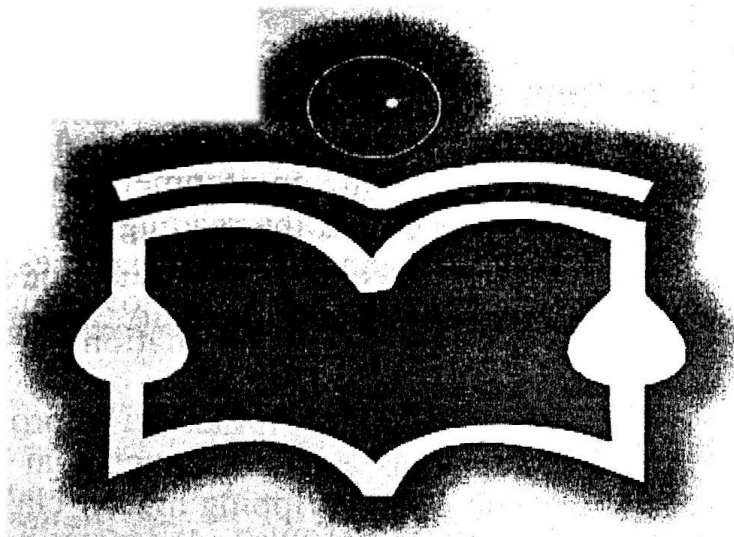


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Non-effective Communication as a Result Of Poor Reading Habits Among Unical Students

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ABSTRACT

The link between reading and effective communication cannot be overemphasised. A student who reads will not only be able to communicate well but will equally enhance his academic performance. This study therefore investigates the impact of reading on communication among students of the University of Calabar. It also examines the impediments to reading among these students. Our findings show that the students vary in their opinion about the interrelationship which exists between reading and effective communication and the impact of these on their academic success. This study supports the idea that sensitising the students on the relevance of reading to their academic and social well-being will help re-position them.

Introduction

Reading, has several definitions. Nuttall's (1988:2) outstanding notions of reading include words like understand, interpret, decode, decipher, articulate and so forth. Communication on the other hand is any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings. This process involves not only the spoken and written word but also language, personal mannerisms, style, the surroundings—anything that adds meaning to a message (Hybels and Weaver 1992:5-6). Our focus is on the written forms of human communication.

Reading is considered an essential skill by all types of people and is perceived as being vital for effective communication. An interesting fact about reading however, is that reading is not tied to specific cultures, age or sex.

Reading and communication

According to Maseko and Thumbadoo (2003:41) reading is a literacy skill needed to enable everybody to function in a literate environment and in every situation. For instance, people who have not acquired the reading skill are unable to read road signs and directions, interact with automatic letter machines and read medicine instructions in modern societies. One can search for knowledge when one is able to read. It is mainly by reading that one can get information for self improvement. Knowledge is posited in books which have to be read to be understood. A student who cultivates the habit of reading will show a marked improvement in his/her productive skills. This often comes as a breakthrough that results in his/her progressing at increasing speed and far outstripping his/her classmates who have not developed the habit of reading (Nuttall 1988:164).

Often we are told that we should use clear and precise language, a task which many of us wouldn't know how to go about. Command of a language and effective communication require years of practice and study. Sometimes our meaning is unclear when our sentence structure is faulty. Clarity is essential since a second opportunity to make our point clear may not arise. It is therefore important to read in order to develop ones vocabulary and improve on the grammatical aspect of language usage. In oral communication, people interact continuously and simultaneously and their conversation sometimes reflects knowledge which they had acquired from books (Hybels and Weaver 1992:100).

Reading in Nigeria

A number of seminar and conference papers have been written on the state of reading in present day Nigeria. Scholars are of the opinion that the reading culture is on the decline, especially among students. It is very disappointing to note that even though there are so many activities to help students improve their reading skills, some of them fail to read without being pushed. It has also been observed that many of the students come from a non-reading background. By the time extensive reading is introduced to them, it is rather too late. Inculcating reading culture in a school is not a very easy task as noted by Dlamini (2003:32) because according to him, not only do the students have little interest in reading but also teachers are not keen to read extensively themselves.

The reading culture, amongst Nigerian youths is further jeopardized by the popular video culture. These days people would rather sit by their television than read. According to Uko (cf Onuoha, 2003:31), "if you want to hide something from the black man, hide it inside a book and place it on the centre-table. He may never find it because he won't read the book". This is very unfortunate but to a large extent it is the truth. There is the need to discourage orature and encourage reading and eventually, writing. We are therefore of the opinion that the video culture could be made to complement reading.

Worried by the poor reading culture among Nigerian youths, well-meaning individuals, governmental and non-governmental organisations have initiated efforts to remedy the situation. Their objective being to promote reading amongst Nigerians, especially the youths. They should read and be enthusiastic to have information which will make them become not only educated but also prepare them to face the challenges of the future. Oguntase (cf Ajayi, 2004:22) opines that: "reading is a dosage you must take daily to stay alive...."

It is our belief that students in tertiary institutions should be able to read better, faster and with full understanding. The student can improve his/her reading skill and thus benefit from the skill. But do the undergraduate students of University of Calabar read? If they do, how does this impact on communication? The main objectives of this study therefore include the following:

- (1) To investigate the reading habits of UNICAL undergraduate students read.
- (2) To examine if the students see any relationship between reading and writing.
- (3) To examine if the students see any relationship between reading and communication.
- (4) To examine if reading has in any way contributed to the improvement of the students' vocabulary and grammar.

The sampling procedure

This article is a survey of the reading habits of the University of Calabar undergraduate. Students were randomly selected from six (6) Faculties of the University. They were given a set of questionnaire to fill in order to elicit information about their reading habits and their opinion about the relationship between reading, writing, communication and the improvement of their grammar. One hundred and twenty (120) copies of the questionnaire were randomly distributed to students from different Departments in the various Faculties chosen.

The instrument

The set of questionnaire which was divided into two sections 'A' and 'B' were administered on one hundred and twenty (120) undergraduate students.

Section 'A' had fourteen (14) questions to test the objectives of this research. Section 'B' on the other hand was meant to obtain demographic information which focuses on the bio-data of the respondents. (cf Appendix 1) Simple percentage was used to analyse the data statistically. The survey questionnaire was supplemented by unstructured interview of some lecturers of the different Departments in the University of Calabar.

Findings and analysis

In Section 'B' of the questionnaire 45% of the students were males and 55% were females. 22.50% of the students were in the 15 – 20 years age range, 55.83% fell in the 21 – 26 years range while 21.67% of the students were in the 27 – 35 years range. In the qualification area, 3.33% of the students already hold BA/B.SC/HND, 13.33% are NCE/OND holders while 83.34% have SSCE/WASC as their qualification. From the six (6) Faculties that were taken, 13.33% of the students were from year I, 31.67% from year II, 27.50% from year III, 19.17% from year IV and 8.33% were from year V.

In order to find out the reading habit of some UNICAL undergraduate students some questions which would give insight into their reading habit were asked and their responses are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Unical Undergraduate Students Responses to their Reading Habits.

S/No	Item	Yes(%)	No(%)
1	Do you think is important to read	100	0
2.	Do you read often?	25.83	74.17
3	Do you restrict yourself to reading only recommended texts?	5	95
4	Do you read books etc about other academic disciplines?	25	75
5	Can poor reading among students be attributed to lack of books?	34.17	65.83

It is observed from the table that even though all the respondents agree that it is important to read only 25.83% read often. 5% restrict themselves to reading only recommended texts and 75% do not read texts which have nothing to do with their course of study. 65.83% claim that the unavailability of books and other reading materials is responsible for the poor reading habit of undergraduate students of the University of Calabar.

The students responses to our attempt to examine if they see any relationship between reading and writing is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Students Responses to the Relatedness of Reading to Writing.

S/N	Item	Yes(%)	No(%)
1	Does reading affect the way you write	96.67	3.37
2	A student who reads often and extensively writes better in examinations and in his/her papers?	95	5

We equally observe from table 2 above that 96.67% of the respondents agree that reading does affect the way one writes and 95% of them agree that reading often and extensively is necessary for one to write well during examinations and write better term papers too.

Table 3 below contains information about the student responses to our investigation about the relationship between reading and communication.

Table 3: Students responses to questions on the effectiveness of reading to communication.

S/N	Item	Yes(%)	No(%)
1	Do you think reading can affect communication?	82.5	17.5
2	Is it true that those who can read can communicate effectively.	35.83	64.17

We observe from Table that most of the respondents 82.5% agree that reading can affect communication but many of them 64.17% as shown on the table, do not agree that all those who can read can communicate effective.

Table 4 below contains information about the students' responses to our attempt to examine if reading has contributed to the improvement of their vocabulary and grammar.

Table 4: Students responses to questions on the effect of reading on the improvement of the students vocabulary and grammar.

S/N	Item	Yes(%)	No(%)
1	Has reading helped in building your vocabulary?	96.67	3.33
2	Has reading helped you overcome grammatical errors?	99.17	0.82

We observe that 96.67% of the respondents agree that they have found reading rewarding in building their vocabulary while 99.17 claim that reading has helped them overcome errors in grammar.

Discussion of findings: Repositioning our students

Knowing that reading is very important and it goes a long way in positioning the individual in the society, our students need to be encouraged to read. We have found that responses from the students are very illuminating indeed. For instance, all the respondents in the study claim that it is important to read but only 25.83% of them read often. Their claims also show that even though many of them read texts other than the recommended texts, very many of them restrict their reading to materials that have to do with their course of study only. Their claim is however at variance with the responses we got from the unstructured interview with some of their lecturers who claim that evidence from classroom participation, performances in examinations and other academic activities with students show that students do not read at all or do very little reading.

In the light of the responses from the students concerning the relevance of reading to writing, communication, vocabulary development and in improving their grammar much needs to be done to reposition our students. The students could be repositioned by providing well equipped library where they can find books to read on all subject matter. In addition to this, parents should endeavour to buy books for their wards in order to encourage them to read. Seminars on reading should be conducted by governments, schools and well meaning individuals or organisations as these would go a long way in redirecting the students minds towards reading. Rewarding outstanding scholars that have read much and giving books as gifts to students could also encourage and help to repositioning the students as these gestures will redirect their minds to the benefits of reading.

Lecturers should be able to check examination malpractice and when students are caught, full measure of punishment be meted to them to serve as a deterrent to others and by so doing the students will sit up and read. Students should be encouraged to read often and extensively too so that they will be better informed, better prepared to meet the challenges of their academic programme and also prepared to meet the challenges of life outside the institution of learning.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have been able to highlight the importance of reading. We have also touched on the fact that students should be encouraged to read. This is because the need for reading cannot be over emphasized.

For instance, it is pathetic that in a recent survey by the UNICEF on HIV/AIDS, only 8% of the subjects aged 4 – 12 years who were interviewed could read a sentence effectively (NTA News, 2004). This shows that a lot more than is currently being done needs to be done to assist young Nigerians on the path of reading. This paper has emphasized ways of re-positioning the students of University of Calabar in particular to become good readers. The suggestions proposed here can be extended to other classes of students and non-students alike to enable them benefit from reading and to reposition them in their career in particular and in life generally.

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Appendix

Please tick (") the box that best represents your view on each question below. A questionnaire on "Non-effective Communication as a result of poor reading habits among UNICAL students".

S/No	Section A	Yes	No
1	Do you think is important to read		
2	Do you read often?		
3	Do you restrict yourself to reading only recommended texts?		
4	Do you read books etc about other academic disciplines?		
5	Can poor reading among students be attributed to lack of books?		
6	Does reading affect the way you write		
7	A student who reads often and extensively writes better in examinations and in his/her papers?		
8	Do you think reading can affect communication?		
9	Is it true that those who can read can communicate effectively.		
10	Has reading helped in building your vocabulary?		
11	Has reading helped you overcome grammatical errors?		

SECTION B

Gender:

Female: []
 Male: []

Year of Study:

I []
 II []
 III []
 IV []

Faculty:

Arts []
 Law []
 Medicine []
 Management []
 Science []
 Education []

Age:

15 – 20 years []
 21 – 26 years []
 27 – 35 years []

Qualification:

BA/B.Sc/HND []
 NCE/OND []
 WASC/SSCE []