

The Environment and Reading Habits of Students in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa, Nigeria

¹James Ogom Odu, Ph.D
ogomjodu@yahoo.com

¹Faith Sylvester Orim, Ph.D
¹Department of Library and Information Science
University of Calabar, Calabar
Cross Rivers State, Nigeria
fate-orim@gmail.com



Abstract

The study sought to ascertain the suitability of environmental factors (the home, school and library) in promoting reading habits among students of the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa. Survey research design was adopted in this study which population consists of registered library users in the 2016/2017 academic session. A total of 1,317 students registered in the library. The stratified sampling and accidental sampling techniques were adopted while questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. 20% of the registered library users were sample for study, giving a sample size of 265 respondents. The data obtained was analyzed using simple percentages (%). The study found that students perceived reading principally as a venture needed to pass examination and to respond to the desires of their parents. The study also revealed that a weak home environment does not encourage reading habits in students, as 99.8 % of the respondents were from homes without a library, 70.9% were from homes where parents do not read, while 67.9 % were from homes where there are no reading materials apart from students' books while 54.0% were from homes where parents do not encourage children to read. It was recommended in the study that Parents should create a good environment for reading by encouraging their children and wards to read, they should create time to read as a source of motivation for the children to emulate. Government and school owners should endeavor to have libraries in schools, acquire the right resources to support the curriculum contents, recruit professional librarians and accommodate reading hour in the school time table.

Key words: Environment, Reading, Habits, students, Education and Nigeria

Introduction

Reading is the conscious act of interpreting the words of a given language as expressed by a writer in order to comprehend what is being expressed in written format. Reading in any language requires basic understanding of the alphabets or signs used to convey ideas or information in that particular language. This presupposes that, a learner in a formal school setting begins by learning to read the alphabets, numbers, mathematical signs, objects and symbols, as the case may be. This explains why reading is so vital to learning and acquisition of knowledge. It is by reading that one can be exposed to the vast reservoir of humans' creative ability. Therefore, reading is a platform or a panacea for acquisition of education, knowledge, personality development and the liberation of the humans mind.

A habit is the exhibition of one or more characteristics consistently and most times, unconsciously, without any influence arising from pressure or compulsion. The individual will frequently manifest such act or behaviour as part of his/her routine activity. Reading habit is depicted when the desire to read is borne out of curiosity to explore the rich universe of knowledge as against the pressure to pass examination, test or to do well in an interview. Where there is good reading habit, the reader develops a consciousness that makes leisure or recreational reading an integral part of daily obligations. The individual reads frequently and consistently for the love of reading and the desire to explore the universe of knowledge. At this point, there is no limit or scope of what to read. Such a reader takes pleasure in reading whatever reading material that is available, irrespective of the subject treated. Reading habits are calculated as how much a person reads, how often does he read, when he reads and what does he read. The individual takes pleasure in reading across disciplines depending on what resources or literature that is available. Reading therefore could be seen as a liberator of the mind, a key to success, a weapon against ignorance and an adventure into the universe of ubiquitous knowledge (Odu, 2015). Reading habit is identified as the single most important determinant of a student's success in education and in our modern complex society (Nssien, 2008).

Several efforts have been made by parents, schools, and the government towards creating an appropriate environment that promotes reading habits in children and other citizens on sustainable bases. There are associations and non-governmental organizations that have continued to play leading roles in championing the campaign for positive reading habits in Nigerian (Odu, 2015). There are several educational institutions in Nigeria, from the nursery, primary, secondary to the tertiary institutions designed to provide the kind of literacy and education that can transform the children and reposition them for the challenges of adulthood: acquire higher education, seek employment, manage a family and interact freely with others in the society and to sustain the habit of reading even after leaving the school environment.

There have been several interventions over the years to promote reading among young people. For instance, the Reading Association of Nigeria, the Nigerian Book Development Council and Nigerian Library Association have been in the forefront of the struggle for the development of good reading habits of students in Nigeria. To this end, the National Library of Nigeria has been sponsoring the readership promotion campaign in the country. Bring Back the Book (BBTB) initiative was the brainchild of the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan. One of the aims of the initiative was to revitalize reading habits of young people (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018). Igwe and Uzuegbu (2013) acknowledged that Bring Back the Book is a right initiative for reviving the poor reading habits in Nigeria. However, as good as the initiative was, there were fundamental problems with the implementation of the initiative. Igwe and Uzuegbu (2013) affirmed that the initiative was not properly implemented and some essential factors were found missing; hence, this affected the execution and the success of the initiative.

It is obvious that parents have a role to play in developing and sustaining reading habits of their children and wards. It is imperative for parents and guardians to always monitor what their children and wards indulge in, the friends they keep and their attitudes toward reading. However, it is sad to note that most parents do not encourage their children to read. Some would rather sit with the children to watch movies all night long. For most children, a negative habit of spending more time watching television and other electronic gadgets is gradually taking the place of reading in their order of priorities. Many of our young people are gradually becoming addicted to watching movies. Consequently, many children and adult consider reading an ordeal.

In a study on reading habits of undergraduates, Akabuike and Asika (2012) revealed poor reading habit and negative attitude towards reading which resulted in their abysmal performance as evident in the reading test conducted. This study shows also that many students read only to pass their examination and not for pleasure and acquiring knowledge. Okebukola (2004) affirms that, through reading, humans have the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation; it allows one to listen to the wisdom and people of the ages. Douglas (2000) asserted that every child must become fully competent in reading to succeed in school and discharge responsibilities as a citizen of a democratic society. According to Tracy (2008) quoted in Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun and Ogundipe (2011), reading is the only form of entertainment that is also an essential life skill. Eyo (2007) revealed that 70% of the problem associated with the poor reading culture of children is traceable to many social and environmental factors, including parents. In Nigeria, a study carried out by Henry (2004) reveals that 40 percent of adult Nigerians never read a non-fiction book from cover to cover after they finish school. The average Nigerian reads less

than one book per year, and only one percent of successful men and women in Nigeria read one non-fiction book per month. The same study showed that 30 million Nigerians have graduated from high school with poor reading skills.

According to Buchwald (2001), children are made readers on the laps of their parents. Habits are contagious and it is easier to copy than to cultivate, hence parents should cultivate the reading habit for children to copy. Similarly, Ode (2014) reported that children have never been good at listening to their parents but they have never failed to imitate them. In a study on reading habits of students in Oyo Town, Ojebode (2018) found that the respondents were not encouraged to develop positive reading habits by their parents, school as well as the community. Similar studies which revealed that the home environment is not conducive for reading include Etuk (2006), Adesulu, Adewole and Amos (2017), and Ogunrombi and Gboyega (1995). The library is a basic educational facility, a research infrastructure and a suitable environment for reading to thrive (Odu, 2015). That explains why Eyo (2007) noted that libraries are vital to education; and research has shown that the current low level of proficiency in reading is due to underfunding of libraries and their services. Similar studies on the influence of libraries on reading habits of students includes those of Oji and Habibu (2011), Shabi and Udofia (2009) and Ngwoke (2016).

Statement of the problem

In our contemporary society, education remains the greatest legacy to bequeath to children who would eventually become leaders in the near future. The foundation to success in education lies in provision of educational resources, ability to bear the cost of education and the willingness to acquire education. The desire to acquire education depends on the individual's interest and reading habits. Realizing the place of reading in achieving success in educational attainment, parents are encouraged to teach children the need to read regularly, the government is encouraging the provision of libraries in schools, agencies like the National Library of Nigeria is constantly organizing readership promotion campaign to help both children and adults cultivate the habit of reading. However, preliminary observation in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa reveals a state of apathy towards reading. Students were observed to show very poor attitudes towards reading. With the high level of advocacy on the need to develop good reading habits in children, the provisioning of libraries in schools and parents being encouraged to guide their children on the path of reading, one would expect to see a generation of students with positive attitude towards reading. However, the reverse appears to be the case here. It becomes imperative therefore to undertake this study to ascertain the influence of environment on the reading habits of students in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa.

Research Questions

This study was conceived with the objective of answering the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive reading and what are their pattern of reading in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?
2. How suitable is the home environment in promoting reading habits among students of Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?
3. How suitable is the school environment in promoting reading habits among students of Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?
4. What are the ranges of information resources that students prefer to read in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted in this study which population consists of registered library users in the 2016/2017 academic session in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa. A total of 1,317 students registered in the library. A questionnaire named Environment and Reading Habits of Students Questionnaire (ERHSQ) was the instruments used for data collection while the stratified sampling and accidental sampling techniques were adopted for this study. The College was stratified into five strata thus: School of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Languages, School of Sciences, School of Early Childhood Care Education and School of Vocational and Technical Education. 20% of registered Library users from each School were sampled for the study, giving a sample size of 265 respondents. The questionnaire were administered directly and retrieved by the researcher. The data obtained was analyzed using simple percentages (%).

Presentation and discussion of findings

Research question 1: How do students perceive reading and what are their pattern of reading in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?

The findings on perception and reading pattern of students in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Students Perception of Reading and Frequency of Reading

S/N	Students' perception of reading	Respondents	%	Frequency of reading	Respondents	%
1	I read in order to pass examination	121	45.7	0 to 2 hours everyday	27	10.2
2	I read in order to make me versatile	40	15.1	2 to 3 hours everyday	31	11.7
3	I read for leisure	21	7.9	Above 3 hours everyday	12	4.5
4	I read because my parents want me to	58	21.9	0 to 2 hours a week	50	18.9
5	Reading is an uphill task	25	9.4	2 to 3 hours a week	89	33.6
6				3 to 4 hours a week	23	8.7
				Above 4 hours a week	33	12.4
	Total	265	100		265	100

As shown in table 1, majority of the respondents, 121, representing 45.7%, perceived reading as a venture needed in order to pass examination. Others, 58 representing 21.9%, perceived it as what their parents or guardian want them to engage in, while 40 respondents, representing 15.1%, perceived reading as an exercise that could make them to be versatile and 25 respondents, representing 9.4%, perceived reading to be an uphill task. Those who perceived reading as a means of leisure were 21, representing 7.9% of the respondents. Similarly, the average time students spent reading showed that 10.2% spent 0 to 2 hours daily, 11.7% spent 2 to 3 hours daily, while 4.5% spent above 3 hours daily. However, 18.9% spent 0 to 2 hours a week, 33.6% spent 2 to 3 hours a week, 8.7% spent 3 to 4 hours a week while 12.4% spent above 4 hours a week reading.

As shown in the findings, students' perception of reading principally as a venture needed to pass examination, to respond to the desires of their parents and as a difficult task is a clear indication of a mindset that does not encourage the habits of reading. This finding agrees with that of Akabuiké and Asika (2012) who found that many students read only to pass their examination and not for pleasure and acquiring knowledge. However, there were students who showed positive attitudes towards

reading. Those who perceived reading as an exercise capable of providing leisure and making them versatile have a positive attitude towards reading. This category of students will read regularly for the love of it and to explore the universe of knowledge. They take pleasure in reading whatever is available.

Research question 2: How suitable is the home environment in promoting reading habits among students of Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?

The findings on the suitability of the home environment in promoting reading habits among students of the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa, is presented in table 2.

Table 2: The Suitability of the Home Environment in promoting Reading Habits

S/N	Items at home	Number of Respondents	%
1	Home with a study or library	2	0.8
2	Home without a library or study	263	99.2
	Total	265	100%
3	Home where parents are seen to be reading	77	29.1
4	Home where Parents are not seen to be reading	188	70.9
	Total	265	100%
5	Home where parents encourage children to read	122	46.0
6	Home where parents do not encourage children to read	143	54.0
	Total	265	100%
7	Home with different reading materials	85	32.1
8	Home without reading materials	180	67.9
	Total	265	100%

As shown in table 2, only 0.8% of the respondents were from homes where a library exists while 99.2% were from homes without libraries. Besides, 77 respondents, representing 29.1% were from homes where parents are seen to be reading while 188 respondents, representing 70.9% were from homes where parents do not read. Besides, students from homes where parents encourage children to read were 122,

representing 46.0% of the respondents while homes where parents do not encourage children to read were 143 respondents, representing 54.0%. Students from homes where there were different types of reading materials were 85 respondents, representing 32.1%, while students from homes without reading materials were 180, representing 67.9%. The home environment is the place where learning begins. Children learn by imitating others and by playing with the items around.

This finding is in consonance with that of Ojebode (2018), who found that respondents were not encouraged to develop positive reading habits by their parents. Many researchers in the area of reading generally observed that Nigerian students' reading habits is very low. The findings in this study reveal that a weak home environment does not encourage reading habits in students. Almost all the respondents, 99.8% are from homes without a library, 70.9% were from homes where parents do not read, while 67.9% were from homes where there are no reading materials apart from students' books. Ideally, the home is expected to offer the most challenging environment to encourage the students to read and build good reading habits. It may be difficult to build private libraries at home, but parent were expected to guide the children towards the habits of reading by living exemplary lives of reading constantly for the children to emulate (Etuk, 2006). Similarly, Ogunrombi and Gboyega (1995) found that family background of students, where few homes are conducive to reading owing to noise and lack of reading materials are inhibiting factors affecting reading habits of students.

Research question 3: How suitable is the school environment in promoting reading habits among students of Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?

The findings on the influence of the School environment on reading habit of students in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa is presented in table 3. The findings on table 3 showed that 37.4% of the respondents considered the available classrooms in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa as conducive for reading while 62.6% felt the classrooms are inadequate for reading. The college library was perceived by 57% of the respondents to be conducive for reading, while 43% of the respondent perceived the library as not being conducive for reading. The library was considered to have good resources by 39.6% of the respondents while 60.4% feels the library does not have good resources.

Table 3: The Suitability of the School Environment in Promoting Reading Habits

S/N	Items	Number of Respondents	%
1	There are good classrooms to stay and read	99	37.4
2	There are inadequate classrooms to stay and read	166	62.6
	Total	100	100%
3	The College Library is conducive for reading	151	57 %
4	The College Library is not conducive for reading	114	43%
	Total	100	100%
5	There are good resources in the library	105	39.6
6	There are no good resources in the Library	160	60.4
	Total	100	100%

The college library was observed to be very conducive to reading. The library upholds the serene atmosphere with adequately made and enough reading tables and chairs. There are a wide range of current and fairly current resources in all the programs in the College available in the library. Besides, the College library has a sitting capacity of 520 seat spread in four different divisions. There is progress in the development of electronic library to serve as a complement to the physical library. At present, there are 300 functional computer systems that are connected to the Internet. Thus, the school environment, according to the findings, is relatively suitable for the cultivation of reading habits. This finding is at variance with that of Adesulu, Adewole and Amos (2017), who found that about 30 million Nigerians have graduated from schools with poor reading skills and poor reading habits, which they attributed to the poor habit cultivated during their stay in schools with limited support and encouragement of reading habits.

Research question 4: What are the ranges of information resources that students prefer to read in the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa?

The findings on the ranges of material read by students of the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa, are presented in table 4. As shown on table 4, majority of the students (55.1%) prefer to read the course materials provided by the College, while 15% of the respondents read whatever is available. 11.7% of the respondents also read Newspaper while 10.9% also read relevant resources from the College library, and 7.2% equally read religious materials. It was observed that the

College management produces books in all the courses, both semesters and in all programs in the College for the students. This idea may be appealing, but it has a limiting effect on the scope of what the students read. Majority of the students will not find any reason to read outside the course materials provided.

Table 4: The Ranges of Materials that Students Read

S/N	Item	Respondents	%
1	Reading materials provided by the College in different courses.	146	55.1
2	Newspapers and Magazines	31	11.7
3	Religious materials	19	7.2
4	Relevant resources from the College library	29	10.9
5	Any readable material available	40	15.1
	Total	265	100%

Those who read whatever is available (15.1%), as well as those who read relevant resources from the library (10.9%), were those with positive approach towards reading. They exhibit attributes of good reading habits. They neither read for the sake of examination nor do they read in response to pressure from their parents to read. It implies that the desire to read comes as a habitual act that can be sustained and developed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A good reading habit is an essential virtue that each student should acquire. This will enable the student to explore the universe of knowledge and develop good personality characteristics, be an invaluable asset to the society and the nation generally. A student with good reading habit will certainly become a versatile and positive minded, with a liberated mind devoid of ignorance, timidity and fear. Such a student will possess good virtues that will present the student as a responsible citizen that will be alive to his/her rights, privileges and obligations. Therefore, reading skills and good reading habits are cardinal to 21st century student whose mission and goal are to excel in their academic pursuit, future endeavours, fulfill their obligations and uphold their rights and privileges while respecting the constituted authority at all levels and performing their civic duties. It has become imperative to strive towards having a nation whose citizens, to a large extent, possess good reading skills and good reading habits. Major stakeholders in the Reading Project, parents, government, Schools, Libraries and Library Associations, should step up their efforts towards building the right reading skills and good reading habits in children at all levels of education to guarantee prospects, progress and development of our dear citizens and the nation at large.

Parents should create a good environment for reading by encouraging their children and wards to read not necessarily for the purposes of passing examination, but as an exercise that should be part of a child's daily routine. Parents who are literate should create time to read as a source of motivation for the children. Where possible, parents should create a study or library at home and ensure that the children frequent the library and spend quality time in it. It is possible to reduce the domestic work load on the children to allow them ample time to read.

Government and school owners should endeavor to have libraries in schools, acquire the right resources to support the curriculum contents, recruit professional librarians and accommodate reading hour in the school time table during which the children will be required to be in the library to read. Each child should be made to report in class what was read while in the library.

References

- Adesulu, D., Adewole, A. & Amos, R. (2017). Reading culture: How students waste hours on social media. Available: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/05/reading-culture-students-waste-hours-social-media>
- Aina, J. A., Ogungbeni, J. I., Adigun, J. I. & Ogundipe, T. C. (2011). Poor reading habits among Nigerians: The role of libraries. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*, 529, 1-9.
- Akabuibe, I. G. & Asika, I. E. (2012). Reading habits of undergraduates and their academic performance: Issues and perspectives. *African Journal Online*, 6(2), 246-257.
- Akande, S. O. & Oyedapo, R. O. (2018). Developing the Reading Habits of Secondary School Students in Nigeria: The Way Forward. *International Journal of Library Science*, 7(1), 15-20.
- Buchwald, E. (2001). Education: The price of Freedom. Being a paper presented on the launch of The National Year of Reading.
- Douglas, M. P. (2000). *Primary school library and its services*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Etuk, G. K. (2006). Administrative strategies for improving reading skills in senior primary pupils in Nigeria. *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria*, 11(1), 43-49.
- Eyo, W. (2007). Nigeria: Libraries and reading culture. *This Day*, February 11.
- Henry, P. (2004). Children reading habits and their use of media: exhaustive suggestions on encouraging reading habits.
- Igwe, K. N. & Uzuegbu, C. P. (2013). An evaluation of Bring Back the Book initiative of the Nigerian Government. *Higher Education of social science*, 4 (2), 8-12

- Ngwoke, R. I. (2016). Role of public library and ICT in promoting reading among students of English language in Abakaliki education zone of Ebonyi state, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 64-75
- Nssien, F. U. (2008). Reading habits and skills. In F. E. Etim & F. U. Nssien (eds). *Information Literacy for Library Search*. Uyo: Abaam Publishing co. 90 – 105
- Ode, E. O. (2014). Evolving reading culture and readership promotion among the Nigerian Youths. *International Journal of Research in Applied Natural and Social Sciences*, 2(12), 27-34
- Odu, J. O. (2015). The environment and reading habits in Nigeria: A case study of Calabar Municipality. *The Information Technologist*, 12(1), 87 – 98
- Ogunrombi, S. A. & Gboyega, A. (1995). Factors affecting the reading habits of secondary school students. *Library Review*, 44(4), 50-57,
- Ojebode, F. I. (2018). A study of reading habits of students in selected secondary schools in Oyo Town. *African Journal Online*, 7, 13 – 22.
- Oji, S. E. & Habibu, I. (2011). The role of the Schools and Public Libraries in promoting reading habits among children and adolescents in Nigeria. *Journal of Information and Knowledge Management*, 1(4), 33-40. Available: <https://www.iiste.org>, retrieved May17, 2016
- Okebukola, F. O. (2004). Reading: Key to lifelong development. A keynote address delivered at a workshop on readership promotion campaign, organized by National Library of Nigeria.
- Shabi, I. N. & Udofia, E. P. (2009). The role of the school library in promoting reading culture in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Education*, 6(1&2), 259-269