

Trends in Aliteracy Among Secondary School Students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria

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Abstract

There had been a lot of concern among stakeholders about declining of reading culture among secondary school students in Nigeria. Secondary school students demonstrate different dispositions towards reading, while some are favourably disposed to reading and enjoy it, others do not have interest in reading. Aliteracy describes the lack of interest in reading. This study examined the trends in aliteracy and the implication of gender as well as parental involvement on aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria. Focus Group Discussion was used to elicit responses from the 25 participants who were identified as aliterates. Content analysis was used to analyse the response of the participants to self-designed questions on aliteracy among the secondary school students. All the participants affirmed that they were aliterates, thus confirming the prevalence of aliteracy among the secondary school students. Findings showed that gender played no significant role in the choice made by the participants to be aliterates. The participants also affirmed that aliteracy could have been contained if their parents had been involved in helping them to develop the love of reading while they were younger. The study recommended identification of aliterates by teachers just as parents were encouraged to support their children in developing reading attitude and behaviour, establishment of functional and well-equipped school libraries with wide range of reading materials and properly staffed by qualified librarians to curb aliteracy among secondary school students.

Keywords: *Aliteracy, Gender, Nigeria, Parental involvement, Reading, Secondary school students, Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria*

Introduction

Reading has always been an important means of acquiring education by different categories of students and an intellectual engagement that requires the willingness and interest of the reader. In order for meaningful reading to take place, the reader must be interested and willing to engage in reading. Unfortunately, as important as reading is to the successful accomplishment of educational goals, it has not been accorded the seriousness it deserves by secondary school students in Nigeria (Akande and Oyedapo, 2018). Despite having the ability to read, some students in Nigerian secondary schools do not show enthusiasm towards reading as they ought to.

Aliteracy is the term used to describe the lack of interest in reading shown by capable readers. It is what happens when individuals who have ability to read are not willing and interested in doing so (Well, 2012). There are basically two forms of aliteracy as observed in the literature which are functional and conditional aliteracies. Functional aliteracy occurs when an individual has poor reading skills and a negative attitude towards reading while conditional aliteracy occurs when an individual is made an aliterate by certain conditions (Sweeney, 2003). Aliteracy is expressed by the reading attitude and the reading behaviour of the affected students. Reading attitude refers to the feeling a student has about reading which could be positive or negative thus determining the acceptance or evasion of reading. Aliterates have negative feelings and as such negative attitude towards reading, the feeling that reading is burdensome, tiresome, time consuming, neither profitable nor rewarding. Thus, they prefer to engage in some other rewarding and profitable ventures other than reading. Moreover, aliterates have the feelings that reading is neither an acceptable nor a popular exercise especially among their peers and that the world cannot be

experienced through reading alone hence reading is considered an irrelevant activity which is not worth their time or effort.

Reading behaviour on the other hand, refers to all the actions a reader put up while reading which has to do with the skills, likes and dislikes possessed by the reader. Most time aliterates demonstrate negative behaviour towards reading which is depicted by faking the act of reading when it is demanded of them, finding fault in all genres of books and authors, avoiding reading with any flimsy excuse, not being excited by any kind of reading and having a feeling of discomfort when reading is required (Stearns, 2015).

Apart from reading attitude and reading behaviour, aliteracy is depicted by the intensity of motivation to read, types of text read, importance attached to reading and reading skills of the affected students. Motivation refers to the internal and external factors which could arouse the desire to be continually committed to a course; it is the readiness to wield effort towards the realisation of a goal. Motivation could be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual is motivated by internal factors to perform a certain behaviour while extrinsic motivation occurs when an individual is motivated by external factors to perform a certain behaviour (Lai, 2011). Unfortunately, aliterates are barely motivated either by internal or external factors to read, they exhibit low intensity of motivation to read any genre of books because they attach little or no value to reading.

The types of text read by aliterates are usually short, catchy texts of their interest; they are usually put off by long texts and assigned reading materials. They do not attach much importance to reading and this is observed in the time spent on reading compared with the time they spend on other engagement of lesser value than reading hence they can be seen dedicating much time to sports, social activities, watching television and playing games at the expense of reading. Aliterates also possess poor reading skills because young people tend to do better at what they have interest in and perform poorly in what they detest. Similarly, aliterates struggle with reading due to the declined interest they have in it. They struggle with the comprehension of the facts presented in books and other reading materials and as such the assimilation of fact and ideas presented in the books becomes a daunting task

In Nigeria, secondary school education is the intermediary level between the primary and the tertiary institutions of learning and the foundation for sound higher education as the quality life after school is laid in the secondary schools. Reading is a pre-requisite for secondary school education; hence, its importance cannot be over-emphasised. Reading enhances sharing of information and ideas, broadens interests and horizons. It enables students to develop critical thinking skills, enriched knowledge, enhanced language proficiency and broadened life experiences (Oyewusi, 2016). The concept of reading in the 21st century cannot be confined to physical book reading because apart from books, students in this age have access to digital and web-based content through the Internet. Aliteracy among secondary school students can then be described as a choice made by such students who can read but are unenthusiastic about reading either digital or non-digital content. Such students are uninterested in reading and are usually surrounded by peers with similar attitudes (Beers, 2011). Factors such as shortage of well-equipped libraries with qualified librarians, a curriculum which does not give room for thoughtful expressions by students, lack of parental involvement in reading and negative influence of social media among others had been adjudged to be responsible for the prevalence of aliteracy among secondary school students in Nigeria (Ilogho, 2011; Abimbola and Adeoye, 2013 and Olufowobi and Makinde, 2013).

Several studies including Wayne,2011; Saunders,2012; Wells,2012 and Myers, 2013 confirmed that aliteracy could be disadvantageous to the realisation of all-round education of students, if

nothing is done to curb the menace. Wayne (2011), Beers (2011), Well (2012) and Saunders (2012) reported high prevalence of aliteracy in Bradford, Florida and New Zealand respectively. They found that aliteracy among secondary school students is a growing concern for stakeholders which requires adequate attention. In Nigeria, poor vocabulary acquisition, poor acquisition of declarative knowledge, poor communication skills as well as lack of critical and analytical thinking skills which invariably contributed to poor performances in standardised examinations as being observed among secondary school students are some of the detrimental effects of aliteracy (Ilogho, 2011; Olufowobi and Makinde 2013).

The Matthew effect was a theory coined from the book of Mathew 25:29 and propounded by Merton (1968). The theory explained the reason why the rich with status get richer and the poor get poorer with low status (Study.com, 2015). Connecting Matthew effect to reading among students, Cunningham and Stanovich (2001), stated that good readers will continue to advance their abilities in reading and comprehension, while those who do not love reading have their reading abilities and reasoning skills unceasingly subdued. This infers that the avid readers among the secondary school students will continue to be enthusiastic about reading while aliterates who do not have interest in reading will continue to display indifference to reading if nothing is done to assist them. Therefore, the need for concerted effort on the part of the stakeholders to awaken the lost interest in reading among secondary school students by every good means possible cannot be compromised because the place of reading in raising a thorough bred, self-determining generation that will make noteworthy impact in the development of the society cannot be underestimated.

Aliteracy describes the lack of interest in reading shown by capable readers. It is the lack of voluntary and involuntary reading habits among individuals who have the ability to read but perceives reading as an unpleasant chore or a task rather than pleasure (Wells, 2012), and becoming rampant among students in Nigerian secondary schools. If this menace is not curtailed, the realisation of SGD-4 which is quality, inclusive education with equal access by the year 2030 may be a mirage as there cannot be quality education where reading is not given the attention it deserves. A nation whose youths are apathetic to reading stands the risk of raising a generation of complacent adults who instead of contributing to societal development become less productive and creative thereby inhibiting the progress of such a nation. Previous studies had identified lack of well-equipped and functional school libraries, the existence of rigid curriculum and the negative effect of technology such as mobile phones and television among others as factors that are accountable for the thriving of aliteracy among secondary school students in Nigeria.

Gender and aliteracy

In studies that have to do with reading among secondary school students, gender had always been a relevant factor. Ameyaw and Anto (2017) were of the opinion that male and female students demonstrate varied mental disposition towards reading and observed that male students engage more frequently in reading than female students. The reading preferences of both male and female students significantly differ as more males than females read textbooks while more females than males read fictions. Clark, Osborne and Akerman (2009) also observed that female students have a more positive attitude to reading and have preference for reading a wide variety of genres compared to male who have flair for adventures, science fictions and sport stories. In a study carried out by Yildiz and Kiziltas (2018) in Turkey, it was discovered that female students in secondary school selected for the study had better reading attitude than their male counterparts while Machin and McNally (2006) observed that gender gap in male and female students reading and consequently academic achievement widen in the secondary schools in London as Shafi and Loan (2010) postulated that gender is a central point affecting students' reading habits and that female student are superior to male students in terms of reading in India.

Moreover, Cook (2012) stated that no significant difference occurs in the academic and recreational reading of male and female adolescents in the United States of America while Heyman (2016) stated that parental involvement and peer influence rather than gender played significant roles in the attitude of secondary school students towards reading in Netherlands thus, gender is of less importance than the support of friends and associates in the reading attitude of secondary school students. Observing the reading behaviour of children patronising five public libraries in Salt Lake City in America, Kennedy (2008), found out that female students participate in discussion after reading more than male students and Torppa, Eklund, Sulkunen, Niemi and Ahonen (2018), reported that females devoted more time to voluntary reading and spent more time in reading more books than males in a study carried out in Finland. Contrariwise, Okebukola (2002) stated that gender did not have significant effect on the reading performance of students in Nigeria. This was corroborated by Akinwumi (2017) that gender had no significant difference on the reading comprehension of secondary school students. Most studies on gender and reading were geared towards academic achievement and reading comprehension but this study seeks to examine gender as one of the factors that may affect aliteracy among secondary school students.

Most of the studies reviewed did not directly address aliteracy with regards to gender. Rather, they addressed reading comprehension, reading attitude, reading preferences and reading interests and gender some of which are indicators of aliteracy. Therefore, it could be inferred from previous studies that gender of the secondary school students has little or nothing to do with aliteracy. Thus, the occurrence of aliteracy among secondary school students had nothing to do with their gender. Oyewusi and Abimbola (2021) reported that gender has nothing to do with the choice of secondary school students as regards aliteracy.

Parental involvement and aliteracy

The disposition of secondary school students towards reading could be affected by the involvement of the parents in reading activities because family is an influential factor on the child from where a child receives inspirations that help to make informed decisions (Egunsola, 2014) just as Allison (2007) was of the opinion that increased effective parental involvement is associated with increased levels of reading achievement. It is therefore of utmost importance that parents support secondary school students to develop reading habits and be helped to perceive reading as indispensable skills. According to Jafarov (2015), the involvement of parents in encouraging their children to read positively affected the academic performance of students in the United Kingdom. The disposition of students to reading will likely be determined by the support students get from home concerning reading, so parents need to make conscious and deliberate efforts to grow positive attitude to reading in their children while showing positive examples regarding reading because it is quite probable for a student with high intellect and potentials to have negative attitude towards reading if enough support from parents is not received.

Nehal (2017) opined that the reading ability of students could be determined by the extent to which parents get involved in matters relating to reading activities of students as parents remain the key players in the development of love of reading in children. The role parents have to play in making children develop and master the art of reading is very critical (Mudzielwana, 2014), thus, parents should therefore do everything within their power to build the love of reading in their children while they are still young as Olatoye and Agbatogun (2009) stated that no one is more than parents in sending signals about the importance of reading to students through their examples. Aliteracy which is the choice made by capable readers not to read may be encouraged or mitigated by the involvement of parents in the reading activities of children or otherwise. school students.

The researchers observed that studies relating to aliteracy among secondary school students are just emerging in Nigeria. Ilogho (2011) asserted that Nigerian secondary school students are not easily given to reading for the love of it. Contrary to what obtains in the past when reading was

regarded as a noble enterprise among the students in the secondary schools, the few students who have the privilege of having books these days do not have interest in reading them. Olufowobi and Makinde (2011) stated that students in Nigerian secondary schools do not find reading interesting and this affect diverse facets of their lives including academic accomplishment. Most of them cannot analyse and comprehend facts and comprehending examination questions become difficult.

Abimbola and Adeoye (2013) reported that boys and girls in secondary schools get involved with many things that distract them from reading and these include wrong use of computer and video games, spending undue time on extracurricular activities and the wrong use of Internet, unguided interest in sports and unsupervised television viewing to mention a few. The quest to provide empirical information on aliteracy among secondary school students in Nigeria necessitated this study. Although there are a handful of studies on aliteracy among secondary school students in Nigeria, most of these studies focused mainly on the causes, consequences and way out of aliteracy, not much data is available on the gender and parental involvement as they affect aliteracy among secondary school students in Nigeria. This study seeks to fill this gap with the intent of mitigating aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The study seeks to identify the trends in aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. establish the prevalence of aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria;
2. examine how gender affects aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria and
3. determine the role of parental involvement on aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria.

Methodology

The qualitative study was carried out using participants from three public secondary schools in Ilesa, southwest, Nigeria. All the 25 participants who were identified as aliterates through a survey tagged Aliteracy Initial Survey designed by the researcher were included for the study through total enumeration. Aliteracy Initial Survey was designed by the researcher. The survey was designed using four constructs that are components of aliteracy which are; motivation to read, types of text read, importance attached to reading and reading skills. The survey consisted of ten (10) items which were measured with a four- point Likert scale of Very True of Me=4 (VTM=4), Almost True of Me=3 (ATM=3), Fairly True of Me=2 (FTM=2) and Not True of Me=1 (NTM=1). Aliterates who were willing to partake in the study were identified through their response to the survey. (See Appendix I)

Focus Group Discussion was used to get in-depth response on the prevalence of aliteracy and the roles played by gender and parental involvement in reading. Self-designed guided interview was used to make the participants discuss freely about the prevalence of aliteracy and their feelings about the roles their gender and the involvement of their parents in making them aliterates. The face validity of Focus Group Discussion guide was done by the lecturers in the Departments of School Library and Media Technology as well as Library, Information and Archival Studies, faculty of Education in the University of Ibadan. It was trial- tested on 10 students from Ogedengbe High School of Science which was not part of the study. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involved eight sessions of direct discussion with each session lasting for 30 minutes. The qualitative data obtained from the FGD sessions was content analysed.

Interpretation of results and discussion of findings

The study focused on aliterates in the secondary schools in Ilesa, Southwest, Nigeria. These set of students were identified as having all the traits of aliteracy such as poor reading skills, negative reading attitude, negative reading behavior, low motivation for reading and low reading ability among others. To start with, the researcher obtained approval to carry out the study in the selected schools in Ilesa from the Permanent Secretary Osun State Ministry of education. Permission to carry out the study was then obtained from the principals of the selected schools. The participants who identified as aliterates were briefed about the essence of the study.

Why do you think aliteracy is prevalent among secondary school students?

All the boys and girls from the public schools stated that they have not heard about aliteracy until now. With their understanding of aliteracy, they can say that lack of information about aliteracy, little or no motivation to read, lack of books to read are some of the reasons for prevalence of aliteracy among them.

What is your view regarding the role of your genders in the aliteracy traits being exhibited?

Both boys and girls from the public schools were of the view that gender has nothing to do with being aliterates. According to the statements of the participants:

“Our gender has nothing to do with being an aliterate. I was not an aliterate because of my gender. I became an aliterate because of the wrong choice made regarding reading and not because of my gender and such choices were not made based on my gender”.

This agrees with the findings of Akinwumi (2017) that gender has little or no effect on the academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria and academic performance improves where there is positive attitude and behaviour to reading. It also affirmed the observation of Cook (2012) that gender has no effect on recreational and academic achievement of secondary school students. Therefore, aliteracy among secondary school students has nothing to do with gender but a wrong choice made by students of both genders not to read when there is ability to do so.

Do your parents give you enough support as far as reading is concerned?

Both boys and girls from the public schools affirmed that they receive support from their parents. All the participants except one confirmed that:

“Our parents give us enough support in academic activities but not necessarily in reading. Enough provisions were made by our parents within their ability in other aspects of our academic activities but not much was done to develop the love of reading in us since we were young. We hardly see our parents reading at home except for religious books and there are hardly conducive places where we can read at home”

One of the girls from the public school stated that:

“My parents do not support me in reading as the fact that I did not live with them when I was younger affected my reading habit”. I’m struggling with reading and this is affecting my academic performance because my guardian hardly gave me enough time to read after the school hours because of home chores.

What do you think your parents could have done to avert your being an aliterate?

Participants believed parents have roles to play in averting aliteracy among secondary school students. In the words of the participants:

“Even though our parents do what they can to support us in our academic activities, not much is being done in supporting us specifically in reading. Our reading habits could have been better if relevant textbooks and recreational texts were purchased as more time is allowed to read at home and the home is made conducive and comfortable for reading”

This affirmed the assertion of Nehal (2017) that the reading ability of secondary school students can be determined by the extent of parents’ involvement. Much as the participants appreciated the contribution of their parents to academic and learning activities, the common opinion is that, they might not have turned out to be aliterates in the first place if the parents had inculcated the love of reading in them when they were younger. Thus, setting examples for the young children in reading, creating reading areas with the involvement of the children, encouraging the reading of road signs, food menu, game instructions to create the impression that reading could be done everywhere as suggested by Oxford Learning (2017) are important in inculcating the love of reading in younger children and as they grow, such love of reading will grow with them. This study affirms the report of Hemmeechts, Agirdag and Kavadias (2016) and Heyman (2016) that parental support is needed to develop a positive reading attitude and reading behaviour. It further corroborated assertion of Iroegbu (2015) that students with parental support as regards reading had higher reading achievement score in English Language in Nigeria. The study agrees with the assertion of Nehal (2017) that parents are key players in developing the love of reading in students.

Therefore, in order for aliteracy to be adequately curbed among secondary school students, parents must get involved in awakening the dwindling interest in reading. This finding is corroborated by Allison (2017) who found that increased effective parental involvement is associated with increased levels of reading achievement and Al- Matalca (2014) who reported that as parents get involved in the reading activities of secondary school students, they can actually improve and do better in reading activities because motivation aids in the development of good reading habits.

Conclusion

There is high prevalence of aliteracy among secondary school students in Ilesa. Southwest, Nigeria. Thus, they have negative reading attitude and negative reading behaviour as a result of the choice made about reading. It was observed that gender of the students had nothing to do with high prevalence of aliteracy among the students because boys as well as girls exhibited negative attitudes towards reading. Thus, the lack of willingness to read by capable readers among the secondary school students had nothing to do with gender. Lack of parental involvement in reading was adjudged by the participants to contribute to the prevalence of aliteracy among secondary school students. Therefore, it could be inferred that if parents could support their children in building and sustain the love of reading, aliteracy could be reduced among secondary school students. Parents should however get involved in instilling the desire and interest in reading in their children. This should be done by creating an enabling environment that will encourage the habit and willingness to read without being coerced.

Having established the fact that gender has nothing to do with the high prevalence of aliteracy among secondary school students, the love of reading should be instilled in young children irrespective of their gender and should be sustained as they grow older. This could ameliorate the ugly trend and cause aliteracy to be nipped in the bud among secondary school students in Ilesa, southwest, Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Aliterates among secondary school students should be identified through the synergy of teachers and school librarians as early as possible.
2. Parents should do everything to support their children in developing positive reading attitude and reading behaviour at a tender age which invariably leads to good lifelong reading habits.
3. Government should make policies that will encourage the inclusion of the teaching of reading in the curriculum right from kindergarten through the primary to the secondary schools.
4. Authors and publishers should write more story books on aliteracy and its implications as well as benefits of reading.
5. School libraries and school library media centres should be established in all government and privately-owned secondary schools with certified school library and media specialists to offer library services to the students.
6. School librarians should work closely with teachers, parents' volunteers and other stakeholders to curb aliteracy among secondary school students.

Acknowledgement

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APPENDIX I
University of Ibadan
Faculty of Education
Department of School Library and Media Technology
Aliteracy Initial Survey (AIS)

Dear Student,

This survey is purely for data collection from secondary school students in Ilesa City and it is purely for research purpose. All responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thank you.

Mrs. Margaret. O. Abimbola

Section A

Background Information

Please tick (✓) the item in line with your response

1. Name of School (Optional).....

2. Age: Less than 12 { } 12 - 14 { } 15-17 { } above 17{ }

3. Gender: Male { } Female { }

Section B

Instructions: The survey is to be answered by ticking the most appropriate answer. Rate your responses as they best describe you by ticking (✓) in the space provided in the table below:

Very True of Me (VTM), Almost True of Me (ATM), Fairly True of Me (FTM), Not True of Me

S/N	Items	(VTM)	(ATM)	(FTM)	(NTM)
	Reading Motivation				
1.	I do not like to read without being forced				
2.	I do not like to read printed material				
	Types of text read				
3.	I prefer short stories to long ones				
4.	I prefer to read only notebooks				
	Importance attached to reading				
5.	Though I know the importance of reading, I do not like reading				
6.	I will rather play games and watch movies than reading				
	Reading skills	(VTM)	(ATM)	(FTM)	(NTM)
7	I found it burdensome to comprehend school-based textbooks when I try to read them				
8.	I prefer textbooks that are simplified with illustrations				
9	I found it difficult to recall what I read later				
10	I prefer to read just to pass examinations				

APPENDIX II

Sample of Introduction Letter from the Ministry of education, Osun State



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT,
P. M. BAG 4418, OSOGBO, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

Your Ref. No
All communications should be
Addressed to "The Permanent Secretary"
Ministry of Education, Science & Technology:
Our Ref. No:

Date: 24th May, 2019.

The Principal,
Ilesa High School,
Ilesa

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I am directed to inform you that the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education has approved that ABIMBOLA, Margaret Olusola, a Ph.D student of the University of Ibadan should be allowed to carry out her research titled "The Effects of Bibliotherapy and SQ3R on Aliteracy among Secondary School Students" in your School.

2. Kindly accord her necessary support.
3. Thank you.

O. O. Adeyeye

For: Permanent Secretary.