Frequency	%
User education	125	84
Conducive library environment	148	100
Borrowing of books for home reading	120	81
Availability of what to read	148	100
Inclusion of library hour in the timetable	148	100

*Combination of answers was given for this question.

The information got from the respondents revealed that conducive library environment, availability of what to read, inclusion of library hour in the timetable are the major factors that promote reading habits in students. Each of the questions got 100% response.

User education and borrowing of books for home reading got 84% and 81% respectively. This implies that all these factors promote reading habits in students and therefore should be encouraged.

TABLE v: How They Spend Free Periods and Holidays

	30	20	Travel	39	26
Play	53	36	Visit public libraries	12	8
Sleep	2	1	Watch movies	93	63
Chat with friends	56	38	Attend parties	3	2
Others (rest)	6	4	Noanswer	1	1
No answer	1	1		-	-
	148	100%		148	100%

Table 5 reveals that 56(38%) chat with their friends during free periods while 53(36%) play during free periods, and a lesser number 30(20%) read.

On how they spend their holidays, a larger number 93(63%) watch movies while 39(26%) travel. 12(8%) visit the public library while 3(2%) attend parties and one gave no answer. This implies that students have not formed the habit of reading as a form of relaxation or recreation during their free

periods and holidays. Most of them do not have knowledge of the existence of public libraries and their services and therefore do not see the need to visit public libraries which is open to them at all times at little or no cost.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it is apparent that students have not been educated both at home and in school on the importance of reading and making use of the library for their educational development. Students should be taught how to explore the resources and services of the school library. This is lacking and that is why students go to the library to read their personal books and to pass examinations mostly.

Forming reading habit is a sine qua non to educational development of an individual. Therefore, there is every need to develop it as early as possible. The promotion of reading in students is a task that must be taken up by all stakeholders. To this end, families, libraries, librarians, teachers, mass media private and government have roles to play in promoting reading and instilling reading habits in our youths. School libraries have major roles to play and therefore the librarians should ensure that they provide an enabling environment for students to read and love reading, making them to see reading as a pleasure and not a task. If this is done students will grow up to be book lovers thereby making reading a hobby. Recommendations.

The following recommendations are some of the ways through which reading habit can be developed: Adequate attention should be given to libraries by school authorities. As much as possible, the school should be a separate building and be spacious and conducive. The school libraries should be manned by qualified librarians who can properly organize library materials for students use. A school library is not optional but compulsory and should be meant to operate actively in every school. The federal government should make this mandatory to all schools. Adequate and relevant books on different subjects taught in the schools and other books for recreational reading should be provided.

Library instruction/orientation should be vigorously taught to students. This exercise should aim at helping students know the importance of library as it relates to academic as well as helping them to reach at the books needed for their various subjects with relative ease. Library hour should be incorporated in the school timetable and strictly adhered to. This period should not be used for leisure or relaxation in the library rather it should be used for teaching various use of the library which include reading skills, use of dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps, card catalogue etc. From time to time reading competitions should be organized for students not only by their schools; libraries should reach out to members of the community for

sponsorships to such competitions or to donate books and other reading materials.

Knowing that no one library is self sufficient, the school authorities should intensify their efforts by cooperating with other libraries especially the public libraries to benefit from advisory services, mobile library and extension services as well as book donation from the Book Aid International which is coordinated by public libraries in the states.

Parents have great role to play in developing reading habit in their children. This can be done by giving books as gifts to their children and desiring to know what they learnt from such books, monitoring their activities especially time they spend in watching movies and other trivial activities to the detriment of their studies. As children learn by imitation, parents should read so that their children can learn from them how to read. Schools should embark on programmes and activities that will encourage the use of library by the students such as library tours, formation of library clubs, young readers club etc. Non-book materials in the form of audio-visuals were not in existence in the school libraries investigated and where available, were not functional. In view of this, it is hereby suggested that school libraries should acquire and use these vital information materials and equipment along side with books considering the tremendous assistance which they render in instructional methods. Indoor games such as ludo, scrabble chess etc. should be acquired also. This will attract students to the library.

All the above suggestions and recommendations can not be effected without adequate funding. Therefore adequate funds should be provided for school library activities.

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