

Developing the Reading Habits of Secondary School Students in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Abstract In recent times, lack of cultivating the habit of reading has been the concern of all stakeholders. The lack of enthusiasm of secondary school students for reading has contributed to many failures such as poor writing and limited understanding about what they are taught in class. This growing concern provides motivation for this study. Thus, this study seeks to discover and elucidate the various ways whereby secondary school students in Nigeria could develop the habits of reading amidst divergent distractions around them especially in the 21st century society as well as the roles of stakeholders towards enhancing the reading habits of students at the secondary school. The study concluded that the reading habits of secondary school students should be given rapt attention because of the imminent danger of losing reading habits in the era of information and communication technologies, where the use of social media sites is the order of the day. The study recommends that there must be a fixed time for reading a variety of reading materials that will appeal to students and that adopting different methods to arouse the interest of students could enhance their reading habits.

Keywords Reading, Reading Habits, Secondary School and Students

1. Introduction

A good reading habit is a vital skill that students should possess. Students should strive to imbibe good reading habits that would enable them function well in all spheres of life. Reading is the ability to induce meaning from written or print words. Therefore, reading is cardinal to 21st century students whose mission and goal are to excel in their academic pursuit and future endeavours. Habit is something one does repeatedly usually without awareness; therefore, reading habits could be described as reading voraciously. Reading develops the mind, imagination, creative potentials, improves spelling and expands the vocabulary. A student who does not have good reading habits would find it difficult to flow along with his counterparts. It is assumed that students with good reading habits find school interesting. When a strong foundation is laid both in the school and at home by parents, the nation will surely be transformed into a reading society [1]. The habit of reading can only be cultivated through regular and keen reading of various reading materials such as books, magazines, novels and newspapers by students in order to acquire knowledge which will be applied for development. Students who are avid readers would not be bereft of ideas to have breakthroughs in

any life endeavour. Reading is an essential skill that is crucial for all-round development of students at all levels of education in the world of today. However, Adesulu et al [2], asserted that about 30 million Nigerians have graduated from secondary schools with poor reading skills, attributing it to the poor habit cultivated during their stay at school.

2. Importance of Reading Habits

Reading habits enhance individual self-confidence, moral and intellectual development. With a good reading habit, students will inevitably, attain success in their academic endeavours. Reading provides experience through which the individual may expand horizons of knowledge, identify, extend and intensify interest and gain deeper understanding of himself, other human beings and the world [3]. Oyewusi [4] asserted that reading broaden young people's experiences and knowledge. Ogugua et al [1], acknowledged a reader as one who seeks to understand the meaning of a written text; evaluates its significance and uses what he or she has read to enhance his or her knowledge, effectiveness or pleasure. Developing good reading habits would improve the secondary school students' comprehension skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, speed, knowledge and lifelong learning. Reading is an exceedingly important ability that every student should strive to possess. It is essential for secondary school students in order to achieve the desired outcome in their academic pursuits and beyond. Hence, it is imperative for all stakeholders to promote the reading habits

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of secondary school students. Reading also improves a person's vocabulary, spelling, writing skills, fluency, proficiency, language enrichment, cultural enrichment, critical thinking, personal involvement, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge and emotional intelligent [5]. According to Oji and Haliru [6], there are diverse ways of promoting reading habits among students which include programmes such as reading clubs, mobile reading tents, book talk, and story hours. *Gifted Hands* a book by an internationally acclaimed Neurosurgeon Carson (1990), as cited by Shabi and Udofia [7], challenged young people to evolve a sustainable reading habit as reading is pivotal to educational success and an essential key for students' lifelong learning.

3. Developing Good Reading Habits

Developing a good reading habit is highly essential to students because it will enable reading with ease, and provide opportunity to have great accomplishments in any task. However, many students do not embrace the habits of reading the way it is expected, hence, there is need for cultivating a good reading habit early in the life of every student which would act as a catalyst to their personal development and lifelong learning. There is a general saying that 'readers are leaders: when a student is an avid reader, such would have an edge over his colleagues, who are casual readers, the reason being that he would acquire inspiration, information and have an insight into the rich knowledge of the world around him through reading. According to Davidovitch et al [8], acquisition of reading habits is a gradual process of letters, words, sentences, paragraphs and complete texts. It is evident that the development of good reading habit is not sudden but stepwise. Promoting reading for pleasure is fundamental to empowerment of students to become lifelong readers and to have successful careers. Ngwoke [9] submitted that the act of reading is expected to form part of students habits, ad stressed further that good reading habit is a precursor to information, education and communication strategies. Reading is an indispensable tool in learning that forms an integral part of any learning situation, and the bedrock of education [10]. Reading is central to intellectual actions and also an essential skill for lifelong learning. Adu-Sarkodee et al [11] contended that there is an urgent need to develop reading habits among individuals in the society, most especially students of high schools.

There have been several interventions over the years to promote reading among young people. For instance, the Reading Association of Nigeria, the Nigerian Book Development Council and Nigerian Library Association have been in the forefront of the struggle for the development of good reading habits of students in Nigeria. To this end, the National Library of Nigeria has been sponsoring the readership promotion campaign in the country. Bring Back the Book (BBTB) initiative was the brainchild of the former

president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan. One of the aims of the initiative is to revitalise reading habits of young people. Igwe and Uzuegbu [12] acknowledged that Bring Back the Book is a right initiative for reviving the poor reading habits in Nigeria. However, as good as the initiative is, there is a fundamental problem with the implementation of the initiative. Igwe and Uzuegbu [12], affirmed that the initiative was not properly implemented and some essential factors were found missing; hence, this affected the execution and the success of the initiative. Government should not hesitate to establish adequate public libraries in all local government areas and school libraries in all secondary schools in the nation. These libraries must be funded appropriately to achieve the missions and the goals of the libraries.

Moreover, Readership Campaign is a vision of the National Library to promote, stimulate and inspire the inculcation of reading habits among students. Specifically, the objectives of the readership campaign are to: encourage more reading Nigerians, promote the increase in production of reading materials in Nigeria, both in quality and variety, and identify the major inhibitors of reading in the country and find ways of eliminating them. Readership promotion campaign should be embraced by all stakeholders to create awareness and emphasise the importance of good reading habits among secondary school students. Funding has been a major setback to readership campaign across the nation. Consequently, the effect of the programme has not cut across the whole federation due to lack of print and electronic media that could go round which could enhance the achievement of the set objectives. Good reading habits could serve as a panacea to socio-economic and political problems.

Developing the reading habits of secondary school students should involve revisiting what transpired in the elementary school. Kolawole [13], asserted that most primary schools have no functional libraries, books and teachers who can promote reading at elementary school level of education and therefore concluded that problems, affecting reading at the secondary school level are a carry-over from the elementary level of education. The most unfortunate thing is that high school students experience the same scenario, and most school libraries are not adequately equipped to develop or support students' reading habits. Many of them are either not stocked with adequate materials or do not employ certified teacher librarians. Thus, there is practically nothing to motivate students to develop good reading habits. Little wonder, Etuk [14] observed that some primary school leavers do not have adequate reading habits and end their primary school career as illiterates, thereby swelling up the illiterate population in Nigeria. Many researchers in the area of reading generally observed that Nigerian students' reading habits is very low compared to that of developed countries [14, 12]. It is evident that students prefer accessing social media sites to the detriment of reading books, magazines and novels among others, which compounds and erodes the problem of poor reading habits.

4. Factors Inhibiting the Reading Habits of Secondary School Students in Nigeria

There are various factors hindering the development of good reading habits among secondary school students in Nigeria. These include: lack of functional school libraries in secondary schools, large percentage of obsolete information materials among the library stock, lack of professional librarians, lack of inviting and conducive environment for reading, lack of adequate funds from government to procure information materials that will cover both intensive and extensive reading, non-existence of public libraries, high poverty rate, illiteracy among others. Ogunrombi and Gboyega [15] highlighted inhibiting factors: the family background of students where few homes are conducive to reading owing to noise and lack of reading materials; the lack of functional libraries in most of the schools surveyed and a similar lack of trained librarians or teacher librarians; the failure to provide library periods in schools; language teachers and shortage of equipment and resources for teaching reading skills; and a heavy reliance on school texts. Taking cognisance of all the aforementioned inhibiting factors, all educational stakeholders should be involved in developing and sustaining the reading habits of secondary school students.

5. Reading Habits of Secondary School Students: the Way Forward

Oji and Habibu [6], highlighted the following strategies for promoting the reading habits of secondary students. The strategies include: book exhibition; book talk: story-talk hour; creative activities or creative writing; book clubs; drama and mobile reading tents. They further suggested improved funding, establishment of libraries and associating reading with pleasure. There are other ways of introducing pleasure or fun to reading such as group reading, excursions to libraries and book/fairs exhibitions, appropriate legislation and resuscitation of mobile library services. However, there is need to explicitly earmark each stakeholder's responsibility. Therefore, in developing the reading habits of secondary school students, there are major stakeholders in the society that should be actively involved, such as parents, teachers, school librarians, school counsellors and the students themselves. Parents' role in nurturing the reading habits of students cannot be over emphasised because parents stand the best chance in nurturing a reading culture [16]. Parents are the first teachers of any student right from childhood; therefore students should be introduced into the act of reading at early age. Okoro (2004), as cited in [10] suggested that children should be introduced to reading very early in life even before the child steps into school so that children can imbibe reading as a means of self-development and enjoyment. In this regard, mothers should play this important role of introducing reading habits to their children

at pre-school age.

Parents have a crucial role to play in the development of reading habits of secondary school students. Parents should read to their children, procure picture books and attractive reading materials for their children, through their elementary school and secondary school levels to ensure that children imbibe good reading habits from an early stage of childhood and the habit nurtured into adulthood. It is evident that when a habit is formed it is always difficult to break; thus, with good reading habits, high school students would find tertiary education easy, interesting and attain success in their academic career. Oyewusi [4] stated succinctly that parents are one of the major factors in developing the reading habits of secondary school students. However, Oden and Denga [17], suggested that parents should inculcate themes in their children by asking question on what they read. Parents' model for every student should be active and avid readership so that students can be inspired to imbibe the habit and also become voracious readers. In addition there should be regular reading hours for students without interruption with household chores.

Ben Carson's mother is a typical example of a mother of purpose that through her unrelenting efforts did develop good reading habits in Ben Carson. The story of Ben Carson is a significant example of the transformation that good reading habits could afford an individual. According to Tella and Akande [18], ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning and that it is an art capable of transforming life and society. Ben Carson remarked in the book *Gifted hands*, delightful motivations from his mother. 'Bennie,' she said again and again, 'if you can read, honey, you can learn just anything you want to know.' Ben Carson followed his mother's advice and later affirmed that, "As I continued to read, my spelling, vocabulary and comprehension improved and my classes became much more interesting." The vital lesson from this submission is that poor reading habit can lead to poor attitude to learning and negative self-concept. It is when students do not understand what is taught in school that the interest in pursuing academic goals is lost and subsequently they drop out of school.

Illiteracy and ignorance are presupposed to be the major factors hindering developing good reading habits of secondary school students in Nigeria. Illiterate parents may find it difficult to assist and motivate their children to become passionate about reading and this could compound the problem of poor reading habits in Nigeria. As the general saying goes, those readers beget readers, if parents are voracious readers, their children would also become ardent readers. Thus, it is imperative for all parents to play their role in giving their children a solid foundation of reading right from pre-school age.

Teachers also have to play a fundamental role in helping students to develop and maintain a positive reading habit. According to Pierre [16], teachers should be passionate about reading and act as model readers for their students. Teachers' role in developing reading habits of secondary

school students cannot be overlooked simply because they are the second role model for the students. Schools should organise reading competitions with attractive rewards for successful competitors, and relevant media houses should feature such programmes. Teachers should therefore endeavour to teach students how to read and develop them to be ardent readers. It is only those teachers who possess good reading habits that could endeavour to impart these skills to their students. Conversely, those who do not possess good reading habits would find it difficult to engage their students in reading activities such as extensive reading. Obviously, the reading foundation is formed both at the pre-school and primary school level. Secondary school teachers should be involved aggressively in inculcating good reading habits in students.

In developing students' reading habits, teachers should assess their students reading competency and should start from the level at which students could cope with conveniently and enjoy the reading exercise. Teachers must ask frequent questions on the read book that would provoke the curiosity of students to read more and more. Difficulty in reading or spelling might discourage an individual from engaging in reading and teachers should explain difficult words to students and encourage them to use the dictionary as well as to acquire more vocabulary. When students lack adequate vocabulary to understand the texts, it will naturally lead to discouragement. It is not an overstatement by Haliru *et al* [10], that teachers are the chief drivers of the education engine. Hence, teachers must be passionate about the reading habits of their students. Teachers should continually challenge students with activities that will improve the reading habits of students such as providing reading lists of interesting materials which student will discuss together in the class. Kolawole [13], expressed displeasure that most school teachers do not know how to promote reading. Hence, there should be continuous training and retraining for both primary school and secondary school teachers on the need to develop reading habits in Nigeria.

School teachers should advocate for the integration of reading into the school curriculum to resuscitate the dying reading habits of secondary school students. In addition, school teachers should encourage students to use the library by giving assignments that will compel students to use the library such as reading novels presentation of book reviews. Developing the reading habit of students should not be left to language teachers alone. All subject teachers should harness their efforts together to accomplish in the students irrespective of their discipline or area of specialisation to inculcate a love for reading. Teachers must also engage in recreational reading, in order to increase their horizon and sharpen their intellect.

School librarians/School media specialists are also significant stakeholders in developing students' reading habits. School librarians are to play the role of mediator between books and students. They are to advocate for more funds in order to increase their book collections. Fund could be solicited from government, non-governmental

organisations (NGO) and well-meaning Nigerians. According to Oyewusi [4], school librarians should strive to increase their collection to a minimum of eight (8) books per student, although this number is not even up to half of the international minimum standard of eighteen (18) books per student. The reason for this reduction cannot be farfetched. It is the problem of lack of funds in schools to procure books for extensive and intensive reading. Therefore, school librarians have to be proactive in sourcing for grants.

It is also important for school librarians/school media specialists to select materials that will interest and therefore incite reading among students. School librarians/School media specialists should carry out preliminary investigation to find out which reading materials that would catch attention of the students and stock their collection with such materials. It will be counter-productive if money is spent on underutilised collections. Likewise, school librarians/School media specialists should read various novels and information materials and share with the students on the assembly ground, at least once a week or at any avenue found most appropriate. In addition, students should be allowed to read in an environment that is comfortable and conducive for them. School librarians/school media specialists should collaborate with school teachers in taking students out on excursions to libraries and book exhibitions in various school libraries to stimulate students to imbibe good reading habits.

Besides school librarians must ensure that the school libraries are in good condition and are stocked with adequate and age appropriate reading materials which are relevant to Nigerian culture. School librarians ought to be accessible to students, that is, they must be friendly, approachable, not gloomy and hostile to students. School librarians should advocate for library period in the school time table in order to fast track the development of good reading habits of secondary school students in Nigeria. In addition, school librarians must be good public relation officers (PRO), in order to facilitate effective sourcing of funds. Organising fascinating programmes such as "Drop Everything and Read"(DEAR), book talk, library week, book exhibition and book talk story-talk hour creative writing, book clubs and among others. Those school librarians that engage in these methods had enviable success stories. Mefor (2010), as cited in Nwokocha [19], urged all Nigerian schools to launch a readership promotion campaign which will help to inculcate the habits of reading in students.

According to Olasehinde *et al* [20], many schools (public and private) have not complied with library provisions in the National Policy on Education (NPE). Ilori and Abdulahi [21], highlighted various roles of libraries in promoting reading habit as following: creating an enabling environment, provision of reading materials, library orientation programmes and motivation of students to be avid readers through literary competition and giving of prizes and other incentives. Ailakhu and Unegbu [22] asserted that school librarians should continue and improve their reading promotional strategies the more, so that the impact will be overwhelmingly felt by all and sundry.

Government has a significant role to play in developing the reading habits of students in the nation. There is urgent need to re-design the school curriculum at secondary school level to emphasise the acquisition of reading skills, train and re-train teachers and adequately fund the school system for the sustainability of educational standards in Nigeria. Reading should be given a place in the secondary school curriculum apart from language classes such as English, Yoruba and French classes. In an interview conducted, Haliru et al. [10], found that teachers are eager to have reading in the school curriculum. Therefore, government should integrate reading into the school curriculum in order to facilitate the turning of Nigeria into a reading society, where students at all levels would be passionate about reading.

School guidance counsellors also have roles to play in developing the reading habits of students; through counselling and sharing success stories of people who attained great heights through good reading habits while they were young such as Ben Carson. Portraits or pictures of people who have excelled due to their good reading habits should be placed at strategic places to motivate students. Students should not be left out in the effort towards developing reading habits. All efforts should be harnessed in order to remove distractions that are capable of subjugating their reading time to watching television, using social media sites such as: Facebook, 2go, whatsapp, and twitter among others. Students should be engaged in intensive and extensive reading that would illuminate their minds, sharpen their intellect and guarantee their educational success and all round development. Marantina [23], affirmed that students do not like to read despite the fact that it is fundamental to their intellectual development. Hence, if every other stakeholder puts in their best and students still fail to do their part, low reading habits will remain the norm. Haliru et al [10], asserted that to inculcate reading habit, students must develop the habit of reading on a daily basis. In essence, students' efforts cannot be underplayed in developing their reading habits.

6. Conclusions

Reading habits of Nigerian Secondary School students has been a concern to all and sundry, because reading is the pillar of all round educational development. Reading habits enhance individual self-confidence, moral and intellectual development. Reading habits are the essential skills that all secondary school students must possess in order to excel in their academic pursuit. Literature revealed that the reading habits of Nigerian secondary school students are declining. Consequently, all stakeholders: parents, school teachers, school librarians/ school media specialists, Government and school counsellors, should pay rapt attention to the development of good reading habits of secondary school students.

7. Recommendations

The recommendations fall within the purview of the students, parents, teachers, the school and school librarians. They are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Recommendations

S/N	Stakeholders	Recommendation
1	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students should strive to be avid readers - Avoid all forms of distractions from social media site on the Internet. - Students should pool their reading resources together to overcome the problem of paucity of reading materials. - Form book/reading clubs where they can come together to share exciting reading experiences.
2	Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents should partner with school librarians in order to enhance secondary school students reading habits.
3	School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There must be a fixed time for reading, that is, there should be a reading period in the school time table that will enhance students' reading time and consequently improve reading habit. - Adopting different approaches to arouse the interest of students which could enhance their reading habits, such as organising reading contest, book talks by school media specialist and school teachers. - There should be provision for classroom libraries to be funded by the Ministry of Education, parents, the government and public-spirited individuals. - Schools should convene regular Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meetings to establish solid foundation for strong reading habits among secondary school students. - Parents should be given hints about how they should help their children at home to become avid readers. It is obvious that once good reading habits are not inculcated at this level of education, it will be extremely difficult at a higher level of education to develop solid reading habits.
4	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers as role models should be afforded the opportunity to attend reading conferences at both national and international levels and should be motivated to be members of the Reading Association of Nigeria so that they can keep abreast of current developments in reading research.
5	School Librarians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School Librarians should form readers' forum where students engaged their leisure time to read inspirational, motivational, biographies and story books. - School Librarians should organise library exhibition at least once a term to create awareness of all kinds of books in the school library and arouse the interest of students.

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