

THE DEARTH OF READING CULTURE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION ON THE POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS

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Abstract

Many studies have shown that most Nigerians have not formed the habit of wide informative reading because reading culture is yet to be our culture. It is alarming! Many; read only when they are forced to read, perhaps because of passing examination and be certified. Reading which should be a day-to-day affair is today relegated to the background. The paper examines the causes of reading failure in the school system and proffers solutions to the identified problems. Every well-meaning Nigerian citizen has a role to play in order to remove the reluctant readers, the slow readers, the frustrated readers as well as the non-readers from the recurrence of age of darkness. This is because the country must be rescued so that the individual can succeed and be productive for the betterment of this great nation of ours. Our leaders in Nigeria ought to live and lead aright! Our leaders should give more priority and attention to the education of the populace so that their ford governance will correct the anomalies in the country.

Keywords: Dearth, Reading Culture, Polytechnic Students.

Introduction

Today’s complex society has many obstacles which militates against the success of an individual, even when the determination to succeed is there. Reading is an important skill of language that almost everything else must be sacrificed to it. It can be described as a passport, proof of knowledge, experience and knowledge. Survival can be synonyms with reading.

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), the primary education is the bedrock of our education system, and so it is the key to the success or failure of the whole system hence one of the primary objectives of primary education in Nigeria is the inculcation of permanent literacy. The widespread reading failure in the school system is principally attributed to the primary school teachers' inability to master the subject matter for they cannot teach what they do not know or master.

Furthermore, the widespread reading failure in the school system (primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education) is compounded by the dearth of quality reading instruction. It is no doubt that there exists a reluctant reading and learning syndrome (Bunza, 1997), as or children's reading is not all it should be (Williams, 1975). Numerous studies have also shown that prevailing poor reading culture is not only peculiar to Nigeria as a country, but Africa in general. According to Ruterana 2012, Onyango et al., 2015, Otiike, 2011, Nalusiba, 2010; Kayumi, 2017, Haliru et al., 2015; Akande and Adeniyinka, 2007, Kumburu, 2011. as cited by Innocent Otache notes that the prevalence of poor reading culture abounds in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Botswana. The situation in one country cannot be better than the other. However, one looks at it, the negative effect affects everyone and everything around progress and development.

Reading and its Culture

Reading, according to Oyeyemi (2005) refers to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader. It is a means of tapping information and knowledge from superior minds. Reading is a way of acquiring knowledge, which has to do with the recognition of printed or written symbols that serve as stimuli for recalling meaning by the reader. Reading is also the ability to

identify, decode and interpret an array of words through a cognitive process. It is another complex way of dealing with communication in written form (Ogwu, 2010). Reading is done for different reasons. While some read for pleasure, some read to acquire knowledge, some to relax, others read to pass exams. Whatever it is, reading enhances one's writing skill. Johnson (1999) notes that there are two types of reading, reading aloud and silent reading. The former involves audible vocalization of what is being read and good for young readers because it exposes errors for timely corrections, the latter allows the reader to read for only himself. This is the type of reading that is encouraged in libraries, in other not to disturb other readers. The ability to read is a skill that a person can develop or acquire which has become very necessary to enable one to compete favourably in today's job market. Therefore, for reading to become a culture, a reader must engage in it on a regular basis. Orakpor (2012) notes that reading culture is an act of reading as a usual practice or pattern of behaviour. Reading culture must be consistent and dedicated to one's lifestyle (Enamen, 2015). Poor reading culture erodes good knowledge and leads to gross misinformation; the result of these two could be dangerous. Nzeako (1982) observes that the average Nigerian was neither taught how to read well nor how to acquire the skill for reading proficiently. This means that an average Nigerian doesn't have the culture of reading. For a person to remain relevant, he needs to keep learning, unlearning and relearning, as knowledge can be outdated but can also be updated only through reading.

Literature Review

Reading is essential to literacy and it is an emancipatory tool that liberates one from ignorance, disease and poverty as well as providing one with the liberty for all round development. Onuhaogo notes that for effective and efficient living and

learning, one should be able to read. He maintained that reading is the foundation of literacy. Through reading, literacy becomes more functional, durable and development oriented.

Ike (1999) as cited in Fabunmi Francis and Folorunso Olayinka maintains that successes brought about by campaigns on reading habit of Nigerians are not enough. He stressed that a book reading culture cannot be established among illetrates. Bankole (1999) as cited in Fabunmi et al believes that children need to be exposed to books and reading, to convince them that reading is an impressive habit. Johnson (1999) as cited in Fabunmi et al, also notes that, the level of readership to a large extent, is an index to a country's development. She defined readership as the number of citizens who do effective reading in relation to the population of the country. This means that the more the readership, the more the development.

The Polytechnic Education in Nigeria

Tertiary education as defined by NPE (2004) is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses. The goals of tertiary education include among others:

- i) Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- ii) Develop and inculcate proper value for the survival of the individual and society.

Education is the most important instrument of change. In Nigeria, it is undisputable that less attention is given to the primary education for reasons best known by our leaders. Government tends to overlook the assertion. "The primary level of education is the key to the success or failure of the whole system." Since both the secondary and tertiary levels of education are built upon the primary level of education, our leaders' attention needs to be

drawn to this important fact that the primary level must be given paramount attention instead of relegating it to the background. The NPE also identifies three types of tertiary education: university education, teacher education and technology education respectively. The policy does not leave us in doubt technology education where polytechnic education takes its root. Technical education is that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.

The role of language and communication in the quest for national development cannot be overestimated; hence development connotes positive or desirable growth or advancement. Language is a tool of modernization and development. The ability to read is necessary for success in school and even out of school. It therefore follows that any student who cannot read efficiently is bound to fail at school.

Ayodele (1984), states categorically that in higher education, inability to read efficiently constitutes a problem of the very vast and ever-expanding world of knowledge. Today, it is not only our students who cannot read, but also some of our leaders. Indeed, most of our students at different levels of education read very slowly and sometimes some get frustrated because reading does not make any sense to them. Dr. Emmanuel N. Egbe, a lecturer at the University of Jos who some years back said in his Advanced Seminar in Reading class, “That whatever level we find ourselves as teachers of English Language and discover that a good number of students cannot read, we must first of all leave out all things we intend to teach and concentrate on reading (i.e making the class be able to read) before proceeding on any other aspect of teaching”. This is because reading forms the core of the syllabus in any course or subject.

Reading as the Core of the Syllabus

Reading is an important language skill that teachers of English Language must master and teach it effectively. It is also a vital skill that our students must acquire in life. According to the National Open University of Nigeria (2015: 155), a syllabus is

A broad outline of the work planned to be done, in the course of a year with each class or programme in each subject or course...constructed by the school or imposed by some external examining bodies” while the secondary school in Nigeria has NECO and WAEC examination bodies, NABTEB is the one for the Nigerian Polytechnics.

There are rules governing a good syllabus. These include:

- ✓ Aim - that the work planned should have an aim and a purpose.
- ✓ Relevant - that the work planned should be relevant to the needs of the students and the society which they serve.
- ✓ Work load - that the work load should contain a manageable amount of work, not being overloaded.
- ✓ Time - that the work load should be capable of being completed within the time allotted.
- ✓ Suitability - that the work planned should be suitable for the group and the stage of development for which the syllabus is intended.
- ✓ Previous knowledge - that the syllabus should take into account students’ previous knowledge or skills.
- ✓ Correlation - that it should be integrated or linked with other subjects or courses or courses in the school curriculum.

Since student are center of teaching and learning process, teachers of English Language must be able to identify the different types of learners in the school in order to help them.

According to Rasaq (2003), understanding the different types of learners will be of immense value in assisting the teachers in preparing suitable materials to cater for the varying learning needs. To him, the slow learners and the gifted learners are highly problematic whereas the normal (average) learners need to be stimulated and encouraged to make maximum use of the potential and to develop their individual talents.

Reading, not listening, speaking or writing skill, is the core of the school syllabus. Bright and McGregor (1973) states reasons reading is the core of the school syllabus.

- (i) The book provides most pupils/students with the situation in which learning takes place. This means that without reading hardly will any learning take place and where there is little reading, there will be little language learning too.
- (ii) That only by reading can students acquire the speed and skills they will need for practical purposes when they leave school. In our literate society it is hard to imagine any skilled work that does not require the ability to read. Professional competence depends on reading.
- (iii) That further education depends on quality and quantity of reading. All the important study skills require quick efficient and imaginative reading.
- (iv) That general knowledge depends on reading. The more people read, the more the background knowledge they acquire of other ways of life, behavior and thought.

- (v) The reading makes a total man. According to an English Philosopher, Francis Bacon, “Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man”. The more a man knows, the more he is worth. Therefore, reading really sharpens a man.
- (vi) That it is in literature that the student is most likely to find words used memorably with force. It is there he finds words used in the widest range of contents and there he will find words passionately or deliberately covering emotions and attitudes.
- (vii) The people who hardly quotes are definitely are those who scarcely read. Reading extensively and intensively are required of a good student.
- (viii) That reading sharpens sight and insight, widens sympathies and experiences and provides occasion for the exercise of judgement about man and his condition.

From the foregoing, one could infer that unwilling readers or reluctant readers are a problem in all types of classroom, especially in this generation where the social networks are competing favourably or are pressures on the students. Reading is for them, a passive activity performed constantly in isolation and perhaps with skills they feel they do not possess.

Causes of Dearth of Reading Culture

The word ‘dearth’ not ‘death’ needs to be clearly and properly explained or defined here.

According to the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010), dearth refers to “lack of something or the fact of there not being enough of something”. That is, there is inadequate or absence of reading in our school system.

Culture on the other hand refers to a total way of life of a given people. The culture of reading is gradually losing its pride of place in Nigeria education system. Today, most pupils/students take reading as a boring academic exercise. The attitude of students towards reading of textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and so on is highly discouraging. This poor reading culture amongst our students is really worrisome. We may pause here to ask ourselves some rhetorical questions.

1. Do our students love to read books?
2. Do Nigeria place high premium on reading culture?
3. Is the reading culture being imbibed by the young ones at an early age?
4. Are there adequate and well-equipped libraries in our schools and colleges?
5. Are there enough trained and qualified teachers of English Language in the school system?

The questions are endless. There may be only one answer to the above questions. The answer is a capital NO. This is so because there is a fast decline of the reading culture of almost all categories of learners in Nigeria education system.

Okon (2010) highlights eight reasons on the dearth of the reading culture in the country.

Foundation Problem

Since independence to date attention of our learners are not channelled to sectors that yield high economic returns. Corruption and the value of the naira have contributed rapid decline in the reading of books, newspapers, magazines, journals and the likes. The Nigerian education system does not prioritize reading for acquisition of knowledge, growth, information, progress and development. Rather, it is for passing examinations.

For this singular reason, what most student do is to cram and produce verbatim what they were taught in class.

Economic Factor/ Poverty

Many families are poor and their poverty has hindered them from buying recommended textbooks and other learning materials for their children. Reading entails buying many books or materials, which costs a lot of money. When parents live below poverty line, live in abject poverty, cannot afford fees or three-square meals a day, it becomes impossible to sponsor a child through quality education. Since the children could not get access to valuable learning materials at the early age, they tend to dislike or even hate reading.

Poor Quality of Teachers

It is unfortunate that some teachers cannot read and even speak fluently, let alone teach effectively. It is important to ensure that quality teachers are trained because they determine the success of the next generation. Teachers of English Language should as role models, not only rate students' performance but also gauge the quality of instruction they give.

Lack of Libraries.

Most secondary schools do not have school libraries. Public libraries too are lacking. Most tertiary institutions have good and well-equipped libraries, but the sad thing is that most students tend to stay away from such libraries because of the continuous decline of reading culture. Establishing school and public libraries usually encourages positive reading habits in students but the absence of this vital educational facility is really affecting our students negatively. In some cases, the libraries are stocked with outdated books and reading materials.

Parental factor

Some years ago, only men worked while their wives stayed at home to take care of the children. Fortunately, or unfortunately today, both men and women work for their living and therefore, there is not much time given to the children. Nowadays, many parents cannot make out time to ensure that their children read. In a bid to strengthen the financial power of the family, both may return home late thereby the stress of their jobs may not permit them to check their children's books. Checking the children's book will motivate them to put more effort. Parent who develop the habit of reading, the children can emulate such. Parents should imbibe reading culture in their children so that they will love reading. Are you a reading parent or teacher/lecturer? You cannot give your child what you do not have.

Lack of Reading Competition

Competitive platforms have overtime sprung up, though primary hinged on discovering talented individuals. Television (TV) programs and some organizations such as 'Young Brains', 'Cowbell Mathematics Competition', 'Close Up Essay Competition', etc. to produce contestants and /or make students to read or practice. This is encouraging because students are being challenged or pushed to read or practice mathematics.

Low Level of Research

Research in its ideal sense makes the researcher to read extensively, but many students have developed the habit of 'mere' copying with little alternative only. Research supervisors who insist on the 'supervised student' doing the right thing, the supervisor is being painted 'wicked'. Today, some students do not even read towards tests and examination, because the interest for reading has long vanished.

Strong Contenders

Sports, music, movies, etc. have taken the place of reading nowadays. In particular, footballers make huge sums of money and as such, children and even some parents prefer pushing their children where they will get the naira quickly than taking these children through the long process of education.

Internet Factor/Social Media

The internet has now become the order of the day. Most Nigerian Youths use the net to seek for almost all the information they want. Many are interested in information, entertainment, Facebook, WhatsApp (for chatting and meeting new friends), etc. it is worrisome that only an insignificant number of students embark on extensive reading and research or log on to educative sites to increase their knowledge. Most youths are of the view that everything should be reduced to e-library than going through the stress of hard copies and reading them. The importance of reading in the academic life cannot be over-emphasized. Many studies have shown that Nigerians have not formed the habit of wide and informative reading. Reading is yet to be our culture, because many read only when they are forced to read – they read for tests, examination or academic purposes only. They are weak in reading for pleasure – forgetting that reading entertains the readers.

Effects of Reading Culture in Nigeria

The dearth of reading culture has some educational implications on the Nigerian child. The negative effect of the dearth of reading culture (or habit) among the Nigeria students include:

- (i) Erosion of knowledge in our society which is characterized by inability of some students to read and/or write well.
- (ii) Examination malpractices in attributable to the collapse of reading culture among the school children and even the university students.

- (iii) Overemphasis on certificates instead of knowledge and skills yields poor reading habits.
- (iv) Nonchalant attitude of our government towards education in the country. ASUU has been on strike for five (5) months now, and all they concerned about is the next elections. How can reading culture be established and maintained in such a situation?

The way Forward/Recommendations

The dearth of reading culture in Nigeria education system should be the concern of all Nigerians, especially well-meaning citizens of this country. Permit us to outline some way forward as ways of reducing the poor reading habits of our students.

- (i) Teachers of English Language should adopt appropriate teaching strategies in handling this very important language skill (i.e. reading) so that the problem of reading failure might be drastically minimized.
- (ii) Government should ensure that only professionally trained and qualified teachers of English Language be recruited to teach the subject. They should also make a policy that will ensure that students pass one of the indigenous languages with English language before they are admitted into higher institutions.
- (iii) Remedial reading programme should be organized for non-readers, poor readers and slow readers too.
- (iv) Reading of literature story books should be encouraged among the students.

- (v) Students should be encouraged to utilize their time meaningfully. The system should be knowledge based rather than examination based.
- (vi) Awareness should be preached to the students that academic success is dependent on the meaningful reading rather than cheating to pass examinations.
- (vii) Professional training workshops should be regularly organized for teachers of English Language
- (viii) Reading competition among the students should be organized to stress the importance of reading.
- (ix) Schools should be supervised regularly to ensure that quality control is maintained. They should make it compulsory for students to read a certain number of books per semester. They should also have functional libraries to encourage both staff and students.
- (x) Teacher-student ratio of 1:40 should be observed and maintained to enhance effective teaching – learning process.
- (xi) Parents should, apart from buying books and other learning materials, discourage their children from spending late hours in watching movies and the like.
- (xii) Parents as well as teachers should imbibe in children/students the good habit of reading.

Conclusion

Reading is like medicine because it heals the soul, it enlivens and always makes you feel better (NOUN, 2015). From the foregoing discussion, all and sundry owe this country a responsibility of making our children good readers as many of them are “at risk” and therefore need to come to their rescue if not the age of darkness might occur. There is no doubt that the widespread reading failure exists in the school system and this problem is further compounded by the dearth of quality reading instruction. Our children and students are a vulnerable generation indeed, but we will not give up; the logs in the wheel of progress are, however, surmountable because of two major reasons:

- (i) Reading, as a linguistic process, can be effectively systematized, and
- (ii) There is in every child/student a facility for reading mastery.

Let us all join hands to remove reluctant, slow, frustrated readers; and at worst non-readers from the recurrence of age of darkness. As a strong reading culture is beneficial to both the individual and the society. Our society must be rescued so that the individual can succeed and be productive for the betterment of this great nation, Nigeria.

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