

## READING FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CATCHING THEM YOUNG

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### **Abstract**

*This paper has highlighted the impact of efficient reading at home and outside home. It also discussed the impact of illiteracy and inefficient use of reading skills in an era of world's advanced technology. Some agencies that can promote literacy were discussed, namely the home and community, the school libraries and bookshops. These are agencies that could encourage and arouse enjoyment and interest in a reader through parents, teachers, well trained librarians and book sellers. They should allow for diverse literary tastes in reading and not forced reading which can kill the young readers' enthusiasm to read. The reader therefore should be helped by making books of different subjects available at home, in the school and in public libraries with well trained librarians. The publishers should make available books that are in conformity with the readers' social environment in their bookshops throughout the nation. When a reader becomes avid in reading, he is able to explore the world of books. He is becoming an intellectual in the society. It is worth noting that a reader can become enthusiastic in reading at an early age if encouraged. The agencies mentioned in this paper could make a reader discover himself and his world if carefully handled. When a reader is caught young by exposing him to reading early enough, he will develop in speech, visual and auditory discrimination. He will gradually develop stimulating reading maturity – a phase that can make him challenge what he reads in print. There is no doubt that when a nation produces avid readers, it makes the readers enjoy the inherent reward of being properly literate. The nation too will develop and realize as Bacon says that “reading maketh the full man and the full life. It is time therefore for the nation's reading culture be developed.*

**Keywords:** *Reading, National development, Reading skills*

### **Introduction**

I watched an imposing building which was displayed on the fox television channel. The building was displayed for one million U.S dollars. The building is solid, and it shows a foundation that is solid and firm. It is a 19<sup>th</sup> century building and today it is still an edifice and a building that cannot be underestimated by present day standard. It is still modern because of the foundation and maintenance. The reading experience of a nation is like this, it happens gradually as readers grow up from a good reading foundation and life is thereby being experienced and beautiful. Calsen (1971) quoting Emerson says that: “In the highest civilization, the book is still the highest delight. He who has once known its satisfaction is provided with a resource against calamity.” This means that reading therefore is synonymous with civilization or national development. Calsen in his book says that one of the criteria in judging a nation is the

percentage of its people who can read, and that one of the important criteria in judging an individual's cultural level is whether he does read.

There is a great influence of reading on national life at this age of complex high technology; because knowledge and enlightenment are transmitted through the written words. Illiteracy and inefficient use of reading skills can be retrogressive in any nation of the world however high the technology. The western world is a reading culture and they continue to spend a lot of money on improving their reading skills and so they are highly developed in culture and rich in reading. For instance, there is nowhere one is, either in the coaches, trains, airplanes or ships, reading materials are always available for the citizens travelling or not travelling. The effects of illiteracy and inefficient reading are equally devastating on our social and political life. Omojuwa (1984) illustrated that illiterate and semi-literate policemen and soldiers at road blocks have repeatedly accepted fake vehicle driving particulars taking them as genuine. They have no literacy skill with which to solve the mystery of graphic symbols and distinguish between what is genuine and what is fake. He elucidated further that in the area of justice, our march towards civilized practice has been unduly retarded by illiterate customary court judges, and alkalies who can still be found administering justices in parts of the country.

In the areas of national security, and national defence, the efficiency with which military operations are planned and executed can quite easily be compromised by illiterate or semi-illiterate troops rampant even today in our society. In a nutshell, illiteracy has seriously constrained crime diction, crime prevention, injustice and ignorance since illiteracy is a social disease that prevents the citizens from knowing their right. It is worth noting that our national daily newspapers are full of errors and are badly written or edited, wrong spellings are written on posters, fliers and written information on television screens, especially when drama is being translated from mother tongue to English Language. It is pertinent to show the audience statistics kalango (2009) presented. This was a research carried out by the Lumina Foundation. The research says that thirty seven percent of literate Nigerians read for utilitarian purposes, that is, such as passing examination or to succeed at job interviews. Thirty seven percent read soft cells for gossip; twenty two percent read for information and only four percent read for leisure. The last percentage is disappointing and the antidote urgently needed is promotion of literacy.

Literacy is defined by the Longman Encyclopedia (1990) as the ability to read and write. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2004) gives an additional definition that literacy means having knowledge. In this sense literacy is elastic, it embraces education. As Eguare (2006) cited, the view of UNESCO (1965) is that rather than an end in itself, literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man for social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting of merely in the teaching of language and writing, the way it is now in our public schools.

We need to proffer solutions to reducing or eliminating illiteracy and promote efficient reading in our society. The questions are: how are we promoting literacy? How are we winning the battle against elimination of illiteracy? Are we directing readership

promotion campaign towards those who do not care for reading and learning culture? How do we start building properly and developing the nation with functional reading experience?

This paper is in line with Omojuwa's idea (1984) that the ultimate goal of literacy is for it to be both productive and permanent. The impact of literacy on individuals and community life is socially and culturally overwhelming. Being literate is said to be more than reading and writing but for the entire way of life, that is, thinking method of acquisition and storage of knowledge. Since reading skills cannot function in a vacuum, Eguare (2006) pointed out that there are variables that are regarded as agencies for the development of literacy. He mentioned home and school. This paper discusses more agencies: Home/Community, School, the Library/learning resource centres and bookshops/bookstores.

(i) **Home and community:** Literacy begins at home. The pre-reading skills begin at home and this is the stage when parents engage in reading to their children. If parents never read or scorns reading the young person will not care about reading. A reading home makes children aware or feel that reading is important in the adult world. The home is the child's most immediate environment so the home is the first veritable agent of literacy. Alegbeleye (2008), analyzed in her paper the variables needed for reading from birth to adolescent. These are highlighted.

Parents especially mother at this stage spend most time with babies and toddlers so that they can make sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms that parents use when reading or talking to them. Babies at this stage respond to these gestures and facial expressions of parents and they begin to associate words they hear frequently with parents, also they read to their children often especially at bed times. Literate and wise children's parents often stock home with books picture books, pre-primer and reading materials that can thrill the children at home. This is to catch them young.

(ii) **The School:** Pre-reading activities are later complemented at school that is the nursery and primary schools. The school is thus the second agency of literacy. Okebukola (2004) gave a survey of pre-reading activities that can ignite interest in children.

- Drawing of different shapes of objects
- Tracing and copying patterns
- Re-arranging objects according to their sizes
- Recitation of rhymes
- Story telling
- Reading and recognition of letters of the alphabet (beginning phonics)
- Obeying instructions and commands
- Picture reading and talking
- Matching of shapes and colours
- Organized plays (role playing)
- Drawing and painting
- Colouring, drawing and tracing

There are other activities like using puppets, tape-recorders, jigsaws, odd-man-out, 'what is missing' and many others that are creative that well-trained reading teachers can

provide to make reading enjoyable and help in language development as practiced in Abadina Media Resource Centre, University of Ibadan. The whole point about all these activities and experiences provided for the child should be such that they encourage the child to want to learn to read. It is therefore necessary to make reading enjoyable and meaningful at this stage of reading phase. It is a phase that the reading teacher should attempt to ensure that the words he chooses for the child to read are found within the child's own vocabulary. The teacher should attempt to provide children with experiences that will lead to rich and varied language development. The words and ideas must be met in the printed form which are intellectually and culturally adequate for the young readers. At this reading phase, the reading teacher is developing in the child the powers of visual and auditory discrimination. The child's level of spoken vocabulary, listening, social and emotional maturity will prepare him for his reading experience in the primary school.

Creating a functional language background allows for a reservoir of ideas and vocabulary before a start in reading especially in the primary school. If learning to read at this phase could be made more natural more like the process by which a child learns to talk, the child could make reading a personal effect and there would be fewer difficulties appearing later on. It is pertinent to note at this stage that forcing a child during this phase, may result to psychological damage. As children are growing in literacy tastes so they are growing in physical body, so the reading teachers must build in stages just as the bricklayer builds a good house in stages. Samuel Johnson in line with this idea states that: *"A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good"*. A child in the primary school must not be ill-equipped to meet the personal and national challenges of life. The study of Dike, Amucheazi and Ajogwu(2006) instruct that there are many reasons for primary school pupils leaving without sufficient literacy for independent learning later in life.

Some of the reasons are:

- impoverished learning environment
- faulty teacher orientation and teaching methods
- the lack of libraries and learning resources
- the use of second language literacy
- lack of access to reading materials (in English or mother tongue)
- home and societal factors like poverty and parental illiteracy.

It is ideal for a child to see his parents reading, as this could make the child care about reading. There are certain learning strategies that can make reading pleasurable to pupils in the primary school. Dike et al (2006) introduced project work for example, whereby information skills could be developed. This is a method that could be used to teach reading and thereby increasing the volume of vocabulary. Pupils could acquire information from resources they are exposed to, such as people, markets, animals and plant life through observation and interview and they would be made to write a class book or hold interactive sessions. This method would surely develop the literacy pupils need for lifelong learning in reading, writing and even in drawing, organizational and social skills. There is no better way to catch them young.

Omojuwa (1984) clarified that even though we identify education within four walls of the classroom, a great deal of our educational process takes place outside the formal structure

daily. Omojuwa (1984) explained that in a more practical, every day sense, most of what come our way, most of what we pick up in the shop, most of the tools we need for our jobs assume a basal level of literacy. They are accompanied by directions or information to aid their efficient installation, use and maintenance. Kalango (2009) added that a great deal of our education process takes place outside the formal structure daily. They take place in the streets, at the playground, in the religious gathering and in homes. Our education activities also take place outside home and outside the country. There is value in reading not only for self but national development.

Various projects, games and activities are to develop language and make reading fascinating and functional and they however are not intended to replace or hinder the regular daily activities at school but to supplement them. K.A. Nnamdi gave examples of children activities that could be introduced accurately at various levels of growth and development of pupils. Apart from the pre-reading skills already discussed he added techniques that could promote pupils motivation. They are:

- (a) Scavenger Hunt: where pupils search around the classroom to find the matches of cards in their hands.
- (b) Modelling: where pupils must be able to teach to their class, letter 'S', for example, by using pictures they have drawn or acting out an action like 'swimming' that they created about the letter during interactive sessions.
- (c) Listening and Reading: this is reading along the tape as the teacher plays the cassette. The tape should include instructions that allow pupils to physically interact with the text (pictures or an action in the tape).

In addition to reading or learning project, there are other activities that can revive our reading culture and promote literacy. Nwakuno (2009) gave how reading culture is being revived through the Rainbow Club Way. The club was founded by Mrs. Koko Kalango as a way of promoting literacy through the "Get Nigerians Reading Campaign" of Rainbow Book Club. The children were given a book of the month to read. These children later on interacted with others about the book. Each month had a book to be read and discussed. This is a reading motivation in children, as they grow up nurturing their life in books, the nation thereby keeps reading and developing in literary sense.

This paper agrees that the importance of education in national development cannot be overemphasized and literacy through reading is an essential building block of a strong and literate society. The Rainbow book Club has thrown a challenge at reviving reading culture through various instruments like facilitating and running book clubs, hosting authors, organizing various literary activities, publishing good children books through 'book-of the month, running workshops for teachers (and librarians) holding an annual writing competition and getting adults to read to children. This is another way of catching them young.

As the children are caught young in literacy activities, they grow in literary tastes. As they grow into teenage and adolescent periods, that is, from childhood to adolescent with rich background in reading the awareness of reading will have deepened and changed direction. As children grow, they should be able to read books of animal stories,

adventure stories, mystery stories, of the supernatural sports stories, magazines, newspapers etc. They should desire to read books on growing up around the world; home and family, life stories, biography, and autobiography, historical novels, the mystical romance, the story at adolescent life; books on the search for personal values, books of social significance and books on strange and unusual human experiences. As the reader matures, he discovers a kind of satisfaction in books they choose to read. Reading becomes to them a means of understanding and testing their own problems and world. The question is where do they find these materials? The answer leads us to the next agency of literacy.

(iii)**The Library and Learning Resource Centres:** The Library and learning resource centres are attractive and fascinating to visit. When a reader comes to this level of reading, he has made books part of his life. The major sections where readers may explore are the fiction section, non-fiction section, reference section, circulation section and catalogue section, and the librarian in attendance.

The government and all stakeholders in education cannot play down the value of good public libraries and learning resource centres. Reading is a tool for all books in the library. Functional libraries where current and useful materials are available to readers all over the country will surely promote literacy and there will be enlightenment and national development like developed countries that make libraries a priority in their national development. The libraries must be readily accessible and be located in appropriate places where readers can enjoy reading. They must be inviting in appearance and fully equipped with current reading materials.

#### **(iv) Bookshops/Bookstores**

There is need for modern bookshops as well. The bookshops or stores must be filled with books or materials that can be embraced by our environment. A good bookshop permits its customers to browse. Parents and teachers can be partners to their children by visiting bookshops, there they can see how people pick up books from tables and shelves. They can see how people skim or scan from book to book. In addition to books, they will see posters, stationery, art prints and gift items that may fascinate them. All these could make the young people discover the love for printed materials and they could develop the reading skills they need by browsing in a bookshop and then select titles they want to purchase for satisfying reading. When a reader becomes avid in reading he is building his nation. He is getting to the roofing stage of an imposing building. He is becoming an intellectual the nation needs.

## **Conclusion and Summary**

This paper has highlighted the impact of efficient reading at home and outside home. It has also discussed also the impact of illiteracy and inefficient use of reading skills in an era of world's advanced technology. Some agencies that can promote literacy were discussed, namely the home and community, the school, libraries and bookshops. These are agencies that could encourage and arouse enjoyment and interest in a reader through parents, teachers, well trained librarians and book sellers. They should allow for diverse literary tastes in reading and not forced reading which can kill the young readers enthusiasm to read. The reader therefore should be helped by making books of different subjects available at home, in the school and in public libraries with well trained librarians. The publishers should make available books that are in conformity with the readers' social environment in their bookshops throughout the nation. When a reader becomes avid in reading, he is able to explore the world of books. He is becoming an intellectual in the society. It is worth noting that a reader can become enthusiastic in reading at an early age if encouraged. The agencies mentioned in this paper could make a reader discover himself and his world if carefully handled. When a reader is caught young by exposing him to reading early enough, he will develop in speech, visual and auditory discrimination. He will gradually develop stimulating reading maturity – a phase that can make him challenge what he reads in print.

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