

PROMOTING READING CULTURE IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

BY

ALIYU ABDULLAH (Ph.D)

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY KEFEI

AND

BILKISU MOHAMMED

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA, ABUJA

Abstract

This study explores the concept of reading, reading culture and decline of the culture in the Nigerian society. The study adopted a theoretical approach and relied totally on existing literature. The consequences of the decline in the reading includes anti-social behavior, delinquency, school violence, bullying, hacking computers, and even examination malpractices. Children with poor reading skills receive poor grades at school, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behavior problems, seem to dislike school, and often fail to develop to their full potential. The study highlighted some government initiatives targeted at reviving reading habit in Nigeria which includes Lagos State Government Reading Time; Bring Back the Book campaign, Lagos Book Fair and Reading Circle. The study therefore recommends some way forward that will help in reversing the trend such Excursions to libraries, Exhibition, Government should take a bold step to increase the production of textbooks to reach the target figure of five textbooks per pupil; revival of the school's Literary and Debating Societies and teaching of arts and literature etc. The paper concludes that reading culture should be encouraged not only in school but the society at large.

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Introduction

The holy Qur'an reveals that the first communication between Allah and Prophet Muhammad was knowledge-based, - Iqraa, meaning "read" or "recite" (Qur'an 96: 1-5). Islam holds acquisition of knowledge (literacy, reading, etc.) in high esteem. In Nigeria, literacy is recognized as a basic tool for personal and national development. The National Policy on Education (2004), places inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively as one of the objectives of school education. The library must provide resources to complement education. These resources can take children and youth far above technical literacy to developing reading culture which makes permanent literacy attainable. Promoting reading culture has become very important for any society in the 21st Century. This is more important for children who are the future of the nation. The need to inculcate the culture of reading in the younger ones should be the primary goal of institutional heads, teachers and parents. The declining interest in reading exhibited by many today is a cause for concern and a challenge to all. It is through reading that the mind is broadened and opened to new ideas. Reading enables creativity to blossom, it gives the tools to explore ones' talents while learning about oneself and the society. This is more so for developing nations like ours. The function of formal education in the development of Africa cannot be overemphasized.

The Concept of Reading

Reading literally refers to the ability to recognize and understand characters or speak words that may be printed or written on paper and other formats of recording human knowledge. Reading is the ability to obtain meaning from words. Reading is the ability to understand words contained in a document and make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development (Dadzie, 2008).

This implies making meaning out of recorded information either printed or non-printed in the life of an individual. People read for different reasons and purposes, some of which include for pleasure, leisure, relaxation, information and for knowledge. Reading is the identification of the symbols and the association of appropriate meaning with them. It requires identification and comprehension. Comprehension skills help the learner to understand the meaning of words in isolation and in context (Palani, 2012). He believes reading is a process of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning and problem solving. Ogbonna (2014) states that reading literally refers to the ability to recognize and understand characters or speak words that may be printed or written on paper and other formats of recording human knowledge. Reading is the ability to obtain meaning from words. The ability to read and write is called literacy, and a person who can read is said to be literate, while a person who lacks the ability to read is said to be illiterate. According to Etim (2008) basic literacy means an individual's ability to read, write and speak in English. Reading is the cornerstone of learning. Gbadamosi (2007) quoting Okwilagwe describes reading as reasoning involving the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases and sentences requiring all types of thinking such as critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, evaluative, judgmental, and problem solving. Reading is a means of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written word. This can be through books, journals, magazines and newspapers. Collins and Cheek (1999) describe reading as a process that requires the use of complex thought processes to interpret printed symbols as meaningful units and comprehend them as a thought unit in order to understand a printed message. According to Rubin (2002), reading is a total integrative process that starts with the reader and includes the affective, perceptual, and cognitive domains. Okebukola (2004) affirms that, through reading, humans have the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation; it allows one to listen to the wisdom and people of the ages.

Types of Reading

Skimming reading is reading to confirm expectations; reading for communicative tasks. Skimming is the most rudimentary type of reading. Its object is to familiarize you as quickly as possible with the material to be read.

General reading or scanning is reading to extract specific information; reading for general understanding. Scanning is a skill that requires that you read quickly while looking for specific information. To scan a reading text, you should start at the top of the page and then move your eyes quickly toward the bottom. Generally, scanning is a technique that is helpful when you are looking for the answer to a known question.

Close reading or searching reading is reading for complete understanding; reading for detailed comprehension (information; function and discourse). Close reading is the most important skill you need for any form of literary studies. It means paying especially close attention to what is printed on the page. Close reading means not only reading and understanding the meanings of the individual printed words, but also involves making yourself sensitive to all the nuances and connotations of language as it is used by skilled writers.

Reading Culture

Culture is a term used by social scientists for a people's whole way of life. Reading culture can best be explained as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written word. Such practice can be acquired by reading books, journals, magazines, newspapers etc. Reading culture refers to a way of life characterized by the habit of reading intensively and extensively. 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.

Ronald, Benard and Ondari (2014) viewed reading culture as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written word. Such practice can be acquired by reading books, magazines, newspapers etc. Reading habit is the use of reading as a regular activity. It is the cultivation of an attitude and possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and constant activity. Reading habit is identified as the single most important determinant of a student's success in education and in our modern complex society Nssien (2008). Reading culture is the process of building up positive reading attitude among students and children over a period of time. 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, he is said to have a reading culture. Oke (1996) gives reasons why people read, including self-improvement, pleasure and relaxation, and a feeling of pride and prestige. Research has shown that most people only read to pass the prescribed examinations. There is little of reading for leisure and development of the mind. The economic situation in the country has not also helped matters; a lot of graduates, including professors remain academically trapped in the midst of an evolving world full of new ideas. Reading should be popularized not only for examinations but as a long life hobby. Nigerians' ingenuity of entrepreneurship and massive development remained incomplete until they embrace a thorough reading culture. When reading becomes a popular habit, pupils will constantly borrow books from the library, a culture that is almost dead. When we read, we get power. The greatest legacy anyone can leave for others is education. When challenges come, the knowledge we have acquired will help us out; and reading is crucial to education. Read books, newspapers, magazines; and when we surf the Internet, let us search for

valuable knowledge.

Nurturing Reading Culture

In other to nurture reading culture 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:

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.

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.

Reading in the Nigerian Society

The average Nigerian reads less than one book per year, and only one percent of successful men and women in Nigeria read one non-fiction book per month. The same study showed that 30 million Nigerians have graduated from high school with poor reading skills. Some Nigerians may not read because they are not working in the right field(s). If regular reading and studying is a required condition of your job or profession, this in effect means you read, even if it is under compulsion. The Federal Government, which came up with a projection that by the year 2000, every Nigerian should be literate, at the same never ensured the availability of books in our institutions as there is a critical shortage of textbooks and library materials at all levels of education. It is lamentable where one textbook is shared among five or more pupils, scenario which is not suitable for learning. Aina (2011) asserts that being a former British colony, Nigeria's literacy culture ought to be as standardized as that of Britain. About 99% of British citizens can read and write. The same cannot be said of Nigeria. The literacy rate of Nigeria dropped from 62 percent in 1992 to 52 percent in 2006.

fifty nine point six percent (59.6 %) Male: 69.2%. Female: 49.7%(2015). This implies that the illiteracy rate in the country is 48 percent. It also means that rather than improving on the literacy rating, Nigeria keeps on retrogressing Olanrewaju (2008). Henry (2004), states that out of the 814 million illiterate people in the world, developing countries, especially in Africa, represent a huge percentage.

Decline in Reading Culture:

Declining reading culture in Nigeria is alarming and has caused great setback for the nation in all sectors. There is a high decline rate in the reading culture of Nigeria. A study which examined reading culture among students in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria found that 60% of students had prescribed textbooks only during examination. Browsing and watching television took most of the students' time, 21% of students buy novels to read for knowledge and pleasure. The reading culture in Nigeria has totally collapsed (Arua and Nwaebiem, 2014) and (Ayanbimpe, 2012). A Study by Ukwu (2012) reaffirms this allegation by stating that the reading culture of Nigerian students is poor and gradually dying away. Students no longer spend quality time with their book which is not encouraging. It is evident that reading culture among Nigerians is gradually diminishing. Onifade (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. The decline in reading among children is an offshoot of technological advancements that have brought about overall changes in family, social, and economic conditions. Poor reading habits occur in children and young people because reading is not considered a relevant leisure activity as it does not form part of children's social interaction and reading is considered a solitary pursuit which is not attractive compared with interactive activity on the Internet.

There is also an overriding desire amongst young people to spend more time with their friends than to remain at home reading. Adults and children alike may enjoy television and films as a way of enjoying their leisure instead of reading. There is unprecedented rise in the price of books, while DVDs are becoming more affordable. For many years, especially in the West, there have been doubts whether the written medium of narration would survive the onslaught of technology. Will children and adults who spend most of their time in front of television or computer continue to read books? Similar fears were expressed at the end of the 19th century with the emergence of films and cartoons. Nigeria has been rated by the World Culture Score Index as one of the countries in the world that has the lowest reading culture. A recent survey on hours of reading per week per person by the World Culture Score Index showed that India is leading in reading culture with a score of 10.42 hours per week, followed by Thailand with 09.2 hours and China eight hours. Only two African countries of Egypt and South Africa were listed in the survey, with Nigeria not being listed at all. The reason for this poor reading culture according to the National Librarian of Nigeria, Prof. Lenre Aina is as a result of lack of budgets for libraries. Aina (2011) affirms that the need today is the thoughtful integration of book reading with hightech, i.e., the integration of multi-media activities such as photography, printing and drawing, sewing and crafts, 3-D and digital art, hip-hop, claymation, and online services in our libraries. This will reverse the decline in book reading among children and adults.

Consequences of Poor Reading Habits

Poor reading skill can make a child develop a poor attitude toward school and can create self-esteem problems later in life Fosudo (2010). Low standard of education nowadays can be attributed to poor reading culture among teachers and students, a situation that results in frequent failures recorded by students in WASC/NECO and other examinations. Children with poor reading skills receive poor grades at school, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behavior problems, seem to dislike school, and often fail to develop to their full potential. According to Rubin (2002), children with poor reading habits have a higher chance of anti-social behavior.. Delinquency; school violence, bullying, hacking computers, and even examination malpractices have a correlation with poor reading habits. This does not mean that those with poor reading habits display such behavior; however, poor reading habits are associated with such behavioral patterns while good reading habits help develop a steady and constructive mind.

Government and Institutional Initiatives for Promoting Reading

The need to promote effective reading habits among the general populace of Nigeria has been receiving attention from some organizations even though the campaign has been restricted largely to Abuja, Lagos, and some few state capitals. An example of such initiatives includes:

Lagos State Government Reading Time; Pupils here are expected to stay back after school hours, specifically to read. The state expects the children to read journals, magazines, newspapers and other books. But it was argued that most of these pupils, during and after school hours lose concentration on whatever they are taught. Remaining in school beyond 2pm is like compounding their problem.

President Jonathan's Bring Back the Book campaign was launched December 2011. He had a joint reading session with the Nobel laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka, to about 400 secondary school pupils at the Eko Hotel and Suites, Victoria Island, Lagos. Federal Capital Territory, bought into the Bring Back the Book campaign of President Goodluck Jonathan. The endorsement programme held at Transcorp Hotel in Abuja did not only underscore the significance of a viable reading culture, it also seemed to show the direction the campaign. The campaign entails reading to pupils and provision of standard libraries adequately equipped with thousands of relevant books and other study materials. Other government initiatives include book fairs such as the Lagos Book Fair (LABAF), Garden City Literary Festival (GCLF) in Port Harcourt as well as the literary pages of newspapers have contributed immensely to book culture.

Reading Clinic is another campaign by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), aimed at promoting reading skills for all ages, an initiative of Reading Awareness Society for Development in Africa (RASDA). Nevertheless, there is need for more efforts in this direction.

Corporate organizations/Professional bodies/NGOs - Civil Societies) like the Nigerian Library Association, the Nigerian Book Fair Trust through the Nigerian International Book Fair etc.

Way Forward

To promote reading and literacy will involve a number of stakeholders: Libraries, Governments all levels, Author, Publishers, Teachers, Journalists and Potential readers.

The role of the libraries in promoting reading is especially crucial in developing scientific, reflective thinking and creativity. Librarians can help children and youths develop critical and independent thinking through their exposure to a wide variety of instructional resources and learning opportunities. Apart from the development of creative and critical thought, the role of the library in the promotion of reading culture can be seen in the readers' development of values, attitudes, and appreciation

Government should take a bold step to increase the production of textbooks to reach the target figure of five textbooks per pupil; ensure that textbooks are made from high quality materials; and motivate indigenous authors to take interest in writing textbooks which portray the Nigerian cultural environment.

There should be a kind of follow-up at home, and this is lacking in our society today. The problem of reading is not the issue of government alone, but that of the parents. Tackling the issue of poor reading habit and poor performance in examination from outside than dealing with it from home will not solve the situation.

Parent should teach their children what they need to know. They should create a timetable at home in order to monitor their children's activities. Even if children have to watch television or surf the net, parents should encourage educative programmes.

Parents should expose their wards to reading, which sharpen their minds towards greatness to the betterment of the entire nation. Reading for the enlightened mind goes beyond the school programme.

Parents should serve as good examples to their children. "Instead of parents buying home videos, they can imbibe the habit of buying books on a monthly basis.

There is a need for a revival of the school's Literary and Debating Societies and teaching of arts and literature.

Excursions to libraries and exhibitions: Children/students in schools where there are no libraries can be taken on excursions to libraries in other schools or in their locality. They can also be taken to book exhibitions/fairs. During such visits, children would be introduced to the library and its resources. They will also be educated on the importance of books and reading to their education and future lives.

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