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Reading Culture and Internet Browsing: A Shift of Paradigm among Nigerian Adolescents?

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the state of adolescents' readiness to project a stable reading culture in a society where the growth of ICT is catching their fancy, A total of 100 respondents, 52 awaiting admission into the university and 48 in their first year in the university, were used. Four hypotheses were tested to confirm the average number of hours the participants devote to browsing on one hand and to reading on the other, identify gender difference in respondents' perception of the time they spend and what they use the time for and if their browsing indeed have any impact on their reading habit. The participants' awareness of the existence of ICT language training programmes was equally tested and whether such have impact on adolescents' attitude to reading or studying. All the four hypotheses were rejected and probable reasons advanced. The thrust of the

recommendation is that it is possible to assist the adolescents to combine their drive for internet browsing with the essential culture of reading.

Introduction

Reading as a skill and a norm is desirable for the youth and for all in a developing nation to foster understanding, increase knowledge and expand horizons of citizens. The World Bank Encyclopaedia, 2001, says reading is basic to learning and one of the most important skills in everyday life. This idea corroborates the opinion of Johnson, 1999, who feels that the level of readership is to a large extent, an index to a country's level of development.

In Nigeria, English is the National language and, so, must be learnt to gain entrance into institutions of higher learning and to fit into the highly competitive secular world after graduation. Like in Scandinavia, as observed by McMillion and Shaw (2009) where the study of most scientific subjects involves reading textbooks and articles and listening to lectures in English, Nigerian undergraduates have to do their assignments in addition to taking virtually all their general courses and specialised studies through the same medium of English language. It is in this vein that we view reading as synonymous to study skills in the language of communication in Nigeria.

Most of the Universities in Nigeria are community based and allow students to either come from home or live with people where the universities are situated. In addition to this, students have to share their time between attending lectures and going to business centres (within and outside the campus) to type and print their assignments before going home to rest where supply of electricity is epileptic. Caught between sharing their time to getting information for their assignments and taking time off the busy schedule to browse for pleasure, adolescents have the usual temptation of diverting more of their time to pleasure than to study.

In previous related studies like that of Agyemang (1998), Ghanaian students, despite the goodwill of the Ministry of Education, have apathy to reading when confronted with the volume of material they are expected to cover. (Anigbogu 2006), identify the following reasons as being responsible for Nigerian undergraduates' negative attitude to reading. According to her, some undergraduate students feel reading is no fun. Some study more during the exam period and for tests while others feel bored reading their texts. It was also discovered that quite a number of undergraduates, about 68% of her

respondents, did not have specific time for reading and others did not have efficient time table.

Undoubtedly, the purpose of ICT, all over the world, is to modernise teaching and equip learners with skills that will enable them to use such technology after their graduation in a way that they will fit effectively into the challenges of the workplace. ICT in its different 'shapes' and 'shades' is also expected to, massively, cut down the workload of teachers and students by making planning and resources available on the internet. Information and learning exchange could then be made easier through electronic form. The advantage of this is that the long time spent on exchange of information manually would thin down. Perhaps the primary goal in promoting the use of ICT in schools has been to increase the effectiveness of teaching and improve pupils' learning. ICT tools could indeed assist students in acquiring language competency as well as enhance the quality of the learning experience (Samuel and Zaitun, 2007).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenge of maintaining a reading culture in the face of the visible effect the emergence of internet browsing is registering on adolescents. It was equally conducted to identify the gaps in ICT Curriculum as it relates to reading and study skills and in the process suggest ways of managing adolescents' drive for ICT exploration to bring best practise into the teaching and learning of Reading and development of Study skills. Additionally it aims at assisting Nigerian adolescents, in the universities and those awaiting admissions, to come to the levels of their colleagues in other parts of the world where ICT is having a strong impact on all language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing and not the other way round. For instance, digital reading materials, called talking books by (Labbo & Kuhn, 2000,) act as scaffolds for the children's developing concepts of print. This occurred in ways similar to traditional adult-child print interactions with the talking book taking the place of the skilled reader.

Hypotheses

Four Null Hypotheses Were Tested

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of students on the time they spend Browsing and the time they spend Reading/Studying.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students on the time they spend browsing and the time they spend reading/studying.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the perception of school certificate graduates (awaiting admission) and their counterparts in the university on the effect of long/short browsing time on their attitude to reading

Ho4: There is no significant effect of internet browsing and familiarity with ICT programmes that facilitate development of language skills on adolescents' attitude to reading

Research Methods

Sampling technique & Procedure for data collection

A total of one hundred (100) subjects were used for this study. 48 were purposefully selected university undergraduates studying English, in their first year and 52 school certificate graduates awaiting admission into the university, also to study English. The latter group was selected as captive audience at the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) office, Abuja. The undergraduate students (all of whom are from University of Lagos) had completed their *Harmattan* Semester and had just resumed for *Rain*. All the fifty two ambitious applicants who hope to find a place either for foundation or preliminary programmes in the universities of their choices in Nigeria were enthusiastic to talk with me and my research assistants and were willing to fill my questionnaires. They voluntarily released their UME forms for inspection, confirming their choice of English as a proposed course of study. UME is the qualifying entrance examination into Nigerian universities. The same questionnaire was designed for all respondents who were briefed to fill only the portions relevant to them. In Part A, respondents were expected to supply information on basic questions like: gender, age, qualification, future career and area of study (if student) or what you are doing presently (if seeking admission). The Part B of the form sought to elicit information on issues like: *The number of hours I spend for browsing per day is...: The number of hours I spend reading per day is..., The number of hours I spend for browsing per week is...: The number of hours I spend reading per week is..., (alternatives like(a) Between 4 and 28 hours (b) Between 28 and 42 hours (c)Above 42 hours (d)Less than 4 hours (e) Not really sure but certainly not up to 1 day in the week, were available for respondents to tick their choices.), I am familiar with one or more of the following computer/internet programmes: audio dictionary, sentence*

generator, spells checker, audio books, e-exercises test programmes and passage analyzer. The purpose of the structured questions is to find a link between the time respondents spend on browsing and their 'occupation' while their browsing lasts.

Other variables tested were: *I prefer reading to browsing, I must be sincere; I used to read much but now I browse more. I browse only when I have assignment that demands that I seek information from the internet, I don't have enough motivation in my previous school to read, We have no computers in our school, The library periods on the school time table are optional, Our computer periods are unguided. We don't have a standard library in our school etc., The responses were rated in the 5-point Likert scale with the highest mark of (5) going for Strongly Agree (SA) for all positive statements and the lowest (1) for Strongly Disagree (also for all positive statements). 'Agree' attracts 4, 'Not sure attracts' (3) and Disagree (2). The assessment is turned round if the statement is negative with the highest mark of '5' awarded to Strongly Disagree (SD) and (1) for Strongly agree*

A little orientation was conducted prior to filling the questionnaires on the need for objective response and assurance of confidentiality. Questionnaires were collected back the same day from the two categories of respondents though there was a gap of two weeks between the periods used to administer the questionnaires in University of Lagos and in the JAMB office, Abuja.

Data Analysis

Ho1: *There is no significant difference in the perception of students on the time they spend Browsing and the time they spend Reading/Studying.*

Table 1: Relationship in the perception of students on their browsing and reading time

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	r	sig
Time spend on Browsing	100	5.16	2.81	-0.112	0.27
Time spend on Reading	100	36.32	12.29		

Ho2: *There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students on the time they spend browsing and the time they spend reading/studying.*

Table 2: Perception of male and female students on their browsing and reading/studying time

Gender	N	Mean	Sd	Df	t	sig
Male	56	36.43	13.46	98	0.099	0.92
Female	44	36.18	10.76			

Ho3: *There is no significant difference in the perception of school certificate graduates (awaiting admission) and their counterparts in the university on the effect of long/short browsing time on their attitude to reading*

Table 3: Perception of school certificate graduates and their university undergraduate counterparts on the effect of long/short browsing time on their attitude to reading

Qualification/Level of study	N	Mean	Sd	Df	t	sig
Undergraduate students	48	37.08	13.68	98	0.595	0.55
School Certificate graduates	52	35.62	10.93			

Ho4: *There is no significant effect of internet browsing and familiarity with IT programmes that facilitate development of language skills and adolescents' attitude to reading*

Table 4: Effect of internet browsing and familiarity with IT programmes that facilitate development of language skills and adolescents’ attitude to reading

Sources of Variation	N	Mean	Sd	Df	t cal	t crit.	sig
Browsing adolescents familiar with IT language programmes and attitude to reading	27	46.40	4.70	68	7.21	2.0	.05
Browsing adolescents not familiar with IT language programmes and attitude to reading	43	40.20	3.20				

***Only 90 out of the 100 respondents made data available for this hypothesis**

Results and Discussion

The first table shows an r-value (-0.112) which is not significant at 0.05, ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, there is no significant difference on the perception of students on the time they spend browsing and the time they spend reading/studying.

This hypothesis is not rejected probably because most of the respondents feel that they browse only when they have assignment that demands that they seek information from the internet. A few respondents also claimed they browse when they have done enough reading for the day just as others feel they have computers in their school and periods on the school time table to go to computer room. Studies have shown that little or no direct reading instruction is given in schools (Spiegel, 1980, Poindexter & Prescott, 1986,

Hartman & Nelson, 1989 and Udosen, 2004) and in Nigeria schools, reading has no recognisable position. At best it is incorporated in the language curriculum. In the case of ICT however, most schools advise students to visit internet cafe to learn the use of computers in addition to going to computer rooms to spend their free periods in addition to enforcing the use of computer periods in the computer rooms with or without teachers or supervisors.

Table 2 presents to us a t-value of (0.099) which is not significant at 0.05, ($p > 0.05$). This means that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students on the time they spend on browsing and the time they spend on reading/studying. Though no significant difference, the mean values 36.43 for male students and 36.18 for female indicate that the male students have a slightly 'higher' perception than the female.

This hypothesis is tested to establish possible gender difference on adolescents browsing time compared to their reading time. It is not uncommon in research to either uphold or debunk the claim that female students have interest in reading more than the males. In a study on sex differences in the reading habit of senior secondary school students, (Oladunjoye, 2006), it was found that there was no significant difference in the reading habit of male and female students. But, Ross, J. W., Beath, C. M., and Goodhue, D. L. (1996), reporting on Sex or Gender difference on electronic mail discussion favoured male while females have been shown to score higher than males in Japanese language class in a research conducted by (Oxford, 1990).

Table 3 shows a t-value (0.595) which is not significant at 0.05, ($p > 0.05$). This means that there is no significant difference in the perception of undergraduate students and that of School Certificate graduates. Though no significant difference, the mean values 37.08 for university undergraduates and 35.62 for school certificate graduates awaiting admission into the university, indicate that the university undergraduates have a slightly 'higher' perception than their colleagues seeking admission.

Hypothesis 3 was generated to test what students do in their 'waiting' time (awaiting admission) and what they do in the first year of their admission into the university. This is against the backdrop of the fact that they have so many options to choose from. They could devote their new liberty to unlimited internet browsing, socialise or go partying, pick up new novels to read and gain new vocabulary, travel (those awaiting admission) or simply develop a hobby to pass time. The researcher intended to confirm the possibility of

divergence in the opinions of the two categories of respondents related by academic need (seeking first degree in English) and psycho-social status (adolescence) but different in levels and qualification. The mean difference in their perception rated the undergraduates higher probably because having spent a semester in the university; it was beginning to dawn on them that they need to create more time to serious academic work.

On Table 4 we have a t-value (7.21) which is not significant at 0.05, ($p > 0.05$) being greater than t-critical (2.0). This means that there is no significant effect of internet browsing and familiarity with ICT language development programmes on the attitude of those familiar with the programmes and those who are not. Though no significant difference, the mean values 46.40 for browsing adolescents with ICT language programmes awareness as against 40.20. of Browsing adolescents with non familiarity with ICT language programmes indicate that Browsing adolescents with ICT language programmes awareness have a slightly 'higher' advantage than their colleagues who are ignorant of the existence of these programmes and could change their attitude to reading at a sooner than later date.

It is established through this hypothesis that though the respondents devote so much time to internet browsing, little is known about what they actually do in relation to their academic work. The ideal thing would perhaps have been that they search for internet programmes that could aid their learning and lay a foundation for their university programme. I think the problem here is lack of awareness. Students need to know that reading is fun and a lot of internet language programmes are available to help them build a strong reading habit. Through a research done by Lewis, (1988), in America, she found that most students felt internet web programmes would improve their reading skills because the story is read aloud, 'it shows the words and you can read along with it' and 'you can click on a word and it will say it'

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study evolved from the hunch to identify adolescents' attitude to reading with reference to their involvement in internet browsing such that teachers, counsellors, parents student affairs personnel, and indeed, all stakeholders will, among other things:

- (a) Determine the centre of interest of the Nigerian youth while busy with ICT facilities.

- (b) Confirm if indeed there is a shift of paradigm among Nigerian adolescents with reference to reading or studying; attempting to answer the question ‘who is interested in reading?’
- (c) Attempt to evaluate the time they spend browsing and the benefits such a time provide them.
- (d) Prove their awareness of computer/internet language programmes and software that could improve their reading and study skills.

The study has confirmed the admission by the participants to spend much time on browsing while agreeing partially; however, that such time spinning endeavours ever had anything to do with their attitude to reading. The possible explanation to this is that, in this part of the world, internet browsing being pretty new is more of attraction and exploration to the young people than for exploitation of the benefits it carries. The priorities of the adolescents at their foundation or preliminary levels is to embrace the euphoria of their admission into the university with exchanging pleasantries among friends and folks on face books, interact on yahoo messengers and make endless email contacts that lead to nowhere particularly with less attention to studying and research.

To this end, this researcher recommends that:

- (a) A planned supervisory programme is mounted to assist them on proper use of time to affect a balance between social and academic life.
- (b) A general study course is made available in our community ICT centres where experts could attend to the youth awaiting admission. Such a course should be based on correct exploration of relevant internet language facilities that could restore the culture of reading.
- (c) The National University Commission (NUC) should set in motion the process of accrediting existing Nigerian university libraries to ensure the availability of both digital and non digital sections and recommend that librarians be equipped with facilities that will make them qualified to supervise library users. For example they should be trained to monitor balancing in the use of time between manual book selection/ study and digital/e – learning surveying.
- (d) Back to reading campaigns could be organised in schools, colleges and community centres to establish a foundation for future university intakes.

- (e) Without delay, the Federal government should make one or two national newspapers free for Nigerians like it is done in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world for pick in public places.
- (f) Public internet browsing centres should be advised to print out, regularly, reading materials that will attract the adolescents and distribute freely to their customers as gifts for patronising them. They could organise occasional contests that will award best reader prizes. I call this ‘operation take reading targets to them where they are browsing.’

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