

**ANALYSIS OF READING HABITS OF PUPILS IN PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN OWERRI,
NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

Reading skills are among the competencies that promote gainful use of time, facilitate knowledge acquisition and buttress information dissemination. The importance attached to early development of reading habits necessitated this investigation while identification as exhibited by pupils in their reading exercises provided the major thrusts. The subjects were made up of 400 pupils drawn from selected public and private primary schools in Owerri, Nigeria. Relevant data were obtained through a customized "Quesitonnire for Reading Habits in Primary School Pupils" (QRHPSP). Findings showed that whereas respondents read for differnt reasons, there was a marked difference in the reading habits of children in public and private schools. Private School pupils had more access to reading materials, and thus, exhibited a better attitude to reading . Furher results showed that the subjects of this study paid scant attention to Igbo Language and Mathematics, which is not a healthy

development. Scarcity of reading materials and retrieval difficulties in libraries were among the factors that affect reading by many respondents. Recommendations were made to assist children imbibe good reading habits, and ultimately, remedy lapses which this study has brought to the fore.

Introduction

Reading connotes the ability to decipher the meaning of written or printed words. It is the process of making sense out of coded message or information buried in a chain of words put down by writers or authors. The state of literacy of an individual is, often, measured by the ability to read and write. This is because, reading skills are not inborn, father, they are competencies which a person acquired after a period of rigorous training within and outside formal school system.

Reading is one of the method through which information, knowlege, experience and learning are acquired. The importance of reading as a method of gaining knowledge becomes more easily appreciated when it is realized that the deaf and dumb rely, largely, on reading and sign language for their information. In addition to insufficient lesson periods and perhaps, the teachers' inability to effectively transfer knowledge to the students and puplils, differences in the rate of understanding between learners make reading one of the easiest methods of information- gathering.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the book, and its reading,are vital components of successful learning. Since the book is variously, an important media of information dissemination, backbone of national development, and principal element in the educational process (Okwilagwe, 2001), its reading deserve periodic examination in national priorities. This is particularly true of children who are acknowledged as the future leaders. Hasan (1981) opined that no advanced country can function and no developing nation can advance significantly wihtout making abundant use of ideas, information, and knowledge stored in books. In another

contribution, Wilson (1995) explained that books and other reading materials play an important role in preserving the ideas, thoughts and histories of civilizations.

Since these records are handed down from generation to generation, books and allied textual matters have become the most paramount of all the mass media. However, despite the therapeutic and other values of books and reading, Olanlokun (2000) in his study of reading environment in Nigerian society, concluded that Nigerian children are not sufficiently encouraged to read books at home and in the school. In addition to testing the veracity of Olanlokun's (2000) report in a circumscribed part of the country, the present localized study examines specific behavioural traits exhibited by primary school pupils in Owerri municipality located in south-eastern Nigeria in their reading exercises. Due to the multiplicity of primary schools in the areas of study, an equal number of public and privately-owned primary schools were selected to make for credible and balanced research report. (See Appendix for list of primary schools covered in this survey).

Objectives of the Study

This study analyzed aspects of reading habits of selected children drawn from public and private primary schools in Owerri, Imo State of Nigeria. The specific areas examined were:

1. to identify frequency and purpose of reading.
2. to identify the types of materials read.
3. to identify the time spent on reading exercises.
4. to identify subjects which the pupils prefer to read.
5. to identify factors affecting reading by pupils.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This empirical study draws its theoretical underpinning from two sources; viz: Bacos' time-honoured dictum that "reading maketh a full man" and Usoro's (2006) recent assertion that "...reading is life and life is full of reading". This is on the

backcloth that reading facilitates educo-information quest. Since learning is truly lifelong, it goes without saying that age does not constitute any barrier to reading, for whatever purpose, as long as the requisite skills, motivation and good sight, exist. This underscores Davies' (1997) opinion, as recorded by Uwa (2007), that a good reading habit is a prerequisite to successful accomplishment in practically all areas of life. Besides, Fetuga and James (1980) while quoting Durkin (1966), affirmed that "there is a positive and lasting benefit for children who read early". Considering that children are tomorrow's successors, it becomes necessary to examine specific traits manifested by these vital members of the society in their reading undertakings.

Several studies have been conducted on reading in various parts of the world by researchers in different disciplines. Bond (1989) is of the view that effective reading entails acquisition of meaning intended by the writer as the reader interprets, evaluates and reflects on the effectiveness and the import of what is read in books and other textual materials. However, Wallen(2001) summarized the meaning of reading with an explanation that it involves looking at signs and symbols on printed matter in book and non-book forms, with the aim of understanding what is written.

Unoh (1990) opined that good reading habits have real roles to play in all-round development of individuals and communities, while Carter (1986) hinted that children can only acquire good reading habits and grow into voluntary adult readers if books and libraries are introduced to them at a younger age when cognitive skills are still being developed. In another study, George(1982) identified four types of reading as: skimming, scanning, reading for pleasure and critical reading:

Scholars have categorized readers according to some of the mannerisms they exhibit in libraries. George (1982) wrote about an assortment of difficult readers whose activities create problems for both library staff and materials, in addition to

the normal readers that are free from any negative spell or complex. Katz (1989) identified a group of reader known as “callers” who appear personally in libraries with the expectation that the whole tracing would be done for them by library staff. Ranganathan (1992) added the following typologies of library user’s reading habits: the meek readers, the inferiority-complex readers, the superiority-complex readers, the book thieves and selfish readers.

There is no doubt that appraisal and acquisition of reading materials for children are complicated undertakings. This is because, according to Usoro (1996), “...not all books published are satisfactory. Some are dull, some may be attractive in appearance, but lack suitable content, style or vocabulary control”. Whipple (1997) was quoted to have advised that thoughtful appraisal and choice of books are necessary if the books selected are to serve the intended purposes. (Usoro, 2006). Colwell (1992) presented the probability that a learner would be more alert when he read materials that appeal to him and consequently, would score higher when tested on such subjects. This logically raises the issue of taste and / or interest. Writing on taste, Harns (1988) reported that a pupil’s interest largely determines the area of field in which he tends to concentrate his reading activities, adding that the quality of what is chosen for reading determined the level of taste.

Several writers have harped on the benefits of good reading habits. Nweke (1990), in a survey of reading promotion campaign, in Nigeria, submitted that academic brilliance, achievement and sundry successes could be attained through proficiency in reading. In another report, Ekanem (1994) revealed that good reading culture imbibed by children is normally taken beyond schools years in skillful, voluntary and spontaneous reading. Scogin (2007) noted the value of books in enhancing the quality of life and management of psychological disorders, particularly depression.

These benefit of good reading habits depend, largely, on the types and content of materials read. Lee and Rubin (1979)

therefore, reminds us that proponents of reading have directed attention to the potential impact which the types of materials given to a child might have on reading ability and development. Conversely, effective reading is generally constrained by certain factors. Okoro and Azubogu (2007) emphasized that books must be treasured for reading to be effective. In their opinion, “it may not be possible to cultivate good reading habit if one is not love with books”. Elaturoti (1990) opined that inadequacy of both reading spaces and materials have adverse effect on the reading habits of students. Whittaker (1992) stressed that inability of the eyes and mind to transfer and examine characters and information limit effective reading, lead to poor culture. The content of a reading material, can also discourage the cultivation of good reading habits. This position has been canvassed by several authorities, including, Klemens (1993) who noted that novels with handicapped characters are loathsome to children who view the word “handicap” in a narrow sense and reject anything to which it is connected.

The foregoing extensive literature review, rather than diminish the present study, provides further justification for the exercise. In addition to providing a template for assessing the applicability of some of these viewpoints, this report highlight gaps in literature and represents a valid document on the current reading habits of selected primary school pupils in the geographical area surveyed

Methodology

This questionnaire-based survey lasted for five months (September , 2007 to January, 2008.) Respondents were children whose ages range between 10 and 12 years in primary classes five and six. This was to ensure that only pupils who could understand and complete the research instrument participate in the study. Close observation and, sometimes, collaboration with class teachers ensured category of pupils was selected.

A self-constructed “Questionnaire for Reading Habits of

Primary School Pupils” (QRHPSP). was used to gather core data after validation and pre-test with few school children at Federal Polytechnic Saff School, Nnekede-Owerri. Due to the sensitive nature of the subjects of this study, there was repeated revision of the research instrument which left the authors with a twelve-item, dual-section structured data-form that reflected the primary objectives which the researchers sought to achieve. Respondents from twenty primary schools took part in this study and the selection was such that 10 respondents each were chosen from both public and privately owned schools in the area of coverage. With the help of selected officials in each participating school, 10 pupils were identified from primary five and another 10 from primary six. This means that a total of 400 pupils from 20 schools formed the sample population.

Because of the tender ages and other peculiarities of the respondents, the administration of the questionnaire presented challenges which were overcome after series of trials. The entire exercise, particularly questions and accompanying options, were careful combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to pupils who were allowed a period of 30 minutes to complete and return the questionnaire. There is direct involvement of the researchers in distribution of the questionnaire. These meticulous procedures adopted in the administration, completion and collection of the instrument ensured a hundred per cent (100%) return rate. Frequency tables numbered I-VIII were used in data analysis upon which discussion were based.

Research Findings and Discussion

Respondents from all the selected schools made useful contributions. There was an equal male and female pupils from primary classes five and six. The entire study population had been involved in one form of reading or the other, either at home or in school. There was greater participation in reading

by children in private primary schools. This might not be unconnected with the fact that 90% of the pupils have highly educated parentage. Also, 61% of the pupils, mostly from private schools, revealed that a specific period is set aside for reading and assignments at home. the aspiration of majority of the respondents to gain admission into elite secondary school obviously affected their reading habits. The frequencies of reading by the children are analyzed in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Frequency of Reading (N = 400)

| Frequency | Public Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| Daily | 69 | 101 | 170 | 42.5% |
| Every other day | 34 | 76 | 110 | 27.5% |
| Weekly | 47 | 14 | 61 | 15.35% |
| Biweekly | 32 | 09 | 41 | 10.35% |
| Intermediate | 18 | - | 18 | 4.5% |
| Total | 200 | 200 | 400 | 100% |

Table 1 shows clearly that majority of the pupils that participated in this survey 42.5% were involved in daily reading while 27.5% read “every other day” a closer look at the table under reference reveals that most of those regular readers are pupils of private primary schools. The picture presented here is that there is more serious reading in these private schools and higher standard of education which necessitated the frequent reading sessions by puppils in these schools in order to measure up to the required academic standard. Those respondents (18 or 4.5%) who could not determine the frequent reading sessions be classified as serious and regular readers. The fact that all the respondents in this category were affiliated to public primary schools further buttresses the author’s position that there is less emphasis on reading by children in government-owned primary school.

Table 2: Time Spent on Each Reading Session (N = 400)

| Frequency | Public Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| 2hours and above | 44 | 84 | 128 | 32% |
| 1 hour, 30 mins | 56 | 63 | 118 | 29.5% |
| 1 hour | 49 | 41 | 90 | 22.5% |
| 30 minutes | 51 | 13 | 64 | 16% |
| Total | 200 | 200 | 400 | 100% |

Different lengths of time are committed to reading depending mainly on the purpose of reading and availability of time. The result analyzed in table 2 shows that as much as 246 (61.5%) of the pupils exceeded 1 hour 30 minutes in each of their reading sessions. Slightly more than 29% of this number read for 1 hour 30 minutes while 32% exceeded 2 hours. It can also be noticed that comparatively, few respondents read for shorter period as only 16% of the participating pupils read for 30 minutes on each occasion. This means that most primary school children still have ample time for reading despite the ubiquitous presence of toys, television, video home services (VHS), video compact disk (VCD), radio, digital video disk (VVD), and other electronic gadgets, which obviously compete with books for the attention of children at home and in schools. Whereas it is advisable to expose children to good books, the length of time they are allowed to spend on each reading session should be closely monitored to achieve the desired result. This is against Chall's (1991) caution that "children are characteristically restless and thus tend to concentrate for a short time on any given activity"

Table 3: Types of Reading

| Types | Public Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| Serious reading | 131 | 98 | 229 | 57.3% |
| Pleasurable reading | 51 | 46 | 115 | 28.8% |
| Scanning/ browsing pages | 18 | 38 | 56 | 14% |
| Total | 200 | 200 | 400 | 100% |

The types of reading done by respondents is presented in Table 3. It shows that 57.3% of the pupils always read for serious or specific purposes while 28.8% undertook leisurely or recreational reading. The least number of the participating pupils merely browsed or flipped through pages of reading materials. Besides educational and therapeutic value reading has positive social effects on children because it helps to keep them gainfully occupied. Again, recreational or pleasurable reading is done by people with highly developed reading habits. It can therefore be concluded that a good number of the participating primary school pupils have good reading habits. This is particularly true of children in private schools since more of them did pleasurable reading.

Table 4: Rationale for Reading by Respondents (N = 400)

| Reason/Purpose | Pub. Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|------------|
| To pass examination | 168 | 128 | 296 | 74% |
| For general Knowledge | 114 | 156 | 270 | 67.5% |
| As a hobby | 121 | 144 | 265 | 66.3% |
| To do class assignment | 117 | 132 | 249 | 62.3% |

In table 4, more than half of the respondents (74%) read to pass various examinations while another 62.3% channeled

their reading towards solving class assignment given by teachers. This result buttresses earlier research reports, including Nwokocha's (1993), that most Nigerians read essentially to achieve narrower academic purpose of passing examinations. However, when the distribution of respondents between public and private primary schools is further examined, it becomes clearer that an over-whelming number of children in government-owned schools merely to read to pass examinations. While most pupils from the participating private schools also read for examination purposes, they manifested better reading habits as a good number of them undertook reading for both recreational and knowledge purposes.

Table 5: Ranked List of Materials Read (N = 400)

| Reading Materials | Pub. Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|------------|
| Recommended text | 147 | 173 | 320 | 80% |
| Novel | 83 | 161 | 224 | 61% |
| Class notebooks/ jotter | 132 | 91 | 223 | 55.8% |
| Newspapers/ magazine | 71 | 122 | 193 | 48.3% |

Table 5 showed the distribution of materials read by the subjects of this study. It is obvious that the most-read documents are various recommended textbooks with 80% response rate. This should not be surprising considering that many of these pupils read for purely examination purposes as shown earlier in table 4. Novels and newspaper/magazine were used by 61% and 48.3% of the children, respectively. While this is indicated of healthy reading habits amongst these children since novel and newspapers are largely recreation, it should be noted that majority were from private schools. More than 55% of the respondents read their class notebooks and jotters, with a good number of these pupils affiliated to public schools. If the socio-economic background of these

children is anything to go by, the impression is created that children in private schools (who are mostly from upper and middle class families) that can afford the exorbitant charges have more access to recommended textbooks than their counterparts in public schools that rely more on class notebooks due to absence of textbooks and other reading materials. Lastly, the large number of pupils in private schools who read novels, newspapers and magazines also indicates that there are more voluntary readers from that groups.

Table 6: Reading Location (N = 400)

| Reading Materials | Pub. Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|------------|
| Home | 87 | 173 | 260 | 65% |
| Class rooms | 127 | 112 | 239 | 59.8% |
| School Libraries | 54 | 151 | 205 | 51.3% |
| Other libraries | 21 | 83 | 104 | 26% |

Majority (65%) of the respondents read at home. It would be noticed that few of them were from the public schools. This might be as a result of the fact that most of the children in public schools have poor and not very-educated parents who can neither afford their children's textbooks (and other reading materials) nor provide the kind of home environment that encourages reading. It is therefore not surprising that most of these children in public schools read in their class rooms. On the other hand, majority of the children in private schools read at home which suggested that the environment and facilities that encourage reading as well as the motivation, exist in their homes. Table 6 also show that an overwhelming number of the pupils who read in school libraries were in private schools while fewer pupils in public schools read in the school library. This can be understood against the backdrop that almost all the private schools that took part in this survey have libraries /learning resource centre whereas this facility was non-existent in the public schools, except those affiliate

to tertiary institutions. Children, therefore, tend to read more in places with reading materials and favourable environment. More children from private schools read at home which signifies that the relative comfort they enjoy at home coupled with availability of electronic gadgets do not interfere with their reading when they return from schools.

Table 7: Distribution of School subjects Read by Pupils (N = 400)

| Subjects | Pub. Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|------------|
| English Language | 136 | 162 | 298 | 74.5% |
| Social Studies | 146 | 101 | 257 | 64.3% |
| Primary Science | 98 | 151 | 249 | 62.3% |
| Home Economics | 123 | 112 | 235 | 58.8% |
| Agricultural Science | 104 | 127 | 231 | 57.8% |

Table 8 showed the five subjects read by respondents of this study. English Language attracted the highest readership followed by social studies, while agricultural science attracted least number of pupils. Whereas the factor responsible for the choice of subjects read by pupils was not covered in this report, it can not be denied that English language-related materials are more commonly available. Beside, most schools subjects are written in English language. This might account for the large number of respondents who read the subject. Also, a large number of pupils in public schools are interested in social studies. One of the references to be drawn from this result is: considering that public schools system in the country is increasingly becoming the preserve of children whose poor parents cannot afford the high charges at private schools where there are learning facilities and higher academic standards, these children from poor homes spend more time reading to understand, and perhaps, wriggle out of their deprived

condition. However, it is both instructive and worrisome that Igbo language and Mathematics will also affect the future development of scientific and technological competences because the subject is the foundation of all sciences.

Table 8: Challenges to reading (N = 400)

| Subject | Pub. Pry School | Private Pry School | Total | Percentage |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|-------|------------|
| Scarcity of interesting reading materials | 158 | 101 | 259 | 64.8% |
| Inconvenient home environment | 151 | 82 | 233 | 58.3% |
| Retrieval difficulties | 52 | 142 | 194 | 48.5% |
| Noise and distracting from electric gadgets | 73 | 104 | 177 | 44.3% |
| Lack of time to read | 114 | 35 | 149 | 37.3% |

This study reveals that the involvement of pupils in reading was not without challenges. The five major inhibiting factors are presented in table 8. Scarcity of reading materials and inconvenient home environment were the main discouragements to reading with 64.8% and 58.3%, respectively. In both instance, more children from the public schools were affected. This means that many of those children do not have access to interesting reading materials in school and home. The distribution of pupils who experienced retrieval difficulties in libraries is also telling. Whereas this finding supports the earlier claim in table 6 that most public primary schools do not have schol libraries. The representation in table 8 indicates that location and retrieval of book and other reading materials in libraries in the private schools are fraught with diverse problems.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Most primary school children that took part in this survey read regularly. The frequent reading sessions were prompted by the desire to pass examinations and gain knowledge. However, while many pupils in private schools read at home, and in school libraries, findings show a majority of their counterparts in public schools do their reading in classrooms. Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that children in private primary schools display better reading habits than their colleagues in public schools. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that, in addition to their reading not dominated by the desire to merely pass examinations, majority of children in private schools have greater access to recommended texts, novel, newspapers and other reading materials. This study also showed that Igbo language and Mathematics are not among the five major Subjects read by most primary school pupils selected for this study.

The following recommendations will, not only imbibe positive reading habits in children, but help to improve the quality of education in the country's primary schools:

Children learn a lot from and are influenced by the society in which they live. There is an urgent need to revive the wanning reading culture observed in pupils in public schools. This decline in reading, which naturally affects scholarship, knowledge acquisition, has been aptly attributed to "... too much indifference of value re-orientation and proper prioritization for children and young adults, which should not be stressed too strongly.

Developmental psychologists are of the view that children introduced to books early in life develop better reading habits and other cognitive skills. It is therefore necessary to expose Nigerian children to good books and libraries at the earlier stages of educational development. This recommendation is not novel as Carter (1986) opined, more than two decades ago, that the younger the children, the greater their likelihood of being voluntary readers. Therefore, to keep children gainfully

occupied and guard against likely manifestation of negative reading habits, there is need to introduce them to books and libraries, which can sustain the interest of these children in reading during later stages of life.

Deliberate steps should be taken to remove or minimize those factors that affect reading which were identified in table 8. This calls for adequate provision of reading materials at homes and in schools. Efforts should be made by relevant authorities to ensure that books provided in school libraries are processed and properly arranged to make for easy access and retrieval by children. Setting specific periods, in primary school time-table, for reading will also go a long way in helping to develop and sustain reading habit in pupils. Additionally, parents should ensure that their children and wards devote part of their time to reading at home.

The fact that Igbo language and Mathematics were not among the five major subjects read by primary school pupils points at a clear decline of interest in those subjects. The authors, therefore, recommend that deliberate steps should be taken to reverse this trend. This will help to save Nigerian languages from irrelevance and extinction. Mathematics remains the foundation of scientific progress. Its study, and subsequent reading, should achieve the sorely needed scientific and technological capabilities.

There is also need for government owned primary schools to make provision for school libraries which is one of the learning facilities recommended in the National Policies on Education (1977, 1981, 1997). Unavailability of this facility in most of the public primary schools covered in the study show lip service to the implementation of policy. Governments should, therefore, provide school libraries stocked with relevant reading materials. This will help in no small way to encourage children to read and acquire knowledge, especially, in this era of emphasis in learner-centred education.

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APPENDIX:

Institutional Affiliaton of Respondents.

Government - Owned Primary Schools.

1. Demonstration Primary School, Shell Camp, Owerri.
2. Development Primary School, Owerri.
3. Estate Primary School, Trans-Egbu, Owerri.
4. FSP Primary School, Owerri.
5. Housing estate Primary school, Aladimma, Owerri .
6. Ikenegbu Layout Primary School, Owerri.
7. IMSU Staff School, Owerri.
8. Model Primary School, World Bank Estate, Owerri.
9. Orlu Road Primary School, Amakohia, Owerri.
10. Uzii Layout Primary School 1, Owerri.

Private-Owned Primary Schools

1. Claret Academy Primary School, World Bank Estate, Owerri.
2. Dora Amako Montessori Primary School, Owerri.
3. Excell Nursery and Primary School, Owerri.
4. Golden Child Nursery and Primary School, Owerri.
5. Kingdom Heritage Nursery and Primary School, Owerri.
6. Living World Academy Primary School, Owerri.
7. Nice Children School, World Bank Estate, Owerri.
8. St. Mulumba's Primary School, Owerri.
9. Start-right Primary School, Aladinmma, Owerri.
10. Wesley Nursery and Primary School, Owerri.