

READING CULTURE AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The place of reading culture in educational development can best be described as strategic. The prevailing regime of poor reading habit among youths in Nigeria is highly disturbing because the situation is already adversely affecting the country socially, economically and politically. The government efforts in fighting illiteracy, examination malpractices and under development are speedily being thwarted by decline in reading culture among the general populace. This paper therefore reviewed conceptual definitions of reading culture and highlighted its importance to the individual and the country at large. It also located the place of the library in the promotion of reading culture in Nigeria and the effect of reading culture on educational development. It was concluded that if the present low level of reading culture in the country is allowed to continue, it will lead to a retarded growth and development of the country. Therefore, setting up of functional libraries across all nooks and crannies of the country and embarking on attitudinal change campaigns in favour of reading culture are recommended among others.

Keywords: *Reading culture, tool, educational development*

INTRODUCTION

All over the country, there has been the general feeling among Nigerians that reading culture has been a missing link in the educational development of the nation. People are worried that there has been a high rate of decline in the reading culture among school children in Nigeria. Indeed, close observational studies of students within the academic environment of this researcher shows that most students read only during the examination periods while few only make attempts at reading for knowledge and pleasure. Sadly enough, what is happening at present is that the students' reading time has now been taken over by watching of home videos, television programmes and the browsing of internet for games, social interactions with foreign friends and other less beneficial indulgences.

This is a worrisome development for, in a situation like this; experts say it poses serious problems for the country in the future (Chika, 2009 and Sandars, 2007). In the event that poor reading habit is sustained, it will lead to the continuous high failure rates in internal and external examinations by students, increase in students' drop-out rate, poverty, production of unskilled man power for the country, high rate of illiteracy, frustration and loss of self esteem. According to Omo-Ojugo (2005), a report jointly produced by the World Bank and the Nigerian institute for Social and

Economic Research at Ibadan in 2001 on the Nigerian graduate confirms the fears of Nigerians over the lack of interest by school children to take to reading as a way of life. The report reveals that the average graduate who leaves a university or polytechnic with a degree or certificate is not worth the qualification, which he is supposed to have.

The report concludes that the average Nigerian graduate lacks technical skill, has a poor command of English, is poorly trained and is largely unemployable. This to my mind is totally unfortunate. This paper therefore seeks to identify the areas where reading culture can support the development of education and suggest ways by which reading culture among students can be strengthened in Nigeria.

READING AND READING CULTURE

Adima (1990) defines reading as the complex act of dealing with communication in written form, visual or in pictorial illustration. He explains that when a pupil reads, he gets the message in words, sentences, paragraphs and longer selection presented in written form and pictures. He says that the message might be in descriptive material (non-fiction) or imaginative material (fiction). He points out that in reading, the Child's tasks were to grasp information presented and to interpret and apply the information.

Horner (1988) cites Widdowson (1979) which suggests that reading is the realization of general interpretative process which underlies all communicative activities; the first level being the immediate comprehension of information while the second is the dissemination of this information into patterns of conceptual significance. He argued that reading is not just a question of reaction but of interaction between the writer and the reader which is mediated through the text. He says that extracting meaning from a text depends crucially on two things namely the reader's knowledge and his purpose and also the writer's effectiveness in giving the reader the necessary pointers to activate his knowledge and also to help him absorb new knowledge from the text.

Sandars (2007) defines reading culture as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written word. She says that the practice could be acquired by reading books, Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers etc. According to her, having a reading culture is imperative for citizens if the future of the country is to be guaranteed. Agada (2008) cites Olaolfe (2003) which defines reading culture as the art of inculcating reading habits and interests in learners through conducive reading environments and copious reading activities. He says that in the school set up, the art of inculcating reading habits and interest in learners rests squarely on teachers, stressing that the importance of reading, especially in learning, is not in doubt.

IMPORTANCE OF READING

The importance of reading to the individual and to the society cannot be over emphasized. Chika (2009) outlines the virtues of reading to include the provision of individual's welfare, social progress and international understanding, the provision

of skills, knowledge and the right attitude that frees one from idleness or boredom. She points out that reading is not just for school but also for life and that it enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. She observes that achievement in reading is necessary for achievement in school, adding that when a poor reader makes no provision for achievement, he is eventually frustrated into a miserable failure. Agade (2008) states that reading is an indispensable tool for learning in the various hierarchies of modern educational set up which he opines facilitates the learning process and effectively promotes intellectual development in the learners. Sandars (2007) stresses that reading is essential to full participation in modern society because it adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. She posits that reading empowers and emancipates citizens and brings people together. She is also of the view that it is through reading that a child broadens his/her understanding of life, affords him/her the tools to explore his/her talent while learning about himself and his society. According to Sandars (2007), reading enables creativity to blossom in the child. The English Philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626) once said that while speaking makes a ready man and writing, an exact man, reading makes a full man. Consequently, there is fulfillment in indulging in the reading culture.

PROBLEMS OF ENTRENCHING READING CULTURE IN NIGERIA

The poor reading culture among our youths has been attributed to a number of factors. These factors include the distraction by the fallouts 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, workshops 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 newspapers. Others include the lack of adequate number of bookshops and the use of handouts instead of textbooks for students' learning (Fortune news, 2009 and Sandars, 2007).

LIBRARIES AND THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE IN NIGERIA

Ogwu (2006) highlights the various ways by which libraries can be used as a platform for entrenching reading culture in Nigeria. The first strong point here is the fact that the library has a variety of learning resources such as books, computers, the virtual library facilities etc. Secondly library offers a much more conducive atmosphere or silence which makes it conducive for reading. The third factor is that library provides reading accommodation for large number of users which is more as a result of the fact that it is cheaper to access library information than what the home or the office can offer the reader. The fourth factor in this direction is that library offers more conducive atmosphere or silence which is necessary for developing a reading habit. In libraries, information can be discovered very quickly because the cataloguing and classification treatment has been applied. Finally, the library offers the readers the services of professionals and experts to meet their information needs.

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Okeke (2004), cited by Odiba (2007) posits that to some people, development refers to growth plus change. He says that Okeke's definition gives a complete process in which not a single aspect of human life such as education, health, agriculture, industry and aspiration can be ignored. Odiba (2005) equally, contended that development suggests "a genuine break with tradition or perceptible disruptions of the static equilibrium". Osagie (1985) states that development is a more inclusive concept with its social, political and economic facts and emphasizing that development is a quantitative and qualitative positive transformation of the lives of the people.

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. Teachers in educational institutions direct the education of students and might draw on many subjects including reading, writing, mathematics, science and history otherwise known as schooling. Adesina (1981) gives an indication of what educational development should be made up of. They include the establishment of greater number of schools, high number of school enrolment at all levels of education. It also includes the provision of learning facilities such as functional libraries, laboratories, workshops, computer units and games facilities. The tailoring of the education curriculum that is relevant to gaining employment, academic, research activities or efforts that will lead to technological, industrial, agricultural and scientific breakthrough for the progress and prosperity of the nation. Others include the kind of education that will lead to the sustenance of high moral and spiritual values, capacity building, adequate motivation and the welfare of teachers, adequate funding of education in the country and the provision of education that will create self reliance creativity and the realization of the individual potentials and aspirations in life.

READING CULTURE AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt that the reading culture among the Nigerian youth is fast eroded. One can even say that the past generation made up of our fathers and grandfathers had a remarkable thirst for knowledge through education in spite of the

limited resources they contended with. Our present generation of youths is risking the future educational growth and development of our dear country by their refusal to imbibe the reading culture. Unknown to them however, knowing how to read and accepting reading as a way of life even for its own sake is an invaluable asset.

The following recommendations are made to promote reading culture in Nigeria. Firstly, government at all levels should establish libraries across the length and breadth of the country; in all schools and for the public. This can be done by reasonably increasing the education budget allocation and deploying a good part of it into setting up libraries. These libraries should be sufficiently supplied with reading resources so as to achieve the desired learning impact on the readers. Secondly, the private sector with educational enterprises should be made to set up standard libraries as part of the requirement for establishing primary and secondary schools. To this end, school proprietors should be made to meet with adequate capital requirement for running of a school, part of which will be used to set up a good library for the students to read in.

In addition, private companies in the oil and gas, banking, communication, food and drink, manufacturing etc should be encouraged to set up libraries for schools and communities as part of their social/corporate responsibilities in the country. Thirdly, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the publishing companies should mount awareness campaigns in schools and communities in the country on the dangers and consequences of the present negative reading habits among Nigerians on the future growth and development of the country. This can be done by holding attitudinal change talks in favour of regular reading by citizens in schools and in communities, media campaigns on such consequences and the setting up of readers club in schools and communities in the country.

Fourthly, the system of performance evaluation in schools in the country should focus more on using library and information resources in the execution of students' assignments, projects, drama and debating activities. Finally, governments at all levels should partner with the private sector and the NGOs to reward school children and individuals that demonstrate evidence of commitment to the reading culture. This can be achieved by organizing award nights and library weeks where prizes can be given out to the deserving individuals and groups.

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