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The Importance of the Use of Libraries and the Need for a Reading Culture

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Abstract: Libraries are very important for information, communication and transformation. They help to inculcate a reading culture for an upward progression of people's life. They reduce ignorance, thus they are empowering literacy, knowledge and skill acquisition. This paper is an opinion paper. The authors employed literature research methodology to carry out the analysis. It gives an insight into the reading culture of different nations and further portrays the role of libraries in promoting reading and an effective reading environment in the society. The authors also aim at improving the reading culture of different nations by using their own nation as a case study. The paper demonstrates that establishing of reading clubs, reviving of education in the schools through electronic libraries, promotion of books and reading in the media are those factors that could improve the situation of reading.

Keywords: literacy, reading culture, libraries

Introduction

Reading is an act of being able to understand, comprehend, make sense and utterly interpret written symbols or letters. Aina et al. (2011) opined that reading can be defined as a process of comprehending the representation of symbols that are written and printed by looking at them, recognizing them and sometimes verbalization of these visual signs. It involves a mental formulation of communication which represents sounds in human speech. Reading takes place when the reader understands what has been encoded and decodes it properly. Reading is a vital mean of acquisition of knowledge, skills and expression of thought especially in this modern world of science and technology which demands that one should be able to take in an intelligent and informed interest of happenings within ones environment and the world in general. Reading and writing are the premises to a secured occupational coherence; it is closely related to the advancement an individual gets out of life. Each child needs to become fully competent in reading in order to succeed in school and to discharge responsibilities as a citizen of a society. A citizen who reads has the capacity to participate actively in the continuity of learning.

Elkin (2007) pointing to the fact that books still matter in the digital age, stated that a study was conducted in 2003, in 37 countries by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and it was aimed at assessing students ability to communicate and perform effectively in the society. For the PISA 2009 report, in each country, except Korea, girls enjoyed reading more than boys. On average across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, just over half of boys (52%) and nearly three-quarters of girls (73%) said that they read for enjoyment. It was discovered that the most important factor for academic success was the amount of time pupils devoted to reading; books, magazines, newspapers, and websites. Reading provides a backup of information which reduces ignorance, thus empowering and promoting literacy and communication. The espousal of good reading habits should be seen as a matter of great concern in the educational, socio-economic and political development of our world. Most people would rather not read for leisure except for a purpose. In most cases we read when we have a programme at hand or to pass examinations. Many of us would rather prefer visiting friends, sit and chat, watch television or play video games than to read a book. Even when we read, we do not read to broaden our knowledge, we read because it is mandatory at that point in time. However, it is important to note that readers are leaders and good readers make good leaders.

What is a Library?

A library can be defined as a collection of printed and non-printed materials, organized and kept for reading, studying and consultations. Futalib (2015) states that a library is an institution responsible for the acquisition, organisation and storage of recorded knowledge in various media for study, research and consultation. In her own opinion, Owolabi (2010) defined the library as a collection of books and other information materials for reading or studying, or the building or room in which such collections are kept. Libraries are agents of educational, social, economic and political changes in the communities where they are established. They serve as cultural and generational heritage, recreational centres and houses of knowledge. They are organized and set up to appropriate informational, educational, social and recreational needs of their users. Libraries transform individuals, communities, and nations by raising their mental consciousness and elevate people's minds (Itedjere, Achugbue & Sokari, 2012). A library is an institution established in a society to play a role in that society like any other institution and this requires accommodation / infrastructure, materials, arrangement and utilization. One can, therefore see the library as an institution properly housed, having a collection of knowledge materials that are systematically arranged by librarians and made available for use by the society for which it is established. All types of libraries have these elements.

The materials maintained in libraries contain information which people require daily for survival, for without information there can be no knowledge and knowledge empowers living for existence. Human beings require information to broaden their knowledge, to investigate past events in order to find solutions to problems, keep abreast of current happenings and enjoy the thoughts and works of others. Information brings about the preservation of civilization, and it is important for upholding legacy. This is what the library has done for mankind, through the sustenance of recorded knowledge and dissemination of this information through many ages.

As a social institution, the library is to any individual what he/she desires. *The National Policy on Education* (2013) stated that the library is at the heart of the education enterprises and is one of the most important enterprises. It further mentions that States, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Local governments, as well as proprietors of schools should establish functional libraries in accordance with established standards and actively promote reading culture in all their educational institutions. Each growing child is supposed to have a good reading environment where he can learn and have an independent study life.

The Role of the Library in Promoting Reading

Reading is basic to learning and its process is not only tedious and gradual, but also endless. While it is basic to learning, learning itself is also basic for survival. Hence, lack of reading is disastrous because, it is the most efficient way of acquiring knowledge and a source of achieving sound and physical development of our minds. The library is a place designed to freely support the attainment of these purpose. Libraries play invaluable role in the educational set-up of any institution or country and can be seen as the national treasures where knowledge, both in print and non-print formats, is acquired, preserved and disseminated to the reading public. Libraries are generally regarded as storehouses of information and it is made available to users through print and non-print resources because this is a vital aspect of the world's systems of education and communication.

People in various disciplines including students use library resources for their work. Some people also visit libraries to obtain materials for pleasure reading or for some kind of leisure activities. Therefore, there is need for the provision of libraries in our primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. In a nutshell, Busayo (2011) emphasized that the role of libraries cannot be overemphasized in the provision of the much needed facilities for the development of good reading habits and interest, as it caters for different reading interests at various stages of our intellectual development and for pleasurable reading.

One can also regard the library as an agent for educational and social change. Agbama (2014) averred that it is often said that if you teach a child to read, you have made him a king. Developing the right reading culture help nations to develop and no nation can develop without its people reading. Reading makes a man, and it helps to develop the mind, to be informed, thoughtful and constructive.

Effective Reading Environment in a Society

Bature (2011) posited that, an effective reading environment exists in a society „where there is an awareness of the benefits to be derived from reading and in which books are made accessible to all”. It follows, of course, that such awareness can only exist in a society where a high percentage of the population is literate and therefore possess the ability to read and write. Another fundamental requirement for an effective reading environment is the availability of appropriate books. Without books there can be no readers,

since readers exist because there is something to read. Books in the right number, at the right price and of the right variety constitute a pre-condition in any effort to bring books and readers together. Above all, such books must be perceived by the society as meeting their needs and interests. Igwe (2011) noted that it is however possible to have a situation where even though the vast majority of the people in a society can read and write and where books are available potential users are not motivated to read and do not realize the advantages books offer and so the information they contain remain under-used or largely unused.

Therefore, the issues surrounding an effective reading environment are complex. Indeed, reading is a difficult, complex and multifaceted process involving the ability to perceive and comprehend letters, words, sentences, paragraphs or whole stories in written text. It is an acquired art which individuals acquire over a period of suitable exposures which demands for its efficiency, skill and a set of behaviour which are both linguistic and psycholinguistic. Ode (2014) opined that reading is an acquired art, thus it requires skills which can be developed or can become stunted under certain socio-cultural environments. In this connection, it is indeed the case that Nigerians, and Africans as a whole, derive more pleasure from the oral and performing arts – talking, singing, dancing, and socializing – than from the rather private and solitary preoccupation of reading. It is generally agreed that the home and the first years of schooling are the essential theatres for fostering appropriate cultural attitude of reading, nurturing and awareness of, the importance of reading.

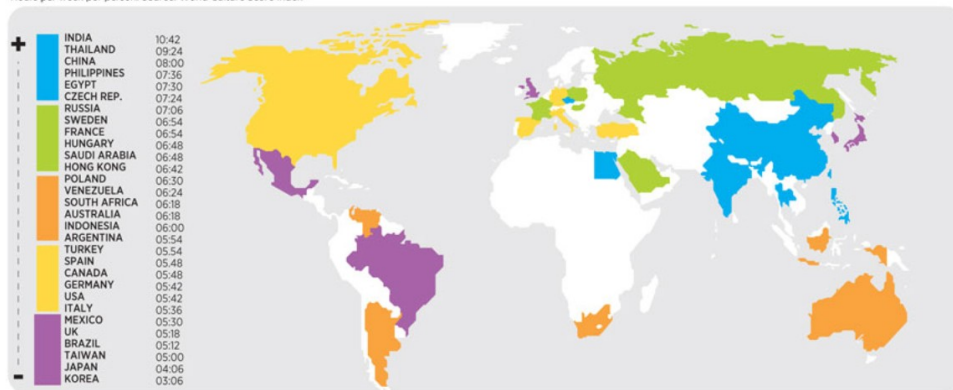
Akindele (2012) advised that it is desirable that children should be introduced to books and reading from an early age. Parents should start reading to their children as soon as they can understand sounds. In the school system, informal learning in the school library should be recognized as a necessary complement to the formal learning in the classroom. The school curriculum should include periods for using the school library while school library collections should include a wide range of recreational books. Finally, access to books in any given society is significantly aided by the existence of a virile publishing industry geared towards meeting the society's reading needs and skills; a wide network of commercial book selling channels in both the urban and rural areas and an equally wide network of good public libraries.

Fig. 1. World Culture Score Index

Readers round the world

WHERE DO PEOPLE READ MORE?

Hours per week per person. Source: World Culture Score Index



Source: World Culture Score Index (Dilworth, 2014)

Dilworth (2014) highlighted specifically the hours of reading per week per person:

Table 1. Hours of reading per week per person

No.	Nation	Mean Hours	No.	Nation	Mean Hours
1.	India	10 hours, 42 minutes	16.	Australia	6:18
2.	Thailand	9:24	17.	Indonesia	6:00
3.	China	8:00	18.	Argentina	5:54
4.	Philippines	7:36	19.	Turkey	5:54
5.	Egypt	7:30	20.	Spain	5:48
6.	Czech Republic	7:24	21.	Canada	5:48
7.	Russia	7:06	22.	Germany	5:42
8.	Sweden	6:54	23.	USA	5:42
9.	France	6:54	24.	Italy	5:36
10.	Hungary	6:48	25.	Mexico	5:30
11.	Saudi Arabia	6:48	26.	U.K.	5:18
12.	Hong Kong	6:42	27.	Brazil	5:12
13.	Poland	6:30	28.	Taiwan	5:00
14.	Venezuela	6:24	29.	Japan	4:06
15.	South Africa	6:18	30.	Korea	3:06

Source: (Dilworth, 2014)

The Situation in Nigeria

When viewing the above figures with an objective appraisal, it will be observed that the state of the reading environment in developing countries are not mentioned, this can lead to the conclusion that their current situation is not very desirable. Igwe (2011) rightly opined that the level of development in a country is directly proportional to the literacy level.

The literacy rate of Nigeria with significant regional and gender variations needs to be improved. The fundamental requirement for the existence of an effective reading environment seem largely in the deficit in the context of Nigeria and requires immediate change. The situation regarding book availability is not cheerful any more than it used to be in time past. Igwe (2011) further noted that book production rate in Nigeria, as it is in the rest of Africa, is abysmally low and very few of these are for recreational and general reading and even fewer are in Nigerian indigenous languages. As a result, most of the books which are available for educational, professional and recreational reading in Nigeria are the output of European and American publishing industry and they are very expensive in the local currency. The net effect is that there seems to be book scarcity in Nigeria; a situation which undermines the creation of an effective reading environment.

At any rate, access to books, either through a network of book-selling channels or the public library system, seems to be largely absent, except in a few state capitals and even if there is, these libraries are sub-standard and inadequate. Booksellers operate seasonally to meet some of the textbook needs of students, particularly textbooks for primary school pupils. They have little or no interest in stocking recreational or general books. The public library systems on the other hand, seem to be too few, are poorly funded and carry aging stocks largely for educational reading. They too, are unable to satisfy the broad range of the reading needs of the public for recreation, entertainment, information and culture. Nor can they adequately satisfy the interests of various classes of readers: which are the pre-schooler, early-school children, adolescents and adults, particularly those who are new readers.

Furthermore, there is almost a total lack of libraries in the primary and secondary school systems, except for those in the private sector. This continues to be the case in spite of the adoption of a philosophy of education which requires that the formal learning in the classroom should be supplemented by self-directed, informal learning in the school library. Ilogho (2011) noted that the average 'literate' Nigerian finds no joy in reading and is happy to be a purposive, rather than a recreational reader; reading as narrowly as he can for his examination or job requirements and no more. This is partially because he is not introduced to reading at home and during the first years of schooling or to the use of the school library/media resource centre early enough.

Present Efforts at Improving Reading in Nigeria

It seems some efforts are being made to improve the Nigerian reading environment through relevant government policies, activities of government agencies and parastatals and non-government organisations (NGOs). The philosophy underpinning the current Education Policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria, as has been stated earlier, has in theory replaced rote learning with self-directed learning supported by library facilities and services. Unfortunately, this historic re-direction of education policy remains largely unattained because of the absence of libraries in schools. The Federal Ministry of Education has also attempted some book and readership promotion through one of its agencies: the Book Development Centre and a parastatal organization, the National Library of Nigeria. The Book Development Centre has, since 1984, been promoting readership by supporting the information and organization of Young Readers Clubs in schools throughout Nigeria. It is however now necessary to carry out a comprehensive assessment of this initiative and to determine what impact it is making in schools. Nevertheless, it can be surmised that lack of libraries in schools must be a source of concern.

The National Library of Nigeria began implementing a Readership Promotion Campaign as far back as 1981 with the objective of fostering reading and promoting the production and distribution of affordable reading materials. Within the years of 1981 to 1984, it organized annual National Reading Weeks featuring film shows, symposiums, debates, book exhibitions and prize awards at the end of the reading competitions. It established an implementation committee to carry out a survey on the Reading Habits of Nigerians. Unfortunately, that important survey has not been carried out as far as can be ascertained, while the National Library's readership promotion and advocacy has become largely dormant since the initial flurry of activities of the 1980s. The Nigerian National Library secured the Education Tax Funds (ETF) sponsorship and was able to organize this promotion in the six geo-political zones of the country in the year (2004). The Edo State Branch of the National Library of Nigeria in 2012 in Benin-City also held the Readership Promotion Campaign. It is hoped that this will continue unabated and an upcoming Readership Promotion Campaign will be held at Abuja, in September, 20, 2017 (FG launches..., 2017). Activities present at book and readership promotion scene currently consist of the efforts of the National Library of Nigeria, individuals and NGOs. Of particular interest is the Nigeria Book Foundation; a NGO founded in 1991. The Nigerian Book Foundation is a voluntary association of authors, publishers, printers, booksellers and librarians whose objectives include the promotion of an indigenous book industry in Nigeria and the encouragement of the reading habits among Nigerians. Its activities in-

clude the holding of annual conferences to generate ideas for policy recommendations and advocacy. Its greatest handicap appears to be the shortage of funds to implement this programmes.

There are two centres with concentration on encouraging reading among children; they are the Abadina Media Resource Centre at the University of Ibadan and the Children's Centre Library at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Children's Centre Library was founded in 1978 as the first component of the Children's Centre Project of the University Women's Association of University of Nigeria. Its goals are: to encourage reading and the enjoyment of books, help users develop information and learning skills; offer literature and learning materials reflecting Nigerian culture and environment; and provide resources for meeting the varied needs of children and youths. The Abadina Media Resources Centre was established in 1974 by the Department of Library Studies, University of Ibadan. Among its objectives are: to provide facilities for the training of teachers to support recreational reading and to develop listening, reading and searching skills among children. Generally, these and other initiatives, such as that of Mrs Mabel Segun (the Children's Literature Association of Nigeria – CLAN), need to be assessed, assisted and more widely replicated.

Useful Strategies from Other Places

South Africa and Thailand offer two useful but contrasting strategies for the promotion of literacy and reading. One is inspired and sustained by private initiative, while the other is the result of government planning and execution. The READ Education Trust, South Africa, is a privately funded educational Trust, it was founded in response to community concern regarding lack of reading and library services in black townships (Krolak, 2005). Its mission is to help people throughout South Africa to develop their reading, writing, learning, information and communication skills, so that they can become independent long-life learners. Its programmes include the training of principals, librarians, teachers, student teachers and community workers to improve language competence and facilitate independent study through the use of books and other materials and providing information infrastructure and resources; such as libraries, book packages and other media. Adeoye and Popoola (2011) noted that READ's research indicates that in schools where teachers are trained and committed to using books in all aspects of teaching and where adequate resources are provided, pupils demonstrate substantial gains (two years) in reading and writing ability. READ has, by its success in fund-raising and country-wide programmes, demonstrated the potential for

dedicated and well-organised private initiative in book and readership promotion campaigns. However, many literacy programs incorporate much broader skills than learning to read and write. Whether by design or by accident, program planners in the Asia-Pacific region have found that they are more effective at imparting literacy skills if combined with the teaching of relevant life skills.

Thailand, on the other hand, offers an example of a successful government-sponsored literacy promotion and reading campaign directed by the Adult Education Division of the Ministry of Education. Wongrujira (2013) noted that Thai communication culture is basically on listening and talking rather than reading and writing, and with broadcasting and internet technology, fostering a reading culture is more difficult. In 1983, the government's Fifth Development Plan set a mandate to reach 1.5 million illiterates in five years (ICET, 2013). The used strategies included:

- The establishment of a nationwide system of village reading centres which are constructed and operated by village committees with government support in the form of 2 daily newspapers and periodic wall-newspapers. During the five year period of National Literacy Campaign, village-reading centres increased from 8,100 to 28,000.
- The use of Temple Reading Centres to further accelerate the expansion of reading resources centres in rural communities.
- The use of the country's network of 73 provincial public libraries and 315 district public libraries. In addition various forms of mobile libraries employing boats, motorcycles, books vans and book boxes were used to extend library services to the rural area.
- Reading campaigns aimed at promoting reading habit among children, youth and the general public. The campaign began with training workshops for teachers, librarians and key personnel involved in the promotion of reading.
- A centre for book donations was established to donate books to village reading centres, district and provincial public libraries and secondary schools in remote areas.

The Brazil story (Literate Brazil Programme, 2013) noted that as of 2006, about 14 million Brazilian youth, adults and elderly people had little or no reading and writing skills. Thus, multiple actions were needed to be coordinated to address this serious problem. One such action was to create sustainable learning opportunities for illiterates in order to improve the quality of life for all citizens as well as to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals. Paulo

(2006) noted that Brazil was known as a nation of non-readers but the government, businesses and NGOs were vigorously making efforts to change this.

Wilk (2014) however noted that Poland also has a good story of Warsaw Book Fair – a leading grassroots revolution of book-lovers, as the younger generation revives the culture of reading. Even in the digital era, Poland, a country with a strong literary heritage is embracing changing reading habits.

Where Should We Go From Here?

From the foregoing, it is clear that, at the threshold of the new millennium and with the global information or knowledge revolution, the reading environment remains harsh and unfavourable both in Nigeria and around the world. It is largely characterized by:

- A high rate of illiteracy, particularly among the female adult population.
- Security access to books resulting from an underdeveloped indigenous publishing industry and the high cost of imported books.
- Difficult access to books, particularly for recreational and general interest, by the small reading population, because book-selling outlets are few and their stocks are generally unsatisfactory.
- Poor and enormously inadequate public library services (in number and quality) for both rural and urban dwellers.
- Absence of libraries and training in learning and reading skills in the school system.
- Unfavourable home environments and the failure of most parents to encourage reading for enjoyment and recreation at home.

These challenges have always been there and there is the dire need to proffer solutions to them. Thus, we would like to recommend as follows:

1. Appropriate solutions should be found to the problems listed above as a matter of urgency by various organs of government which hold appropriate responsibility. Parents should recognize their primary duty in motivating their children to read from the early childhood; to this end, enlightenment programmes for parents should be organized by educational and cultural bodies, libraries, etc.
2. Reading should not be made to end up either in the library or the school. Conducive environments should be created at home for

reading. Some educated parents even create spaces, rooms for reading in their homes.

3. Formation of Reading Clubs and reading competitions in our schools.
4. Organisation of book-week, preferably during the second term of every academic year that focuses attention on reading. Publishers and book-sellers can be invited to exhibit materials on various subject areas during such occasions.
5. Reading programmes should be encouraged via radio and television. This will have the means of reaching a wider audience. Books read on the mass media should be encouraging for our youth to read books apart from those recommended in schools.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the fact that learning to read and reading is a life time process and the ability to read increases interest and provision of enabling environment to get it accomplished.

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Znaczenie użytkowania bibliotek i potrzeba kultury czytania

ABSTRAKT: Biblioteki są bardzo ważne dla informacji, komunikacji i transformacji. Pomagają wpajać kulturę czytelnictwa, tak istotną dla progresywnego rozwoju ludzkiego życia. Redukują ignorancję, a zatem wspierają alfabetyzację, wiedzę oraz nabywanie umiejętności. W celu przeprowadzenia analizy autorzy zastosowali metodologię wyszukiwania literatury. Poniższy artykuł pozwala uzyskać wgląd w kulturę czytelnictwa różnych narodów oraz ilustruje rolę bibliotek w promowaniu czytelnictwa oraz środowiska efektywnego czytania w społeczeństwie. Autorzy mają również na celu poprawienie kultury czytelnictwa różnych narodów poprzez zaprezentowanie swojego kraju jako studium przypadku. Artykuł wykazuje, że zakładanie klubów czytelniczych, ożywianie edukacji w szkole poprzez biblioteki elektroniczne, promocja czytania i książek w mediach są czynnikami mogącymi poprawić wskaźniki czytelnictwa.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: alfabetyzacja, kultura czytelnictwa, biblioteki