



Developing Reading Habit in Children through Effective School Library Services in Nigeria

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Abstract

Developing reading habit in children and turning them into life-long learners is quite crucial for building a knowledgeable society. Reading is essential and good reading habit is paramount as it equips an individual with necessary knowledge and understanding, not only for building his own life but also for contributing positively in the socio-economic development of the nation. It is the intention of this work to harness how good reading habit could be developed in children through effective school library services in Nigeria. It specifically focused on the concept of reading cum reading habit, potentials of reading habit, school libraries and development of reading habit in children and factors affecting development of reading habit of Nigerian children.

Keywords: Reading, Reading Habit, School Library

Introduction

The school library belongs to the category of libraries found in primary and secondary schools. The school library is the academic nerve centre of the school system. Daniel cited in Busayo (2012) likened an educational institution without a library to a motor car without an engine and a body without a soul. It is the backbone of functional educational without which academic excellence cannot be achieved. Busayo (2012) stated categorically that both the library and the school are inseparable twins of which one ceases to function well without the other. The development of reading habit and love for books no doubt start from the two levels of education; primary and post primary school levels. The indispensable means of achieving this ideal is through the establishment and development of libraries in schools. The educational aims of school libraries according to Ilorin and Abdulahi (2016) include:

- To stimulate and enhance the reading habit, promoting lifelong learning
- To develop in children the ability to read for information
- To help pupils to increase and improve their knowledge of reading, speaking and writing
- To train children to care for books and make good and intelligent use of the library
- To enhance children's reading and communication skills
- To provide children with information both current and retrospective
- To provide recreation.

They pointed out further that the school library prepares both the teacher and students to achieve sound and quality education by the improvement of teaching and enabling the teaching staff to make reference to current books in the preparation of lessons, providing information



for teachers and pupils on current affairs, providing supplementary reading for teachers thereby enriching class work, serving as laboratory of all books on all disciplines, encourages self reliance, good use of leisure time, and arouses interest for reading.

Concept of Reading cum Reading Habits

Reading and reading habits are two aspects that have received increasing attention in recent years. Oyewusi (2016) describe reading as a term used to refer to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader. Echezona (1999) quoted in Kolawole (2019) stated that reading involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall or meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. In the same vein, Marantina (2015) consider reading as a process that requires the use of complex thought processes to interpret printed symbols as meaningful units and comprehend them as a thought unit in order to understand a printed message. It is crystal clear from the definitions that reading is a total integrative process that starts with the reader and includes the affective, perceptual, and cognitive domains. In addition to personal and mental developments, reading is critical for ensuring one's access to social, economic and civic life.

Ogunrobi and Gboyega (2015) gives reasons why people read thus:

- Reading is a tool of self-improvement leading to do-it-yourself techniques acquisition, equipping oneself with skills for better job.
- Reading for pleasure and relaxation.
- Reading is status symbols - this involves the prestige and value society places on reading rather than nothing.

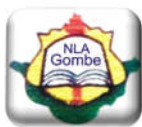
In the evolving knowledge society, reading is considered crucial for gaining the necessary information and insights, which prepare a person to face the diverse challenges of modern times and this calls for deliberate services towards development of reading habit in children.

The term "reading habit" refers to the behaviour which expresses the likeness of reading of individual, types of reading and tastes of reading (Shabi and Udofia, 2019). It is a pattern with which an individual organizes his or her reading. The ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning and quite disheartening to know that reading culture in sub-Saharan Africa is not encouraging. Based on this, Haliru etal (2015) clearly stated that Africa is not a reading society but rather a chatting society as the background of learning through culture and the cultural habit of people prefer listening and chatting more than reading.

The significance of reading and potentials of developing reading habit in school children can never be over-rated. Etuk (2016) outlines the virtues of reading to include the provision of individual's welfare, social progress and international understanding, the provision of skills, knowledge and the right attitude that frees one from idleness or boredom. She also pointed out that reading is not just for school but also for life and that it enhances the chances of success at school and promotes lifelong learning. Reading is an indispensable tool for learning in the various hierarchies of modern educational set up which facilitates the learning process and effectively promotes intellectual development in the learners. Nwokocha (2016) stresses that reading and inculcating good reading habit is central to full participation in the society as it adds quality to life and provides access to culture.

Potential of Reading Habit

Reading empowers and emancipates citizens and through reading, a child broadens his understanding of life and affords himself the tools to explore his talent while learning about himself. The art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone as is one of the most important



activities in life, through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experience, and enjoyment. Educationally, with good reading habit, intellectual growth of a person is unhindered as the ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning. Shabi and Udofia (2019) noted that active learning from books is better than passive learning such as watching televisions and playing games and librarians should seek for more ways to make the reading more exciting and enjoyable for children and youths by the services they provide.

Ilorin and Abdulahi (2016) opined that a healthy reading habit has a pivotal role to play in the social, economic and technological development of any country. Developed countries of the world were able to attain that height because, at a point in their history, they were able to give themselves too much reading and research. Countries like Japan, America, and Britain etc. took to reading and research to achieve technological breakthroughs. Most developing countries do not have a healthy reading habit hence they lack substantial information that could be utilized for national development. This rhymes with Oyewusi's statement (2010) that a poor reading habit stunts a country's national growth. He noted that the cultivation of a reading habit especially among school children and youths will boost their academic excellence and ultimately their countries' growth prospects. In the same vein, Kushmeeta and Rout (2013) noted that a reading habit is at the heart of learning at any educational level and allows students to capably interpret and draw conclusions from their reading. This implies that a reading habit well inculcated would enable students to read, write, and think more critically.

According to Haliru et al (2015), children with poor reading habit have a higher chance of anti-social behavior. Delinquency; school violence, bullying, hacking computers, and even examination malpractices have a correlation with poor reading habit. This does not mean that those with poor reading habit display such behavior; however, poor reading habit are associated with such behavioral patterns while good reading habit help develop a steady and constructive mind. Langit-Dursin (2019) shows that the development of a reading habit should start in early childhood and be nurtured up to adulthood and, in the process, it can build a literate nation that can transform itself into an informed and knowledgeable society capable of playing a rightful role in the global village. Other advantages of reading habit include improving concentration and focus, building self-esteem, improving memory, learning ability to aid independently, improving creativity, giving you something to talk about, reducing stress among others. Generally, people who read are more alert and perform better because knowledge is one of the best tools one can give to a child.

School Libraries and Development of Reading Habit in Children

The ability to read and write alone cannot lead to a reading habit. Reading must play a significant role in people's day to day life and become a routine in order to constitute a reading habit. For a reading habit to be possible reading must be part of all aspects of life and not only certain parts such as school or work (Marantina, 2015). Promoting the lifetime love of reading should be one of the most important goals of school libraries. Through pleasurable reading, primary and secondary school children have opportunity to apply skills to meaningful contexts, build general and content-specific knowledge, experience fluency with connected text and of course, develop the lifetime reading habit. He further noted that children need opportunities in school and at home to enjoy "real" reading as a valued and worthwhile activity. For school children to consider reading as a serious part of their lifestyles, they need exposure to a variety of reading materials, including short story anthologies, novels, plays, poetry collections, biography etc.



Over the years school libraries in Nigeria have taken a more proactive approach to the promotion of reading habit. At the early stage, libraries were viewed as playing only a supportive role to education but a stronger position eventually emerged, of which libraries are seen as lifelong learning centres. On the strength of this assertion Busayo (2012) clearly stated that libraries (both school and public) moved away from the traditional role of passively waiting for readers to come and borrow books and make reference queries. Nwokocha (2016) outlined some literary promotion strategies that could be embarked upon by libraries to achieve a viable reading habit as follows:- encouraging reading for pleasure; promoting the value of reading; and building a strong library network backed by an equitable book distribution. The end result will be a nation of avid, lifelong readers. This requires that libraries must make reading visible everywhere.

The initiator of the R.E.A.D (Rainbow Education for Advancement for Development), Kalago (2010) quoted in Kushemeeta and Rout (2013), stated that to sustain a viable reading habit among the children the following points must be put into consideration:

- The school/teacher librarian should take care to choose appropriate literature for children and present materials to them in particular ways according to their age and also to stimulate love for reading.
- The librarian is duty bound to instruct children on library use. This has the advantage of helping the child to use the library independently, since library use correlates highly with library use instruction.
- The services in school library should be such that children are helped to get the information while answering their query.
- The school library serves many ends, enrichment of teaching by provision of illustrative background material; instruction and practice in the use of books and of library: reference: development of pupils personal interest and creative reading.
- The school library activities aim at giving children the idea of the library as a place where they can find answers to all they wish to know. Apart from the fact that children have varied interests. They also have certain obscene characters. It is imperative that whoever has a cause to deal with children should be malleable.
- Finally, children's librarian can encourage children to read by guiding them to the right books, by serving as a match-maker between children and books. They can help by selecting the right book that is quality, interesting and simple books that children can understand such as picture books, fiction, traditional.

Factors Affecting the Development of Reading Habit in children

There are several obstacles that impede the creation of a good reading habit among school children. Studies show that many pupils dislike reading because they did not find pleasure in this practice either at their home or in school environments during their literacy journey (Busayo, 2012; Kushmeeta and Rout, 2013; Nwokocha, 2016; Tella and Akande 2017). Etuk (2016), laments that reading habit in Nigerian children is indeed one worrying aspect that needs serious attention if the nation is to avoid sliding further into an illiteracy vertex.

According to Langit-Dursin (2019), the distraction by the fallouts from technological innovation in the world today, such as the easy availability of the entertainment media, games and gambling, the inadequate funding of educational institutions including funding of libraries, laboratories, workshops and computer units are all hindrances to development of reading habit in school children. The list also includes poor economy and low standard of living, the quest for money by parents who use their children to hawk consumer items, the acceptance of examination malpractices, and the increasing cost of publishing making it difficult for school pupils to have access to books, magazines, journals and newspapers. (Haliru etal, 2015).



Additionally, as Kushmeeta and Rout (2013) noted that there are millions of people, mainly in Nigeria and other developing regions, who are functionally literate but, do not read anything simply because they have no access to books in their native languages relevant to their lives and aspirations, and thus there are no books and journals of interest to them. This is supported by Shabi and Udofia (2019) who also stated that the situation of literacy and aliteracy in the developing countries is exacerbated by weak publishing sectors and a poor purchasing power of the population which contribute to a severe shortage of quality indigenous reading materials, making the acquisition of reading habit and its sustenance a mirage for all except the elite.

Other factors responsible for inhibiting the reading habit in Nigeria include an education system with a narrow perception of reading. The school system approach towards reading has made students conceive it as a once and for all activity associated with passing examinations, getting a certificate, winning a job and attaining promotion (Etuk, 2016; Tella and Akande, 2017; Shabi and Udofia, 2019).

Finally, in many educational institutions, especially in the developing nations, the demonstrative effects of reading cannot be achieved because of the weakness in collections and resources in libraries. Kolawole (2019) emphasized on the role of local institutes and organizations in the promotion of reading habits among students.

Conclusion

Investing in the knowledge of an individual is one important component acknowledged by the United Nations in 2006 Human Development Report as quoted in Haliru et al (2015). According to the report, a well-read mind is assertive, articulate and seeks information to help solve daily challenges. Such children will read and learn about their rights and other information that enhances the quality of life, thereby enhancing creativity. This could only be envisaged when good reading habit is developed in children. The librarians through the establishment of standard school libraries have greater roles to play in promoting the lifetime love of reading among the school children.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

- Government should make it a priority to fund the school libraries adequately as they are the foundation of education system and play indelible roles in developing reading habits in children.
- Concerted efforts should be made by school authority/management to ensure that there is adequate, sufficient and up to date information resources in the school library.
- Library skills should be properly inculcated in the children as most school children lack knowledge of the library organizational pattern and find it difficult visiting the library. This could be achieved through library orientation by teacher-librarian, library instruction and bibliographical guides. Through this, the children become more receptive to library usage thereby increasing their competence in reading and developing reading habit.
- Children should be exposed to varieties of reading materials and other activities that correlate to books, such as arts and crafts, songs, drama, storytelling, and puppet shows. These activities expose children to a wide range of topics and provide opportunities for children to choose their own books and reading materials thereby enhancing reading habit.
- Conducive reading environment like sufficient seats and reading spaces, good lighting, good ventilation, standby generator, nice and serene environment among others should be provided by the school library to spur good reading among children



- Information repackaging should also be embraced by the school librarians. Through this information are presented and tailored to the requirements of specific child making it more readable, understandable, reward-able, acceptable and usable.

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