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Reading Culture and Literacy Development in Nigerian Secondary Schools: The Role of Libraries.

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Abstract

Reading provides vital roles in learning and development of a child. It encourages imagination and creativity to shine in a child and it gives them the tools to explore their talent while learning about themselves and the society in which they belong. The aim of this paper is to examine the role of libraries in promoting reading culture and literacy development. To achieve this, the concept of reading and reading culture were examined. The paper also identified the role of libraries in promoting reading culture and literacy development in Nigerian secondary schools. Strategies for developing and improving reading culture among the secondary school students were also highlighted.

Keywords: Reading Culture, School Libraries, Literacy development.

Introduction

Reading is the key to learning. It is a useful skill that helps an individual in his lifelong pursuit of education. Connors-Tadros (2014) defines reading as the ability to read and interpret meaning from varied texts. Ogugua, Emerole, Egwim, Anyanwu, and Haco-Obasi (2015), note that reading is the ability to obtain meaning from words. Thus,

reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text (Connors-Tadros, 2014).

Reading affects the way an individual reasons or behaves. It increases our knowledge and widens our mental horizon. Arua and Nwebiem (2014) observe that reading stimulates imagination, encourages quick learning, widens views, expands horizon, and helps learning about different people and places. The ability to read is one determiner of a student's success in academics. A good reader has a better opportunity for greater achievement in all areas of life than a poor reader. The ability to read is the most important dividend of education. Reading leads to the development of literacy skills. Given the benefits of reading, it is crucial for the youths to form the habit of reading regularly so that they can have chances of success at school and beyond.

The habitual and regular reading of books and information materials is referred to as reading culture (Ogugua, et al, 2015). In support, Gbadamosi (2007) reveals that 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 profession or career. Developing a reading culture fosters a love for reading and a habit for reading among learners (Arua, et al, 2014).

Literacy is a key to academic success. Reading leads to the development of literacy skills. Literacy refers to learning to read and write (text and numbers), reading and writing to learn and developing these skills to effectively meet basic needs (The International Council for Adult Education cited in Etim and Jarigbe, 2016). Eze (2016) defines literacy as a foundational and universal skill; with the potentials to meet the individual's vital needs and stimulate their participation in community life. Similarly, Connors-Tadros (2014) notes that literacy includes knowledge and skills to

read, write, listen and speak. Keefe and Copeland (2011) propose the following set of five core definitional principles for literacy:

- All people are capable of acquiring literacy.
- Literacy is a human right and is a fundamental part of the human experience.
- Literacy is not a trait that resides solely in the individual person. It requires and creates a connection (relationship) with others.
- Literacy includes communication, contact, and the expectation that interaction is possible for all individuals; literacy has the potential to lead to empowerment.
- Literacy is the collective responsibility of every individual in the community; that is, to develop meaning making with all human modes of communication to transmit and receive information (Keefe and Copeland, 2011).

The library has the responsibility of encouraging reading culture and literacy development among the students. Shukla, Singh and Mishra (2013) defined a library as an organized collection of published and unpublished books and audiovisual materials with the aid of services of staff who are able to provide and interpret such material as required, to meet the informative research, educational and recreational needs of its users. Libraries are regarded as agencies through which sources of information of accumulated knowledge and experiences are selected, acquired, organized, preserved and disseminated to those who need them. Libraries are essential tools in learning at any level. Libraries make reading materials in different formats available to encourage reading culture among students. They play a key role in

creating literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all ages and all literacy levels. Libraries assist in finding, using and interpreting appropriate information that opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, informed citizenship, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, critical thinking, and ultimately, empowerment in an increasingly complex world (Krolak, 2005).

In recent times, the researcher observed that people are no longer reading especially the youths; instead they take interest in sports, music, social media and other activities. Consequently, their academic performance is discouraging. They read and write poorly, having limited understanding of what they were taught in schools. Whereas a very few students read for pleasure, others read just to pass examination. Thus, the decline in reading habit among the youths has been the concern of all the stakeholders especially in the education sector. It is important to find out the role libraries play in promoting the reading culture and literacy development of students.

Concept of Reading

Reading is a skill which enables us to get a message; recognizing the written words (written symbols); getting (understanding) the meaning; used to teach pronunciation; grasping information from texts (Connors-Tadros, 2014). Reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Igun and Adegbegi (2007) maintain that reading is an attempt to absorb the thought of the author and understand what the author is trying to convey, which leads to acquisition of knowledge that leads to development. Reading offers productive

approach in improving ones vocabulary, word power and language skill. Karim and Hassan (2006) opine that reading is a crucial form of communication through which we get most of the information required in teaching and learning situation and everyday life.

Contributing to this discourse, Ilogho (2015) noted that reading is the art of making meaning or sense from printed or written words. It is the ability to interpret and decode an array of words through a cognitive process. Reading is a tool for acquiring knowledge, language, communicating, and sharing of information, including ideas. Besides reading for academic purpose and job performance, reading can be engaged in for pleasure and enjoyment. It is one of the avenues for personal advancement in social, civic and economic development (Holden, 2004). Ilogho (2015) citing Gupa observes that reading is the finest habit a person can have. Furthermore, he noted that reading is an opportunity to rub minds with greater minds. It has been widely acknowledged that reading is one of the most valuable legacy parents can give to their children.

In the past when the television technology had not been invented, people spent a greater part of their time reading books. It was through books that people tried to know about the world outside. Many became members and users of libraries just to have access to reading more books. Since the advent of the Internet, the habit of reading books has continually dwindled. People rather spend more time chatting than reading.

Akande (2007) asserted that the ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning, which is an art capable of transforming life and society. The

importance of reading cannot be over-emphasized. Ngoboka cited in UNESCO (2011) highlighted the following as the benefits of reading: reading exercises the mind; develops critical thinking; boost self-esteem; improves reflective writing; and increases understanding and creativity. Meyer (2012) identified three reasons for reading, as: reading reminds you, reading challenges you and reading gives the opportunity to interact with others. Acquisition of reading skill has a beneficial effect on all school subjects, including social studies, sciences, mathematics and others (Fosudo, 2010). Connors-Tadros (2014) again identified the following types of reading:

Skimming reading: This 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. *f*

General reading or scanning: This 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: This 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.

Concept of Reading Culture

Reading culture or habit describes a regular engagement in the act of reading on a continuous basis. It is an addiction to read with provable, positive effects on addicts. Reading culture involves the acquisition of positive attitude to reading among children, students and adults alike (Gbadamosi, 2007). Reading habit is the key to students' academic success (Nssien, 2007). Reading culture, therefore imbibes reading as an instrument for growth and development (Igwe, 2011). Reading is simply consistent, dedicated reading lifestyle. It is the underlying basis for lifelong learning, long after graduating from school. According to Akinbola (2007), reading culture is a sustained regime of reading textual and non-textual materials for the purpose of broadening the horizon of knowledge within and outside one's disciplinary interest. 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 (Ogugua, et al, 2015). Benefits of reading culture to an individual include increase in memory, discipline, vocabulary, creativity and skills, while at the national level it enhances educational growth and development of the nation. However, the development of reading culture is faced with so many challenges including language interference, poor funding of education and poor economy. Teachers, school librarians and parents face an enormous task of trying to confront the poor reading culture environment in Nigeria (Ilogho, 2015).

Role of Library in Promoting Reading Culture and Literacy Development in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The role of libraries in promoting reading culture and literacy development among Nigerian youths cannot be overemphasized. Library is the nerve centre of any academic institution. It can promote reading culture and literacy development using the following ways:

- Provision of appropriate, relevant and current information resources in various formats to the users;
- Provision of access to the information resources acquired;
- Authorities in libraries must ensure that those working in the library are properly trained for the job;
- The professional librarians, library officers and other support staff must have good public disposition towards library users;
- The professional librarians and library officers must be vast in knowledge about various subjects to enable them answer all queries from clientele;
- Establishing user education programme to enlighten users on how to make maximum use of the library;
- Assisting the users to develop critical, creative and independent thought by the provision of varied instructional materials and learning opportunities;
- Enable users to develop full potentials and widening the horizons of perception, interests and skills;
- Create literacy among the people, give public lectures on social values and expected conduct in public life (Arua, et al, 2014, Shukla, et al, 2013 and Krolak, 2005).

There are numerous challenges that hinder the library from rendering effective services

to the users. Shukla, et al, (2013) identified the challenges as lack of funds, insufficient trained or professional librarians, irrelevant reading materials, colonial model of librarianship, lack of needs analysis, ICT challenges, inappropriate buildings and lack of international support. It is sad to note that these challenges affect the library services and activities geared toward the promotion of reading culture of young adults.

Strategies for Developing and Improving Reading Culture in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Reading culture can be enhanced through provision of suitable reading materials in schools, establishing school and public libraries and use of readership promotion campaigns (Ogugua, et al, 2015). Having an improved reading home environment and school environment can also improve and develop reading culture (Arua, et al, 2014). The government can improve the reading culture through the following ways:

- Giving education priority attention in national human capital development,
- Establishment of National Commission for Libraries (NCL),
- Establishment of National State Commission for Libraries (SCL),
- Integration of information literacy education in the curriculum of secondary schools,
- Creation of library periods in school timetable,
- Establishment of the state-of-the-art publishing firms by the state government,
- Establishment of family libraries,
- Institution of Scholarship Schemes by state governments,
- Assistance of philanthropists and other spirited individuals,
- Philanthropists should come up with the establishment of non-governmental

organizations for promoting reading culture,

- Media awareness,
- Formulation and implementation of National Information Policy (NIP) (Igwe, 2011).

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build library, employ trained library staff, equip the library with state-of-the-art ICTs and organize regular training for the staff.

Conclusion

Reading is important for every human being. It empowers and emancipates citizens and brings people together. Reading is essential to full participation in modern society. The habit of reading can only be cultivated through regular and dedicated reading of information resources. Libraries provide information resources in various formats to the users. They also organize user education programmes to teach the use of libraries. Therefore, libraries promote reading culture and literacy development among the learners at all levels.

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