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# The School Library As a Foundational Step To Childrens' Effective Reading Habits

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## Introduction

Reading is recognized as an art capable of transforming man's life and his entire society. However, in the state of the World Children Report by (UNICEF,1999), it was stated that nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or write their names. The Hindu newspaper (2004) also put forward 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." 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).

Reading is a very important issue which is not only about enjoyment but a necessity; the basic tool of education (Makotsi, 2005). Reading makes way for a better understanding of one's own experiences and it can be an exciting voyage to self discovery (Panigrahi and Panda, 1996; Eyre, 2005). It is the art of interpreting printed and written words, the most effective process of conscious learning which influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgement and action of readers (Devarajan and Gray in Panigrahi and Panda, 1996). In the African continent, the reading habit of children is waning. The cause of this has been traced to poor reading cultures of Africans generally and other notable factors like non-availability of reading materials (books). As Choudhung (1990) put it "the reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school, but once formed, it can last one's life."

Young children acquire reading literacy through a variety of activities and experiences within different contexts. According to Sharma (1978), to know about the world and its environment, a child helps himself through reading books, newspapers, and other magazines. Based on this fact, Panagrahi and Panda

(1996) explain that once the child has been taught to read and develop a love for books, he can explore for himself the wealth of human experience and knowledge. These authors went on further to say that “children missing the opportunity of getting in touch with books at this stage, find it difficult to acquire reading habits in their later years.” Dave (1977) asserts that reading is an intellectual action which is possible only if a man has formed a habit of reading and practicing it since childhood.

It can be deduced from the above that the importance of reading cannot be overemphasized and this is because reading habit plays a very crucial role in enabling a person to achieve practical efficiency. Books are the most suitable medium through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation. Books yield their best to you if you read them at the age at which each particular masterpiece can ideally be chewed and digested (Naik, 1976). It has been pointed out that most people in Sub-Saharan Africa have less access to

books or other learning resources, and without proper access, it is hard to establish a reading culture. To Makotsi (2005), “the challenge is fundamental.” Children and adults according to him need access to a wide range of reading materials to help them acquire and maintain fluent reading skills, broaden horizons, and think independently and critically. Improving access to relevant information and promoting a reading culture are prerequisite for strengthening literacy skills, widening education and learning opportunities, and helping people to address the causes of poverty”.

The non-progressive nature of literacy in almost all African countries is more prevalent. The issue has been put forward to go beyond schooling. This is because parents who cannot read themselves are unable to help their children to read and the cycle continues. The situation in Botswana is no different from other African countries, though, the literacy level is now improving. It stands at 77 % as observed by Lauglo (2000).

School library is the one found in primary and post primary institutions where educational services are offered to patrons of the library. Cummins (2001) as cited by Adeniji (2006) sees school library as the heart and soul of the educational system, thus, the role of school library in any school in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized as the library provides the necessary impetus to all categories of learners in schools from the slowest learner in the kindergarten to the most intelligent senior in the high school through the provision of print and non print materials to aid learning.

Daniel (2004) observes that the library remains the power house of educational institution and that an education institution without a library is like a motor car without an engine and a body without a soul. Smith (2002) opines that the school library is the backbone of functional education without which academic excellence cannot be achieved. Obviously speaking, both the library and the school are inseparable twins that one ceases to function well without the other. Ironically, however, one still finds in Nigeria, some primary and secondary schools been run without libraries. Erinle (1997) stress that both the library and the school serve the same purpose to achieve a common goal; that the school educates the student through the help of teachers while the library on its own offer tutorial lecture materials to aid verbal classroom teaching which is referred to as silent function of providing materials for the pleasure of students.

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. The extent to which many young people will be creative, informed, knowledgeable and exhibit the trait of a well cultured individual within their own years will be shaped by the boundaries of the content of the library resources available within the support of the school. The school on its own cannot achieve the laudable goals of Nigeria education without the library

(Gbadamosi,M.& Omotayo,B.1995).

## Reading Habit

The term “reading habit” refers to the behaviour which expresses the likeness of reading of individual, types of reading and tastes of reading (Sangkaeo, 1999). It is a pattern with which an individual organizes his or her reading. Reading is important for everybody in order to cope with new knowledge in a changing world – that of the technological age. The ability to read is at the heart of self education and lifelong learning. Yet, reading culture in sub-Saharan Africa is not encouraging. 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”. Darko-Ampem (2005) asserts “the great divide between home and school, the facilities of education system to recognize the oral culture of communities- especially, folklore and story telling traditions, and the lack of culturally relevant materials in indigenous languages, are all factors which contribute toward the lack of a reading culture in many African communities”.

## Objectives of School Library

School library serves intended purposes,which are aimed at academic excellence.Oguntimehin and Adeyemi (2004) gave the following as the purpose/objective of the school library:

- Support the teaching programme of the school
- Guide students on the choice of relevant materials for study
- Provision of material resources to enhance academic growth and development
- Assist the pupils to develop skills in the use of books and libraries
- Acquire the relevant books and non-book materials to meet the requirement of the school curriculum.

It can be deduced from the above that the school library is of paramount importance.It helps to guide the student in all areas of their academic endeavour, inculcate in them the desired reading culture before graduating from high school and also provide appropriate materials to supplement classroom teaching.

## Literature Review

School library has been appraised by different scholars as an inevitable segment of the educational system.Thus,it is an integral part of the educational system that cannot be ignored without jeopardizing the quality of education in schools.The school library,therefore,is an important part of elementary,middle and high school programmes, without which students would not thrive academically and would find it most difficult to do research before they reach the college level.

Reading has been described as the art of interpreting printed and written words (Devarajan, 1989). It is regarded as one of the most effective processes of conscious learning. According to Devarajan and Gray, as cited in Panigrahi and Panda (1996), reading influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgement and action of readers. These authors postulate that “a creative and

pragmatic education involves the habit of personal investigation,which requires self study to be followed by self thinking and analysis”. Strivastar, cited in Panigrahi and Panda (1996) sees self study, i.e. reading at one’s own accord, as a habit which is technically known as reading habit.

It has been asserted that a child can know much about his environment, only, by exposing him or her to reading books, newspapers, and magazines. As the child is exposed to reading and develops the love for books, he finds it easier to explore the wealth of human experience and knowledge. During childhood, it is possible that children miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books and find it difficult to form reading

habit at the later years. This is based on the belief that reading children become reading adults. Frequent reading is related to the development of sophisticated language structures; higher levels of comprehension, improved word analysis skills, and fluency in significant amounts of voluntary reading, are associated with greater interest and skill development (Irving, International Reading Association, 2000).

Much research has provided insight into the importance of home environments for children's reading literacy. Long before children develop the cognitive and linguistic skills necessary for reading, early experiences with printed and oral language establish a foundation for learning (Verhoeven cited in Dent and Yannotta, 2005). To these authors, particular home characteristics can create a climate that encourages children to explore and experiment with language and various forms of texts. Some of the major aspects of the home that contribute to reading literacy development as highlighted by (Tella & Akande 2007) are:

*Activities Fostering Literacy-* the literacy related activities that parents or care givers engage in with children, or encouragement and support (Gadsden, 2000). As children develop their capacity for oral language, they are learning the rules of language use. This knowledge will be translated into expectations for printed language as well. Adults and older children reading aloud to young children, and early association of enjoyment with printed text establish a positive attitude toward reading which eventually motivate young readers (Martin, Mullis and Gonzales in Dent and Yannotta, 2005).

*Language in the Home-* The fact that children learn to read depends heavily on their early experience with language. The language spoken at home, and how language is used, are important factors in reading literacy. Children whose knowledge of the language used in formal reading instruction is substantially below that expected of children of that age, are likely to be at an initial disadvantaged. Use of different languages

or dialects at home and school may cause problems for young students learning to read.

*Economic Resources-* Important aspects of the home environment include the availability of reading material and educational resources. Homes that make such resources available convey to children the expectation that learning to read is a desirable and worthwhile goal.

*Social and Cultural Resources-* Society and culture are inherent in influences on the perceived importance of reading for academic and personal success. Parents and caregivers engaged in many literacy activities to foster children positive attitudes towards reading. For most children, the home provides modelling and direct guidance in effective literacy practices. Beyond modelling, parents or other caregivers can directly support

reading development by expressing positive opinion about reading and literacy.

*Home School Connection-* Research show that students who discuss their school studies and what they are reading with their parents or caregivers are higher achievers than those who do not (Mullis, Martin, Gonzales and Kennedy, 2003 in Darko-Ampem,2004). Involved parents or caregivers can reinforce the value of learning to read, monitor children's completion of reading assignments for school, and encourage children through

praise and support.

*Students' Out-of-School Literacy Activities*- The child not only enjoys reading for recreation but also for practicing skills that are being learned. Reading for fun or to investigate topics of interest is the hallmark of lifelong reading. They may choose to spend their out-of-school time reading books or magazines, looking up information on the Internet, or going to a local library to read or take out books (Shapiro and Whitney,

cited in Dumea, 2001).

Tella and Akande (2007) equally observed that, many factors in school affect reading literacy acquisition, directly or indirectly. These include:

*School Policy and Curriculum*- Literacy policy and curriculum at the school level establishes the context for the formal reading instruction children receive from the beginning of formal schooling. Such policies may include decisions about the emphasis on reading instruction in relation to other content areas. In turn, such decisions according to (Krolak, 2005) help to shape the environment within the school and the resources that

are required.

*School Environment and Resources*- The school environment encompasses many factors that affect learning. The sense of security that comes from having few behaviour problems and little or no crime promotes a stable learning environment. School-wide programs that provide for the basic needs of students and their families (e.g., before- or after-school child care programs) may also be important. Other school-wide programs,

which focus specifically on reading and literacy development, may directly support the acquisition of skills and attitudes toward reading literacy.

Additionally, the context of the classroom cannot be overlooked, when considering factors affecting reading literacy. Even though, the curricular policies and resources of the school often set the tone for accomplishment in the classroom activities, are likely to have a more direct impact on their reading development than the school environment. The instructional approaches and materials used are clearly important to establishing teaching, including the curriculum; the strategies employ to teach it, and the

availability of books technology, and other resources. The teacher of course, is another very influential determinant of the classroom environment. This can include his or her preparation and training, use of particular instructional approaches, and experience in teaching reading. Finally, the behaviours, attitudes and literacy level of classmates may influence the teacher's instructional choice, thereby affecting a students reading development (Kurtz-Costes and Schneider, 1994 cited in Ekundayo, 2005).

Daniel (2004) reports that the Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA) has played a great role in championing the course of school librarianship especially in the area of drafting of resolution which over the years, have influenced government policies in the provision of school library services. The Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development in 1992 came up with minimum standards for school libraries in Nigeria, as a result of the argument, that it was because of lack of standard that there was low development in Nigeria. The minimum standard for school libraries was formulated based on the following fact:

*Students without access to supplementary reading materials as provided for in a library will be seriously handicapped. His academic success will be based largely on his ability to memorize his lecture notes. On the other hand, the student with access to a good school library can learn and be judged on his own skill in clarifying problem collecting information relative to its solution and formulating conclusion. This student no doubt, will have acquired the foundation for*

*independent, purposeful and life-long learning. The cornerstone of the present policy as stated in the minimum standard includes:*

Ø To support teaching and learning;

Ø To enrich the school curriculum;

Ø To promote and develop reading skills and encourage long-term learning habit through reading, listening to viewing a variety of learning materials. Learning habit form the key to continuous success in school as well as personal enrichment of the student pupils;

Ø Stimulate research and independent study by providing a wide variety of reading materials so that it cannot only supply information in printed form but also picture, films, tapes, Information Technology, Electronic mail, Internet etc. This makes learning more exciting;

Ø Provide opportunities for further reading and use of materials other than prescribed classroom textbooks;

Ø Provide recreational materials and encourage students/pupils to read for pleasure;

Ø Encourage students/pupils to develop their power of analytical appraisal by exposing them to varied collection of printed and other multi-media in the library;

Ø Provide students/pupils with vocational information and career guidance leading to the choice of suitable career and

Ø Provide up to date information to keep staff and student abreast of new development.

#### Library Promotes Teaching and Learning

The school library enhances teaching and learning and by extension, promotes reading habit in children.

Habit die hard, hence, it's important to "catch the children young" by introducing them to the use of the library right from the kindergarten/nursery classes to the secondary school.

Joseph (2003) sees the school library as an organized collection of books and other learning materials placed in a school for the use of teachers and pupils, who are the major patrons in the school libraries. It can be inferred from the above that the diverse collection coupled with the quiet, conducive and comfortable seats provided makes reading and assimilation easy.

Odusanya and Amusa (2004) opines that school library play significant and indispensable role in

inculcating reading habits in students at the primary and secondary levels of education. These levels of education according to them, are very crucial to the success of students at tertiary level.

Fayose (1995) views a school library as a collection of books, periodicals, magazines and newspapers,

films and filmstrips, video tapes, recording of all types, slides, computers, study kits and other information bearing resources housed for use by teachers and students for learning, recreational activities, personal interest and interpersonal relationship of children in a school.

#### Reading Promotion

The school library serves as impetus to promoting effective reading habit/culture in

children.

It can be likened to the foundation of a building. As a weak foundation cannot sustain a building, a weak school library background cannot sustain the academics of the child. Alegbeleye (2010) opines that studies are carried out at all levels through the medium of English Language in Nigerian Schools. She noted that reading, speaking,

listening and writing play a very crucial role at various stages in intellectual growth of the Nigerian child.

Reading is therefore seen as the tool to other subjects taught at school. Reading promotion can be enhanced through book display and exhibition, book fair, excursion to publishers/publishing houses, encouragement of reputable authors to write on desired subject areas and for school libraries to be stocked with the relevant titles.

#### Recommendations

The import of reading cannot be overemphasized. Children by their nature are susceptible to words. The need to catch them young by introducing them to books (reading) early in life, as habit die hard, is therefore imperative. The stakeholders in this laudable task as rightly observed by Tella and Akande (2007) are :

#### Parents

Much research has provided insight into the importance of home environments for children's reading literacy (Adams, Ehri, Holdaway, Verhoeven in Dent and Yannotta, 2005). Reading habits need to be built and promoted from an early age. Parents who spend time reading to their children, giving them the best possible start on the road to literacy are setting a good example for their educational attainment. Many researches

have also pointed out that children who do best in literacy skills at school are those who come from homes where there are books, where their parents spend time reading to their children and where children see their parents and older siblings engaging in reading activities. In order to encourage reading habit in their children, parents should:

1. Set a good example. If the child finds you reading, instead of being glued to television, he or she may also do the same.
2. Provide appropriate reading material, controlling television viewing and helping the children in their routine to include enough time to both play and read. However, children should not be forced to read. This may make them rebel and not do as told or instructed.
3. Other suggestions include reading story books aloud, creating a learning environment by setting up a mini reading corner with reading materials, visiting the library; bookshops, and offering books as prizes or gifts to the children.

#### The Teachers

1. The teachers are the next set of people children spend most of their time with after their parents. In the light of this fact, they should know the type of books children should enjoy reading. Hence, they need to request appropriate numbers of books for classrooms, and school libraries.
2. Teachers should introduce books to the pupils after giving them a brief introduction about the contents. This will give children the freedom to choose according to their taste.
3. They should inform parents and policy makers the importance of access to books.



4. Teachers need to appreciate the importance of reading. This will afford them the opportunity to motivate and encourage their pupils to read widely. Fluent reading comprehension skills are the basis of quality educational attainment.

#### The Librarian

Librarians have a crucial role to play, since they provide the only environment in which most people can access books. Therefore, they need to:

1. Attract children who are reluctant readers, expose them to the joys and benefits of reading.
2. Help the children to develop pleasant and positive attitude towards reading. This should be done before children could develop habits of reading and love for books.
3. Sangkaeo (1999) states that "in any effective school library program, the librarian should have definite responsibilities in certain areas of the curriculum and should have an active teaching role." To him, the role must always be coordinated with what is taking place in the classroom. By having a wide knowledge of materials and techniques for using them, the librarian can now make very strong partners in the planning and implementation of the educational enterprise.
4. The librarian working in primary schools libraries should endeavour to make the library attractive to the pupils.

#### School Libraries

For inculcating the habits of reading from the childhood, the recommendation by (Panigrahi and Panda, 1996) is very relevant here. That school libraries should:

1. Create an environment conducive to reading so that the children feel at home and comfortable;
2. Request teachers to encourage the students to read more books, magazines and newspapers regularly;
3. Request parents to subscribe to good newspapers and magazines for their homes matching the tastes of their children, and
4. Request schools to organize debate and essay competitions, story hours, chat shows exhibitions, quiz hours, etc..., at regular intervals so as to generate reading interest and information gathering habit".

#### Mass Media

Radio and television media in the country should include in their program 'Children Reading'. This should come up at least once or twice a week. They should as well make sure that interesting books are always read on air. This will encourage children to want to listen and thus enhance their pronunciation and reading habit.

#### The Government

The government needs to play the greatest role if the aim of achieving quality basic education is to be realized. Parts of the role should include:

1. The government needs to be aggressive on the issue of improving primary school libraries and should stress the contribution made by libraries to the quality of education for children. Adequate funds should be provided to keep classrooms and school libraries current with quality literature.
2. The idea of giving children free books as the case of *Bookstart - the books for babies* scheme in UK should be emulated. The scheme aims at giving free books to yield extraordinary results. "If books can have such an impact on educational attainment in the UK where information is so plentiful, the impact is likely to be

greater in Sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps in Botswana particularly where learning resources are so scarce and expensive (Mokatsi, 2005). Nigerian children no doubt, would appreciate this offer and benefit by it.

3. More library facilities need to be incorporated in all primary schools where there is none. The government should make efforts to strengthen such libraries. However, it is not enough that the shelves of such libraries are fully stocked with books. It should also be ensured that these are accessible to the pupils and devoid of unnecessary restrictions.

4. Generally, there is need to harness a myriad of opportunities brought by information communication technology ICTs. This has turned the world into a global village as the common saying. We should not be surprised if in the long run, the printed world is converted to electronic as a result of this advancing

technology and thereby opening a new arena of reading promotion. Essentially, therefore, the government should consider it a welcome development to introduce multi-media in school libraries. They may provide primary and secondary schools libraries with Internet browsing facilities and CDs on different topics that have direct relevance to the different subjects offered by the pupils (students) in their respective schools. Some of these topics can also be suggested by the teachers and who can ask children to summarize it. With this, children may become more inquisitive and more encouraged to use the library and search the Internet.

Andrew Loh (2002?) reports the good news that research studies indicate that almost 95% of children can really learn to read at elementary grade by spending just 15 to 20 minutes with proper guidance and care.

Thus, observing that parents can make a real difference in their children's ability to read by utilizing 15 minutes every day with their son or daughter. He equally identified the following as some of the most common and practical tips to make children learn reading quicker and faster:

**Consistent and Habitual Reading:** Reading continuously and in a habitual manner can make your child learn reading in a double quick time. Reading to children in a loud voice will help your child increase the general knowledge of the world, enhance vocabulary skills, jack up familiarity with written language (or what you call 'book language'), and step up an active interest in reading. When your kid listens to words read continuously, he or she will start showing an active interest in the language. He or she will also feel that reading is something really enjoyable and pleasing. Repeated reading habit will not only help your kid learn how to read, but also succeed in academic activities.

**Using normal and easy to learn language:** Right communication starts at your home, and as a parent you will need to talk to your kids in a more refined and polished way. Children are avid and quick learners at all age groups, quickly absorbing critical information through normal interactions and associated experiences with other children, adults, and the general environment. The general rule is very simple and straightforward: The more interactive and interesting conversation and playtime your child is involved in, the more he or she can learn and better will be the ability to talk and read in the future.

**Playing meaningful games:** Interactive games are the best source of reading and writing skills; a number of games help children read something before they can proceed to the next step of the game. One simple example is matching words with pictures by reciting the word loudly. This type of interactive game is extremely beneficial and cajoling in making your child learn reading books at a young age.

In summary, it can be deduced that teaching a kid to learn reading starts right in his or her ears! One can lay a strong foundation for success in reading and comprehending by slowly and surely reading stories to one's kids, talk in a simple language and by playing linguistics related games and riddles. As you start reading

more numbers of books, your child will start picking up a small collection of simple words. As he or she starts to build the power of vocabulary, the future will also look brighter and promising.

Sanacore (2000) asserts that promoting the lifetime love of reading should be one of our most important goals in middle schools. He stressed that through pleasurable reading, middle school students 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 noted further that our students, therefore, need opportunities in school and at home to enjoy "real" reading as a valued and worthwhile activity. He opines that for middle-level learners 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.

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