

Full Length Research

Intervention Strategies for Combating Aliteracy in Nigerian Schools: Implications for Public Libraries and Government

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The study examined the strategies for handling or curbing aliteracy in Nigerian Schools. Aliteracy is having the ability and capacity to read, but lack the interest and motivation to read on a regular basis. Aliterates read for functional reasons and not for pleasure or as a hobby. Lack of reading/literacy was identified as one of the principal causes of underdevelopment in many nations across the globe. The study identified and discussed some of the factors militating against reading habits of students as the lack of reading and reasoning competency, lack of intrinsic motivation, indecision, introduction to ICT among others. Low leadership output, lack of understanding and interpretation of things and situations; the vocabulary and terminology acquisition is low, individual intellectual limitation, poorly developed analytical skills, and lack of knowledge were listed among other consequences of aliteracy. Some of the strategies for managing aliteracy include encouraging reading using ICT device, introduction of readers' club in schools, involvement of students in book recommendation and selection process, encouraging students to do book reviews, organize excursion for students to visit national public/academic libraries. The recommendations identified in this study include allocating time for reading in school Time-Table, parents should encourage reading by buying books as gifts rather than toys, student reading interest should be taken into consideration when selecting books for school libraries, reading competition among others.

Keywords: Aliteracy, Reading, Intervention Strategies, Nigerian Schools, Public Libraries, School Libraries, and Government

INTRODUCTION

Education is the bedrock of national development. The advancement and development of a country depend on sound educational policies and robust structures in place. Thus, nations craving for recognition, Nigeria inclusive should put in place standard educational policies and development. From the National Policy on Education, the goal of the Nigerian Government is to eradicate/eliminate

illiteracy at the shortest possible time through nationwide mass literacy campaign (FGN, 1998). Obanya (2007) notes "relevance determines the use a society make of educational opportunities" (p. 2). The literacy level of a nation is a function of the quality of education received by the citizens of that country. The saying that knowledge is power, suggest that strong and powerful nations are built

on the foundation of knowledge and the application of same to national challenges. According to Issa, Amusan, Adeniran & Bolarinwa (2014) “the level of readership is largely an index of a country’s level of development”. In other words, the strength of a nation lies in the depth of knowledge of the citizens of that nation and how much of the knowledge is utilized in solving personal and national problems. Acknowledging the declining culture of reading, Chinelo (2010) observed that no society could develop above the knowledge base of its citizens. He decried the dying culture of reading among children (the leaders of tomorrow). The pathetic situation indicates that Nigerians are not reading, and if they do, they do it reluctantly. The 21st century era more than any other period in human history has produced a generation of skilled readers and writers. Thus, available opportunities and survival is very limited for the reluctant readers. The century holds a gamut of unpleasant surprises for all non-readers. The ability to function or perform efficiently on a given assignment at work, home, civic or social function depends largely on some measure of literacy or reading skills without which life will be frustrating and difficult (The International Reading Association, 1999, p. 3 or Moore et al, 1999).

The Nigerian society, according to Ilogho (2011) is composed of three categories of people, the partially literate people, the aliterate people and the avid readers. The partially literate people have no formal education. However, the partially literate acquired knowledge and information orally from parents, family members and their interaction with their environment. The avid readers are highly motivated individuals who take delight in reading. They read with passion and for pleasure. They naturally love and enjoy reading. Reading for pleasure could be described as free will reading with an anticipated satisfaction in view (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). The aliterates read by compulsion. They are unwilling and reluctant readers. They are uncommitted and occasionally motivated individuals. Aliterates are inconsistent or irregular readers. The Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) describes aliteracy as having the ability to read yet lacking the interest to do so. Aliterates readers easily abandon whatever book they set out to read. They cannot boast of reading more than a book in one year without several breaks. Aliteracy exist and cut across every profession and strata of society. Aliteracy affects students across all levels of education, career/profession, including those in the teaching profession. Cole (2002) explores readers’ beliefs, reasons and purposes as what motivates students to read. Aliteracy is here with us, and though we cannot run away from this fact, the challenges can be addressed. According to the Mark Twain Circle of New York (1998) “The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can’t read them”. In other words the literate who can read but refuses to read is no

better than the illiterate man who cannot read at all.

Igbokwe, Obidike and Ezeji (2012) citing Henry (2004) found in one of the studies carried out in Nigeria that “40 percent of adult Nigerians never read a non-fiction book from cover to cover after graduating from school”. An average Nigerian is believed to read less than one book per year. Only one percent of successful men and women in Nigeria read one non-fiction book per month. The study further revealed that 30 million Nigerians who graduated from high school have poor reading skills. This explains why Nigerian students hardly read except for reasons of a test, examination, homework, and occasionally for recreation.

Statement of the Problem

A large percentage of Nigerian students do not see reading as pleasurable. Instead, reading is generally viewed as a work. Igbokwe, Obidike & Ezeji (2012) observed that students rarely read for pleasure or enjoyment, rather they read only to pass an examination. Students prefer to sit back and watch the screen than read school recommended books, newspapers and other educational materials such as novels, fiction literature, etc. With increasing use of information technology, the prospect of spending leisure time or even creating time to browse through a book does not readily come to mind as it was in the past. The current study, therefore, seeks to achieve the following set of objectives:

- Identify some of the factors militating against reading habits of students
- Highlight consequences of poor not reading habit for individuals and society
- Examine some strategies for tackling/managing aliteracy in Nigerian schools
- Examine the possible implication for public libraries in Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW

A passion and love for reading is imperative for a sustainable disciplined reading lifestyle. According Sangkaeo (1999) the number of disinterested readers or reluctant readers compared to those who read is on the increase. The aliterates in the society have outnumbered the illiterates (Beers, 1996). Kjersti VanSlyke-Biggs (2011) citing the National Endowment of Arts (2007) reported that teens are reading less and for shorter amounts of time. The report further reveals that nearly half of all Americans age 18 to 24 read no book for pleasure. According to Gann, Sharp, & McIlquham (2013) reading is the ability to sort through a staggering amount of information and thoughtfully engage with text while

utilizing cogent reasoning. Each reader must actively engage in the skill of reasoning for effective reading to occur. Thus, the lack of reasoning competence could result in frustration and eventual loss of interest in reading. Trelease (1998) observed in Welther (2002) that “we need to advertise reading; we need to read to our children to entice them and instill in them the desire to read” (p. 17). The two studies of Trelease (1995; 1998) emphasized the importance of reading aloud to children. Reading habit is enhanced when children are introduced to reading at the elementary school level (Pavonetti & Cipielewski, 2000).

Ilogho (2011) opines that a reading lifestyle is dependent on the individual’s personal decision. Many young reluctant readers have a problem deciding whether to read or not, when to read, and why they should read. The need for reading is not in view, hence reading is considered as difficult, boring and burdensome. The decision to do a thing compels that individual to act which in turn depends on whether there is a strong reason for the action. Some of the factors identified as responsible for the dying reading culture of young people include:

Lack of intrinsic motivation for reading: the ability to engage in an activity for its sake (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is from within forms the basis for establishing the love for reading. In other words, reading is sustainable when it is motivated by love (Purdy, 1995).

Lack of choice of what to read: lack of choice of what to read. Gambrell (1996) found that over 80% of children indicated a book they chose for themselves when asked to make a comment about the book they enjoyed. Provoking and sustainable reading interest requires the involvement of readers choosing the materials to read.

Negative attitude to reading: negative attitude to reading could develop when reading is not based on individual willingness, interest or a decision to read including, when an individual is forced. Individual is crucial to a reading lifestyle. Although Mitchell & Ley (1996) observed that studies on attitude towards reading of students at the high school level of education is limited in the literature. Kush & Watkins (2002) in their research addressed the subject of children’s attitude to reading and long-term stability.

Competing activities for reading: quite a number of activities compete for the attention of young people, including ICT devices such as video games, sports (indoor and outdoor games), entertainment TV programs and several other compelling activities. Anne and others (2011) observed that the decline in reading among children is an offshoot of technological advancement. ICT has brought changes in all strata of society, including the education sector and the family. Most young students who have access to computers, tablets and internet facilities prefer to browse, and engage in diverse forms

social media, in the absence of household chores rather than reading. Occasionally, we see isolated cases of students’ engagement in reading as a recreation. In this IT driven age, there are more than enough activities competing for the little available time for students.

Another contributory factor to the reading decline among students include: the transition experience from elementary to middle school which creates in students a mindset that middle school is “serious” or difficult. Thus, reading is associated with increased testing requirements and work (Gallagher, 2009). Furthermore, Clark & Rumbold (2006) identified some issues causing reluctant reading tendencies, including low self-esteem, boredom and peer influence and suggest creative approach to dealing with reading disengagement related issues.

Consequences of Aliteracy on Individuals and Society

Much is at stake when majority of the people in society are reluctant readers and many experience unnecessary and avoidable limitations. The following are some negative consequences of aliteracy for the individual and the larger society:

- Extreme ignorance of various subjects and issues of life;
- The Leadership output and impact from a nation of reluctant readers is likely to be very low (that is a case of the blind leading the blind)
- Lack of visionary leadership
- Lack of understanding and interpretation of things and situations;
- The rate of vocabulary and terminology acquisition is low;
- There is a high level of individual intellectual limitation;
- Poor development of individual analytical abilities;
- Lack of individuals’ exposure and knowledge of important locations across the globe
- Lack of reading deprives individuals of inspiration, insight and revelations; Murphy (1998) “notes that our enthusiasm, insights, and expectations can entice children to become more actively involved in literacy” (p. 93).
- Impairment of individual mental development and imagination;
- Opportunities for self development is kept hidden and never discovered;
- Lack of reading hampers self cerebral development which can result in mental stagnation;
- Lack of reading impairs self confidence and boldness;

- Interpersonal relationships are poorly managed and cannot improve without reading;
- Lack of reading hinders people from making quality decisions;
- Lack of reading hinders one of envisioning a bigger and brighter future

School Library Intervention Strategies for Managing Aliteracy

The primary/secondary school library is strategically the centre of all intellectual activities. The library houses all print and non-print materials, including audio and audio-visual resources, etc. The librarian's primary responsibility is to lead the entire school staff and students in a reading revolution in which students are taught to desire and enjoy reading instead of just learning how to read for the sake of doing so. Murphy (1998) alerts that overlooking/ignoring the experience of aesthetic in reading could mean a failure to dealing with the challenges of aliteracy. He further, "notes that our enthusiasm, insights, and expectations can entice children to become more actively involved in literacy" (p. 93).

As a priority, the school librarian must know the areas of interest of users in reading. The United Nations and UNESCO over the years gave high priority to reading promotion through education and cultural organizations. The result is the publication of diverse information sources such as easy to read books, newspapers, etc. while championing the school reading revolution; the school librarian should ensure students are actively engaged.

The school librarian must adopt effective, workable strategies when organizing/planning reading promotion programmes for students. The school librarian must carry everyone along in pursuance of the reading revolution. In other words, students, teachers, parents, and non-teaching staff alike should be properly educated about the reading promotion plan. The school in addition to the effort of the school librarian could address the problem of aliteracy by adopting designed reading programmes (Moorman, 1983). Mackey, & Ingrid (1996) listed some strategies for encouraging reading among reluctant readers. These include:

- Assigning reading time to students in class.
- Involve students in selection of books among a limited number.
- Discuss selection techniques with students,
- Follow-up an author's series or genre,
- Browse the internet for diverse titles of interest,
- Talk to friends, a teacher, a librarian or make a choice based on an appealing title or cover.

- Read the beginning of novels aloud in class to get reluctant readers hooked.

Other strategies to encourage reading among students are:

Projection of the benefits of reading to students:

This involves painting a picture of what students stand to gain, achieve or become by making reading a lifestyle. It is the school librarian's responsibility to help library users see and dream of a great future through the art of reading. Students should be helped to understand that reading is a platform for interacting with great minds and visionary men and women.

Encourage writing in order to inspire a love for reading

It is an established fact that every writer is a reader. Therefore, students can be encouraged to write stories of their own. Therefore great writers are born out of great commitment to reading as a lifestyle.

Encourage Information and Communication Technology Skills to Inspire Reading Motivation

Information and Communication Technology is a strong tool for encouraging reading among youths. The youths of this generation tend to find this technology, highly fascinating and exciting. ICT devices are user friendly, easy to use and require manipulative skills. Hardly can we find young persons in urban cities who cannot use or operate any of the new Information and Communication Technologies, be it internet, TV, telephones, GSM, emails, computers, computer games etc. Research however, has shown that many young people prefer reading via ICT devices. ICT is not only ideal, it is effective, for promoting reading habit, especially among young people who have a flare for ICT. Hassan, Olaseni, & Mathew (2012) discovered from investigation that students read online information more than offline information. That reading of emails and online information surpassed the reading of information in print format. Today there are a wide range of electronic information resources and databases. Literary works for children and teenagers abound on the internet, including stories and novels in CD-ROM formats, talking books, audiovisual, e.t.c. Young people can be encouraged to read electronic materials, especially those who have access to ICT devices.

School Readers' Club

Another way school libraries can mobilize reading campaign in school is to involve everyone in the school

through the instrument of a "READERS CLUB". The club membership should consist of the school librarian, teachers and students. The club is responsible for organizing reading campaign and events in the school. The club may choose to organize programmes on weekly, monthly and yearly basis, taking into consideration all categories of students. The following are some of the programmes of the Readers Club:

- Go on an excursion to university libraries, national libraries, publishing houses.
- Organizing a reading competition and giving awards to the best readers.
- Visiting renown authors/writers and publishing houses
- Organize trainings and seminars on reading for students and teachers;
- Weekly design bookmarks by students under the supervision of teachers to promote a particular book, genre, or nonfiction material.
- Students are encouraged to participate in book recommendation and selection process for the library.
- Participation in student journalism which involves writing reviews of new library books and publishing them in the school newspaper/magazine.
- Organizing book talks and allow students to record the whole event, on audio CDs, and DVDs.
- Create time for students to talk with each other in an informal one-on-one or a small-group basis about books they have read for assignments or share aspects about the books they are reading.
- Engage students in selecting books for teachers to read out to students in the elementary schools. The benefits of involving children in book selection cannot be over stressed. Moss & Hendershot (2002) examined the selection of nonfiction books by sixth graders.
- Engage students in designing poster advertisements about books and display them in hallways, e.t.c.

Implication for Public Libraries in Nigeria

The destiny and development of Nigeria depend on what the leadership of today/future does or fails to do, thus the current need to salvage the dying reading culture in our nation Nigeria. Apart from the effort of the government, there is a need for public libraries to provide leadership in the campaign for a national reading culture, through their mentoring role to primary and secondary schools. For the

purpose of community impact, academic libraries can embark on programmes that will not only promote reading awareness in Nigerian public and private schools, but also improve library services to pupils/students in Local Government communities. Such programmes include:

- Organizing conferences, seminars and trainings for school/teacher librarians to update them with knowledge of the latest practices in librarianship
- Provide consultation and support services for school libraries in aspects of improvement of service delivery and how to make libraries more relevant to users.
- Assist new schools to set up standard school libraries on request.
- Extend consultation services to companies/organizations who desire to have libraries of their own.
- Encourage schools to establish and publish a school magazine that will, among many things promote reading awareness.
- Identify and form alliance with Book Donation Agencies to receive books and distribute same to schools that cannot afford to buy books.
- Organize inter-school reading competition where the best readers given book awards.
- Organize Book Fair/Exhibition to involve publishers, authors, secondary and primary school, schools, ministry of education (state and federal), NGOs and others.
- Identify wealthy individuals, organizations and politicians who are interested and willing to sponsor buildings and the establishment of community libraries.

CONCLUSION

Until people positively change their attitude to reading they may never uncover the countless hidden secrets of life success and achievement. Thus addressing the decline in reading among Nigerian youths is an important subject of concern to educators, parents, government and other stakeholders. The reluctant reading behaviour displayed by both old and young adults reflects the state of intellectual decay and backwardness in society. The lack of desire, urge, interest, drive or motivation to read by educated literate persons describes "aliteracy". Several militating factors have been identified as being responsible for the ever increasing non-reading population, factors like sports activities, music, art, party events and diverse kinds of ICT devices such as internet, emails, computer games, iPods, DVD films, satellite T.V

programmes, etc. These and many more compete favourably for the attention of the majority of people especially young adults. There is therefore a need to draw attention to young people's reading needs, interest, and challenges in order to make them want to read more. Research investigations show that intrinsic motivation, interest, attitudes, preferences and material types have in a way influenced students reading culture, particularly in this age of Information and Communication Technology.

Given the necessary support of government at different levels, in conjunction with the contributions of tertiary institutions, attitudes of students to recreational reading will definitely improve. The school librarian, together with all academic staff are at the forefront leading the reading revolution campaign in Nigerian schools is saddled with the responsibility of putting in place programmes aimed at helping students experience an aesthetic response to reading. Such that they become self-motivated and independent readers, who need no push to read.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents, teachers, librarians and school management should work as a team to encourage students' positive attitude to daily reading, whether in school or outside the school. The following are some recommendations for schools and school libraries:

- Free reading time to be included in the school time-table such that it is not associated with test, examination, homework etc.
- Students should be given the freedom to choose from a variety of materials in different formats what they want to read during their leisure time.
- Encouraged by parent teachers and school librarian should build their home library collection to suit the interest of the students.
- Parents, teachers, school management and librarians should encourage reading by giving book gifts to students in different areas of achievements.
- Teachers and librarians should structure reading events to suit children's' current interests, and include group discussions that encourage aesthetic responses.
- Schools should introduce reading activities such as reading group meetings, sharing reviews of books, and interaction with local authors.
- Libraries should provide reading stories in multimedia presentations that include audio and visual components.
- Teachers should engage in book discussions with students regularly to promote analytical

reasoning skill development.

- Classroom library that has a wide range of material including graphic novels, nonfiction, picture books designed for older readers, and books from a variety of cultures should be introduced.

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