

Reading Culture and English Language Performance of Senior Secondary School Students in Northern Education Zone of Cross River State

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Abstract

The study investigated reading culture and English Language performance of senior secondary school students in Northern Education Zone of Cross River State. Ex-post facto survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 62 public secondary schools in the education zone. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 1,200 respondents from twenty schools in the zone. Three null hypotheses were tested at .05 alpha level of significance. Data collection was done with the use of two instruments tagged “Students Reading Culture Questionnaire (SRCQ), which had the cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87, and English Language Performance Test (ELPT) developed by the researchers with a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The findings of the study showed that students who utilized library, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facility and students with home reading culture have higher English Language performance than those who do not. The study recommended, among others, that reading culture should be inculcated at an early stage of childhood and nurtured to adulthood, so that academic achievement can be enhanced through developed reading competence in students.

Keywords: reading, culture, performance, library, ICT

Introduction

Many students are endowed with rich cultures, but unfortunately reading is not among them. Students with reading culture are informed and knowledgeable people. Such people can communicate whatever needs to be said or written. It is not surprising that the now so familiar phrase, developing of “reading culture” has found itself a place amongst media’s daily vocabulary. The development of this culture should start at an early stage of childhood so that students would become more familiar with the various uses and usages of the language. To support this view, Wagner (2002) asserted that reading is regarded as a habit when it is carried out frequently. This would make students to be familiar with the various uses and usages of the language. For effective reading culture, use of library,

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and home reading culture should be looked into. They could determine or influence students' reading culture.

According to Ngwira (2006), reading culture should be developed at a tender age so that students will be well equipped to excel in their studies, thereby improving their use of English Language. The idea is that by making reading regular and a happy habit, students are directly and indirectly establishing close links with minds far and near, thus helping in English Language performance.

Language development is a process that starts early in life, when a person begins to acquire language by learning it as it is spoken. However, language according to Abisama (2007), is the ability to produce and comprehend both spoken and written, and in the case of sign language. Language is no doubt the major means by which ideas are shared. Therefore, it is fundamental to all living and learning. It shapes the social interactions and brings order to human lives.

English Language performance moves from simplicity to complexity. Usually, language starts off as recall of simple words without associated meaning but as students advance from one class to another, words acquire meaning and connections between words are formed. As students move higher educationally, new meanings and new associations are created and vocabulary increases as more words are learned through imbibing a reading culture. Students can communicate effectively and properly at their own ability levels.

Uwatt, Odey and Ebam (2006) were of the opinion that “reading culture has never been a way of life for many Nigerians but rather a purely utilitarian engagement for a few who can manage it”. This means that people never make reading a regular and happy habit. It could be that the Nigerian culture is predominantly a non-print oriented; hence children from this background cannot read deliberately. Students should be interested in reading different types of texts. This is not reading under instruction, not texts assigned by teachers.

Reading culture is supposed to build students that can transform themselves into informed and knowledgeable members of the society, able to play their rightful role in the global village. Inadequate use of library in reading could however contribute highly to lower levels of educational standard and high levels of illiteracy, hence poor performance in English Language. The primary purpose of establishing a library is to provide information to students with a view to improving educational standards and promoting functional literacy among students, thus, encouraging good performances in English Language. The library therefore exists to provide an educational support and help in students' English Language performance. To support this view, Odu and Afebende (2015) maintained that library assists in the development of effective delivery system which is a key component of university teaching and learning. The question now is “do students really make use of library”? This has somehow contributed to a lack of reading culture among students.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities play important roles in connecting students to critical areas of information which include state and private sector performance, education, financial institutions and markets, and rules and rights regarding basic services. Aniemeka (2006) posited that ICT is a convergence of various electronic media with computer at the centre, for the purpose of collecting, storing, processing and distributing information by electronic means. This implies that ICT plays a pivotal role in broadening access to information. Information dissemination does not end with the written word, but also includes group discussion, poetry, story-telling, debates, among other culturally appropriate forms; and use of a variety of media including radio, television and the internet. Books and ICT complement each other. Gorman (2000) is of the view that libraries have professionals embedded with librarianship who are always ready in service delivery. This entails that students are always guided in the use of library facilities. The internet offers immediate access to information both locally and internationally and networked information is not limited by the physical barriers like the book. Radio, audio visual materials can increase the range of information sources for the library whereas access to newspapers can play a key role in developing a reading culture and maintaining reading skills. Newhouse (2002) supported the use of ICT, that technology has great potentials to enhance students' achievement and enhance learning in the classroom. The use of such Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in reading by students could promote a reading culture.

The roles of some homes in modelling children's behaviour to inculcate desired reading habits are enormous. Ogodo (2005) was of the opinion that the home lays the foundation or goals and motivation early in the life of the child. This entails that the home provides what the students take with them to school and build them up. Herein, the importance of the home in the reading culture of students can be appreciated. Li and Qiu (2018) maintained that families affect children's learning behaviours and their academic achievements. This entails that the home is a breeding ground for morally and socially approved behaviour. Alike and Edosa (2012) also posited that parents' lack of attention on their children influences the children's overall development especially their academics, emotional and social performance. Therefore, if the home, being controlled by the parents, does not provide conducive reading environment and reading materials among others, reading habit would not be encouraged among students.

Statement of the problem

It has been observed that students' spoken and written English is very poor. This is contrary to the expectations of the parents, government, professionally trained teachers of English who have invested in education. It has become a collective concern to observe that many students hardly read or make simple sentences without grammatical flaws. This has caused a lot of controversies for this poor performance in English Language. Although, the Cross River State Government has invested a lot in the educational sector, the standard of students' written and spoken English has been discouraging. With this investment in education, it is expected that students should be competent in written and spoken English. There are however different shades of opinions with regard to reading

culture and students' English Language performance. This trend motivated the researchers to carry out this study to determine the influence of reading culture on English Language performance of senior secondary school students in Northern Education Zone of Cross River State.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised for the study:

1. How does the use of library influence students' English Language performance?
2. How does Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facility influence students' English Language performance?
3. How does home reading culture influence students' English Language performance?

Hypotheses

The following three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students who use library in reading and those who do not utilize library facilities in reading.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students who utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and those who do not utilize such facilities.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students with home reading culture and those without home reading culture.

Methodology

The ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 12,000 senior secondary II students of 2018/2019 in all the 64 public secondary schools in Northern Education Zone of Cross River State. A sample size of 1,200 students was selected using simple random sampling technique representing 10% of the population of 12,000. The research instruments used for data collection were Students' Reading Questionnaire (SRCQ) and Students' English Language Performance Test (SELPT).

The Reading Culture Questionnaire had positive and negative statements measured in a 4-points likert scale with Strongly Agree - SA (4), Agree - A (3), Disagree - D (2) and Strongly Disagree - SD (1) response categories. The questionnaire had two sections (A and B). Section A was on personal information (age, sex and school). Section B of the questionnaire was on students' use of library which had 6 items, students' use of Information and Communication facilities which had 7 items and students' home reading culture which had 7 items. To ascertain the reliability of instruments, the researchers conducted a Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha reliability for the students' reading culture questionnaire. The English Language Performance Test (ELPT) consisted of twenty multiple-choice items with four options. The test was a researchers' made instrument used to determine the English Language Performance of students. Questions 1-5 tested the

phonological aspect which covered sounds and intonation; questions 6-10 tested the morphological aspect which covered inflection, derivation and compounding; questions 11-15 tested the grammatical aspects which covered the elements or parts of a sentence; while questions 16-20 tested the semantic aspects which covered meaning of phrases and sentences. The administration of the instrument was done once. The scores obtained from the questionnaire was used to determine the reliability coefficient which stood at 0.87. The value was accepted as reliable. The test-retest method was used to ascertain the English Language performance test (ELPT). This was administered to a group of twenty (20) students from schools that were not part of the sample size. The test was again administered to students after an interval of two weeks. Pearson's product moment correlation (r) was used for statistical treatment. The reliability was 0.82.

Presentation of results

The analysis of data results were based on research questions and hypotheses raised. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. The results are presented on tables 1, 2 and 3.

Research question 1: How does the use of library influence students' English Language performance?

The data that provide answers to the research question is presented below.

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation of students who use library in reading and those who do not

S/N	Variables	N	Mean	SD
1.	Students who use library in reading	1,200	32.36	20.62
2.	Students who do not utilize library		28.22	18.57

Table 1 shows that the mean score for students who use library in reading (32.30) is higher than those who do not (28.22). This means that utilization of library aid in students' English Language performance.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students who utilize library in reading and those who do not utilize library facilities in reading

Table 2: t-test of difference between students who used library in reading and those who did not use library facilities in reading

English performance of students	Language	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Students who use library in reading		948	32.35	20.62	48.13	1.96	Ho is rejected
Students who do not utilize library		252	28.22	18.57			

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level, df 1198

The result as shown in table 2 reveals that the calculated t-value of 48.13 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students who utilize library in reading and those who do not utilize library facilities in reading is therefore rejected.

Research question 2: How does Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facility influence students' English Language performance?

Table 3: Mean ratings and standard deviation of students who use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and students who do not

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Students who use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities	672	58.36	13.63
Students who do not utilize such facilities	528	54.43	11.89

Table 3 shows that the mean values for students who use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities (58.36) is greater than those who do not utilize such facilities (54.13). The variation in mean scores shown by standard deviation was almost homogenous (13.63, 11.69). Therefore, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities is important in students' English Language performance.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students who utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and those who do not utilize such facilities.

Table 4: t-test of difference between the English Language performance of students who used Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and those who did not utilize such facilities

English performance of students	Language	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Students who utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities		672	58.36	13.63	46.96	1.96	Ho is rejected
Students who do not utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities		528	54.43	11.89			

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level, df 1198

The result in table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value of 46.96 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students who utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and those who do not use such facilities is hereby rejected. This means that those students who get in contact with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities get motivated to read and this enhances their English Language performance.

Research question 3: How does home reading culture influence students' English Language performance?

Table 5: Mean ratings and standard deviation of students with home reading culture and those without home reading culture

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Students with home reading culture	870	37.83	21.36
Students without home reading culture	330	33.00	21.34

Table 5 shows that the mean value for students with home reading culture (37.83) is greater than that of students without home reading culture (33.00). Therefore, home reading culture influences students' English Language performance positively.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students with home reading culture and those without home reading culture.

Table 6: t-test of difference between the English Language performance of students with home reading culture and those without home reading culture

English Language performance of students	N	Mean	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Students with home reading culture	870	37.82	45.95	1.96	Ho is rejected
Students without home reading culture	330	33.00			

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level, df 1198

The result in table 6 is an indication that the calculated t-value of 45.95 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis which postulated that there is no significant difference in the English Language performance of students with home reading culture and those without home reading culture is hereby rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in English Language performance of students with home reading culture and those without home reading culture.

Discussion of findings

The findings from the first hypothesis of this study indicated that there is a significant influence of library on students who utilize it in reading in Northern Education Zone of Cross River State. By implication, due to their frequency to the library, their reading ability and English Language is positively influenced. Gorman (2000) opined that the libraries have professionals embedded with librarianship who are always ready in service delivery. This implies that libraries have professionals who are dedicated to assist students who use the libraries. As such, libraries provide scholars with education which will help them to assist with the development of their English Language.

The second finding of the study as a result of testing hypothesis 2 indicates that students who are exposed to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities have higher English Language performance than those without exposure to such facilities. Newhouse (2002) supported the use of ICT, and posited that technology has great potentials to enhance students' achievement and enhance learning in the classroom.

The third finding of the study, which was the outcome of testing hypothesis 3, reveals that students with a home reading culture have higher English Language performance than those without a home reading culture. This portrays that the parents/parental attitudes at home may lead to low or high performance of children. The homes play an important role in the child's upbringing and his/her performance at school. This is supported by Ogodu (2005) that the home lays the foundation for goals and motivation early in the life of the child. It follows therefore that homes help students' English Language performance.

Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that reading culture has significant influence on students' English Language performance in Northern Education Zone of Cross River State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The state government should establish at least two public libraries in each Local Government Area suitable for students' utilization.
2. Government should provide telecentres, high penetration and quality telecommunication services, stable electricity and emphasis on introducing computer classes in secondary schools in the state.
3. Parents should give early exposure of students to reading, with enough time to talk and enjoy stories.

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