



Catch Them Young: Developing and Improving of School Libraries and Reading Habit of Secondary School Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

Reading habit is a fundamental skill necessary in the life of every student. It is essential in developing a more civilized and knowledgeable society. Therefore, the study investigated reading habit of secondary school students and ways of developing and improving of school libraries in Nigeria. The study reviewed the basis of reading skills, reading skill as a prerequisite of students' development, strategies for improving reading habit in schools, guidelines for improving reading habit and the influence of new technology in child development. However, the study finally recommended that school administrators should see the library as a necessity in the development and improvement of teaching and learning. And should employ professional librarians and, or, media specialist to direct and coordinate the activities of the school library.

Keywords: Catch them young, Reading habit, Reading culture, School libraries, Secondary school students, Nigeria.



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1. Introduction

Reading is crucial in the development and improvement of people's mind. It is a process of restoring the dignity of man in facing societal challenges. It adds value to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage; empowers and emancipates man from the shackles of information poverty and also enables sound reasoning and good judgment. The development of reading habit in secondary schools is germane to the growth of students.

The main objectives of school library are to promote and encourage reading habits of the learners, develop and improve students' ability to learn and become independent learners and also imbibe in them the passion for self-development. [Todd et al. \(2010\)](#) describe the evidence school librarians provided on the instructional and collaborative contributions of the school library as:

- a) "Helping students meet core curriculum content standards;
- b) Developing a wide range of information handling competencies;
- c) Providing students with the intellectual and technical scaffolds they need to learn and to be ethical and productive users and consumers of information;
- d) Nurturing and supporting students as readers by contributing to the reading and literacy agenda of schools."

The promotion of reading habit should be a paramount concern of school librarians so as to provide effective and efficient access to information services and resources that will aid and develop students' academic pursuit. However, school libraries should also provide information resources, inculcate ideas, and develops knowledge that is crucial to students which will enable them function successfully in today's information and knowledge based society.

2. Literature Review

School libraries are libraries established in nursery, primary and secondary schools to aid and support learning and teaching activities. The main purpose of establishing school libraries is to meet the information needs of pupils, students and staff of the schools. A school library is managed by a school librarian or media specialist. Hitherto, most school libraries looks like academic libraries in that they serve those whose next library encounter will be at the university; they can also cater for young children who are pre-literate. The library therefore complements the school by encouraging private study, which is required by students and teachers who want to attain an academic height. The school library thus, stands as a symbol for the truthful expression of man's knowledge and experiences ([Busayo, 2011](#)). The role of school libraries in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized as it provides the essential resources for all categories of learners in schools through the provision of enabling environment that facilitates reading and learning.

It is regrettably sad, that most secondary schools in Nigeria do not have a good library or professional librarian to manage the library. Also, there are inadequate information resources, lack of up-to-date information materials and poor management of school libraries. [Edoka \(2000\)](#) asserts that the information resources in those that exist are usually scanty. It is as a result of poor relegation of funding in the management of libraries by authorities concern. In Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly, the problems of illiteracy and the scarcity of learning resources gravely limit the opportunities people have to learn and to transmit their circumstances ([Tella and Akande, 2007](#)). It is a great challenge to Nigeria and other developing nations. It is pertinent to note that most schools in Nigeria have turned their libraries to book store, staff room and chatting room. Based on this, [Sangkaeo \(1999\)](#) clearly states that "we are not reading society in Africa but chatting society, the background of learning through culture; the cultural habit of people...prefer to listening and chatting more than reading". Therein, the growth and development of school libraries is a responsibility of the government, educationist, teachers and parents to support the establishment and functionality of its existence.

3. Effective Reading Skills as a Prerequisite of Students Development

Catching them young is a responsibility of all stakeholders in education so that pupils and students will develop to become independent learners. [Douglas \(2000\)](#) asserted that every child must become fully competent in reading to succeed in school and discharge responsibilities as a citizen of a democratic society; he further reported that reading is a means of attaining educational and professional excellence. Without reading a student or a learner cannot make meaningful progress in his or her academic pursuit. [Collins and Cheek \(1999\)](#) asserts that reading is 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. [Rubin \(2002\)](#) describe reading as a total integrative process that starts with the reader and includes the affective, perceptual, and cognitive domains. Hence, reading is a skill that must be nurtured and developed from a child's early beginning. [Nssien \(2007\)](#) opines that reading is identified as the single most important determinant of a student's success in education and in our modern complex society. Reading habit is the cultivation of attitude and ability to read regularly in order to acquire knowledge and develop self. [Sangkaeo \(1999\)](#) described reading habit as the behavior which expresses the likeness of reading of individual, types of reading and tastes of reading. It is a process of imbibing a positive attitude and regular skill in reading of information resources. [Obada \(2011\)](#) asserts that reading habit is the cultivation of an attitude and the possession of skills that makes reading pleasurable, regular and a consistent activity. Therefore, schools should equip students with the skills of learning to read and reading to learn to improve their overall capacity for life-long learning and whole-person development. They need to promote a reading culture both inside and outside the four walls of the classroom ([Langit-Dursin, 2009](#)). Developing reading habit is a necessity in the life of every young mind which will enable them progress in the course of life. Children develop the skills of reading and gain the habit of reading predominantly in primary school and it becomes very difficult to gain this habit in adulthood ([Palmer et al., 1994](#); [Meté, 2012](#)).

4. Strategies for Improving Reading Habit in Schools

Improving reading skills in the life of school children is tantamount to their growth in the society. Therefore, school librarian or media specialist should play active role in order to cultivate and imbibe reading habit to pupils

and students through promoting their cognitive ability, emotions, attitude, developmental value and broadening their mental horizon through projecting the library as valuable source of teaching and learning. However, librarians should help to assist in the selection of relevant information resources that meet the school's curriculum. Also, they should help in creating easy access to information rich materials that appeals to students' development and comprehension. More so, there should be strong focus on the acquisition of relevant and interesting materials for students with low vocabulary and poor reading skill. School librarians should carry out orientation programmes in order to keep student abreast with the availability, accessibility and use of information resources in the library. Librarians should be user friendly so that students will have high zeal to use the library.

The role of school librarians in the elementary sector cannot be underestimated. Their understanding of different learning styles and collaboration with teaching colleagues enables them to act as a bridge between young people, teachers, information and the curriculum. Their potential contribution towards meeting the National Priorities for education is therefore considerable (SLIC and HMIE, 2005)

Teachers also have a great role to play in developing and improving students reading habit through assisting to imbibe reading interest to students by encouraging them to use the library effectively. Also government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should endeavor to establish school libraries and equally enlighten the rural communities of the importance and value of the library in early child development. Also, parents has a greater role to play in developing the reading skills of their children at home, by exposing them to relevant books and also assisting in providing an enabling environment that will promote their reading interest. Exclusively, government should establish well functional modern libraries all over the federation in both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria and fund them adequately.

5. Guidelines for Improving Reading Habit

They following are guidelines geared towards improving reading habit:

1. Identifying individual differences towards learning: It is essential to identify student's differences towards learning in order to understand temperamental analysis, IQ strength and the nature of reading habits of students. In this way student responses towards reading will be greatly improved.
2. Encouraging the use of library: It is highly important to include use of library period to students' timetable; and when it is library period, the management and the librarian should make sure that students goes to the library and the librarian should also ensure that the student judiciously use the time for reading.
3. Creation of readers' club/society in the school: It is important that reading clubs should be established in schools, so that students will be able to imbibe the zeal towards reading which will become part of their daily life. However, this will enable members of the club to take books home, read them and then discuss the contents with other members at the club in the subsequent meetings.
4. Improve reading speed (rate): To increase reading speed, students should avoid bad reading habits such as vocalization, regression, low recognition, pointing at words and head movement.
5. Adopt the right reading method: It is important that students should read phrases and not every single words. For example, phrase reading demands that the sentence below is read thus:

The fact is that/ the matter is very crucial/

And not

The/fact/is/that/ the/ matter//is/very/ crucial/

However, phrase reading will help in the development of conceptual skills which will aid students to effectively summarize a passage by bringing out the salient points.

6. Effective use of technology : Reading could be encouraged, not only through books but also through visual aids, audio books, book DVDs, etc, using technology appropriately will definitely help in the development of students reading habit.
7. Development of vocabulary: It is necessary for students to increase their vocabulary by keeping a dictionary handy; therefore, maintaining a list of new words and knowing the origin of words will help students to be familiar with the words that are difficult to them.

6. Influence of New Technology in Child Development

The importance of new technology to the educational development of pupils and students of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria can never be underemphasized; therein it should be a catalyst for educational growth and development and not a momentous curse. Reading can be encouraged, not only through books, but also through visual aids, audio books, book DVDs etc. Using technology the right way will definitely help to develop and improve students reading habit. Hitherto, new technology brought a great innovation to the new learning environment in that Lonsdale (2003) agreed that with changes in the amount and quality of information potentially available to students, and the increasingly sophisticated technological means of accessing this information, the most significant change for school libraries in terms of educational practice has been the shift from a content-based education to an outcomes-based education. Whereas a content-based education focuses on what students have been taught, while an outcomes-based education focuses on what students have learned; that is, on their skills and understandings. This is an integrative means of learning that will promote lifelong learners.

Students of 21st Century are children of Net generation; they are so much glued to the new technology which has greatly reduced their pace of reading and invariably influence their reading habit. However, The Hindu (2004) observed that "In an age when browsing the net, playing with funky handsets and passing non-stop SMSs seem to be the order of the day, reading a book in a peaceful corner of a library has become an archaic idea for most people. While technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air".

Many authors has noted that, due to the development of technology in recent years, there has been a drop in children's habit of reading and that television, cell phone, computer games, videos and other technological

innovations influence the rate of reading negatively (Sangkaeo, 1999; Hopper, 2005; Johnson-Smaragdi and Jonsson, 2006). In addition, factors like lack of time, not having easy access to books which address children's and teenagers' interests, not having appropriate conditions for reading at home, not knowing the importance of reading, the fact that reading is not fun, the fact that playing games or computer games or watching television is more attractive, economical reasons, the classroom's being very crowded, and libraries' not functioning properly for various reasons affect children's reading rates negatively (Demir, 1997; Özbay *et al.*, 2008; Balci, 2009; Yaman and Süğümlü, 2010; Duran and Sezgin, 2012; Durualp *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, school administrators, teachers, librarians and parents should take cognizance of this new technology and re-orient the minds of young youths in employing effectively this new technology in their reading and learning.

7. Conclusion

Reading is one of the essential skills needed for effective and successful educational growth. It is the major part of students' life and a smooth means of achieving academic prowess. Reading is a very essential pedagogic principle targeted towards achieving global academic excellence. Mtshweni (2003) emphasized that it is better to catch them young. According to him, it is much easier in this stage since children's minds are like sponges, soaking up much information and ideas. In realization of this axiom "Catch them young" tremendous effort should be made by all stakeholders in education to catch the interest of children in reading. Therefore, school libraries should be equipped with relevant and up-to-date information resources that are tailored towards building the minds of students and developing them to independent learners.

However, school administrators should see the library as a necessity in the development and improvement of learning and teaching. And should employ professional librarians and, or, media specialist to direct and coordinate the activities of the school library.

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