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Influence of Electronic Media on Reading Ability of School Children

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Introduction

Reading is an essential tool for lifelong learning. It is important for everyone to develop the rudiments of reading and the culture of reading always so as to survive in life. Reading according to Holte (1998) adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. He pointed out that reading empowers and emancipates citizens and bring people together. Okeke (2000) reaffirms that the art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone. It is one of the most important activities of life through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experience and enjoyment. It has critical role to play in the overall development of an individual and the nation at large. Reading experience can be obtained in the library. The school library is a gateway to knowledge and will serve as a starting point or road map to reading and the promotion to reading culture. The library provides books and other resources which will help shape thoughts and influence the actions of students throughout life with active supervision by an experienced librarian.

Due to technological development, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air (The Hindu, 2004). Students now lack the skill of reading. Instead they spend more hours on electronic media. Browsing the net, playing with funky handsets and passing non-stop SMSs seem to be the order of the day, there by making reading a book or any other piece of written material in a quiet or peaceful corner of a library or home become an archaic idea for most school children and adults (The Hindu, 2004). Obama (2008) in his speech pinpointed that children cannot achieve unless they raise their expectations and turn off television sets. Shabi and Udofia (2009) noted that active learning from books is better than passive learning such as watching televisions and playing games.

Students are rarely interested in reading for pleasure and enjoyment instead they read only to pass examination. The declining interest in reading culture among our children (especially those in primary and secondary schools) is a cause for alarm

and a challenge to all and something need to be done to alleviate this yawning problem. Unfortunately, reading is not taught or included in school curriculum. Reading is not a subject and cannot be taught separately as most other subjects in the curriculum rather it is subsumed in every other subject and is regarded as a tool facilitating many other types of learning. Nowadays, due to the rat race syndrome, parents pay little or no attention to their children's reading ability, parents themselves lack the skill and the culture of reading such that some do not read to their kids.

Mefor (2010) urged all Nigerians schools to launch a readership promotion campaign which will help to inculcate the culture of reading in children. It is also important to start early to inculcate the culture of reading early enough in a child. Also Olukemi (2010) advised Nigerian youths to imbibe the reading culture in all their endeavours. She lamented that lack of reading culture among youths nowadays has greatly affected quality of graduates being produced by the nation's higher institutions. It is against this background that this study tries to investigate on the influence of electronic media on the reading habits of pupils in homes and schools. Improving access to relevant information and promoting a reading culture are prerequisites for strengthening literacy skills, widening education and learning opportunities, and helping people to address the causes of poverty (Makotsi, 2005).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the influence of electronic media on the reading habits of pupils in two primary schools in Nsukka town, in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed at identifying the following:

1 the activities pupils engage in at home.

2 the number of hours the pupils devote in reading books, magazines, playing games, watching television, chatting with friends and listening to music.

3 the influence of electronic media on the children's reading hours.

4 the influence of electronic media in the homes and school libraries on the pupils' reading ability.

5 the number of times children visit their school library.

Research Questions

To achieve the above stated objectives of the study, the following research questions were raised

1. What are the activities performed by school children at home?

2. What are the number of hours put in by pupils/students in reading books, magazines, playing games, watching television, chatting with friends and listening to music?

3. To what extent do the electronic media influence the children's reading hours?

4. How do the electronic media in homes and school libraries influence the children's reading ability?

5. How often do pupils visit their school library?

Literature Review

Reading is the springboard of any literacy programme. It does not only give

learners an active place, but also places them in the centre of pedagogy and the curriculum (Corcoran and Evans, 1987). Reading is a very powerful and indispensable equipment for learning and acquisition of the varied skills and experiences needed by man to develop a satisfactory personal life. It is important that pupils/students should develop positive habits towards reading of books as a life-long learning experience.

Reading is important and beneficial to man and because of this the Nigerian Government is stimulating the reading of books, newspapers and magazines. This is important now that an increasing number of people are spending less time reading and also when reading skills are declining. According to Ikpaahindi (2008), research has shown that more than half of the adults in Nigeria hardly ever read a book. He stressed that those who do read spend a much smaller part of their leisure time doing so, compared to 25 years ago.

Powell-Brown (2003) cited in Popoola, Ajibade and Etim (2010) reported that a few of her pre-service teachers never loved to read. She pointed out that although many of them know how to read, they prefer to gather information through movies, television, websites and conversations. Ojielo (2001) in support, highlighted that Nigerians prefer listening to story instead of reading, a practice which accounts for the popularity of home video among the people.

Kaufman (2001) observed that children spend their time watching TV and playing video games when they are not spending a great deal of time reading and writing. Statistics collected according to Kaufman by the U.S Department of Education "National Centre for Educational Statistics" shows that students achievement in both has been declining in recent times. Ikpaahindi (2008) rightly observed that information and communication technology especially internet technology is having adverse effect on the reading culture of Nigerians. This is because it discourages lazy students from engaging in serious reading. Many students prefer to spend most of their time in the cyber cafes, browsing, playing games, chatting with friends. Ezema and Ekere (2009) identified that only few schools have good libraries while majority have limited dog-eared books locked up in few cupboards.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. Structure questionnaire tagged "Influence of the electronic media on reading ability in homes and schools" were used to collect information from the children respondents. The questionnaire were of two parts-part A, required the children respondents to supply their bio data while section B comprised of open and closed ended questions. Four teachers (two from each school) were also interviewed.

Population and sample

The population of this study was comprised of primary and secondary school children drawn from two schools (one primary school and one secondary school) in Nsukka town, in Enugu State. A total of 81 questionnaire were administered to the pupils and only 71 were returned.

Administration procedure

All the children respondents were administered the questionnaire in their various schools. The questionnaire were distributed with the help of the teachers of the participants. The pupils were assured that there were no positive or negative answers. They were also meant to know that their responses were to be treated as confidential.

Data Analysis

Data collected for this study were analyzed using frequency distribution and simple percentages.

Results

Bio data and gender distribution of the pupils/students

Table 1: Percentage Gender Distribution of the Pupils/students Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	23	32.4
Female	48	67.6
Total	71	100.0

From the result of the study, majority of students respondents are females 67.6%^while 32.4% of the respondents are males.

Table 2: Percentage Age Range of Pupils/students Respondents.

Age range of students	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0-5 yrs	2	2.8
6-10 yrs	17	23.9
11-15 yrs	31	43.7
16-20 yrs	20	28.2
>-21 yrs	1	1.4
Total	71	100.0

11-15 years age range of students respondents are the vibrant set of students (43.7%). 28.2% of the respondents were between the age range 16-20 years.

Question 1: What are the activities performed by school children at home?

Table 3: Activities performed by school children at home

Activities	Number of pupils	Percent
Writing school home work/assignment	46	64.8
Reading textbooks, magazines, newspapers, novels, etc	54	76.1

Playing football games	18	25.4
Playing volleyball games	4	5.6
Playing games on cell phone (mobile phones)	24	33.8
Going online (internet) to watch movies, play games, listen to music, chat with friends, send e-mails to friends, etc	18	25.4
Watching television (satellite television)	26	36.6
Playing music on DVD and other music systems in your home	20	28.2
Cooking food for the entire family	28	39.4
Washing dresses	32	45.1
Washing plates in the kitchen	28	39.4

Table 3 shows the number of pupils and the corresponding percentages who engage themselves in each of the activities listed in the table while at home. For each of the activities, the number of pupils out of the total number of pupils (seventy one) who indicated that they engage themselves in a particular activity is presented in the second column of Table 1. The corresponding percentage for that number is presented in the third column. For instance, out of 71 pupils sampled 46 representing 64.8 percent of the pupils engage themselves at home by doing school homework and assignments. Out of 71 pupils surveyed 54, which is 76.1 percent of the study population, engage themselves at home by reading textbooks, magazines, newspapers, novels, etc. Similar interpretations can be derived for activities such as: playing football, playing volley ball, playing games on cell phone, etc.

It can be inferred from the table that the activity that is most likely to be engaged in by the pupils while at home is reading textbooks, magazines, newspapers, novels, etc. Following this activity is writing school home work/assignment. The remaining activities arranged in order of preference are: washing dresses, cooking food for the entire family and washing plates in the kitchen, watching television, playing games on cell phone, going online for games, music, chatting, etc and playing football games, and playing volley ball.

Question 2: What are the number of hours put in by pupils in reading books, magazines, playing games, watching television, chatting with friends and listening to music?

Table 4: Number of hours that pupils allot to various activities

Activity	Hours					
	½	1	$1^1/_2$	2	$2^1/_2$	>=3
Writing school home work/assignment	28.2	60.6	4.2	5.6	1.4	0.0
Reading magazines/newspapers	66.2	26.8	1.4	1.4	1.4	0.0

Reading textbooks	63.4	29.6	2.8	4.2	0.0	0.0
Playing games (football, volleyball, etc)	36.6	45.1	4.2	7.0	4.2	0.0
Playing games on cell phone (mobile phones)	5.6	14.1	8.5	14.1	33.8	22.5
Going online (internet) to watch movies, play games, listen to music, chat with friends, send e-mails to friends, etc	7.0	14.1	18.3	28.2	11.3	19.7
Watching television (satellite television)	7.0	45.1	11.3	16.9	7.0	12.7
Playing music on DVD and other music systems in your home	2.8	25.4	18.3	19.7	28.2	4.2
Cooking food for the entire family	31.0	50.7	2.8	7.0	1.4	2.8
Washing dresses	54.9	42.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Washing plates in the kitchen	85.9	9.9	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 2 gives the percentages of respondents according to the number of hours they allot to each of the activities listed in the table. The percentages are based on the total number of pupils (seventy one) for a particular activity. For activity like writing school homework or assignment, 28.2 percent of the pupils devote 30 minutes to it; 60.6 percent devote one hour to it, 4.2 percent of the respondents use one hour thirty minutes to do their homework or assignment; 5.6 percent of the respondents devote two hours to homework or assignment and only 1.4 percent use about two and half hours to complete their homework or assignment. The rest of the activities can receive similar explanations.

From the table it is observed that about 89 percent of the respondents use less than or equal to one hour for writing their homework and assignment. Exactly 93 percent of the respondents devote less or equal to one hour to each of reading of textbooks and reading of magazines or newspapers. About 70 percent of the respondents use a minimum of two hours for playing games on cell phone. For the activities like playing games (football, volleyball, etc) and cooking food for the family, a little above 80 percent of the respondents use less than or equal to one hour. About 98 percent of the respondents devote less than or equal to one hour in each of washing of dresses and washing of plates in the kitchen. Online activities take about 77 percent of the respondents a minimum of one and half hours. About 80 percent of the respondents devote a maximum of two hours for watching of television. Playing music on DVD and other music systems takes 60 percent of the students a maximum of one and half hours.

Question 3: To what extent do electronic media influence the children's reading hours?

Table 3: Children's perception of electronic media interference in their reading hours. Do television, internet facilities, cell phones, musical gadgets, and other electronic media in your schools and homes interfere with your reading hours?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	31	43.7

No	40	56.3

Table 3 shows that 56.3% of the respondents indicated that television, internet facilities, cell phones, musical gadgets, and other electronic media in your schools and homes do not interfere with their reading hours. Since this is the majority, it is concluded that television, internet facilities, cell phones, musical gadgets, and other electronic media in schools and homes do not interfere with their reading hours.

Question 4: How do the electronic media in homes and school libraries influence the children's reading ability?

Table 4: Pupils'/students' perception on the influence of electronic media in schools and homes on their ability to read

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not always true	28	39.4
Encourage students to develop good reading habits	10	14.1
Discourage students from reading hence poor reading habits	24	33.8
Such electronic media keep children well informed on local and international current affairs	8	11.3

From Table 4 it is observed that majority, about 39%, of the respondents feel that it is not always true that availability of electronic media in homes and schools will always lead to poor reading habits.

Question 5: How often do pupils/students visit their school libraries?

Table 5: Availability of school library

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	40	56.3
No	31	43.7

From table 5 it was observed that majority, about 56.3% of the students agreed that they have library in their school.

Table 6: Number of times the pupils visit their school library

Response	Frequency	Percent
Regularly (every school day)	9	22.5
Two times every school day	5	12.5
Three times every school day	2	5.0
Four times every school day	1	2.5

Not at all	23	57.5

In table 6 above it was observed that the majority of the student about 57.5 do not visit their school library to read while about 22.5% of the student visit the library regularly. Other which is about 12.5%, 5% and 2.5% visit the library two time three times and four time respectively every school days.

Table 7: The number of hours that pupils devote in reading their books when they visit their school library

Response	Frequency	Percent
Thirty minutes	21	58.3
One hour	7	19.4
One and half hours	4	11.1
Two hours	2	5.6
Two and half hours	2	5.6

From table 7 it was observed that the majority about 58.3 % of the respondents devote only thirty minutes in reading their books when they visit their school library, while about 19.4% of the respondents devote one hour and minority about 5.6% of respondent devote two hours and more when they visit the school library to read.

Interview: The teachers that were interviewed stressed that there is dwindling reading habits in school primary school children. They attributed the drop in reading habit of the children to too many distractions in the society, ranging from various types of electronic gadgets in homes to lack of proper attention by parents and teachers. The interviewees (teachers) called on the government stakeholders and private individuals that own school to build functional libraries in both primary and secondary schools to boost the reading habits and culture of school children.

Discussion

From the bio data of the children respondents in this study, it is very clear that the female school children (67.6%) are more in number than the male school children (32.4%). The reason for this observation is not very clear. All the same, in this age of graduate unemployment, most parents in rural communities prefer to send their male children to learn one trade or the other instead of going to school for a formal education, hence the dearth of male enrolment in primary schools in Nigeria. The result of this study also indicate that majority of the school children fell within the age range of 6-15 years (67.6%) i.e. 6-7 years-23.3% and 11-15 years-43.7%. 28.2% of the school children fell within the age range of 16-20 years. School children respondents in age range of 11 years and above were from the secondary school that was sampled.

There is great variation on the responses of school children concerning the activities they engage themselves in while at home. The bulk (76.1%) of the school children respondents attested that they read their textbooks, magazines, newspapers, novels etc while at home, while those who concentrate in their home work at home came to 64.8%. 34. 6%, 33.8% and 25.5% watch television, play

games on cell phones and engage themselves in Internet activities respectively, while at home. From the above observation, some of the children respondents might have lied for the mere fear that the result of this study might get to their parents who would frown at their poor reading habits at home. Of course, most parents know very well that school children read only when they have examinations. They engage in reading at this time just for examination purposes and not so much for personal development, fun, or to be well informed (Adenyinka and Samson, 2007). Sangkaeo; 1995, Darko-Ampem, 2005; and Chandilanga, 2006 have observed and postulated that reading culture of Africans is poor. Children in schools are the leaders of tomorrow. For effective leadership and good governance, there is that need to inculcate in our children the habit of avid reading.

This study has also revealed that the school children respondents devote more number of hours for playing games on cell phone than in their homework and reading. It was also very clear from the result of this study that school children respondents devote a good number of hours in online activities, watching television, playing music on DVD and other musical systems. Granted that so much useful information concerning learning could be sourced online, the school children should not be exposed to it too early because of its negative effect on their reading habit and reading skill acquisition. Reading is a very important issue which is not only about enjoyment but a necessity; the basic tool of education (Makotsi, 2005). Good reading habit makes way for a better understanding of one's experiences and it can be an exciting voyage to self discovery (Panigrahi and Panda, 1996; Eyre, 2005).

56.3% of the respondents indicated that television, internet facilities, cell phones, musical gadgets, and other electronic media in their schools and homes do not interfere in their reading hours. Although the school children respondents had asserted that the availability of television, internet facilities, cell phones, musical gadgets, and other electronic devices in schools and homes do not interfere in their reading hours but we should bear in mind of such programmes on television and websites on the Internet that constitute sources of distractions for school children. Notable examples on satellite televisions and the Internet are cartoon network (CN), Africa magi, facebook and twitter/chatting etc. Children in nursery and primary schools can get glued to the television set watching Africa magic and cartoon network for more than 4/5 hours, provided there is electricity supply to the television set. Those children in secondary schools can be on the net and on their cell phones for hours without lifting a textbook or magazine to read. Constant attention to these electronic media by school children distract their attention from reading and ultimately affect their reading habits and skill. School children should be provided with enough materials (books/novels/magazines) to read at home and in schools. Research has shown that children who have no access to books before going to school are severely disadvantaged and have trouble catching up with other children (Radebe, 2001). Children with adequate access to books have many books to select from on daily basis, both in and out of school (IRA, 2000). Mokatsi (2004) emphasised the conditions for learning to read and for sustaining literacy to include an ideal home environment where reading is encouraged, good teachers and schools, plentiful books which are relevant and up to date, and access to computers.

Some group of the children respondent (39.4%) did not support the view that electronic media influence the reading habits of school children. 33.8% shared the view that electronic media discourage school children from reading, hence poor reading habit in some school children. Despite the variations in the opinion of the school children respondents in this study, it is worthy of note that children are faced with distractions and poor reading habits in this modern age of avalanche numbers of communication gadgets in homes and schools. Though some of them play great roles in teaching and learning but there should be enough caution in exposing children to these modern communication tools because of the negative impact on the acquisition of reading skill by school children.

56.3% of the school children respondents were affirmative on the availability of school library in their school. Functional school libraries in primary and secondary schools will afford the school children the opportunity to have access to wide range of books. Children who are allowed to self-select to read and who have access to varied sources of print materials in their classrooms, school libraries, town libraries, and at home read more and more widely, both for pleasure and for information (Krolack, 2005). Such children are noted to have good reading habit.

57.5% of the school children respondents in this study do not visit their school library (where there is existence of any). 22.5% visit their library every school day. Pupils/Students who shun their school library can never develop good reading habit. Teachers should endeavour to encourage their pupils/students to visit the school libraries and to borrow novels and periodicals to read. This will not only help them in developing reading and writing skill but will also help in empowering them with the skill of effective oral communication. Thirty minutes to one hour as seen in the result of this study is not enough time for effective reading in the library. Students should learn how to read for at least 2-3 hours when they visit the library. Pupils in primary school can put in one hour for effective reading when they visit their school library. With constant practice, now doubt, these pupils/students will acquire the skill of effective reading habit that will transform them for a better future. Reading is important for everybody in order to cope with new knowledge in a changing world-that of the technological age (Sangkaeo, 1999).

The teachers that were interviewed stressed that there is dwindling reading habits in primary/secondary school children. They attributed the drop in reading habit of the children to too many distractions in the society; ranging from various types of electronic gadgets in homes to lack of proper attention by parents and teachers. The interviewees (teachers) called on the government stakeholders and private individuals that own schools to build functional libraries in both primary and secondary schools to boost the reading habits and culture of school children. Again, reading should be introduced in school curriculum.

Finally, inculcating good reading habits in children is something that should be started on time in their early childhood days so that these children will grow with it. Both the parents, teachers, librarians and government should be fully involved for this to be realizable. Though it may look like a journey of a "thousand kilometres", but with concerted efforts from all concerned, huge success will be achieved in the end.

Recommendations

- The federal Government should establish functional libraries which are adequately catered for and well equipped with current biographic material which will in turn stimulate the interest and increase the reading habits of pupils/students.
- Reading should be promoted through partnership and collaboration between the public and private sectors such as publishers, booksellers, librarians, teachers and all employers of labour to encourage readership campaign.
- Parents should as a matter of fact encourage reading by buying the books as gifts during their birthdays and when they pass examinations..
- Libraries and schools strive to create an environment conducive to reading so as to make the school children feel at home and comfortable.
- Schools should organize debates and essay competitions for school children. This exercise will no doubt help in generating reading interest and the habit of gathering information.
- Parents should set out time for watching television, playing video games and chatting with friends and also surfing the internet so as to avoid distraction from the electronic media.
- As parents we have the time and energy to step in and help our children to

love reading by reading for them.

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