

Towards Enhancing Reading Culture in an Era of Social Media and Get-Rich-Quick Syndrome Distraction: the Nigerian Perspective

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Abstract

The paper seeks ways to enhance the reading culture among Nigerian youths in an era of social media and get-rich-quick syndrome distraction. At this crucial point in the nation's history, there is need to enhance reading culture among Nigerian youths as this would translate to preparing them to take up leadership positions in the country. No doubt, the advent of social media has made deep inroads into the reading culture of Nigerian youths as they spend the largest chunk of their time glued to their various devices. In the same vein, the desire to make it early in life encroaches badly on the reading culture of Nigerian youths. Apart from discussing the effect of social media and the quest for materialism on the reading culture of Nigerian youths, the paper also looks at other factors, such as: poverty, poor value system, funding issues, corruption, poor parental upbringing, lack of incentives to outstanding scholars, poor remuneration of teachers, lack of libraries/poorly equipped libraries. In view of these identified challenges, the paper offers recommendations on how to enhance reading culture to wit: social media regulation, change of value system, adequate funding of the education sector and related agencies, tackling corruption in higher institutions, rewarding and celebrating outstanding scholars, provision of scholarship programmes, establishment of libraries, etc. The paper concludes that widespread reading culture among the youths would make a nation soar to greater heights in terms of quality of leadership, socio-economic development, among others.

Keywords: reading, reading culture, social media, get-rich-quick syndrome, Nigeria

Introduction

Reading is an indispensable aspect of human life. It makes one mentally alive at all times and keeps one abreast of the latest developments in and around the world. Furthermore, reading is particularly important in that it opens one's eyes to the magical world. Reading makes a man and that is why it is often said that a reader is a leader. In essence, a reader can stay in one spot and travel around the whole world. Reading motivates and inspires the reader to desire to attain lofty ambitions in life. Thus, a child who develops reading culture at an early age would probably go far in life as he may learn about famous personalities who influenced their world. Reading is a worthwhile venture and any person who makes reading a habit is likely to end up being a go-getter and an achiever. Olasehinde, Akanmode, Alaiyemola and Babatunde (2015) assert that reading is a basic building block of learning while the reading culture is the philosophy of developing a progressive reading attitude. They argue that reading hones the mind, making a person think logically and dispassionately.

It appears that reading culture is on a rapid nosedive in Nigeria, especially among youths. The reason could be attributed to the fact that social media have taken over the reading space. Furthermore, the fact that our youths now desire to acquire wealth at an early age is a contributory factor. According to the World Culture Score Index (2017), Nigeria is one of the countries in the world with the lowest reading culture. In its 2017 survey on hours of reading per week per person, India was leading in reading culture with a score of 10.42 hours per week followed by Thailand with 09.24 hours and China eight hours. In the survey, only two African countries, Egypt and South Africa, were listed. This situation paints a gloomy picture for the kind of leaders Nigeria produces.

Furthermore, Akinfenwa (2019) points out that available statistics from the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education indicates that 38 per cent of Nigerians are non-literate as four in ten primary school children cannot read for comprehension. Apart from the fact that social media have blurred the minds of Nigerian youths, making them engage in all sorts of fake life, its counterpart which is the desire to get rich quick is even taking a heavier toll on reading culture. There is no gainsaying the fact that about 90 percent of Nigerian youths who should leverage their formative years for productive and useful ventures spend their time on social media and only think of how to get rich at an early age. This scenario has resulted in youths abandoning reading culture to engage in frivolous comparison and competition on

social media with severe and/or drastic consequences. They see reading as a waste of time and an unproductive venture.

This paper discusses the need to enhance reading culture in an era of social media and get-rich-quick syndrome distraction in Nigeria. The effect of social media on the reading culture of Nigerians is much more pronounced among the youths though the adults are also affected.

Reading culture and its role in national development

It is an indisputable fact that a society's reading culture is critical to its development. This is why it is important that reading culture should be inculcated in children from an early age. The National Library of Nigeria worries that the increasing drop in the interest of Nigerians to read and research is a big challenge that would affect the socio-economic development of the country. At an event to mark the 2022 Annual Readership Promotion Campaign with the theme "Reading as a panacea for societal problems," NLN solicited the support of Nigerians towards correcting what it described as an "anomaly" and return Nigeria to the "good old days" where people read, learn, get informed and lead. Reading is an important aspect of nation building but the reading culture of any society, according to Fagbemi (2018), depends on the level of literacy of the people. She argues that where illiteracy is on the high side among the people, the orientation of the people to reading would be negative and this explains why Nigerians have poor reading culture. Also, Okebukola (2004) harps on the generational value of knowledge, emphasizing that reading provides the tools for transmitting ideas to succeeding generations as well as the opportunity of partaking of the wisdom of the past generations.

Okpala (2019) avers that reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body in that it helps to stimulate the brain and improve its capacity and memory. She posits that apart from improving one's analytical skills, reading can also catapult one from one's immediate environment to a make-believe environment. In this way, it reduces stress and guarantees inner peace of mind. Moreso, she argues that through reading, an individual learns to empathize with fellow humans, which is an aspect of human intelligence. Reading helps one to become more understanding of other people's problems and, in this way, one becomes more tolerant and less judgmental. In this regard, one learns to identify with others and show more love to them irrespective of their social status, health challenges, religion, tribe or family background. She further emphasizes the therapeutic effect of reading whereby it helps one to deal with some

health, psychological or social issues otherwise referred to as bibliotherapy. Indeed, the problem-solving advantages of reading have also been stressed. According to UNESCO, “a well-read mind is assertive, articulate and seeks information to help to solve daily challenges.” This is as a result of the fact that people who read are more alert and empowered. Equally, good reading culture improves the academic performance of children and also helps their mental development outside the classroom environment.

Reading culture, literacy development and the role of the library

There is no gainsaying the fact that reading culture aids in literacy development. In fact, reading constitutes the bedrock of education and a child’s educational journey starts with reading. Literacy development is the process a child takes in learning letters, sounds, and comprehension of written language. The process starts from the preschool years of children and even when they are toddlers and goes into their teenage years. Thus a child navigates from being unable to connect sounds and letters to analyzing the plot and characters of a complex novel. Children who are confident readers see that the confidence translates to other subject areas and the learning process as a whole. Study.com states that children with strong literacy and reading skills who have undergone proper and successful literacy development are likely to succeed in many other areas of learning and life.

At this juncture, it is important to state that the library plays a pivotal role in promoting reading culture. There is no doubt that children who make the library their second home are likely to develop reading culture and this helps them to become life-long learners. The poor reading culture of Nigerian youths is largely due to the fact that there are no libraries in rural areas and even the few ones available are not functional. Nigeria is a country that places a very low premium on education. This accounts for the low budgetary allocation to the education sector. Owing to this, there is lack of funds to establish libraries and equip them with state of the art resources for the educational and recreational well-being of the citizenry.

On the role of the library in enhancing the reading culture of Nigerian youths, Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019) opine that libraries offer us a depth and breadth of resources for us to read, learn, connect and play. In the same vein, Aina, Ogungbemi, Adigun, Akesode, & Ogundipe (2011) contend that libraries provide enabling environment and materials that offer more extensive and varied information than classroom study alone. Furthermore, Itsekor and Nwokeoma (2017) argue that libraries play

invaluable role in the educational set-up of any institution or country and could be seen as the national treasures where knowledge, both in print and non-print formats, is acquired, preserved and disseminated to the reading public. Citing Busayo (2011), Itsekor and Nwokeoma believe that the role libraries play cannot be over-emphasized in the provision of the much-needed facilities for the development of good reading habits and interest, as it caters for different reading interests at various stages of our intellectual development and for pleasurable reading. In their opinion, the library could be seen as an agent of educational and social change.

In the same breath, libraries contribute greatly to the enhancement of reading culture by supporting schools. In this regard, the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) as cited by Aina, et al (2011) states that libraries especially school libraries are fundamental and basic to the design, implementation and attainment of educational excellence. It adds that libraries are an integral part of the educational development of school children and youth. The goals of education as contained in the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) as cited by Aina, et al (2011) include the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes of the individual and the Nigerian society; the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills and social abilities and competence as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society. Aina, et al (2011) believe that without the support of efficient libraries, schools on their own cannot successfully achieve the afore-mentioned goals. They further argue that libraries provide access to enjoyable information-rich reading materials through which children and youths can gain and improve their skills.

Equally, libraries help introduce the use of reading for information, pleasure, passing examinations (learning in school) and personal growth through life-long learning. Libraries provide materials that offer more extensive and varied information than classroom study alone. Voluntary reading helps develop reading skills and mastery of language, extends students' knowledge and assists them in their academic work (Aina, et al., 2011). On their own, Odunewu and Odeyemi (2019) opine that libraries extend services beyond the physical walls of a building, by providing materials accessible by electronic means, and by assisting the librarians in navigating and analyzing very large amounts of information with a variety of digital tools.

Reading culture and social media incursion

Essentially, the advent of web 2.0 tools otherwise known as social media has done more harm than good to the reading culture of Nigerian youths. Social media platforms include Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, etc. Youths are now so addicted to these platforms that they abandon reading and stay all day long on social media, doing all sorts of frivolities. On account of this, reading is relegated to the background as they only read to pass their exams. However, this does not mean that social media do not have positive uses. Kojo, Agyekum and Arthur (2018) have enumerated both the academic and non-academic uses of social media by students. According to them, the academic uses of social media by students include collaborating with classmates on assignments, accessing literature, discussing content with instructors, being up-to-date with current news and events while the non-academic reasons include keeping in touch with friends, sharing opinions, filling up spare time, entertainment, etc.

Still on the positive effect of social media, Daluba and Maxwell (2013) as cited by Kojo et al (2018) see social media as the latest technological explosion in the information world. They assert that it is an online platform that focuses on building and reflecting on social relation among people who share common interests or activities. They further point out that since the universalisation of the internet in the 1990s and the emergence of social networking sites in 1994 and beyond, there is abundant evidence that millions of people across the world use social media on a regular basis for various reasons. Also, Onuoha and Saheed (2011) as cited by Oji and Erubami (2020) argue that among many Nigerians using the web 2.0 based platforms it is not merely a fad but an integral aspect of daily life that pervades all age groups and social classes. They contend that the use of social media has become an integral part of daily routine of most Nigerian youths and this has made them the most technology-savvy group in the country. In their view, the need for social interaction, relationship building and sharing of multimedia/digital contents are the principal purposes for which the Nigerian youths deploy the social media whereas other reasons, as leisure reading, may only come as a second fiddle.

Ahmed (2018) emphasizes that despite the negative use of the internet by most students, it can be used positively to facilitate online learning: the use of social media has helped students to learn through various online learning platforms available to them. The use of YouTube to watch educational videos has helped students to gain wider knowledge. He also

enumerates several groups students can join through online platforms which are related to their course of study, peer group, school, environment, etc. Such online platforms include WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and others which would help the students to have access to quality information when needed.

Nevertheless, it seems the negative effects of social media on the reading culture of youths outweigh the positive effects. Adesanya (2018) argues that the poor reading culture of youths could be attributed to the environment they find themselves in and the impact of social media on them. He further contends that the reading of relevant learning materials in most schools has been taken over by social media such that students prefer to spend more of their time on informal activities on the social media than on books. Similarly, Anyira and Udem (2020) carried out a study on the effect of social media addiction on the reading culture of Nigerian students in which it was established that social media have negative consequences on the reading culture of Nigerian students. In the same vein, Oji and Erubami (2020) conducted a study on social media use and reading culture of Nigerian youths in which it was found out that 94.3% of these youths use social media and that there is a general poor culture of reading among Nigerians.

Kabir and Jeromes (2022) posit that the rapid development of the internet is one of the most fascinating phenomena characterizing the information age and affecting the cultural, social and economic life of the modern world. However, they contend that young people who are termed “the digital generation” spend more time on surfing the internet, adding that this has become an addiction and that it causes many youths to view reading as an ordeal. According to them, children can only benefit largely from electronic technology when firmly established as readers. Also, Talaue, Alsaad, AlRushaidan, AlHugail and Altaha (2018) as cited in Ntakirutimana and Okoro (2021) believe that social media have a dual impact on student achievement and that it is necessary to approach adolescents’ use of social networks with utmost responsibility. In the same vein, Kojo et al (2018) argue that the advent of social media is a distraction to students because they are expected to read and keep abreast of the happenings around them but this is not the case. Ahmed (2019) opines that poor reading culture is one the most critical factors posing a threat to the development of education in Nigeria. This, he argues, could be attributed to a combination of many factors among which is the advent of social media. He cites a study conducted on “children’s reading habits and their use of media: suggestion on encouraging reading habits among children” which revealed that 40 per cent of Nigerian adults never finish

reading a fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school. The study also showed that about 30 million Nigerians have graduated from secondary schools with poor reading habits cultivated during their school days.

In like manner, Sotiloye and Bodunde (2018) conducted a study on assessment of reading culture of students of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) in which they concluded that most students read only to pass examinations as they scarcely engage in any reading outside school books owing to the influence of social media. Also, Kur and Olisah (2007) as cited by Kojo et al (2018) aver that social media encourage negative behavior among tertiary students as they are exposed to fraud, use of drugs, easy point of access to pornography and other obscenities which distract their reading culture. They are of the opinion that social media have become a vital component of daily life of tertiary students and is steadily taking over the consciousness of the youths thus affecting their reading culture. Adejumoh (2016) laments that reading which used to be widespread among Nigerian students, youths, and even adults, is fast eroding at a jet speed. He attributes this trend to the advent of the new media which he asserts has shifted the paradigm and discourages young men and even adults from reading for knowledge. According to him, people now devote more time to chatting, uploading photos and commenting on irrelevant posts on the social media than seeking for materials that would enhance their knowledge.

Reading culture and get-rich-quick syndrome

Strange as it may sound, the quest for materialism has made deep inroads into the reading culture of Nigerian youths. This situation cannot be divorced from the influence of social media on the youths. The youths are more interested in browsing online videos that teach them how to make it early in life. In the same vein, the competition over who would post better photos on social media is among the factors leading to the abandonment of reading by the youths in their quest for materialism. In this regard, Adejumoh (2016) argues that the pursuit of material fame and fortune among Nigerian youths and paying lip-service to education have contributed to the decline in reading culture. He maintains that our youths now attach undue importance to fame and wealth thereby relegating the place of reading. He further contends that youths now prefer to venture into the lucrative world of entertainment where their intelligence quotient would hardly be tested and parents are even encouraging them to toe the path because they want to be the parents of super stars or celebrities. In his words, people now celebrate mediocrity

in their quest for materialism. He decries that many Nigerians have abandoned their educational careers in pursuit of “quick money” which they believe could be faster through business, entertainment and politics.

Moreso, in an interview she granted to *Vanguard*, the Chief Executive Officer, National Library of Nigeria, Professor Chinwe Anunobi blames the poor reading culture in the country on a change of value system. She argues that people have shifted their emphasis from reading and acquisition of knowledge to materialism, maintaining that it is dangerous to the growth and development of Nigeria. She blames the society for the quest for materialism, arguing that people have no iota of respect for the learned “because they have no money and cannot call the shots.” Similarly, Akinfenwa (2019) contends that our socio-economic environment is not reading-friendly, noting that the struggle for economic survival provides little or no time for people to cultivate a good reading habit. Also, Esheu (2020) opines that many youths have the conviction that reading may not be of benefit to them. This accounts for why they go after ventures that would offer them immediate pecuniary benefits.

Akande (2017) is of the view that very few Nigerians read and those who read do so out of duty rather than desire. In her words, “young people in Nigeria prefer to watch movies, chat with their friends or play games. Older people prefer to chase money or worry about not having money rather than read. The few adults who read have a sense of duty to read for knowledge and continuous self-improvement.” According to her, younger people who read do so mostly out of compulsion such as the necessity to pass examinations and obtain certificates. She argues that very few students read out of genuine interest to know more. In the same vein, Madu (2017) contends that people are actually looking for books that would enhance their operations and earning capacity. That is, people read books that would enhance their capacity to earn across board.

Furthermore, Ehiosu (2017) asserts that instead of reading, youths are eager to make money at all costs in order to cover their knowledge deficiencies, adding that they (the youths) would rather engage in examination malpractices, cult and criminal activities. He says: “the number of people that read today is quite few; those who have the natural instinct to study and be successful. Others have a drive to crime and corruption; penchant to make it fast, thus turning a blind eye to books that can bring about mental rebirth.” He maintains that this explains why many people do not find reading fanciful because they see it as a waste of time and this attitude does not better the lot of those who read. In his

view, on account of the fact that people want the easy way out, there is a high incidence of cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery and terrorism in the land. In the same regard, he further argues that young people want to make it quick today to the neglect of reading where they can be fed intellectually. In his submission, this has affected the quality of leadership we are producing as it is often said that “a reader is a leader.” Similarly, Aina et al (2011) contend that the undue importance Nigerians attach to wealth is a major factor affecting reading culture. They maintain that people usually rush for material things, noting that many have abandoned their educational careers in pursuit of money.

Other factors affecting reading culture in the 21st century

Apart from the influence of social media and the quest for materialism on the reading culture of Nigerian youths, other factors which have been identified to hamper reading culture include: poverty, poor funding, corruption, poor parental upbringing, poor value system, lack of libraries, neglect of the educational sector, etc.

Poverty

Poverty is one of the major factors affecting the enhancement of reading culture among Nigerian youths. In this regard, Aina et al (2011) have pointed out that only a few people live above poverty line in sub-Saharan Africa. They argue that as a result of poverty, most Nigerian families cannot afford to send their children to school and they do not have money for tuition fees and textbooks. According to Chukwudera (2022), reading culture flourishes in countries where the people are prosperous and diminishes in countries where poverty seems to be on the increase. He notes that extra-curricular reading could be factored as one of the attributes and symptoms of a high standard of living, adding that wealthier people who spend a large chunk of their earnings on groceries and other basic amenities are as likely to spend money on buying books or visiting the library.

Funding issues/lack of funds

Lack of funds is one of the factors affecting reading culture in Nigeria. Budgetary allocation to the education sector is poor. In this case, there is dearth of fund to establish libraries and equip them with adequate relevant resources. Similarly, the readership promotion campaign sponsored by the National library of Nigeria has been seriously hampered by lack of funds. Aina et al (2011) argue that the readership promotion

campaign which is aimed at encouraging more Nigerians to read lacks national spread as it is restricted to Abuja, Lagos and few state capitals. According to them, the impact has not been felt in other parts of the country as the National Library has not been adequately funded to put the campaign in print or electronic media.

Corruption

Corruption is endemic in the Nigerian society such that it has permeated every facet of our life. Most Nigerian students, for instance, see reading as a waste of time because they believe they can “sort” themselves out after examinations. In the same vein, the high rate of immorality in tertiary institutions is such that students use sex to buy grades. Most students go after money because they believe that with it, they can even buy certificates. In this case, reading culture is relegated to the background.

Poor parental upbringing

The issue of poor parental upbringing is one of the problems hampering the promotion of reading culture among Nigerian youths. Nigerian parents do not inculcate reading culture in their children. This is as a result of the fact that they themselves have poor reading culture. They would rather push their children to go into trade or any other gainful venture that would yield quick money.

Lack of incentives to outstanding scholars

In Nigeria, outstanding scholars are not rewarded or honoured like their counterparts in entertainment, politics or sports. For instance, outstanding musicians and footballers are celebrated by the government and society while first-class students are often poorly rewarded or not rewarded at all. This has really hampered the promotion of reading culture in the country as youths see reading as a waste of time and/or something that is not worthwhile.

Poor remuneration of teachers

Teachers help a lot in promoting reading culture among youths. However, in Nigeria, they are poorly paid. As a result, they lack the inspiration to inculcate reading culture in the youths.

Lack of libraries/poorly equipped libraries

Lack of libraries or poorly equipped libraries is one of the factors hindering the enhancement of reading culture in Nigeria. Most schools do not have libraries and even those that have, the libraries are often poorly equipped. The situation is worse in rural areas which are often neglected by the government.

Poor value system

The value system we have in Nigeria today hampers reading culture. Youths and adults alike do not believe education is the right way to go. Wealthy people, politicians, entertainers and sports stars are highly celebrated while scholars are not even recognized. As a result of this, the youths place a low premium on reading, believing it is not worthwhile. This has led to a drastic decline in the reading culture of our youths.

Recommendations

The decline in reading culture among the youths is not without solution. In view of the identified challenges facing the enhancement of reading culture among Nigerian youths in an era of social media and get-rich-quick syndrome distraction, the following recommendations are made:

Social media regulation

There is need to regulate social media to tame the youths who have become addicted to it. Recently, the Nigerian government embarked on the regulation of the social media though it was based on hate speech. The government needs to take decisive steps to regulate the use of social media so as to tame the youths who are already addicted to it. Appropriate legislations should be put in place to regulate the use of social media. The government should not only observe those who are critical of their policies but should strive to have a holistic regulation of social media. Popular author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie opines that youths should give up social media and read books. According to her, the best ways to counter what seems to be an ugly tsunami of book banning going around the world is to read. She further notes that the only way to answer to censorship of books is to read.

Change of value system

The value system in the country should be geared towards inculcating reading habits in the youths. This should start with the parents and then the government. Scholars should be celebrated just like politicians, entertainers and sports stars.

Establishment of libraries

Libraries should be established across the length and breadth of the country. The libraries should also be adequately equipped with up-to-date information resources to meet the needs of the clientele. Both school and public libraries should be stocked with fiction materials, biographies and autobiographies. Also, Aina et al (2011) advocate the resuscitation of mobile library services. They are of the opinion that promotion of reading habits should not be confined to students in the classroom or physical library alone, noting that consideration and extension of library services should be given to children and youths who, for one reason or the other are out of the normal school or library environment. However, mobile library services require the establishment of public libraries as it is their sole responsibility to carry out this type of services.

Provision of scholarship programmes

The government should roll out scholarship programmes that do not require stringent procedures. This would address the issue of millions of out-of-school children in the country and in turn enhance reading culture among Nigerian youths.

Tackling corruption in tertiary institutions

The management of various tertiary institutions should take decisive steps to tackle corruption in their institutions. Students who engage in examination malpractices as well as staff who aid and abet same should be made to face the full weight of the law. In the same vein, the government should clamp down on the so-called “miracle centres” across the country. When these are done, reading culture would receive a big boost.

Adequate funding of the education sector and related agencies

The government should provide enough budgetary allocation to the education sector and other related agencies. The National Library of

Nigeria, for instance, should be adequately funded to enable it spread its readership promotion campaign which is aimed at promoting reading culture among youths to all the states of the federation. As has been pointed out before, the readership promotion campaign lacks national spread owing to dearth of funds.

Rewarding and celebration of outstanding scholars/teachers

Outstanding scholars and/or teachers should be adequately rewarded and celebrated. This would send a clear signal to the youths that reading is not a waste of time. In this way, they would see reading as a worthwhile venture. Similarly, teachers should be highly remunerated to enable them discharge their duties effectively. This would enhance reading culture as it would make the teaching profession an attractive and a noble one.

Conclusion

A nation that possesses reading culture can soar to greater heights in terms of leadership, socio-economic development and otherwise. In Nigeria as well as other developing nations, reading culture seems to be on a rapid decline. The advent of social media has largely contributed to this development as youths and adults have been overtaken by the frenzy or craze associated with it. Similarly, the get-rich-quick syndrome that is prevalent in the society today constitutes a big distraction to the youths as regards imbibing or developing reading culture. Everybody wants to make it by hook or by crook hence reading culture is relegated to the background. The youths see reading as a waste of time since they believe it is not a worthwhile venture. It is the hope of the authors that the reading culture of Nigerian youths can be enhanced through the various ways advocated in this paper. This would restore the lost glory of the nation and prepare the youths to take critical leadership roles which the country is in dire need of.

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