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# Reviving Moribund Culture of Reading in Nigeria for Sustainable National Development

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#### Abstract

Reading is the foundation of much enjoyment in life and is closely related to vocational efficiency. The ability to read well is absolutely critical to success in life. In Nigeria, reading culture has suffered from widespread poverty, corruption, ineptitude and a dearth of dedicated quiet reading spaces like libraries. The decline in the standard of education has seriously affected reading ability. And it becomes harder when you have to deal with the many interactions and challenges that come with being an adult and living in a country like Nigeria. The daily struggle for conomic survival provides little or no time for people to cultivate a good reading habit. Equally, high cost of books, inticularly imported ones, has contributed to low readership promotion in the country. However, the downturn in reading and book readership actually has a global dimension, especially given the onslaught of the digital revolution. The absence of effective reading culture is a barrier to a civilized political culture and economic prosperity. To attain socio-economic height of our dreams and aspirations, we need to develop literate citizens that are able to read widely to unlock the world treasure of knowledge and participate in the dynamic civilization of the world. It is, therefore, essential that policy makers with evidence based data, evaluate educational policies and literacy programmes in Nigeria for sustainable development.

#### Introduction

Reading is a habit that must be cultivated by every living being in the society. This is the foundation for every achievement on the earth irrespective of race, educational qualification, family level or age. Reading could be done for various reasons: for fun, academics, professionally and for commercial purposes. Reading makes a man an achiever. It is a discovery tool for knowledge development. Many people in the society consider reading to be only for educational development of individual and so some members of the public who are not literate shy away from reading. Reading is a skill that must be taught even from the womb. Similarly, it has been emphasized that every child must become fully knowledgeable in reading to succeed in school and discharge responsibilities as a citizen of a given society. So also, an adult who reads has the capacity to actively participate in the continuity of learning. Reading is the foundation of much enjoyment in life and is closely related to vocational efficiency. Students and employees in every field must read to keep abreast of what is happening in their fields. They must rely on written or digital word to convey information and data. The ability to read well is absolutely critical to success in life.

Developing a good reading culture is central and a bedrock to the attainment of any success in education. Reading has a crucial role to play in creating independent learners, literacy promotion and educational attainment of individuals in every society in the world.

This is an intricate development which involves communication between the reader and the language ideas of the text. It involves the reader drawing upon their existing knowledge of the world, knowledge of the language and the written code to make meaning from the text. Reading is a necessary skill to obtain information; it is a process that aids in meaningful creation of knowledge. While the reading process seems automatic in nature and goes beyond one's conscious control, readers still exert a significant level of active control over their reading process through the use of strategies, which are conscious procedures that are deliberate and purposeful. Since reading is a problem-solving process an analysis of reading strategies can provide insights as to how readers interact with the text, and how their choice or use of strategies influences their comprehension of the text A focus on reading strategies likewise helps researchers determine the extent to which readers understand the purpose of what they read and how they make sense of what they read. Psychologists are increasingly finding that reading can affect our personalities. Reading reminds a reader that he is not alone. His struggles and dreams are shared thus his life is a part of a larger network. The greatest books comfort you with this sense of belonging.

## What is Reading?

Reading is recognised as an art capable of transforming man's life and his entire society. It is a skill which enables individuals to get a message; recognising the written words (written symbols); getting (understanding) the meaning; used to teach pronunciation; grasping information from texts. Reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written text. According to education experts, reading is the only form of entertainment that is also an essential life skill. Reading is a skill that must be nurtured from one's earliest years. Once someone knows how to read, they still need support to reach their full potential as readers. Most people with learning disabilities have problems with reading and related language skills.

Through reading, humans have the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation; it does allow one to listen to the wisdom and people of the ages. God, the creator chooses to relate with us through reading of the holy books that contain God's will and directives for whoever will read and profit thereby. God enjoins us to read, it means we can and we should read to get a deep understanding of ourselves. According to McDonald (2012), there are different reading techniques. There are also different types of reading and the corresponding types of activities to develop the corresponding reading skills:

#### Skimming

This is the most rudimentary type of reading. Its objective is to familiarize readers as quickly as possible with the material to be read. Skimming is sometimes referred to as gist reading. Skimming may help in order to know what the text is about at its most basic level. You might typically do this with a magazine or newspaper and would help you mentally and quickly shortlist those articles which you might consider for a deeper read.

#### Scanning

Scanning involves getting your eyes to quickly scuttle across a sentence and is used to get just a simple piece of information. Interestingly, research has concluded that reading off a computer screen actually inhibits the pathways to effective scanning and thus, reading of paper is far more conducive to speedy comprehension of texts. Generally, scanning is a technique that is helpful when one is looking for the answer to a known question.

## **Close Reading**

This is the most important skill you need for any form of literary studies. It means paying especially close attention to what is printed on the page. Close reading means not only reading and understanding the meanings of the individual printed words, but also involves making yourself sensitive to all the nuances and connotations of language as it is used by skilled writers.

## **Intensive Reading**

You need to have your aims clear in mind when undertaking intensive reading. Remember this is going to be far more time consuming than scanning or skimming. If you need to list the chronology of events in a long passage, you will need to read it intensively. This type of reading has indeed beneficial to language learners as it helps them understand vocabulary by deducing the meaning of words in context. It moreover, helps with retention of information for long periods of time and knowledge resulting from intensive reading persists in your long term memory. This is one reason why reading huge amounts of information just before an examination does not work very well. When students do this, they undertake neither type of reading process effectively, especially neglecting intensive reading. They may remember the answers in an examination but will likely forget everything soon afterwards.

## **Analytical Reading**

Analytical reading (or study reading) is needed when a reader wants to make sure that he fully grasps and appreciates what he is reading. He may have to read statements more than once, stop to think about them, or jot down key words when using this style. As a result, the reading rate can easily drop to below 100 words a minute.

## **Extensive Reading**

This is sometimes referred to as pleasure reading, sustained silent reading and a ladder to deep reading. This form of reading is receiving attention as an effective reading instruction for young learners. This type of reading instruction requires individuals to read large quantities of texts for general understanding and for pleasure. Extensive reading has many benefits, including the improvement of fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing skills grammar. Reading for pleasure does not only develop reading ability but

also benefits a range of affective aspects, such as boosting confidence and self-efficacy, increasing motivation and improving individual's overall attitude towards reading. Though reading is individualised and independent, readers can discuss common texts in a group or as a community.

## The Efficacy of Reading

The importance of acquiring reading skills for individual's success in life cannot be over- emphasized. It is a well known fact that when there were no televisions, handsets and computers, people spent hours reading books and traveled to lands far away in their minds. The problem is that with time, people have lost their passion to read because there are several other exciting options available, aside from books these days (Kozak, 2011). This is a shame because reading offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary and word power. The acquisition of reading skills does not only affect or improve confidence in language arts, but also in all other subject areas. Poor reading skills can make a child develop poor attitude to school and it can create self-esteem problems later in life. According to Obiora and Iheagwam (2016), the advantages of reading are so many. These include but not restricted to the following:

- Reading is an active mental process: Unlike Television, books make you use your brain. By reading, you think more and become smarter.
- It is a fundamental skill builder: Every good course on the planet has a matching book to go with it. Why? Because book helps clarify difficult concepts. Books provide information that goes deeper than just classroom discussions.
- Improves your vocabulary: While reading books, especially challenging ones, you will find yourself exposed to many new words.
- Reading gives a glimpse into other cultures and places: Books can expand your horizons by letting you see what other cities, countries, and cultures seem like and what they have to offer.
- Reading improves concentration and focus, building self-esteem, improving memory, learning ability to aid independently, improving creativity, giving you something to talk about, reducing stress.
- Reading is a tool of self improvement leading to do-it-yourself techniques acquisition, equipping oneself with skills for better job.
- Reading is for pleasure and relaxation.
- Reading is status symbols this involves the prestige and values society places or reading rather than nothing.

## The Reading Culture

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Culture is a way of life. The reading culture is conceptualized as a process whereby reading is part of the people's life style and constitutes a habit that is shared by members of the society. The reading culture is one of the valuable assets which boost human generative powers of thinking for new innovations and development of personal talents and natural endowments. It is known also as an integrated pattern of reading behaviors.

practices, beliefs, perceptions and knowledge. The reading culture in African nations is viewed by many scholars as one way of "boosting students' academic excellence and lifelong learning" The reading culture is thus important since the search for academic excellence cannot be achieved and sustained without the culture of reading for continuous self-improvement. Reading gives us access to full participation in various activities in our modern society. It adds quality to our lives by giving us access to various cultures and cultural heritages. Reading empowers and emancipates us as citizens as well as brings people together as a nation. Reading is not just for school, it is for life. This is so because the quality of age long or lifelong discoveries of new things through the boost of intuitive knowledge and its adaptability on various issues of life is enshrined in the reading culture. Thus, reading in all its variety is vital to becoming better informed. It helps us to have a better understanding of ourselves as well as others. Leading world nations in Europe and America are proud of their endorsement of reading and see the high level of literacy in their society as being one of the major sources of their efficiency and growth. Without doubt, the economic, social and political health of our nation today depends on building literate citizens who are able to read widely and apply this practically for development.

## Reading Culture in Nigeria: The State of the Arts

Nigeria has been rated by the World Culture Score Index according to Akinfenwa, (2019) as one of the countries in the world with the lowest reading culture, while available statistics from National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education shows that 38 per cent of Nigerians are non-literate as four in ten primary school children cannot read for comprehension. Regrettably, this adverse development is an ominous challenge the country seems not to be paying needed attention to as noted by Soyinka (2012). There is generally a poor reading culture in the country. The rich literacy history the country is famous for is gradually been eroded. Once upon a time, the country paraded the best set of authors and publishers in Africa. Then, reading was an innate affection for both young and old. This reading inclination reflected so much on the quality of leadership and civil discipline that brought pride to Nigerians anywhere in the world (Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun, and Ogundipe 2011).

The downturn in reading and book readership actually has a global dimension, especially given the onslaught of the digital revolution. Globally, the influence of new technology has altered the disposition to reading. Before now, schools were engaged in and participated in reading activities to enhance the thinking and creative ability of students. But lack of availability of suitable reading materials, absence of well-designed reading activities, insufficient of trained staff to prosecute reading culture in schools and ineffective monitoring and evaluation of readership promotion programmes are constant challenges currently affecting readership development.

In Nigeria, reading culture has suffered from widespread poverty, corruption, ineptitude and a dearth of dedicated quiet reading spaces like libraries. The decline in the standard of education has seriously affected reading ability. And it becomes harder when you have to deal with the many distractions and challenges that come with being an adult

and living in a country like Nigeria. Perhaps, our socio-economic environment is not reading friendly. The daily struggle for economic survival provides little or no time for people to cultivate a good reading habit. Equally, high cost of books, particularly imported ones, has contributed to low readership promotion in the country. However, the downtum in reading and book readership actually has a global dimension, especially given the onslaught of the digital revolution. Available literature shows that a study conducted in 2004 indicated that the average Nigerian reads less than one book in a year. Only one percent of successful men and women in the country reportedly read at least one non-fiction book in a month.

## **Causes of Moribund Reading Culture**

The various causes of moribund reading culture in the nation are:

## Offshoot of Technological Advancements

It is an established fact that reading is gradually dying down with most people preferring to while away time on frivolity than reading to widen their intelligence. This decline in reading among people has been blamed on offshoot of technological advancements that have brought about overall changes in family, social, and economic conditions. Poor reading habits occur in children and young people because reading is not considered a relevant leisure activity as it does not form part of children's social interaction and reading is considered a solitary pursuit and is not attractive compared with interactive activity on the Internet. There is also an overriding desire amongst young people to spend more time with their friends than to remain at home reading. Adults and children alike may enjoy television and films as a way of enjoying their leisure instead

## Low Level of Computer Literacy

Another reason is the low level of computer literacy among Nigerian citizens. Access to the internet is still poor and this hinders access to online reading resources such as e-books. The small percentage of Nigerians who are computer literate, particularly the youths are involved with the distractive and wrong application of the information and technology devices. This has produced some negative effects on the reading habits of such people. This internet obsession has caused many of our youths to waste valuable time surfing antimoral and socially unfriendly websites. Instead of engaging in serious reading during their spare time, many people, especially youths, prefer to spend most of their time in cyber cafes browsing, playing video games, chatting with friends or drafting and sending fraudulent letters on the net, watching seasonal movies for several hours etc.

## **High Cost of Reading Materials**

The economy situation in our society today is relatively high. Most members of the society cannot afford to buy textbooks for their children in school. Even in tertiary institutions most students depend on their lecture notes due to high cost of reading materials.

#### Low Literacy Rate

Over 75 million Nigerians are illiterate according to Soyinka (2018). A substantial number of those who can both read and write are subliterate – in other words, they have a low level of literacy or are not interested in literature, as represented by any body of written works.

#### **Noise Culture**

A learning environment requires places for quiet study. Most schools are in densely populated areas, where distractions prevent the smooth flow of learning. Moreover, the "illiteracy syndrome" has an adverse effect on the psyche of many Nigerian citizens. Most people perceive noise to be an integral part of their culture. Children who have been immersed in a literacy environment in which words, games, rhyming, poems and storytelling are plentiful are more likely to imbibe reading culture than those who have experienced an impoverished literacy environment. These prepare children to develop positive attitude towards reading and the possibilities of learning basic language structures and forms. This is true because if the surroundings that children live in are not motivating, then it would be difficult for them to want to learn to read as they would not see any point in learning process. Therefore, providing an enabling reading environment for children at the early stage will help them to overcome moribund reading habit.

## Lack of Parental Encouragement

In many homes, parents/guardians, many of who are products of the poor reading culture themselves make little or no effort at all in inculcating the reading culture into their children/ward. The first contact most children have with regular reading is in school and this is rather getting late. Ikpaahindi (2008) observes that as such children increase in age, they tend to see reading and other related activities as superhuman and out of their reach.

#### **Dearth of Public and School Libraries**

Public and school libraries play an important role in the promotion of reading habits in the nation. However, these libraries are either non-existant or not playing their expected role. State and local government and proprietors of schools (government and individuals) have not complied with library provisions in the National Policy on Education (NPE). Public libraries are not being established where they are needed. The few existing public libraries are neither adequately funded nor stocked with reading resources that can affect the lives of citizens. There are no functional facilities in these libraries and in many cases their inadequate personnel to manage the collections.

## Consequences of the Moribund Reading Culture

It is known that a good command of reading skills predisposes an individual to success at school and beyond. The connection between the reading ability on one hand and educational and life success on the other is not debatable. Literacy is interrelated with the total educational process to the extent that educational success requires successful reading. Most of the time, students who failed academically have failed first in reading. According to Denchant (1977), "If the first button of a man's coat is wrongly buttoned, all the rest are certain to be crooked. Reading is the garment of education." A lot of students who would have contributed greatly to the nation's growth, when properly trained, drop out as a result

of inadequate preparation for their examinations. Since a poor reader is not prepared to excel, he ends up in frustration and failure. An average graduate without the reading culture will not only posses a poor command of English, he will be technically inept, badly trained and, by and large, unsuitable for employment. The high failure rate in examinations, leading to the rise in the rateat which students drop out, as well as the incidence of half-baked graduates, etc., can affect a country socially, economically and politically. The much needed manpower produced by our tertiary institutions tends to fall below required standard as a result of this nonchalant attitude of students towards reading. Thus, the consequences of failure to possess the reading culture would be seen in the areas of education, career and generaldevelopment.

# Ways of Reviving the Moribund Reading Culture

There are various ways of reviving the moribund reading culture. These include:

## The Role of Private Organizations

It must be emphasized that the private organizations contribute positively to the revival of reading culture in the nation. This could be done by establishment of reading prices in all levels of education and organizing an institutions reading day annually to encourage the reading populace. Among the prizes and awards to the winners, should be current books on different subject areas to motivate the winners to continue reading.

Some of these organizations often organize mathematics and science competitions for students. This gesture should be extended to reading where the winners are given motivational prizes. Organizations such as the Reading Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Book Development Council should sensitize the public more on this issue for the development of a better reading culture in the nation.

# The Role of Parents in Reviving Moribund Reading

The positive attitude of parents and the availability of reading materials at home are the most important factors in creating positive lifelong reading motivation in children. Children have different reading needs at different stages of their lives, but they need to have access to enjoyable reading materials from the very beginning. The use of picture books helps to offer clear illustrations, words, diagram and pictures which help to captivate the attention of children. Most children fail to imbibe good reading culture when the reading materials are so abstract. Hence, reading should be associated with pleasure. The use of ICT facilities and audio-visual resources will help in bringing abstract concepts into reality thereby helping children to identify things in their real life environment. Encouraging children to play with language apparently helps young children focus their attention on the sounds of words as well as on their meanings. Studies show although literacy is generally acquired in school, the foundations for good reading habits are set in the home, in the earliest year of life.

Available literature indicates that mothers are the key factor, who will unlock the reading ability of a child. Mothers, through their simple efforts like reading a bedtime story regularly have an impact on the child's reading life. Whether working or a home-maker mothers should find time to guide their children with the different tried and tested methods.

such as sing-a-longs, nursery rhymes and story books, to ensure that their children have a head start in life. Good role modeling by mothers who are themselves readers has an additional impact on sealing-in the potential reading habit. Extrinsic motivators are also important in sustaining their interest in reading. To encourage their children to read, parents should purchase story books, newspapers and magazines for enable the children keep reading. Hence continuous supply of reading materials in the home is an essential ingredient for the development of a good reading habit. This can be done using colorful pictures in home videos, which are definite to attract children's attention. Providing educational materials such as home videos are very important factors in creating positive lifelong reading culture in children.

Libraries and the Revival of Moribund Reading Culture

The library plays an important role in the revival of reading habits among Nigerians. Libraries, especially school libraries, are fundamental to the design, implementation, and attainment of educational excellence. Libraries are an integral part of the educational development of school children and youth (Bissala, 2016). Without the support of efficient libraries, schools cannot successfully achieve the goals of education, which are:

- 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,
- 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. (NPE, 2004).

Libraries provide access to reading materials through which school children and youths can gain and improve their skills. Libraries help introduce the use of reading for information, pleasure, passing examinations, and personal growth through lifelong learning. Libraries provide materials that offer more extensive and variedinformation than classroom study alone. Voluntary reading helps develop reading skills and mastery of language, extends students knowledge, and assists them in their academic work. Students and youths who read are likely to have background knowledge, familiarity with new topics or subjects, and thus, find learning easier and interesting.

The library must provide resources to complement education. These resources can take children and youth far above technical literacy to developing reading culture which makes permanent literacy attainable. The role of the libraries in promoting reading is especially crucial in developing scientific, reflective thinking and creativity. Librarians can help children and youths develop critical and independent thinking through their exposure to a wide variety of instructional resources and learning opportunities. Apart from the development of creative and critical thought, the role of the library in the promotion of reading culture can be seen in the readers' development of values, attitudes, and appreciation. These are difficult to teach in the classrooms. In the process of encouraging or inculcating the reading habit in children and youth, stakeholders (parents, teachers, schools, librarians and other library staff) should avoid nagging, bribing, judging,

criticizing reading choices, and setting unreasonable goals. Libraries seek to enrich young people by introducing them to good reading literature which will increase their understanding, broaden their horizons, develop their aesthetic sense, and help them develop their moral, spiritual and psychological growth. Reading helps develop and promote local culture. Libraries help facilitate publication of good children literature based on culture and provide future reading public for such publications.

## Increase of Budgetary Allocation for Education

Funding is crucial to the development of education and reading culture. It is a backbone of better academic performance. Therefore, the Nigerian government has to improve its funding of the education sector, by increasing funds allocated to schools. This would affect provision of school library services. Funds should be earmarked for establishing, equipping and maintenance of libraries (public library inclusive). Sufficient fund should be provided to acquire adequate, current and relevant library materials — books, magazines, charts, transparencies; photographic slides, and computer instructional packages. Concerted effort should be made by the appropriate supervisory body to monitor effective utilization of funds allocated to the library.

## **Sponsorship of Reading Promotions**

For development of reading culture in the nation, government, private and social sectors should collaborate to promote reading culture by sponsoring and organizing reading competitions in schools, communities and societies. Reading competition should not only be restricted to students in the secondary schools, adults should also be involved in the process (Popels, 2019). Awards and good prices that are motivational should be given to winners and all the runners up. We need to go back to our grassroots, we need to entertain that culture of reading and that has to do with innovation that will encourage readership.

#### The Role of the National Libraries

The role of the national libraries in the revival of moribund reading culture in the nation over the years has been highly commended. But it has been keenly observed that the National libraries organize reading campaigns in the urban areas while neglecting the rural areas. This however does not promote the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity as members of the rural areas do not acquire appropriate skills and competence to live and contribute to the development of the society.

## Restoration of Mobile Library Services

Promotion of reading habits should not be confined to students in the classroom or the physical library alone. Rather, consideration and extension of library services should be given to children and youth who, for one reason or another, are out of the normal school or library environment. This can be done through mobile library service, a formidable service provided by the public library. In the 1970s, Nigerian populace in the rural areasfarmers, nomadic fishermen and cattle herders, used to enjoy this service. Regrettably since the 1980s, this important library service became moribund.

To attain the objective of the Universal Basic Education as well as carry out the goals contained in the National Policy on education, states and local governments in Nigeria need to revive the mobile library service. Once revived, remote communities in the country will

benefit from the project. Thus, the library would be able to serve the needs of school children, dropouts, adult illiterates, semi-literates, nomadic fishermen and cattle rearers and other categories of people who wish to be associated with reading and education.

**Revival of Reading Clubs** 

A reading club is actually a fantastic place to promote learning (Ifeduba, 2000).

Members of the club discuss books read which help to reinforce things in their minds and enable them to retain information better. Book clubs can be a wonderful breeding ground for ideas as well as provide the motivation for you to pen your own literary masterpiece. Listening to other people's assessment of a book and their discussion of likes and dislikes about plot, character and style.

Introduction of Reading in Schools

Reading should be introduced as a subject in schools and as a course in the tertiary institutions. The curriculum should be drawn to enhance inclusion of important materials that help in comprehension and retention. Readers are leaders so this project will prepare leaders for all positions in the country thereby enhancing development of the nation.

#### Conclusion

The absence of effective reading culture is a barrier to a civilized political culture and economic prosperity. To attain the socio-economic height of our dreams and aspirations, we need to develop literate citizens that are able to read widely to unlock the world treasure of knowledge and participate in the dynamic civilization of the world. It is, therefore, essential that policy makers with evidence based data or information monitor and evaluate educational policies and literacy programmes in Nigeria for sustainable development.

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