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Abstract

This paper looks at the use of Information and Communication Technologies, (ICTs), and audio-visual resources in developing children's reading culture in Nigeria. It has been observed that most children in Nigeria have very poor reading culture as reading is not associated with pleasure. Developing reading culture in children has been identified as the foundation and the building block for life-long learning. This paper therefore tries to highlight the use of ICTs and audio-visual resources as veritable resources in associating reading with pleasure by encouraging children in learning how to learn, visual literacy, and associating reading with pleasure. The central roles played by Libraries in promoting reading habit in children were highlighted. Some of the identified reading problems associated with children include dyslexia, speech apraxia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Other factors include poor learning environment and lack of functional libraries, inadequate supply of reading materials and poor reading campaign. The paper concluded that in order to have any functional education system that will encourage sustainable development in any nation, it is therefore indispensable to inculcate reading culture from the scratch in order to have informed citizens who will intellectually advance the nation to globally competitive level. This could be done by providing a reading environment such as libraries, provision of adequate reading materials, and proactive public awareness programmes on the importance of reading for national development.

Introduction

Children are future leaders of any nation. In this context, children are referred to Childhood is a formative stage and a period characterized by tremendous drive, character formation and desire to learn. This is a very important period of laying good foundation for the child's academic life. Dike (1993) emphasized that "the foundations of reading development are laid in early childhood... this is especially so in the Nigerian context, where many children lack early home experiences with reading and books. In the early stages, children are ruled by their senses and emotions; hence the importance of a rich environment, play, physical activities and the arts for stimulating educational development in early childhood". At this early stage, children are very active; mentally, emotionally and physically, and they have the desire and a natural curiosity to learn. It is very pertinent to adopt a proactive learning strategies and methodologies that could encourage children in developing life-long reading habit and take cognizance of the various children's individual differences. This is very crucial as a result of the central role of reading in achieving a functional educational system.

It has been observed that most children as well as adults in Nigeria and other developing countries have a very poor reading culture. This is as a result of some notable challenges which this work has been designed to discuss. Reading according to Ahmed (2009) is the meaningful interpretation of visual or graphical symbols, and giving these graph. Reading is a means of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written words. Reading is said to be a means of language acquisition, communication and sharing information and ideas; an activity that helps in the development of the brain, but today, the reading culture is being fast eroding in many developing countries. Reading can be seen as a solid foundation on which almost all subsequent learning activities revolves. Hence, reading is the building block for learning in any educational setting. Tella and Akande (2007) noted that "reading is recognized as an art capable of transforming man's life and his entire society". However, in 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. This is a very unhealthy condition for any nation that is striving to be globally competitive such as Nigeria.

Education is a deliberate act and a systematic process of learning how to learn in order to evoke, transmit, or acquire knowledge, values, attitude and skills; to develop a critical and innovative mind through the instructions in theory and practice of teaching. Any effective education is anchored on developing a good reading culture. Fayose in [Simisaye](#) and [Quadri](#) (2010) extensively discussed the paramount role reading plays in children's educational pursuit and submitted that it promotes a deep awareness and build the child up emotionally and intellectually. Hence, Makotsi (2005) emphasized that "reading is a very important issue which is not only about enjoyment but a necessity; the basic tool of education". Education is a vital instrument for a sustainable national development. The focus and objectives of education according to Ifedili (2009) are to develop natural talents to enhance the quality of environment; production of skilled manpower and generation of knowledge necessary for modern economy; inspiring and enabling individuals to develop capacities to the highest level throughout life so that they can grow intellectually and contribute effectively to society; creating learning society necessary for participation in a world undergoing phenomenal change; inculcation of the right attitude and values for fostering a democratic and civilized society; and finally, to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and foster their application for the benefit of the economy. Therefore, any education system that will be worthwhile should be able to transform an individual to be useful to himself and able to contribute positively to the society. Dike (1993) emphasized that to be effective, education must focus on the learner, not on the teacher or content. This connotes that education begins with a study of the learner, a study of his or her nature, developmental pattern, needs, interests, and capabilities. The learner's requirements determine to a large extent what is taught and how it is taught. Hence, it is very pertinent to look at the individual child and map out adequate strategies that will take account of individual differences.

Developing a good reading culture is central and a bedrock to the attainment of any success in education. In agreement to this, [Simisaye](#) and [Quadri](#) (2010) assert that it is a recognized fact that reading has a crucial role to play in creating independent learners, literacy promotion and educational attainment of individuals in every society in the world. In recognition of the child's education as the building block and the key to the success or failure of the whole education system, the National Policy on Education stated the goals of primary education which are to: include permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively; lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life

of the society; mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child; develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment; give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity; and to provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Kasimi, (2007) emphasized that “developing a reading culture has become very important for any society in the 21st Century. Hence, cultivating a good reading habit is very crucial for national development as it enables creativity to blossom, develop imaginative thinking and innovative mind. 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). Reading habit development in children should be a pleasurable experience for them. Reading for pleasure and information develops reading interests and offers children the opportunity to practice their reading skills in meaningful ways and ultimately develop positive attitudes about reading. Children spend maximum time in their home and this is their first place to start developing healthy and long-life reading habit. Children should be guided both at home and in the library to read simple, exciting, adventure and story books.

The Use of ICTs and Audiovisual Resources in Developing Reading in Children

ICT facilities and audiovisual resources are vital sources of abundant information and knowledge to children. ICT according to Blurton (1999) is a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information. On the other hand, audio-visual resources according to Dike (1993) are “those materials which do not depend solely upon reading to convey meaning. They present information through the sense of hearing, as in audio-resources, or through the sense of sight, as in visual resources, or through a combination of senses”. These resources create a spirit of joy, fun, adventure and imagination in children and help to associate reading with pleasure. They play vital roles in engaging children in learning activities especially in their developmental age and offers a wealth of reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help young children learn how to read for lifelong learning. Owen (2011) posits that “children begin developing the foundation of literacy from as early as a few months old when oral and visual communication skills are learned”. At this age, parents, care-givers and teachers have a very important role to play by introducing pleasurable experience such as home videos that contains educational stories, games, colorful pictures, symbols, spellings, etc. The home is should be made conducive for children to begin to develop lifelong attitudes toward reading. Hence, parents play a critical role in this development by initiating reading activities. Madahunsi (2001) opined that “parents can make use of personal microcomputers in their homes to foster even greater degree of interest and growth in reading”. Parents can aid in the process by reading to their children, thus acquainting them with the more formal language of books, pointing out words and letters, and engaging them in story hours. Similarly, a study of the German Foundation Stiftung Lesen on "Reading Behaviour in Germany in the new Century" revealed that the positive attitude of parents and the availability of reading materials at home are the most important factors in creating positive lifelong reading motivation in children. Children have different reading needs at different stages of their lives, but they need to have access to enjoyable reading materials from the very beginning. The use of picture books helps to offer clear illustrations, words, diagram and pictures which help to captivate the attention of children. Most children fail to imbibe good reading culture when the reading materials are so abstract. Hence, reading should be associated with pleasure. The use of ICT facilities and audio-visual resources will help in bringing abstract concepts into reality thereby helping children to identify things in their real life environment. Encouraging children to play with language apparently helps young children focus their attention on the sounds of words as well as on their meanings. Chambers in Dike (1993) emphasized that “although literacy is generally acquired in school, the foundations for good reading habits are set in the home, in the earliest year of life”.

ICT facilities and audio-visual resources help children to learn a variety of subjects, from simple calculation, spelling, dictation, to educational stories. It offers children the opportunity to explore the world beyond their immediate environment. Encouraging and modeling leisure-time reading using ICT and audio-visual resources such as computers, home videos games, televisions etc. help in fostering children's reading development. Healthy viewing habits and parental supervision can help children develop positive learning experiences. Story books in video format help in capturing the attention of children, offer great lessons, extend their experience beyond their immediate environment and teach them proper reading behavior.

The new electronic gaming landscape offers a vast array of new opportunities and choices for children in playing electronic games in many different ways, including excitement, learning and communication. Home video has an interactive gaming content on children's psychosocial development. Video-games have also been suggested as promoting co-operative behaviour and reinforcement in more educational activities. Thus, gaming activity using home videos can be a veritable educational tool for learning capable of making formal learning more pleasurable, motivating and effective. There are different kinds of game content (e.g. violent games, competition games, fantasy games, etc.). Different ICT facilities have their different effects on children learning abilities. The study carried out by Brandtzaeg and Heim (2009) revealed that "a preference for pedagogical games is associated with both high scholastic and athletic competence, as well as parental monitoring. A preference for fantasy gaming is positively related to scholastic competence, while preferences for competition games are strongly associated with athletic competence". There is need for parental monitoring to ensure that children are not involved in watching videos that will have harmful effects on them. Active parental involvement, such as rules limiting the use of home video, and active mediation will encourage children to embrace the technology for creative, educational and developmental purposes.

Developing Reading Culture in Children for National Development

There is no doubt that Nigeria as a nation is behind in imbibing reading culture with which no nation in the 21st century could make a profound headway to socio-economic, political and techno-scientific advancement, Ugwu, (2008). Nigeria as a nation still has a long way to go in terms of national transformation and cohesion because the many years of having formal education seem to find little relevance in the reconstruction of the nation, Kasimi, (2007). Africa is often referred to as an information-poor continent. This criticism is basically on the fact that there is a paucity of information sources containing local content as well as poor reading culture. Most of the available materials do not reflect our local contents coupled with the prevalent poor reading culture. Hence, Nigeria and indeed many developing countries do not yet have a reading culture where all people are aware of the value of developing lifelong, broad-based, and critical reading culture. Yet in a society where knowledge is expanding, new technologies emerging, constantly changing the learning environment and the whole facet of human endeavour, knowledge access and acquisition have become the key assets in any knowledge-based economy. Therefore, developing reading culture has become a fundamental key to individual, collective and sustainable national development. On the same hand, Tella and Akande (2007) stressed that "the achievement of quality basic education in all countries in Africa call for development of good reading habits of both the children and the adult. This will change the stigma already associated with Africa as a continent with a "Poor Reading Culture". On this note, Sisulu (2004) posits that reading is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning. It is the fundamental building block for developing a literate society that can compete with the global world. A person is literate when he/she can read and write a short simple statement on his own and functionally engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective contribution in the society at large. Igwe (2011) posit that "reading habit is the use of reading as a regular activity. It is the cultivation of an attitude and possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and constant activity". Reading culture is the developed attitude of positive reading habit that involves a critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, and evaluative kind of thinking. Reading is quite indispensable in becoming an informed citizen capable of adapting in the present knowledge-drive environment. Children, as future leaders of any nation need to be nurtured into positive reading culture. Cultivating reading culture at the early age in children is of supreme importance and must be purposeful, strategic, and grounded in pleasurable experiences. This will help to increase their mastery of language, expand their vocabulary, widen their horizon and basically increase their general knowledge of the world around them. Basically trying to motivate a grown up child to imbibe reading habit is always very difficult as he or she had never developed the basic rudiments of reading habit. The best way to develop this habit is to start with a very tender age when the child has just learnt to read independently. Children have different reading needs at different stages of their lives, but they need access to enjoyable reading material from the very beginning. This can be done using colorful pictures in home videos, which are definite to attract children's attention. Providing educational materials such as home videos are very important factors in creating positive lifelong reading culture in children. Hence, reading should be associated with pleasurable experiences. Krolak (2005) emphasized that "teachers should encourage reading for pleasure and as a prerequisite for continuing education. Unfortunately, many children learn only the technique of reading at school and often do not experience anything more challenging than textbook-based learning and textbook-based teaching".

The Roles of Libraries in Promoting Reading Culture

Globally, libraries are dedicated to providing free and equitable access to information for all, be it in written, electronic or audiovisual form. They play a key role in creating literate and conducive environments by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all ages. School libraries are basically established to encourage reading development in children. The modern school library is called a media resource centre as it contains not only books but also a variety of learning resources both in print and non-print media. Owing to the changing library environment and the new philosophy of education which focuses attention on the learner and the various resources and learning opportunities which would help learners develop skills for lifelong education, the library is now seen as the centre for school's educational programme. Children libraries are normally rich in colourful and story books which captivate the interest of children and motivate them to read for pleasure. Librarians play important roles in promoting reading culture globally. They are like the triggers that facilitate the users' experience through library orientation programmes, match-making users with suitable information needs, which increases their ability to readily access this exponentially expanding universe of information. This is done by providing access to relevant reading materials for all ages both in written, electronic or audiovisual form. The primary function of the library is to select, process, preserve, and create an open access to opportunities for developing lifelong learning, positive and independent reading culture, critical thinking, creative imagination and self-empowerment to adapt to the present knowledge environment. The roles of any library invariably depend upon the educational system and the target audience. Dike (1993) posits that libraries were expected to provide supplementary materials to support classroom instruction and to encourage reading, especially of imaginative literature. Notwithstanding the central roles played by school libraries in providing reading material and in developing reading culture in children, it has been observed that most children in Nigeria do not have access to libraries.

The various roles of libraries in promoting reading culture include:

- **Creating an Enabling Environment**
 - Children should be encouraged to live in an environment that encourage reading habit. Libraries generally provide a very conducive environment that encourages people to engage in meaningful reading, learning and research activities. They provide space, reading carrels, reading materials and noise-free environment. School libraries offer opportunities for developing good reading habits in children. Children who have been immersed in a literacy environment in which words, games, rhyming, poems and storytelling are plentiful are more likely to imbibe reading culture than those who have experienced an impoverished literacy environment. These prepare children to develop positive attitude towards reading and the possibilities of learning basic language structures and forms. This is true because if the surroundings that children live in are not motivating, then it would be difficult for them to want to learn to read as they would not see any point in learning process. Therefore providing an enabling reading environment for children at the early stage will help them to imbibe lifelong learning throughout their adulthood.
- **Provision of Reading Materials**
 - Libraries play important role in providing a wide range of reading materials. Apart from textbooks, they provide access to supplementary learning materials such as computers, audiovisual materials like CD-ROM, tapes, videos, films. Children's libraries are always rich in toys and other colourful story books that capture the attention and imaginations of children to develop lifelong learning abilities. Also, children can be taught about basic ICT appreciation to prepare them for future use.
- **Library Orientation Programmes**
 - Librarians engage in coaching fresh users on the use of library materials. People using the library for the first time may not be accustomed with retrieving information from the library. It is the onus of the librarians to educate the fresh users on information retrieval process such as the use of library catalogue, indexes and abstracts. Much more, the school librarian can encourage children to imbibe reading habit by guiding them to the right books that may interest them, by serving as a matchmaker between children and books.

Benefits of ICTs and Audiovisual in Encouraging Reading Culture in Children

Extending experience – ICT facilities such as home videos, television, and computers can be entertaining and educational, and can open up new worlds for children, giving them a chance to travel across the globe, learn

vicariously about different cultures, languages and gain exposure to ideas they may never have encountered in their own local community.

Learning how to learn – With the use of ICTs and audio-visual resources such as video games, toys, computers, etc. children can learn how to learn by playing games that involves them in simple activities that could sustain their interest in reading.

Visual Literacy – Educative home video for children are full of colorful illustrations that can help children interpret visual representations. This helps them to develop their sense of sight and ability to identify different colours and objects in the real life.

Associating reading with pleasure – The various humorous stories in video format develops the sense of humor in children and enable them develop the right attitude towards reading.

Reading Problems in Children

Children may develop problems in their literacy skills for a variety of reasons, but with early intervention and extra attention by parents and educators, many of these reading problems can be overcome. Some of these problems as identified by Owe (2011) include the following:

Dyslexia

This is a cognitive impairment that affects a child's ability to read by causing a disruption in the brain's ability to interpret images and sound. Children with dyslexia often exhibit difficulty in concentrating for extended periods of time, coping with written symbols, reverse letters when reading or spelling a word, have confusion between left and right and also may have poor handwriting. A child with dyslexia has normal intelligence, but his or her attainment of reading skills lags far behind others. Such children may even be unable to read words that they can spell correctly.

Speech Apraxia

This is also known as speech dyspraxia. It is a reading disorder that affects the reading fluency of children. Apraxia is a neurological condition that temporarily paralyzes a child's ability to speak even though he attempts to do so. Researchers believe that children with apraxia are inhibited from fully utilizing phonic sounds as part of their speech recognition. Children with apraxia may be seriously disadvantaged in developing literacy skills.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficient Disorder (ADD)

Children with ADHD/ADD usually have poor concentration in reading. They exhibit abnormal reading pattern as they are normally restless, unable to sit at a place for more than few moments, inattentive and impulsive. Reading requires a sustained period of concentration. The use of ICTR and audio-visual resources will greatly help in capturing the attention of children with these deficiencies and consequently develop the culture of reading for lifelong learning.

Factors Affecting Reading Culture of Children in Nigeria

There are a lot of factors that affect the effective development of reading culture of children in Nigeria. Among the factors which hinder children's reading in Nigeria according to Dike (1993) are: the illiteracy of most parents, poverty, the lack of reading culture, the almost exclusive association of books with schooling, the second language problem, the obstacles to literacy in the mother tongue, the lack of adequate and suitable reading materials, and the lack of reading skills. Other factors affecting reading culture in children include:

Poor Learning Environments and Lack of Functional Libraries

One of the most important influences on a child's development of reading skills is their learning environment and study habits. Children need a very colorful and noise-free environment to imbibe a good reading culture. Most

children lack a conducive environment and guidance for effective reading habit development. School libraries can play a pivotal role of providing enabling environment for children and coaching the children using multimedia resources such as home videos in capturing their attention to developing healthy reading habits.

Inadequate Supply of Reading materials

There has been a gross inadequate supply of reading materials in most developing countries such as Nigeria. The study carried out by Tella and Akande (2007) revealed that pupils in Africa depend largely on the notes given by their teachers as the major source of reading material based on inadequate availability of books. Inadequate book availability, lack of interesting children's literature, and watching television are identified as factors hindering pupils from developing reading habits. Furnishing primary schools libraries in the country with current books, getting parents to develop an interest in reading for their children to emulate coupled with the idea that children's literature should be made available in all primary schools constitute the major suggestions as measures to overcome the problem so that the achievement of quality basic education in the country would not be a mirage.

Poor Reading Campaign

There is generally poor reading campaign in Nigeria. Little attention is being given to educating the general public on the invaluable benefits of inculcating reading habit in children. It is therefore very pertinent to educate the general public on the importance of reading habit through the radio, television, seminars and conferences. If people are enlightened through available media on the invaluable importance of developing good reading habit, then lifelong learning would not be seen as a burden because people will naturally see reading as everyday life. Hence, embarking on a sustained reading campaign quite indispensable for developing a lifelong reading culture.

Conclusion

Reading habit in Nigeria is generally poor. The development of reading habit in the life of any individual should commence at the early stage of life. Hence, attention should be given to the early childhood development when children are taught to learn to read and read to learn at the same time. The role of librarians has changed from mere "books keepers" to "information specialists" who use a lot of resources both print and non-print to make information available to users. School librarians nowadays are actively taking part in acquiring quality reading materials in written, electronic or audiovisual form and providing school children with necessary reading skills. For any educational system to be effective and to ensure sustainable development in any nation, it is therefore indispensable to inculcate reading culture from the scratch in order to have informed citizens who will intellectually advance the nation to globally competitive level. This could be done by providing a conducive reading environment such as libraries, provision of adequate reading materials, and proactive public awareness programmes on the importance of reading for national development.

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