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Reviving and Promoting Reading Culture among Selected Secondary Schools in Nasarawa State

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Abstract

Over the years there has been a great concern over the high decline in the reading culture in Nigeria especially among the younger generation. The appalling level of decline of reading culture and apathy towards books among the youth is becoming embarrassing. The mass failure being experienced recently in most of the national examinations like WEAC, NECO, NEBTEB, JAMB amongst others are surely connected to this drop and lack of interest in reading among students. This research therefore aims at drawing attention to the need to revive and re-introduce the reading culture in Nigeria especially among the secondary school students. To achieve these, a comprehensive mixed-method approach is employed incorporating both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies in this research. The motivation theory of reading is adopted for the theoretical framework of the research. Two secondary schools were selected from Nasarawa State while the respondents drawn from the selected schools were subjected to two major reading training techniques and intra competition. The principal findings of this research reveals that lack of training students in reading skills and techniques and absence of reading clubs in secondary schools are responsible for the gross decline in the reading

culture of the students. These recommendations out of many were made at the close of the research that training of secondary school students should be given priority and reading clubs should be established in all our secondary schools. We are optimistic that if reading culture is revived among students, the high rate of failure will reduce drastically. If this is achieved, parents, society and the government will not be left out in this anticipated awakening of the reading culture among students of secondary schools in Nasarawa state and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Reading, Reviving, Culture, Students, Promoting

Introduction

Scholars are of the view that every habitual reader is an enlightened person. The serious student spends 80% of his academic time reading. Reading is one important tool for learning because it promotes interdisciplinary achievement. Reading can be viewed as a crux to intellectual development. Reading, whether for pleasure or for academic purpose is an essential habit that forms one of the bedrock of greatness in everyone regardless of age, gender or status. Akingbulu (2014) says," reading is for self-development and to others, he thinks of it as a means to passing examinations".

Reading has evolved from ancient writing systems to a crucial modern skill supported by technology. The historical trajectory reflects changes in the society, technology, and education that have continually shaped how we read and engage with texts.

The primary task in this work is to lead students and others generally on what it means to read by understanding its technicalities, understanding and identifying the problems they have with reading and generally improving and becoming effective and efficient readers especially in their academic pursuit. Beside these, the only way to improve in all aspects of reading is by reading.

There are little or no texts that are wholly devoted to the subject of reading. We have come across books on writing, speaking but not on reading. We are not in any way saying there are no academic writings in journals, books, newsletter and others, but scholars probably are yet to see the need to devote an entire book on this very vital aspect of learning.

Research has shown that, 70%of what is being taught at all levels of education is

already committed into writing. By implication majority of what people learn collectively or individually are through books which can only be elicited through reading.

The phase or statement “Read your books’’ or ‘’Make sure you read very hard’’ etc., are common or very familiar expressions parents say to their children or teachers/lecturers say to their pupils or students. Academic successes of pupils and students highly depend on their level of reading. By this, one would have expected a corresponding availability of materials that will serve as a guide on the technicalities of reading. Many students or learners who wish or have interest in reading normally end up losing interest or being frustrated because of lack of the required skills in reading.

In our curriculum and course outline of schools and institutions, learners are encouraged and asked to read comprehension passages, but our curriculum and course outlines hardly spell out or make provision for how students should be taught the rudiments, technicalities or principles of reading skills.

In our opinion lack of thorough teaching on reading to learners has brought about the current apathy we are experiencing today in our generation especially in Africa and Nigeria to be more particular. It is often said, ‘’ If you want to hide anything from a typical African man, hide it in between pages of a book and that thing will remain safe for as long as you desire it to be there’’. Many Africans find it difficult to read and if they must read at all, it must be in relation to either reading to pass an examination, prepare for an interview or reading to make a presentation. There is no culture of reading to learn, for pleasure or to develop one’s self. Research in Africa has not majored up with other parts of the globe because of the lack of interest in reading. The lack of interest in reading may not be unconnected with the reasons for under development in the country. We depend heavily on other continents for technology and other scientific discoveries which reading would have helped in placing us on the same pedestal.

Research cannot be done outside reading, this is because it is through reading that one discovers what scholars have done in a particular field and the gaps yet uncovered. The desire for Knowledge remains great. In order words, every habitual reader is an enlightened person. The decline in the standard of our education cannot be over emphasised. Gone are the days when schools and even communities have READING CLUBS where students and learners come together to read and exchange ideas, books, recite by heart novel, story books, poems etc. During events

it was common to have speakers quote liberally from portions of books, but today an average student cannot read for about thirty (30) minutes without distraction and will take over three months to read a novel.

Statement of the Problem

There has been massive lament over the consistent decline in the performance and results of students in national examination such as, WAEC, NECO and NEBTEP. Recent statistics from these examination bodies reveal that mass failure in these public examinations are now becoming a recurring tolerable decimal. Sharing in this sentiment, Duke (2012) citing some WAEC results as discouraging, that less than 22% of the candidates who sat for the examination passed with credits in five subjects including English and Mathematics.

In the same vein, Igwe (2012) opines that "the appalling level of decline of reading culture, apathy towards books among youth is a major factor responsible for the mass failure in public examination.

With the advent of social media, the situation is speedily going down the slope. Students spend more time on social media engaging in various forms of social activities such as; games, chatting, watching movies, Facebook etc. These activities often occupy the young ones for hours none stop even when they have examinations to write ahead. Their engrossment in social media has brought about: shorter attention spans, distraction and reduction of focus, lack of critical thinking, preference for visual content and so on. All these has contributed immensely to the massive decline in reading generally.

Another problem responsible for this identified challenge of lack of reading is the creation of passing centers also known as "miracle centers" where students go to write their exams and come out with "As" in all their registered subjects through exam malpractice. Exam malpractice is gradually becoming the norm in our education system. There are instances where students have very excellent results but cannot read a paragraph fluently in an essay passage.

Therefore, this research is a deliberate effort on the need to resuscitate, revive and re-introduce reading culture in the Nigerian society with special emphasis on the secondary level of our education. This we intend achieving through inaugurating reading clubs and other innovative programmes. We strongly believe that the selected schools will serve as pilot study and the basis for evaluating their performance against other schools that are not involved in this research. Also, we hope that the selected schools will serve as models for other schools to emulate as

their performance in both internal and external examinations would have improved very drastically.

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this research is to revive and promote reading culture among secondary school students. To achieve this, the following objectives will serve as a guide:

i. To ascertain whether there are reading clubs in the selected schools
ii. To establish effective reading clubs in the selected schools
iii. To train the selected students on reading skills and techniques
iv. To engage the students in reading competition to foster reading culture in the selected schools

Theoretical Framework

This work adopts the motivation reading theory. It was significantly developed in the late 1970s and 1980s. David M. Pearson and Margaret C. McGhee in their publications in 1983 helped to formalize the theory. The motivation theory of reading focuses on the factors that drive individuals to engage with texts and develop their reading skills. The theory emphasizes the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in shaping reading behaviors and attitude among students to be effective readers. This theory is appropriate to this work because the aim of this research is to revive the reading culture among secondary school students.

Literature Review

The Concept of Reading

There are four ways of showing our knowledge or skills in a language or on what we claim to know generally. This include: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Of all the four skills required in the learning process, the most needful of them is the reading skill yet most neglected.

Reading according to Opara (2012) is first and foremost an interaction between three parties: the writer, the reader and the text. Reading involves the acts of looking at the orthographic signs or symbols of a language and interpreting the coded patterning of those symbols. In other words, reading could be defined as "the process of looking at a series of written symbols and getting meaning from them.'' (RSSL4). Reading depends on the eyes. We use our eyes to receive or take in the written symbols, (letters, punctuation marks and spaces). In other words, we rely

on the eyes to take in information by the contact between our eyes and the coded symbols. While we use our brain to convert or interpret them into words, sentences, paragraphs etc. that communicate something to us. On his part, Tinuoye (1997) view reading as a double-pronged process, receptive and productive. She further states that when one reads, one appears to be passive, but at the same time, one is actively engaged in thinking along with the writer using his shared culturally or intellectually acquired knowledge plus general world experience in the interpretation of what is being read. Aliyu (2010) sees reading from a different perspective, that it is a way of building up from what has been put down in the written form. The written symbols in his view are used to form words and sentences, which are in turn expected to represent certain information or intention.

The Importance of Reading

Every habitual reader is an enlightened person. As often said, a reader today is a leader tomorrow. The importance of reading can never be over emphasize yet this all important virtue is gradually slipping out of our nation today. In their recent publication on the importance of reading, Tor-Akwer & Dominic (2023) note that reading is an essential skill that is crucial for all-round development of students at all levels in the world of today. This view is equally shared by Adesulu et al (2017) as quoted in (Tor-Akwer & Dominic, 2023) that about 30 million Nigerian students have graduated from secondary schools with poor reading skills, attributing it to the poor habits cultivated during their stay at school. Obviously they are emphasizing the consequences of not cultivating the reading skills. Speaking in the same vein, Opara (2012) states that "for academic purpose, reading is an indispensable cornerstone. It is the entirety of the student's academic life" He further stresses that academic success is seen as reading and academic failure is invariably a reading failure. Also emphasizing the importance of reading, Chukwuma and Otagburuagu (1997) identified three broad areas where recreational reading is important: one is in developing proficiency in the English language. This is because constant reading provides the opportunity to come in contact with English words and syntactic structures. This contact increases the chances of spelling and using words correctly, writing correct sentences, and making communication generally more effective. The second area is the provision of the general knowledge. Reading of Newspapers, magazines, books, tracts, etc. provides reports on daily events that keeps a habitual reader enlightened and informed of happenings in and around the world. The third area is the provision of

insights into human conditions through reading literary works, feature articles in newspapers, magazines and other useful materials broaden the social horizon of the reader. Also noting the cruciality of reading, (Egunjobi, 2019) states that reading is an important activity in human life and serves as a foundation of human life. He further says, whether the reading is done for pleasure or for academic purpose, there is a saying that readers are leaders. This is because the habit of reading forms the bedrock of greatness in every one.

The Need to Revive Reading Culture

Opara in his passion on the need to revive reading culture in Nigeria generally, strongly agitates that "reading habit should be seen as a culture" (Opara, 2012). Just as culture are practiced and preserved for the future, so reading must be encouraged and practiced by students and Nigerians generally. This is because reading culture is very important in the modern world. It is the hallmark of literacy. The nascent crusade to restore the reading culture in the Nigerian society actually demands a holistic approach. During the Bring Back the Book (BBB) campaign that was launched in 2011 by the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, has this to say, "I want Nigerians reading again because when they read, they know and it is not possible to mislead a people who know". It is obvious that there are lamentations all over on the decline in reading generally. More calls on the need to revive the reading culture in Nigeria is increasing day by day because government and the citizens are seeing the havoc lack of reading is causing to our nation at large.

In his intensive research on the need to revive the reading culture in Nigeria, Egunjobi (2019) a librarian by profession noted that to achieve this noble cause in Nigeria, in his findings suggest that collective roles by parents, individuals, authors and publishers, schools, the society, government, and libraries must be active to salvage the situation. We actually agree with Egunjobi because this task is beyond an individual effort as all hands must be on deck to achieve this uphill task.

Methodology

To achieve these objectives, a comprehensive mixed-method approach is employed incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. While the theoretical framework for the research is the motivation theory of reading.

The study area of this research is Nasarawa state involving two secondary schools, drawn from, Doma and Akwanga local government areas respectively. The name of the schools are:

1. ECWA High School, Doma
2. Rishama Comprehensive School, Akwanga

Population Sample

Three hundred and twenty (320) students from the two selected schools were involved in the training out of which two hundred and eleven (211) voluntarily joined the formed reading clubs in their respective schools after the training. Thirteen (13) students out of the mentioned population were purposively selected to participate in the reading competition. Three (3) out of the thirteen (13) participants emerged as winners of the competition. The tables below show the number of students from each of the schools.

Training Strategies

Two training sections were organized for the students in each of the selected schools. The training were on:

1. **Reviving Reading Culture among Secondary School Students**
2. **The Techniques for Effective Reading**

The training were meant to expose the students to the rudiments of reading skills and inculcate in them the interest in reading generally.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This research focuses on the need to revive the reading culture among some selected secondary schools in Nasarawa state. The research was conducted using two selected secondary schools which are: i. ECWA High School, Doma. ii. Rishama Comprehensive School, Akwanga, both in Nasarawa state. The following tables below showcase the data gathered from the two schools and the analysis of the data presented.

Table 1: General Information on Reading in the Selected Schools.

S/No.	Items	ECWA H/S	Rishama	Total
1	Reading club in School	None	None	0
2	Library in School	None	Yes	1
3	Literature Texts	None	None	0
4	Reading Competition	None	None	0
5	Total	0	1	1

The data in table 1 above indicates that both selected schools do not have reading clubs, no library nor literature or story texts that students could read to motivate their reading culture. In view of these, none of the schools has ever organized reading competition or attended any outside their school. This affirms our objective one that seeks to know whether there are reading clubs in the selected schools or not. By extension to several private and public schools, the story is not different.

Table 2: Data on Students' Attendance on Training I: Reviving Reading Culture Among Secondary School Students

S/No	Name of School	Attendance	Total
1	Ecwa High School, Doma	250	250
2	Rishama Comprehensive Sch. Akwanga	70	70
3	**Grand Total**	320	320

In table 2, the data displayed showcase the total number of students that attended the first training on reading. The high level of attendance indicates their interest to learn how to cultivate and revive their reading culture. This further proof that the reason for apathy to reading among students may be attributed to lack of awareness on the importance of reading by the students. In most schools, reading is not taught deliberately to students or engage them in reading exercise that will in turn build in them capacity for rigorous discipline in reading.

The training on reading birthed the motivation for reading among the participants. This led to the formation of reading clubs in the selected schools as students voluntarily joined the newly formed clubs by the InstIBR team. This is the first of it kinds as both teachers and students testified that they have never experienced such from the inception of the two schools. This upholds the second objectives of this research which to establish an effective reading clubs in the selected schools that will enhance the activity of reading among the students.

Table 3: Data on Students' Attendance on Training II: The Techniques for Effective Reading

S/No	Name of School	Attendance	Total
1	ECWA High School, Doma	160	160
2	Rishama Comprehensive Sch. Akwanga	51	51
3	**Grand Total**	**211**	**211**

Table 3 contains information on the number of students that attended the second training which was on the techniques for effective reading. This particular training was restricted to only those students that joined the reading clubs that were formed in their respective schools. The figure in the table 3 no.1 shows that 160 students attended the training indicating about 100% interest from the students on their willingness to improve their reading ability. In the same vein, the second school also witness an impressive attendance about 89% of total school population attended the training equally high rate of interest by the students to improve their reading habits.

After the training each of the school selected received a donation of a bookshelf and about 160 literature and story books from the IBR research team. This is to enable them practicalise the knowledge acquired in the training by reading several story books that were now at their disposal and also to prepare them for the intra reading competition.
Table 2 and 3 attest to the third objective of this research that states the need to train the students on the importance of reading and expose them to some of the techniques for effective reading.

Table 4: Results of the Reading Competition of one of the Selected Schools

S/No	Nature of the Activity	Expected Scores	Participant Number 8	Participant Number 4	Participant Number 12
1	**No. Novels Read**	**-**	**3**	**6**	**3**
2	**Ability to Remember Author's Name, Titles, No of pages and Chapters**	**10**	**8**	**7**	**7**
3	**Question on the Themes**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**3**
4	**Question on the Plot**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**3**
5	**Question on the Setting**	**5**	**3**	**3**	**2**
6	**Two lessons from the Text**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**
7	**Reading of a short passage to test, speed, fluency, and Pronunciation**	**10**	**8**	**7**	**7**
8	**Appearance**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**2**
9	**Boldness and Composure**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
10	**Total Scores**	**45**	**36**	**32**	**30**
11	**Position**	**-**	**1st**	**2nd**	**3nd**

From the table above, the data captures the results of the reading competition that was organized by the IBR research team in one of the selected schools. It is important to note that thirteen out of one hundred and forty-two members of the reading club were selected to participate in the competition. The criteria used for the random selection is based on those that read between three to twelve literary texts from the books donated to the schools. Only the three best out of the thirteen competitors' scores and position are reflected in the table.

From the table, the participants were subjected to ten (10) different levels of test to ensure a balance and fair assessment as can be seen in column two (2) of the table, indicating nature of activity. Each of the activity has a score while the total expected score is forty five (45).

The result display in the table shows that participant 8 took the first position with a total score of 36 while participants 4 and 12 took second and third position respectively.

The last objective of this research is actually achieved through the keenly contested intra competition that was organized by the IBR team. The competition turned out to be highly contestable as almost all the students in the reading club have engaged themselves in reading of the supplied texts.

Conclusion

This research is on the need for reviving and re-introducing reading culture among secondary school students in two selected secondary schools in Nasarawa state of Nigeria. The study is IBR sponsored by TETFund with an overall aim of reviving reading activities in the secondary schools. The research was conducted in several stages ranging from training students on the importance of reading, strategies for effective reading, organizing reading clubs, supplying of literature and story book, to orgaising reading competitions. All these were geared towards bringing back the culture of reading among the secondary school students. The outcome of the research practically reveals that many students in secondary schools have lost interest in reading because they are not taught the importance of reading as an academic exercise. More so, many schools do not have library and literary texts in their schools to encourage reading activities. Another principal finding is that reading competition is completely alien to most of the students as such practice is no longer in our schools. All these are responsible for the present predicaments of reading in our secondary schools not only in Nasarawa state our case study but in Nigeria at large.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward in view of the outcome of the research conducted in the two selected schools.

1. If reading will be revive and re-introduced in both private and public schools, reading clubs should be as a matter of urgency be formed in all the schools that do not have them. This will enhance reading activity immensely among students.
2. Government, organizations and spirited individuals should assist in establishing library in all schools. From the research, it is obvious that many schools do not have reading library in their schools.
3. Closely related to the above is the supply and donation of literature and story texts in our schools should be taken up with all seriousness. In the selected schools, not a single text was available for the students to read.
4. Reading competition among students in secondary schools should be given top priority. This will serve as a great motivation for the students to cultivate reading culture. Handsome gifts i.e. money or items should be given to the winners to boast their moral and encourage the losers to work harder next time.
5. Lastly, government through the ministry of education should make policies that will reflect and include the above mentioned recommendation in our education curriculum and policy statements of our educational system in Nigeria.

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