

Reading: A Panacea for Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

Okoroafor Patience Ogonna

Igbo Department

Federal College of Education, Yola

Email: pokorofoar@fceyola.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Reading is a crucial aspect of learning process. It is also a way of life which must be encouraged even outside the four walls of institutions. Apart from the knowledge gained by readers from the various documents they lay their hands, it is a means of engaging the readers to spend their time meaningfully thereby preventing them from being involved in social vices. Using a descriptive approach of data analysis, this study finds out that poverty contributes greatly to the down turn in youth reading habit as many parents could hardly afford textbooks and other reading materials for their wards. The advent of ICT in terms of computer, cell phones etc which allow people to dabble into internet to get information on any issue without stress just at a click on a button is a “necessary evil” making students to lose interest in extensive reading. However, adequate rewarding of students who read recommended text and supplementary books coupled with provision of well stocked libraries in various learning institutions from primary to tertiary institutions in this country will surely revamp the reading culture that has really dwindled among our students. The paper submits that if proper steps are taken by engaging our youth in reading culture a lot of social vices in which youth are deeply engaged in will be reduced to a minimum level.

Introduction

The importance of reading in its entire ramification cannot be overemphasized. There are many benefits accrued to it. Apart from the knowledge gained from it, it also empowers one. It serves as a way of recreation and leisure. No wonder some people take reading as their hobby. “Reading is fun” is a name of a nursery one textbook written by Ajayi C. A & Youdewoi A. (2007). The joy a child experiences when he/she starts to read is great. Through reading people have insight into what is happening around and even beyond them. It helps people discover themselves and others.

However, this all important activity of man has been trampled upon and relegated to the background. It has been observed for some decades now that the reading habit of people has dwindled especially the youth. Also laziness on the side of the youth is a contributing factor, to the poor reading habit. Most of them sit down for hours watching home videos instead of reading. These home videos are time killers. Poverty also contributes to the dwindled state of reading habit amongst our students in the sense that some parents cannot afford to buy textbooks for their wards not to talk of buying supplementary reading for them. This trend to some extent has driven children and youths in this category to go into hawking to make ends meet. The quest

and love for reading in these young ones has been quenched thereby making reading culture to suffer.

The advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) is also another factor. It is not uncommon to hear our youths say that they are in the digital world and as such cannot take back the hand of clock. They prefer spending hours on desktop, laptops, cell phones, chatting, tweeting doing “To go” some even go as far as committing cybercrimes, watching pornography to reading.

As a result of these some of our youth have become lazy in the area of reading. They lack the basic knowledge they ought to acquire. Some are deeply involved in social vices that came across while sourcing the internet. These acts eventually end in catastrophe. The aim of this paper therefore is to highlight some of the causes of youth’s poor reading culture and how their interest can be reawakened. It is only when their interest is re-awakened that they will be empowered for greater heights. Reading is a basic life skill, it is a cornerstone for a child’s success in school and indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will be lost inevitably.

Many scholars have beared their mind on this important activity that helps to transform lives. Reading is a unique human activity that is characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reading. The reader seeks to understand the meaning of a written text; evaluates its significance and uses what he or she has read to enhance his/her knowledge, effectiveness or pleasure.

Anderson (1985) defines reading as the process of constructing meaning from written texts. Oghonna (2014) on his own postulates that reading literally refers to the ability to recognize and understand characters or speaks words that may be printed or written on paper and other formats of recording human knowledge.

The purpose of reading is to get information and new knowledge. To do this it requires that some skills be acquired. The National Teacher’s Institute, Kaduna NCE/DLS course Book on; the use of English and Communication Skills NTI (1990) outlines some reading skills to include;

- i. **Skimming:** It involves the act of looking into a book quickly in order to have a general idea.
- ii. **Scanning:** This requires looking for a specific point or information discussed in a text in a little space of time.
- iii. **Study Reading:** Here the reader is often required to read and search texts in order to gather information on given topics, look for main points and supporting details etc.

Reading culture is the process of having thirst for reading among students. Developing a reading culture therefore fosters a love for reading and a habit of reading among learners. The habit of reading can only be cultivated through constant or regular and dedicated reading of information resources by children and young adults for acquiring knowledge which will be applied practically for development. Reading culture according to Gbadamesi (2007) evolves when an individual habitually and regularly reads books and other information materials that are not

necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career. Ozo-Eson (2012) classifies culture into two the material culture and the non – material culture. The material culture consists of arte-fact, clearly visible and can be touched, while non-material culture are more abstract creations, like norms, values, languages and the like that play critical role on the likes of the noticed. Oymike (2012) observed that students exhibit reading culture only, during examination periods while only; very few make attempts at reading for knowledge and pleasure. Rather than cultivating reading culture, most students have turned their reading time to the period for watching movies, playing of internet games, social media interacting with friends etc. Palani (2012).

In the absence of a good reading culture, there will be an increasing rate of failure in both, internal and external examinations by students, increasing rate of illiteracy, frustration and loss of self-esteem. Absence of good reading habit skills bring lack of confidence in children resulting in poor attitude towards school work and as well as esteem problem later in life. Fosudo (2010). Sanders (2007) defines reading cultures as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written word. The practice could be acquired by reading books, journals, magazines and newspaper etc. Having a reading culture is necessary for citizens if the future of the country is to be guaranteed.

Reading Culture as a means of Empowering the Youths

Reading is an invaluable tool that is capable of empowering humans to take appropriate steps that are necessary to develop and live well. Reading is relevant to human to take appropriate steps that are necessary to develop and live well. Reading is relevant to human existence, without which man will never be able to harness information necessary for wellbeing. It is the first button for academic garment.

Reading as a powerful instrument of information and communication is expected to begin from cradle. Because of its importance, children are expected to be exposed early to reading so that in adolescence and adulthood they will not find it difficult.

Tracy and Akande (2008) see reading as a “form of entertainment and an essential skill”. Ogayi and Chima (2012) say that, reading involves being able to obtain three types of information namely; the information which is clearly stated (factual or literal), the information which is not clearly stated, but implied and the information which involve making judgements. Ngwoke (2006) opines that reading is the recognition and conscious reproduction of written or printed symbols, words, word groups and sentences by means eye or finger contact.

On the other hand, empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups make choices and to transform those choices into desirable actions and outcomes. Empowerment is an act of giving more control over his/her life or the situation he is in. Fletcher (2005) asserts that youth empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. Olakulehin and Ojo (2006) see empowerment as assisting people to overcome obstacles which might prevent them from achieving their potential. In addition, it is only by reading that Nigerian youths can be empowered for greater heights because good reading

routine broadens ones understanding of life and affords him/her the opportunity to know himself /herself and the society in which he/she lives in.

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and in the lives of other people (Vavrus and Fletcher, 2006).

Youth as a social group is usually defined in terms of their chronological age and the spectrum of youths has been defined by different authors. The National Youth Development policy (FGN, 2001) defines youths as people aged 35 and that they make up about 40 percent of the more than 140 million people in Nigeria. According to Anasi (2011), the youths occupy a prominent place in any society and outnumber the middle aged and the aged. Besides, adolescent is an age period when young people have the potential to develop powerful new skills for action; skills for action; skills to plan a community even, create a multilevel work of art or business plan or formulate strategy for a lobbying campaign. Youth is the time when a person is young. This critical age, is the right time to teach them the concept, principle and theories of reading. This is because the youths of today automatically become the leaders of tomorrow, and for tomorrow to be more fruitful, we must give them proper education and training. To do this they must learn how to read. The need for empowerment arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize dreams and reach their greatest potentials due to artificial barriers created by individual and other group within the society.

However, there are barriers working against achieving these noble objectives. They will be discussed under the heading below.

Causes of poor reading culture

The following items are the causes of poor reading culture

- i. Lack of funding of educational institutions.
- ii. Entanglement to television, social media, inadequate libraries, shortage of power supply.
- iii. Poverty, as a result some parents cannot afford to buy books for their children.
- iv. Low standard of living by parents who engage their wards to hawking and other vices capable of destroying them.
- v. High cost of living leading to inflation where novels, magazines newspapers are difficult for some parents and students to purchase.
- vi. Unstable educational policies. The introduction of the multiple choice questions to essay questions has not helped students to really sit down to study.
- vii. Poor attitude of today's leader to reading; in times past students were assigned a specific number of literature books they will read per week but now teachers are too busy making money that even when such assignments are given they do not follow the students up.
- viii. Lack of motivation and narrowness of the scheme of work has reduced the capacity of students to study. Also new inclusion of literature books in some schools is also a contributing factor.

In the light of the above, it is obvious that many factors contribute to the poor reading habit of our youths; for them to be empowered these challenges have to be overcome. This will be a collective effort by parents, the government, philanthropists, so that our society will be a better place to live in.

Recommendations

- i. Adequate funding of our schools from primary to tertiary level by the government.
- ii. Libraries in our schools should be stocked with books. This can be achieved by the government giving free books to schools.
- iii. Philanthropists should assist the government by building and equipping public libraries where people especially the youths can have easy access to books.
- iv. Creation of library periods in schools Time tables and proper supervision to that effect.
- v. Parents should encourage their children by buying them supplementary readers and also water their use of ICT's.
- vi. Government should partner with NGOs and well-meaning Nigerians by creating awareness of reading culture in public schools.
- vii. Motivation by schools to students who did well in reading texts should be encouraged. This will boost their morale to read.
- viii. Education policy makers should scrutinize their policies well before implementing them.
- ix. The school curriculum should be broadened to accommodate more emphasis on reading.

Conclusion

Reading is a vital tool for human development. It should not be allowed to be trampled upon, all hands should be on deck to check the negative use of ICT by our youths. Youths should be made to imbibe the good side of it and use it wisely instead of spending hours on their laptops or cell phones chatting, tweeting etc. The young ones should instead learn how to read with phones and laptops. Knowledge is power, for one to be empowered one has to read.

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