School Libraries as Catalyst for the Development of Reading Culture among Students

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Abstract

The absence of reading culture in the primary and secondary school system has become a source of concern to all stakeholders in the education system. This study therefore used interview method to collect data from undergraduate students of the Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State on reading culture. The study revealed that those students that have visited and used school libraries before have built reading culture that has become part of them. Strategies such as: establishment of school libraries, time management by students, frequent use of libraries, adding library-hours to school timetable and conducive reading corner in homes were proffered as ways to improve reading culture among students.

Keywords: reading culture, school library, students, use of library, library hours

Introduction

School libraries occupy a significant position in discussions on learning and many international studies have asserted the positive role school libraries have exerted on education, linking them directly to the improvement of students' academic performance, also in secondary education. With regards to the purposes of school libraries, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (2003) identified seven roles they perform to include:

- ➢ Leading the teaching and learning of information literacy across the curriculum;
- ➢ Collaborating with teachers to embed information literacy across the curriculum;
- ➢ Providing training for teachers and students;
- ➢ Offering a suitable environment for research;
- ➢ Affording access to a wide range of resources;
- ➢ Facilitating opportunities to browse and discover; and
- ➢ Stimulating independent learning.

In Nigeria, many secondary schools both public and private are established without consideration for including school libraries. Education authorities who know the importance of

school libraries fail to include libraries in the process of planning to establish secondary schools. The library, more than any other place, provides ideal environment and vital information resources for students to develop and sustain good study habits necessary for excellent performance in academic works. Adesoji (2007) posited that libraries have been associated with the concept of life-long reading and learning. He further stated that, school libraries are desirable in order to inculcate into the students very early in life the habit of reading for various purposes such as education, pleasure, information, and culture.

Impact of school libraries on study habit formulation

Studying is the interpretation of reading materials that helps students to assimilate thoughts and knowledge for educational purposes. Students with good study habits have learning tendencies that allow them to work privately where school libraries are available. For students to be successful in their academics, they must cultivate an effective study habits. Study habits are the ways students study on their own. According to Azikiwe (2008), it is the adopted way and manner a student plans his private reading after classroom learning so as to attain mastery of the subject. Ayodele and Adebiyi (2013) also stated that good study habits produces positive academic performance while inefficient study leads to academic failure.

According to Subair (2015), "Students with poor study habits should be encouraged into library use from a young age in order for them to develop appropriate and effective study habits that will go a long way with them to university level" (p. 2). Many students who come into the university continue to display study habits formed earlier in life probably during secondary school days. The study habits developed by some students may also affect their use of the university library. In situations where students do not have effective study habits or fail to make adequate use or non-use of the school library in the secondary school they may find it difficult to use the university library. Many students suffer low grade in schools because of bad study habits. School library is very important in shaping students' habit as regard reading for leisure, to pass examinations and to obtain information on different aspects of life (George, 2011). Students should therefore maximize the use of school libraries to their advantage since school libraries provide favourable environment where the students can discover and develop their abilities and talents as well as improve their reading and study skills.

Baro and Eze (2016) studied 356 students from all over Nigeria admitted into Federal University, Otuoke in the 2015/2016 academic session, to know the availability of school

libraries in secondary schools they graduated from and to know the skills or knowledge students gain from using the school library. The study revealed that out of the 356 respondents, almost half of the respondents (N=151) indicated that they had no school library in their secondary schools. As for those who said their school had a library, were asked the skills/knowledge they gained from using the school library. The majority (188: 91%) of the students see that using the school library has increased their reading habit, and the majority (187: 91.2%) also mentioned that it enabled them make their career choice by reading different books in the library.

Students' library use and academic performance

Students' failure to use the school library and its resources to expand their study habits negatively affect their academic performance. Several studies have shown that there is strong connection between the students' use of school library and their academic performance. Students that use the school library often perform better in test and examination than students who fail to use the school library. For example, the study by Lance (2000) revealed that students in middle school with libraries had higher achievement test scores 18% higher than their counterparts without a library. Similarly, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2010) reported that researchers have demonstrated that school libraries have positive impact on student's achievement. It reported that more than 60 studies have been conducted in 19 U.S. states and one Canadian province. The major findings of these studies as reported in the Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2010) are that students with access to well-supported school library media programme with a qualified school library media specialist scored higher on reading assessments regardless of their socio-economic status. In the same manner, studies on the impact of school libraries in different parts of the world (Lance, et al., 2005; Achterman, 2008) revealed among other things that schools with libraries and trained library personnel, students tend to read more, not exclusively for their school work, but also for general information and for the sake of entertainment in its own right.

It is indisputable fact that a vast number of students have completely lost interest in reading, both in and out of higher institutions. To say that the reading competition and zeal among students is fast declining is simply stating the obvious. Educationists have asked questions on what might have gone wrong, but there seems to be no satisfactory answer to the puzzle. Students are expected to read and keep abreast of what is happening around them, but that obviously does not happen anymore. Different studies have

revealed that 40 per cent of Nigerian adults never finish reading a fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school. And there are other studies which show 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. The school libraries that are meant for reading, have since been converted into browsing centres and copying of notes as only few students are seen reading in the libraries most times.

Methodology

The researchers adopted an interview method to collect data from undergraduate students of the Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State on reading culture. 10 students were randomly selected using convenient sampling technique and a lecturer in the university. The participants were engaged in an interview separately on reading culture. The participants were labeled A, B ,C and so on. Questions such as: How often do you read? Did you use a school library when you were in secondary school? The responses were presented in the study.

Findings and discussion

Developing Reading Culture

Participant D, a 200 level student of Mathematics and Statistics said - "I read my books every day and have made it a daily activity after every lecture. I enjoy studying in the library during my exams and writing my assignments." Participant E - a 100 level student of political science said, reading has been part of him since his primary school days and he doesn't think it can ever leave him. He said the reading habit became part of him through his parents, who ensured that he read one book or the other every day. Participant G - a 200-level Sociology student said he enjoy reading books at all times even those that have nothing to do with his academics especially inspirational books.

A lecturer in the department of Political Science, while reflecting on the attitude of students to reading, said there must be a change in their attitude to reading if the society must make progress. "All they do is check for stuffs online and most of the time not even academic books. The blame falls on the advent of technology. Students read more books in the 90s than now. The problem is the advent of many sources of information as opposed to the past when the

only source of academic was book and was found in the library and nothing more." Participant J – a 100 level student of Microbiology mentioned – reading is like an hobby to me, I read one book or the other everyday." Results from the interview show that majority of the students have made reading part of them. Igwe (2011) opines that reading is most essential as it empowers individuals to participate fully in the modern society. Reading enables individuals to mentally grow and fulfill their potentials while empowering and emancipating their minds (Phillip, 2009).

Use of school library

According to participant C, a 200 level Sociology student of the Federal University Otuoke - "I have never visited the library and I only read book a day to my examinations because school books are boring and are not worth reading over and over again." Participant A – a 100 level student of the department of History & Strategic Studies – "when I was in secondary school, our school had no library, so I have not used a library before."

Participant B – a 200 level student of Biochemistry – "I used the school library frequently when I was there, we had one teacher librarian that was guiding us." Participant F – a 100 level student of English Language and Communication Studies mentioned – Nothing like school library in the school I graduated from, it was here I started visiting the library." Participant I – a 400 level student of Accounting & Finance answered "I never used a school library when I was there because there was nothing like that." Participant J – I visit the library frequently to read when I was in secondary school."

Results from the interview with students revealed that those who have visited school libraries before and use them have built reading culture that has become part of them. For example, participant J, who used school library frequently, has made reading a hobby. This will go a long way to influence the students' academic performance in the higher institution. According to Sisulu (2004) reading heightens the chances of success at school, throughout a lifetime and enhances a high level of literacy needed to excel in examinations and provides skills needed to cope with challenges of the 21st century society.

Strategies to improve reading culture among students.

➤ **Establishment of school libraries**

In every primary and secondary school, school libraries need to be established. This will help to inculcate reading habit among the students for lifelong educational pursuit. This can be implemented by the necessary stakeholders such as the government, education authorities, the principals, the librarian, and teachers. Libraries play a major role in the promotion of literacy by making reading materials available to all thereby optimizing human development through education (Krolak, 2005). In this era of massive failures in examinations and prevailing school drop-out syndrome, the school library is best placed to tackle the menace as it is meant to provide teachers and children with access to suitable materials and resources to augment classroom experiences and enhance learning which in turn will aid the growth and development of the pupils as individuals (Usoro, Usanga, 2007). According to Mizzi (2008) properly funded and sustained school libraries have great potentials to play a central role in improving literacy and reading habits amongst children. They are the training ground for students' academic achievement and are able to make learning interesting, colorful and effective. School libraries give children a broader perspective of concepts more than the postulations of their teachers on various subjects while their absence in schools introduces mediocrity in the education sector.

➤ **Time management by students**

Effective time management is very necessary for formation of reading culture. It is only by organizing and planning your time that students can avoid distraction from other activities. This is where making of time table for studies becomes relevant and important. The study by Osa-Udo and Atulu (2012) also revealed that organizing time helps to minimize worry and indecision that may arise in case of any extra work that has to be slotted into students study time. It is also good to mention that time management and study time table helps the students to allocate adequate time to each task so that no particular task consume more time than necessary (Martirano, 2014). Maryland Association of Community Colleges (2002) in their article on developing effective study habits mentioned that a good study habit consists of different skills such as time management, self-discipline, concentration, memorization, organization, group discussions, effort as well as the desire to succeed. According to Alex (2011), "to study is to buy out the time and dedicate self to the application and task of study, and to become engrossed in a process of learning, practice, enlightenment and education of one's self" (p. 2).

➢ **Frequent use of libraries**

Students in secondary schools should frequently use the school library or public library. This will enable them develop life-long reading culture. Unfortunately, many students at the secondary schools have not visited any library, be it public or their school library. For example, the study by Baro and Eze (2016) asked respondents who had school libraries, how often they use the school library. Out of the 205 secondary schools with libraries, only 10 (4.9%) respondents mentioned using the library once a day, followed by 18 (8.8%) using the library once a week. This shows that students' use of school libraries is still very poor in Nigeria and this need to change.

➢ **Adding library-hours to school timetable**

School principals should do well by adding library-hours to the school time-table. This will go a long way in making students develop life-long reading culture that will help them during school and out of school.

➢ **Conducive reading corner in homes**

Parents should make available a reading corner in their homes for the children to read. This will enable them also develop life-long reading culture. It is an established fact that homes that not are conducive for reading due to noise and lack of reading materials, occasioned by socio-economic factors, affect the development of students' reading culture.

Conclusion

Reading has been identified as a very important skill in lifelong educational development. Therefore, if students at secondary and primary school level are properly guided on how to use a library either public or school library, they will develop good reading culture. The school library is an important part of primary or secondary school system without which students would not succeed academically and find it most difficult to conduct research when they reach higher level. School librarians guide students through their reading and research process as well as helping them to choose books that fit their interests.

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