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SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND IMPROVING READING CULTURE IN CHILDREN IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Nigeria, and particularly, Anambra state has been described as a state with poor reading culture. Research shows that a good reading culture is a sine-qua non to personal and national development and which must be inculcated to children in their early stages of development. Hence, this study is aimed at providing ways of improving reading culture among children in Anambra State. Four school libraries were used for the study, with 68 samples selected. Part of the problems discovered was lack of relevant children materials, inadequate funding of school libraries and lack of government attention on the general needs of school children, etc. However, the study recommended that since school library is the basic instrument for developing reading skill in children, their establishments is very paramount. Moreover, public libraries should develop a vibrant children's section and parents should encourage their children to read by reading with them.

Introduction

Musampula (2006), once states that "literary is a skill and like any other skill, gets better with practice and exposure to a variety of reading materials, yet, many children fail to develop this skill". Majority of our children growing up today, particularly, those in the rural areas have limited exposure to reading materials. They rely mainly on their class recommended textbooks and even those school textbooks are not easy to come by. Generally, Nigerians are not known to have a good reading culture compared to the western world. Reasons adduced to this, according to Anunobi (2005), is the inability to develop the attitude of reading at the early stages of life. Moreover, a good number of

people who read hardly read for leisure except either for academic purposes or basically for research.

National policy on education (2004), recommends that school libraries should be established in every school, both primary, secondary and tertiary institutions to enhance effective teaching and learning. School libraries are hoped to encourage children in the use of books and to develop a reading habit. As a matter of fact, children who are surrounded with good books of various kinds and who are helped by their parents reach out well beyond the classroom activities, becomes involved in self discovery, begin to assess and evaluate ideas and finally, develop the curiosity to learn more and form their own personal ideas. Therefore, a school library is very essential in the developmental process of every child, to inculcate in them the habit of reading. A good reading culture improves the academic performance of children and also helps them to develop knowledge outside the classroom environment.

Idowu (2002), laments that Nigeria's reading culture is indeed one worrying aspect that needs serious attention if the nation is to avoid sliding further into an illiteracy vertex. Idowu further reports that Nigeria sadly stands as one of the nations where the reading culture has unfortunately become poor. But interestingly, Mabawonku (2004), reports that one way that could help in correcting this is re-establishing library facilities and restocking them with books and making them affordable and readily available to users.

However, investing in the knowledge of an individual is one important component acknowledged by the United Nations in 2006 Human Development Report (UNDP, HUD 2006). According to the report, "a well-read mind is assertive, articulate and seeks information to help solve daily challenges" such children will read and learn about their rights and other information that enhances the quality of life, thereby enhancing creativity. Generally, people who read are more alert and perform better. Kaunda (2002), also points out that "a child who reads widely is an empowered child because knowledge is one of the best tools one can give to a child. Such an individual will actively seek to participate in the development of his or her community.

Quest (2000), raised hypothesis on the need to promote reading culture among children. Among the hypothesis are that, providing an informal, interactive forum to children will lead them to improve their reading and writing skills, that making available literature that are suitable to children will create interest in reading, writing and

speaking out and also lead to children's enjoyment of the learning process; and that conditioned in-put focused on desired values will lead to children's acquisition of life skills. Alibi (2002), states that in achieving the above hypothesis, children's club should be established in schools where members should be engaged in several child-led activities such as debates, discussion, exhibitions and drama, etc. The underlying purpose should be to address barriers and challenges in the children's schooling experiences and educational process. As evident in Crowe's finding (2006), a good reading culture in children has lots of benefits. One, it gives the child an opportunity to test him/herself; two, it gives children the confidence to compete against each other and finally, it reinforces children's interest to be creative.

Be this as it may, improving reading culture in children is not without constraints. Some of its impediments according to Agbodike (1997), are unavailability of school libraries and more importantly, lack of funding, for where it exists at all. Other seemingly obstacles include lack of professional librarians to manage the school libraries, inadequate requisite resources for children, and the inability to prepare or select necessary teaching materials for the different ages of children.

According to the *Zambian Human Development Report* (2007), one of the problems associated with poor reading culture is the lack of access to quality affordable and relevant reading materials. These problems notwithstanding, the Nigerian teachers, librarians and government have been making determined effort to help children improve their reading habit. This study therefore, sought to:

- Identify the availability of school libraries in Anambra State;
- Determine the type of materials existing in school libraries
- Identify the methods of inculcating good reading habits in children.
- Find out problems hindering good reading habits in children.
- Map out ways of improving good reading habits in children.

Method

The study intended to identify strategies for improving reading culture in children in Anambra State. Survey research method was adopted in this study. The area of the study is Awka South Local Government Area in Anambra State. There are sixteen secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area out of which four (4) were purposively selected for the study due to the availability of school libraries there. Thus,

purposive sampling technique was used to select the schools. The sampling was restricted to only the government funded secondary schools. They are:

1. Igwebuikwe Grammar School, Awka.
2. St. John of God Secondary School, Awka.
3. Federal Government Technical College, Awka and
4. Girls' Secondary School, Awka.

The principals and the teacher-librarians, together with fifteen different subject teachers in each school were used in this study. Accordingly, 4 principals, 4 teacher-librarians and sixty teachers (fifteen from each school) were used for the study. The research instruments were questionnaire and oral interview.

Results

All the administered questionnaires were responded to and returned. A hundred percent (100%) return rate of the questionnaire was recorded. The responses revealed that 25% of the schools sampled represent the first generation secondary schools in the council area. However, results also showed that 88.24% represented teachers while 4.55% each represented principles and teacher-librarians.

Research question 1:

In which schools do libraries exist in Anambra state?

Table 1: Percentage responses of existing school libraries

S/N	Names of schools	Freq	%	Rems
1	Igwebuikwe Grammar School, Awka.	68	100	
2	St. John of God Secondary school, Awka.	68	100	
3	Federal Government Technical College, Awka.	68	100	
4	Girls' Secondary Schools, Awka.	68	100	

Table 1 above shows that all the schools sampled were agreed by the respondents to have functional school libraries. Interview also revealed that libraries in Igwebuikwe Grammar School and Federal Government Technical College, Awka were established and funded by the government while that of St. John of God Secondary School was established by the missionaries and Girls secondary school library was established by the Awka community.

Research question 2

What are the types of Materials Existing in School Libraries in Awka.

Table 2: Types of materials available in school libraries

S/N	Items	Freq.	%	Rems.
1	Books (dictionaries, encyclopedias, novels, story books, poems, etc)	38	55.88	
2	Photographs	22	32.35	
3	Maps	8	11.76	
	Total	68	100	

Table 2 reveals the types of materials available in school libraries. Majority of the respondents, 55.88% were of the opinion that books, comprising of dictionaries, encyclopedias, novels, story books, poems etc are most prevalent; while 32.35% and 11.76% agree on photographs and maps, respectively. Interview also revealed that picture book, or story books, paintings and images etc, including maps and world globe abound in the library. In determining the mode of acquisition, result shows that 83.82% said it is through government donation, and 16.18% said it is through individual donations from members of the public, especially members of the "Parent-Teachers Association" (PTA).

Research Question 3

What are the methods of inculcating good reading habits in children in school libraries?

Table 3: Methods of inculcating good reading habits in children

S/N	Items	Freq.	%	Rems.
1	Teaching of various methods of reading	59	86.76	
2	Teaching of individualized reading skills	57	83.82	
3	Organizing reading competition is debate	55	80.88	
4	Establishing library hour in the timetable	50	73.53	

Respondents were required to indicate possible methods of inculcating good reading habits in children. Results in table 3 shows that 86.76% said that children should be taught various methods of reading; 83.82% said teaching of individualized reading skill; and others, 80.88% opined that teachers should organize reading competition and, or debate. Still on table 3, results indicate that library hour should be included in the school timetable. 73.53% attests to that opinion. Interview also revealed that parents

should not just end up at enrolling their children in school, buying their uniforms and books but in monitoring the progress of their children and finding time to read with them.

Research question 4

What are the problems affecting good reading habits in children?

Table 4: problems affecting good reading habits in children

S/N	Items	Freq.	%	Rems.
1	Lack of relevant children materials.	63	92.65	
2	Inadequate funding of school libraries.	61	89.71	
3	Inability of school administration to establish good reading environment for children.	58	85.25	
4	Lack of government attention on the general needs of school children.	60	88.35	
5	Inadequate propping by parents.	56	82.35	
6	Poor government implementation of education policy.	53	77.94	

Table 4 shows the problems affecting good reading habits in children. Results reveal that lack of relevant children materials, inadequate funding of school libraries and the inability of the school administrators to establish good reading environment for children are some of the major problems. These are represented by 92.65%, 89.71% and 85.29% respectively. Others are lack of government attention on the general needs of school children, 88.35%, inadequate propping by parents, 82.35% and poor government implementation of education policies, 77.94%. Interview further revealed that the basic problems include the absence of school library in some schools and the inability of teachers to develop necessary speech skills in children.

Research question 5

In which way can good reading habits be improved in children?

Table 5: Ways of improving good reading habits in children?

S/N	Items	Freq.	%	Rems.
1	By re-establishing library facilities	59	86.76	
2	Restocking the school library with relevant books	56	82.35	
3	Making books available and affordable to users	54	79.41	

4	Good implementation of education policies	57	83.82	
5	Provision of enabling learning environment for children	51	75	

The results of the study shows that the best ways possible in improving good reading habits in children are by re-establishing library facilities, 86.76%; restocking the school libraries with relevant books, 82.35%; and making books affordable and available to users, 79.41%. In line with the government initiatives on the education of the child through the UBE programme, government should do well in implementing the education policies, 83.82% and also, respond urgently to the general educational needs of children by providing enabling learning environment for them, 75%. Interview also revealed that children should be exposed to proper library seeking skills. They should be assisted to select books, read, solve word problems and have interactive teaching/learning sessions. That, schools should be encouraged to set aside, specific time within the school hours for reading. Story-books are to be used during this period. And finally, mobile reading tents should be established by public libraries, probably, once in a month on Saturdays, where children would be allowed to read library books, listen to poetry recitals, hear stories being told, observe paintings, drawings and play various educational games, using toys.

Discussion of Findings

Although the analysis of results shows that majority of the secondary schools have libraries, many of them are not in good standard. Nevertheless, they are mere book stores or make-shift libraries, without professional librarians to manage them. And most importantly, there is dearth of facilities to give them a face-lift. The finding also indicate that except for books, the libraries so sampled are bereft of relevant materials for children, considering this period when libraries around the world are electronically-driven, using ICTs. Computers and other ICTs-related facilities exist in Igwebuikwe Grammar School, Awka but have not been put into use due to lack of personnel. Results of the findings also revealed that good reading habits could be inculcated to children through the teaching of several reading methods, imparting of individualized reading skills, and organizing reading competition and debates for children. This was in line with Alabi (2002), who postulated for the establishment of children's club in schools. However, it was also discovered that story hour or use of the library period should be included in the school timetable and that parents should make out time to monitor the progress of their children by teaching them reading skills.

Problems affecting good reading habits in children was highlighted by Agbodike (1997), and substantiated through the analysis. Results show lack of relevant children's material, inadequate funding and lack of good reading environment as some of the problems limiting good reading habits in children. Apparently, Igwebuike Grammar School and Federal Government Technical College, Awka are located inside the town and so, the environment is not conducive for learning. Other problems resulting from the study include parents' inability to prop their children adequately, government's lack of attention on the general needs of school children and its poor implementation of educational policies.

Provision of library facilities, restocking the library with relevant children materials, making books affordable and readily available to users was shown in the study as the possible ways of improving reading habits in children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of data made so far, the following deductions and or recommendations are made:

1. School libraries have been identified as the most important instrument for developing reading skills in children. Therefore, both federal and state government should prioritize the establishment of library in every secondary and primary schools in Nigeria.
2. Public libraries should augment the efforts of school libraries by developing children's section in their library where they (children) should be helped to develop their reading skills, hence, a good reading habit.
3. Parents should spare time out of their busy schedules to look at the progress being made by their children in school and by so doing encourage them to read by reading with them.
4. A well-developed individual is an asset to the society. Every individual should contribute to the development of libraries by donating something so as to enhance the educational growth of the nation.
5. Children should be encouraged to read texts or materials outside their academic field so as to boost their reading potentials and knowledge base.
6. The federal government should as a matter of urgency, revitalize book industry so as to contribute to the development of functional library systems in Nigeria.

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