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**Influence of the Use of the Internet on the Reading Culture of Students of Government College, Umuahia Abia State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*The Internet has simplified information services provided in this ICT era. One can easily acquire the required knowledge and information on a single click, thus, making information generation and dissemination timely. Regrettably, this may not be so for categories of individuals who seemed to have deviated from the original plan of the Internet for academics. Hence, this study was necessitated to investigate the influence of the use of the Internet on the reading culture of students of Government College, Umuahia. Three objectives guided the study. The research design adopted was a survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 278 students of the College studied. The sampling technique used was a complete census. A questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, simple percentages and mean scores. The findings showed that majority of the students make use of the Internet to study, prepare for examinations, write assignments, and chatting with friends, among others. Making the students active in class, distracting their reading, and exposing them to unimportant articles and write-ups were among the influences. The study recommended that Management of secondary schools should organize seminars aimed at teaching the students the right use of the Internet to improve their reading culture, among other things.*

**Keywords: Reading, Reading Culture, Internet, Influence, Student, Use**

## **Introduction**

Reading is the springboard of any literacy program. It is one of the oldest habits of human civilization and has remained the passion of the greatest personalities of all times. According to Nnadozie and Egwim (2010), reading is a complex skill requiring the coordination of several inter-related sources of information. It is the art of interpreting printed and written words, and 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 individuals (Edeole & Adejoke, 2016). However, due to the attitude of individuals who rarely pick a book or magazine to read, there is a serious decline in reading culture. The same applies to the school child for whom reading has come to mean a thing of spare time. Considering the place of creative thinking in reading, it becomes very important for one to develop the rudiments of reading and the culture of reading always.

The importance of reading culture cannot be overemphasized because it is crucial for both personal and academic success. Furthermore, it is an aid to language development, socialization and civilization. The development of good reading culture is important because society has realized the importance of information and effective communication for the survival and exploitation of their environment. Moreover, the development of reading and reading culture are basic skills, which society must confer on its students as part of their childhood education. Unfortunately, there are problems inherent in the development of proper reading culture among students as a result of some technological innovations.

One of the technological innovations is the Internet. The Internet can be broadly defined as a worldwide network of computers communicating through an approved protocol. The Internet according to Kumar and Kaur in Jibrin, Musa and Shittu (2017), has an unlimited wealth of information resources that are readily available and easily accessible for people to use worldwide and simultaneously. Internet is a veritable tool in learning, teaching and research if effectively used. However, it has been observed that owing to this technological innovation, reading culture

is being threatened, especially, among teens and secondary school students. In Nigerian society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading culture among secondary school students is fast vanishing. Today, students rather than read to acquire new knowledge prefer to spend hours unending, surfing the net, playing with funky handsets, chatting and passing non-stop short message services (SMSs), thereby making reading a book or any other information resource in a quiet or peaceful corner of a library or home an archaic idea. The declining interest in reading among our children (especially those in secondary schools) compared to increase in hours spent on the Internet has become a cause for alarm and a challenge to all and something needs to be done to change the scenario. However, assuming or concluding that Internet use is the cause of the declining reading culture can be better regarded as an assumption until empirically proven. It is against this backdrop that the current study “the influence of the use of the Internet on the reading culture of students of Government College, Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria” is necessitated.

### **Research Objectives**

The study is guided by the following objectives, which involve, to:

1. find out if students of Government College, Umuahia make use of the Internet;
2. determine the students’ reasons for their use of the Internet;
3. ascertain the frequency of use of the Internet by the students; and
4. investigate the influence of the use of the Internet by the students on their reading culture.

### **Literature Review**

Since the introduction of ICT, the subject of the students’ reading culture has attracted a major concern. According to Yusuf (2015), this major concern is as a result of the need to keep the school child active and able to cope with the demands of the present day. Saka, Bitagi, and Garba (2012) pointed out that inculcating a reading culture should be introduced at an early age among children. This is because reading and reading culture develop over a prolonged period and an early promotion will be able to mould them into lifelong readers. The challenge is therefore to ingrain the culture of reading in children so that it is as important as sports and other hobbies. Perhaps then, the impact of negative media will be directly reduced.

Consequently, Yani (2003) observed that reading culture of Nigerians is a matter of concern in our educational and national development, stating further that in a developing country like Nigeria, the concept of reading culture should not be relegated to the background. Fundamentally, the major way to improve the reading culture of students is through a well-equipped school library. Topo, as cited in Strong (2014) affirmed that the need today is the thoughtful integration of book reading with high technology as it will reverse the decline in book reading among children and adults. According to Yusuf (2007), equipping school libraries is the first practical step in these efforts. This is because books and other information resources are the most suitable medium through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

Nonetheless, Kristy (as cited in Kolawole, 2005) reported that the prevalence of poor reading skills varies, and believed the consequential effect to include poor grades for students and difficulty trying to find or advance to a good job for adults. Saka, Bitagi and Garba (2012) in their submission were of the view that the majority of students read to pass examinations and to do assignments. The implication being that absence of examinations and assignments creates a distance between students and their books, while shifting their attention and energy to the net for frivolities. As to what these students prefer, the study of Chen, Hsiao, Chern and Chen (as cited in Almasi, Machumu & Zhu, 2017) reported a growing increase in the use of the Internet, which is gradually eroding reading culture among secondary school students. The authors, however, observed that the students use the Internet also for activities related to schoolwork as well as more general activities, believing that Internet-based activities in schools may have several impacts on students' life at schools and thereafter. Besides, various studies have reported that the use of the internet can have benefits on the educational achievement of students.

Considering the influence of the use of the Internet on student learning performance or other outcomes, the studies of Davis (2001), Widyanto and Griffiths (2006), Odaci and Kalkkan (2010), and Odaci (2011) reported that it has either a negative influence or no significant influence. Furthermore, Young (as cited in Amasi et al., 2017) suggested that excessive Internet usage among students have negative effects on students' academic success. The studies of Olatokun (2008) and Nwagwu, Adekannbi and Bello (2008) reported that students chiefly utilize the Internet for academic purposes, such as preparation for assignments and examinations, rather than for leisure purposes. Though some students use the Internet much more than their school libraries, they also

find the Internet as a source of general knowledge since it assists them in their reading habits as well as improving their academic performances. Tarimo and Kavishe (2017), believed that by providing Internet access and enhancing its usage in schools, a chance to improve students' learning through access to the huge amount of information that is accessible on the Internet is guaranteed. Chen and Fu (2009) stated that the Internet has brought unparalleled opportunities to students on one hand and a major concern for parents on the other hand. This is because while online searching for information helps to boost examination scores and performances in assignments given to students, using the internet mainly for socializing and gaming results in poor reading habit and poor performance in examinations, general academic achievements as well as poor personal development. Since some internet use may seriously distract students, affect their reading habit and generally distort their academic achievements, effective use of the Internet should be employed by students.

In the same vein, the studies of Adedotun (as cited in Yebowaah, 2018); Akande and Bamise (2017) reported that access to information brought about by the use of the Internet can influence the academic performance of the secondary school students. Sahin, Balta and Ercan (2010) and Yebowaah (2018) believed that the use of credible Internet resources is of greater importance for academic activity, especially in high-class courses which require an academic review of the literature. This is not different from the belief of Kim (as cited in Yebowaah, 2018) who asserted that Internet use for educational purpose is the heart of adolescent academic achievement, as it helps students to broaden their academic knowledge, research and assignments by accessing information worldwide as well as enhances easy communication to the academic community.

On what needs to be done to avoid the negative influence of the Internet on the students, Chen et al as cited in Almasi, Machumu & Zhu ( 2017) noted that Internet usage is of benefit to students but believed that its negative use involves pornography addiction and excessive chat among secondary students, which have relatively negative effects on their academic success and life after school. Fuchs and Woessmann (2004); Kuhlemeier and Hemker (2007) believed that the Internet is used in daily life in educational settings; and as a result, its usage among secondary school students should be channelled appropriately to yield academic success. Downes (2002) noted that if secondary-education teachers are to tailor their instruction to the needs of all students,

they need to develop an understanding of the extent to which incoming students have access to and make use of the Internet at home. Campagna (as cited in Almasi et al., 2017) emphasized that teachers should encourage students to come up with techniques for reading independently, which is one of the outcomes of reading habit.

Ngoumandjoka (as cited in Yebowaah, 2018), Singh, Gupta and Garg (2013) found that the Internet is not mostly used for academic purpose rather for recreational activities. The authors further buttressed that though students are more into the use of the Internet, in reality, they are using it mainly for non-academic purposes like emailing, gaming and social networking, which has contributed greatly to the decline in their reading culture. This brings to the fore the controversy among empirical studies on the influence of internet use on the academic performance and reading culture of secondary school students.

Based on the literature review, it is clear that the Internet has serious effects on students and their reading culture. Students are so vulnerable to becoming addicted to the Internet to the extent that they do their homework not with their efforts but with complete dependence on Internet resources. This is to say that the influence of the Internet is in two faces, either negative or positive. However, it would be inappropriate to conclude on the face the students of Government College, Umuahia belong to. A critical look at available literature has revealed a gap in this respect, which forms the fulcrum of this research.

## **Methodology**

The study was purely a descriptive survey because of the given large number of different sub-sets of the population involved. Thus, a descriptive survey design was adopted for the study owing to its usefulness in the field of Library and Information Science. The population of the study was 278, which comprised senior secondary 2 and 3 classes (SS2 & SS3)). This is because as at the time of the study, the school was undergoing renovation, which made the school authority not to admit students in other classes. Furthermore, the 278 students were sampled using the complete census sampling technique.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire titled: “Influence of Internet on Student’s Reading Culture Questionnaire (IISRCQ)”. The items in the questionnaire consist of close-ended questions using four (4)-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3,

Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, simple percentages and mean scores. A mid-point of 2.5 was taken as the acceptance criterion for the positive response. This implied that questionnaire items with a mean score of 2.5 and above denote “agreed” while questionnaire items with a mean score below 2.5 denote “disagreed”. Presentation of the result was done using the frequency tables.

**Presentation of Results**

This section deals with the analysis of the outcomes of the data collected. A total of 278 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents but 275 copies were completed, returned and found useful for analysis. The presentation follows the order of the research objectives.

**Research Objective 1: To find out if students of Government College, Umuahia make use of the Internet**

**Table 1: Responses of the Students on the Use of Internet (N = 275)**

S/N	Item Statement	Yes	%	No	%
1	Do you make use of the Internet?	267	97.1	8	2.9

**Source:** *Researcher’s Field Survey*

Table 1 shows the responses of the students on the use of the Internet. The result shows that the majority of the respondents 267(97.1%) indicated the use of the Internet, while few of the respondents that constitute 8(2.9%) indicated the non-use of the Internet. The result implies that students of Government College, Umuahia make use of the Internet. This finding corroborates with the earlier studies carried out by Olatokun (2008), Tarimo and Kavishe (2017), which revealed the high use of the Internet among youths and secondary school students.

**Research objective 2: To determine the students' reasons for their use of the Internet**

**Table 2: Students' Reasons for Use of the Internet (N = 275)**

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	I use the Internet for study purposes	75	120	18	62	<b>2.76</b>	Agreed
2	To prepare for examinations	114	126	12	20	<b>3.21</b>	Agreed
3	To do my assignments	92	51	90	42	<b>2.70</b>	Agreed
4	To chat with friends	114	96	35	30	<b>3.07</b>	Agreed
5	To watch movies	126	36	68	45	<b>2.88</b>	Agreed
6	To get information	91	114	40	30	<b>2.97</b>	Agreed
7	To meet new friends	101	114	40	20	<b>3.08</b>	Agreed
8	To improve my reading habit	25	20	86	114	<b>1.73</b>	Disagreed
9	To improve my grades in school	35	50	96	94	<b>2.09</b>	Disagreed
10	To be like others	83	61	48	83	<b>2.52</b>	Agreed

**Source:** *Researcher's Field Survey*

**Key:** SA – Strongly Agreed; A – Agreed; D – Disagreed; SD – Strongly Disagreed

Table 2 showed the responses to the reasons for the use of the Internet by the students of Government College, Umuahia. From the analysis, majority of the students agreed with the following reasons for their use of the Internet: for studying purposes (2.76), to prepare for examinations (3.21), to do my assignments (2.70), to chat with friends (3.07), to see movies (2.88), to get information (2.97), to meet new friends (3.08) and to be like others (2.52). However, few respondents that constitute 1.73 and 2.09, respectively, indicated the use of the Internet to improve their reading habit and improve their grades in school.

Given the above results and their mean scores, it could be deduced that the students of Government College, Umuahia make use of the Internet for numerous purposes aside to improve their reading habit and grades in school. Consequently, preparation for examinations had the highest mean score of 3.21. The finding of this study in this regard partially corroborates with the work of Luambano and Nawe (2004), which found the use of the Internet by students particularly for academic purposes as hugely influenced by their teachers who give them assignments requiring the use of the Internet. Thus, the studies revealed that students will only use the Internet if work given to them by their teachers requires them to use Internet facilities.

**Research Objective 3: To investigate the influence of the use of the Internet on the reading culture of the students of Government College, Umuahia**

**Table 3: Influence of the Use of the Internet on the Students' Reading Culture (N= 275)**

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	It enhances my reading ability	20	15	173	67	<b>1.96</b>	Disagreed
2	It makes me active in class	77	138	40	20	<b>2.99</b>	Agreed
3	It increases my reading attention span	20	30	126	99	<b>1.89</b>	Disagreed
4	It helps me to have a better understanding of what I am reading	80	165	10	20	<b>3.11</b>	Agreed
5	Chatting with friends keeps me awake to read in the night	102	138	25	10	<b>3.21</b>	Agreed
6	Internet articles motivate me to read	63	132	30	50	<b>2.76</b>	Agreed
7	The Internet distracts my reading	113	117	30	15	<b>3.19</b>	Agreed
8	The Internet exposes me to unimportant articles and write-ups	200	30	15	30	<b>3.45</b>	Agreed

**Source:** *Researcher's Field Survey*

**Key:** SA – Strongly Agreed; A – Agreed; D – Disagreed; SD – Strongly Disagreed

Table 3 presents responses gotten on the influence of the use of the Internet on the reading culture of the students of Government College, Umuahia. The result shows that out of the eight perceived influences investigated, six were agreed by the majority of the respondents that constitute 2.99, 3.11, 3.21, 2.76, 3.19, and 3.45, mean scores respectively. These influences agreed by the respondents on item statements 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, include it makes me active in class, it helps me to have a better understanding of what I am reading, chatting with friends keep me awake to read in the night, Internet articles motivate me to read, the Internet distracts my reading and the Internet exposes me to unimportant articles and write-ups. Furthermore, majority of the respondents disagreed with item statements 1 and 3, which present that, it enhances my reading ability (1.96), and it increases my reading attention span.

Consequently, the finding has shown different influences of the use of the Internet on the reading culture of the students of Government College, Umuahia. Some of the influences are positive, such as making them active in class, understand what they are reading, keep them awake to read in the night, and motivates them to read. However, the negative influences include the use of the Internet distracting their reading, exposes them to unimportant articles and write-ups, fails to enhance their reading ability, and failure to increase their reading attention. With these findings, one can deduce that the negative influence of the use of the Internet outweighs its positive influence in the case of students of Government College, Umuahia. This study corroborates the earlier works

of Davis (2001), Widyanto and Griffiths (2006), Odaci and Kalkkan (2010), and Odaci (2011), which reported that the use of the Internet by the students has either a negative influence or no significant influence on student learning performance or other outcomes.

The authors believed that if these young users are educated, they will use the Internet more for educational information resources rather than leisure or entertainment purposes, which will invariably improve their studying and reading culture. The findings of the study also corroborate with the study of Luambano and Nawe (2004), which investigated the use of the Internet by students of University of Dar es Salaam and revealed that many of the students were not using the Internet for issues on education but for communication purposes such e-mailing and Facebooking. The study further showed that some students were using Internet services for pornographic viewing, which is an obvious misuse of Internet facility in an academic background, which negatively affects their reading culture and overall academic performance. The negative influence of the Internet as revealed by the above studies may be attributed to the findings of Manda (2005) that majority of students are not aware that Internet is a veritable tool for searching online academic information but rather jump into the Internet for other frivolous purposes.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

A critical look at the Internet could make one believe that it is a blessing to our generation. However, many students are becoming addicted to the Internet as they spend more time playing games or just surfing the net without any particular reasons. Consequently, the time they spend on studying is automatically reduced, which in turn causes lower academic achievement, which could all be attributed to poor reading culture.

Findings of the study have shown that the students make use of the Internet for different reasons. These reasons include for studying purposes, to prepare for examinations, to do their assignments, to chat with friends, to watch movies, to get information, to meet new friends, and to be like others. However, the influence of the use of the Internet is various, which include making them active in class, helping them to have a better understanding of what they are reading, chatting with friends keeping them awake to read in the night, Internet articles motivating them to read, the Internet distracting their reading, as well as exposing them to unimportant articles and write-ups.

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the use of the Internet amidst some positive influences, negatively influences the reading culture of the students of Government College, Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to ensure that the use of the Internet positively influences students' reading culture:

1. Management of secondary schools should organize seminars aimed at teaching the students the right use of the Internet to improve their reading culture.
2. Teachers in secondary schools should give assignments to students that will stimulate effective use of the Internet for academic purposes and improvement of reading culture.
3. School authorities and parents should closely monitor the Internet sites their students and wards visit to ensure that the utilization of the educational sites is encouraged.
4. There should be a law stipulating the age limit of the utilization of some Internet sites that are detrimental to the reading culture of the secondary school populace.
5. Secondary school students should be provided with adequate guidance on how to promote their reading culture through the appropriate use of the Internet.
6. Establishing, equipping and proper maintenance of school libraries as a means of improving the reading culture of the secondary school students should be highly considered and made a priority for all secondary schools.

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