DEVELOPING A READING CULTURE IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY: ISSUES AND REMEDIES

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Abstract
The paper identified reading as the ability to obtain meaning from words. Reading culture refers to habitual and regular reading of books and information materials. Strategies for developing reading culture are to introduce children to reading very early in their lives, to read for contests, and to establish libraries in their classrooms and training of the teachers who will teach the children how to read. Benefits of reading culture to the individual are increase in memory, discipline, vocabulary, creativity and skills, while at the national level it enhances educational growth and development of the nation. Development of reading culture is faced with the challenges of language interference, poor funding of education and poor economy. Reading culture can be enhanced through provision of suitable reading materials in schools, school and public libraries and use of readership promotion campaigns.

Keywords: Reading-culture, vocabulary, strategy, solutions

Introduction
Reading, according to Hornby (2000) means, to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols. Reading is a unique human activity that is characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reader. The reader seeks to understand the meaning of a written text; evaluates its significance and uses what he or she has read to enhance his or her knowledge, effectiveness or pleasure. Voluntary reading is important not just for personal uses and life-long education, but even for learning in schools. It requires a lot of reading to become a fluent reader. In its broad meaning therefore, 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 the World Book Encyclopedia (1993), culture is a term used by social scientists for a people’s whole way of life. In everyday conversation, the word culture may refer to activities in such fields as art, literature, and music. To the social scientists, a people’s culture consists of all the ideas, objects and ways of doing things created by the group. Culture includes arts, beliefs, customs, inventions, language, technology and traditions. Ozo-Eson (2012) classifies culture into two-the material culture and the non-material culture. The material culture consists of arte-facts, clearly visible and can be touched, while non-material culture are more abstract creations, like norms, values, language and the like that play crucial role on the lives of the individual but can hardly be noticed.

Developing a reading culture fosters a love for reading and a habit of reading among learners. Habit is a tendency to repeat an act again and again. Habits are regularly repeated behavior that requires little or no thought and is learned rather than innate (Encyclopedia Britannica). Reading habits can be inferred to mean the ability to read and understand printed or written word with little or no thought. The habit of reading can only be cultivated through constant or regular and dedicated reading of information resources by children and young adults for acquiring knowledge which will be applied practically for development. According to Gbadamosi (2007), 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. Becoming a skilled adaptive reader enhances the chances of...
success at school and beyond. Reading is for life. Anybody who cannot read finds it difficult solving the problem of everyday needs. It is believed that people who read always find the solutions to the mysteries of life.

The foregoing justifies the rational for this paper entitled, developing a reading culture in Nigerian society; issues, problems and remedies. It would among others focus on the impact of reading culture at the individual level and societal level; strategies for developing reading culture, challenges to reading culture in Nigeria and possible solutions to the problems.

Strategies for developing a reading culture

The first characteristic of an early reading environment is the availability of books and the regular modeling of reading. Nalusiba (2010) emphasized that the best way of promoting reading is the use of informal methods of reading rather than formal methods. Informal methods stimulate a desire in the child to read before trying to teach him 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.

Indeed it was also indicated that for pupils to be encouraged to read they should be allowed to choose the pictures in them, to read for contests, to have a classroom library and to have an author read to them at school. Once pupils were exposed to different practices of reading and reading materials they were likely to broaden their imagination and engage in the practice of regular reading. In other words, the provision of classroom libraries to the pupils expose them to a wide range of books, magazines and other print materials in a variety of genres and at various levels of difficulty. Through such activities pupils were likely to become more exposed and encouraged to develop a culture.

In addition, book fairs, exhibitions and book talks expose pupils and teachers to a variety of information materials. These can be carried out in the school environment whereby teachers and pupils introduce each other to favourite part of the story and teaching others why the book was enjoyable and later on encouraging swapping of books to boost pupil’s morale to read. Rosenberg (2003) adds further that the promotion of reading culture in Uganda, and other African countries, must therefore go hand in hand with the promotion of reading as a pleasurable activity, which meant that the pupils must start to read for fun and not just because they have to prepare for examination. The teachers should use more suitable teaching methods as a means of promoting a reading culture.

Teachers needed to be trained to teach pupils how to read. These teaching methods could be seen as one way of changing the students’ perception of reading as school work. This aspect was important since it is believed that a reading culture could not flourish if reading was seen as something that pupils were obliged to do but do not enjoy doing. When reading was reading as enjoyment, children could start using reading in other parts of their lives and hence reading could be a part of all aspects of their everyday life.

A classroom teacher who was determined to impact positively on the reading culture of her students selected her favourite books that were full of fun and easily to be finished quickly. She introduced the books to them after narrating the stories in the books. The result was tremendous—students started to beg for quiet reading time. They asked to bring the class library books home. They shared their class library books with friends in other classrooms. They made waitlists for the most popular titles. They solicited additional suggestions of books by their new favourite authors. They talked about books with their friends. They started visiting book stores and libraries. They donated new books to the class shelves. Reading in that class acquired an urgency that it never had (Redford, 2011). This therefore means that the most effective strategy to develop reading culture is to introduce books to the children at their early stage in life. When a strong foundation is laid both in the school and at home by the parents, the nation will surely metamorphose to a reading society.

Benefits to the individual

The impact of reading culture to the individual and society cannot be overemphasized. At the
individual level, Divya (2008) and Isaac, (2007) listed the following as benefits:

- Reading is an active mental process - unlike TV; books make one to use his brain. By reading, one thinks more and becomes smarter.
- It is a fundamental skill builder - Every good course on the planet has a matching book to go with it.
- Improves vocabulary - while reading books, especially challenging ones, it exposes one to many new words that wouldn’t be otherwise.
- Gives a glimpse into other cultures and places - Books can expand one’s horizons by letting him to see what other cities and countries have to offer before visiting them.
- Improves concentration and focus - Reading books takes brain power. It requires a person to focus on what he is reading for long periods.
- Builds self-esteem - it helps an individual to become better informed and more of an expert on the topic read. This expertise translates into higher self esteem.
- Improves memory - Reading although not a game, helps to stretch memory muscles in a similar way. Reading requires details, facts and figures.
- Improves discipline - To add book reading to a person’s daily schedule and sticking to it, improves discipline.
- Learn anywhere - Books are portable and can be read anywhere, as well as learn anywhere.
- Improves creativity - By reading more books and being exposed to new and more complete information, one’s creative ideas is enhanced.
- Gives something to talk about - reading a lot of books equips one with the ability to make contribution during discussions.
- Books are inexpensive entertainment – it is very easy to buy a paperback for the price of a movie ticket.
- Easy to learn at one’s own pace - reading helps one to learn at his own pace.
- Improves reasoning skills - reading helps a contractor with the idea of a feasibility study before embarking on a project.
- Builds expertise - reading many books on a subject for a long time makes a person an authority in that subject area.
- Saves money - Apart from saving money on entertainment expenses, reading books that help to develop skills saves money. Reading books on how someone went bankrupt will be a warning to another against repeating the mistakes.
- Decreases mistakes - when the deep and wide wisdom that books can provide is utilised, the tendency to make mistakes is reduced.
- Discovery of surprises - Reading more books as a source of information, enhances learning things that were not looked for. Since so many subjects intertwine it is almost impossible not to learn something other than the book’s subject.
- Decreased boredom - one of the ways of eliminating boredom is to pick up a book and read and one’s interest in the book’s subject will make a difference.
- Can change your life - it helps to open one’s eye to a new way of thinking. It helps to choose a life pattern and set the reader free from old habitual thought patterns.
- Can help break a slump - to be in a slump is uncomfortable. A slump can be simply a lack of new ideas. Books are a great source of ideas, big or small. Books on the portion of life one is slumping will be very useful.
- Reduces stress - many avid readers unwind by reading. It is not proper to move from work stress to home stress through the loud TV news and adverts. Turning off the TV or computer and picking up a book reduces stress.
- Gets you away from digital distraction - by spending more time reading good books, a reader has less time for the plethora of digital gadgets begging for attention.
- Improved writing skills - reading does not only improve one’s vocabulary and critical thinking, it makes him a better writer, especially, when surrounded with books written by those better than him. Regular reading no doubt improves writing skills.
- Making more money - A serious effort to read in one’s chosen career, enhances expertise in that specialty will increase. When a person becomes more specialized and learned, he joins a smaller group of more qualified people. By being part of the small few with the highest
level knowledge, his pay will increase. It is simple supply and demand.

Benefits of reading at the national level
Literacy is a basic tool for national development. For this reason, the Federal Government of Nigeria has concentrated its effort on providing basic primary education for its citizens. The importance of literacy is usually tied to the needs of the nation and the conditions of modern life-literacy is required for industrialization and technological development, participation in culture and in government at different levels, facing the demands of urban life, and adapting to the rapid changes and characteristics of modern life (Iloeje, 2014). The circumstances of modern life demand the development of good reading culture for the actualisation of national goals; and on the individual level for the fullest and most beneficial participation in society.

Ogwu (2010) posits that education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character and the physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society or a nation transmits accumulated knowledge, skill and the values from one generation to another. Teacher in educational intuitions direct the education of students and might draw on many subjects including reading, writing, mathematics, science and history otherwise known as schooling.

The place of reading and learning in educational development is a prominent one. Reading facilitates and deepens the learning activity, and effective learning results in high academic, moral and skills development. The aggregation of all such achievements by large number of persons involved in reading and learning should lead to the educational growth and development of such persons and entire society. Highly intelligent and informed society then becomes the watershed for progressive and innovative ideas which is capable of transforming the entire society for growth and development.

Tella and Akande (2007) assert that the ability to read is an art capable of transforming life and society. No society and no nation can dream of meaningful development if its citizens cannot read. An educated citizenry can easily be mobilized for political, social, economic and technological development. Reading culture must be sustained; otherwise literacy could revert to illiteracy. Uhegbu (2007) notes that reading and information are critical ingredients for national development contributing immensely in such areas as educational enhancement, science, technology, manpower development and promotion of national objectives as well as international co-operation. Reading therefore is the bedrock of national transformation and development.

Problems of development a reading culture in Nigeria
Many factors are responsible for the decline in reading culture in our society. According to the World Book Encyclopedia (1993), some of these factors include unfamiliarity with reading on the part of many children, inadequate development of reading skills amongst children, lack of continuity with reading programmes on the part of the teachers, and language interference, amongst others. Sanders (2007) maintains that the distraction by the fallout from technological innovation in the world today, such as the easy availability of the entertainment media, games and gambling, the inadequate funding of educational institutions including funding of libraries, laboratories, workshop and computer units. The list also includes poor economy and low standard of living, the quest for money by parents who use their children to hawk consumer items, the acceptance of examination malpractices, the increasing cost of publishing making it difficult for school pupils to have access to books, magazines, journals and news-papers. Others include the lack of adequate number of bookshops and the use of handouts instead of textbooks for students learning.

Arua and Nwaebiem (2014) quoting Ifedili (2009) state that there is a high decline rate in the reading culture of Nigeria. He examined reading culture among students in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, and found that 60% of students had prescribed textbooks only during examination; browsing and watching television have taken most
of the students’ time and very few students 21% buy novels to read for knowledge and pleasure.

Ayanbimpe (2012) states that the reading culture in Nigeria has totally collapsed. One has to learn to read in order to read to learn. She states further that with the introduction of information and communication technologies, children are seen carrying their phones and texting messages, listening to music, yahoo yahoo, etc. They neither study nor read and thus are getting deformed. Their command of English language is poor, so also is their vocabulary and diction. All these are because they do not read anymore.

Furthermore, the public library system is grossly under utilized, suggesting that majority of the populace are unaware of the public library services and their potential contributions. School time tables are too rapid to take advantage of useful library events and media programmes. There is inadequate number of qualified school librarians to man school libraries. There is also a paucity in the number of well equipped school libraries in Nigeria, both at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Iloeje, 2014).

Possible solutions to these problems
In concluding this paper, the following solutions are proffered to enhance reading culture in our country.
- Inclusion of reading, library skills and information literacy in the school curricular.
- Provision of suitable reading materials and comfortable reading spaces in the schools.
- Provision of more public libraries in all nooks and crannies of the country where reading can take place.
- Establishment of school libraries in primary schools where the foundation of lifelong reading habit is laid.
- Making books and libraries easily accessible.
- Government support to indigenous publishers and authors.
- Revitalization of the University Presses.
- The Nigerian book industry should emulate the Nollywood film industry.
- Parents should be active readers and establish libraries at home where early reading culture can begin.
- Formulation of enabling policies by Government that would enhance education, libraries and publishing in the state.
- Provision of extension services like Zonal Libraries, branch libraries, mobile library services by the public libraries.
- Parents and teachers should set out time for watching TV, playing video games, chatting and browsing to avoid distractions from reading.
- National and public libraries in Nigeria should embark on aggressive readership promotion campaigns.
- Above all, everyone should endeavour to read a book a day.

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