

Psychology of Reading Culture: Counselling Strategies for Improving Academic Performance of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

This paper examined issues on psychology of promoting reading culture with counselling strategies for improving academic performance of secondary school students. The article views reading culture as essential in the academic fate of the students and makes strong recommendations on how this can be enhanced. The subject matter of this article is treated under different subheadings to make for easy understanding. Such headings include concept of reading culture, ways of promoting reading culture among secondary school students, the importance of cultivating good habit of reading among secondary school students, challenges of reading culture among secondary school students, and academic performance of secondary school students. It was concluded that promoting good reading culture among students in schools is a responsibility of all the stakeholders in the education industry. The article therefore recommended, among others, that government should increase budgetary allocations to education sector so that this problem of reading culture would be tackled in the secondary schools.

Keywords: psychology, reading, counselling, academic, performance

Introduction

Poor reading culture among secondary school students is plunging Nigeria into an abyss of falling standard of education. According to what the researchers have observed over the years, performance of secondary school students in teacher made tests and standardized examinations (like NECO, WAEC, JAMB and NABTEB) are not encouraging. Frequent visit to libraries, attending classes for readings or writing assignments are rarely found among secondary school students nowadays. Promoting reading culture cannot just happen in a vacuum, it needs deliberate and concerted efforts like, note taking, constant practice, rehearsals, participation in learning activities, jotting main points during reading/classes, summarizing lessons, underlining and reorganizing

difficult concepts. Hardly are students found with these avid features of good study habits in Nigerian schools. This paper examines issues on promoting reading culture and posits this as panacea for improving academic performance of secondary school students. The concept of reading culture, ways of promoting reading culture among secondary school students, the importance of cultivating good habit of reading among secondary school students, challenges of reading culture among secondary school students, and academic performance of secondary school students are some of the areas covered in this write up.

The concept of reading culture

Reading, according to Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, is a skill or activity of getting information from books. Also, it is defined as the ability to induce meaning from written or printed words (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018). Culture is defined as the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2022).

Connotatively, the interconnection between the two terms (reading and culture) could be seen as a deliberate and habitual way of life of a student in getting information from books, articles, journals, magazines, newspapers and other reference materials. Researchers have defined reading culture as habitual and regular reading of books and information materials (Ogugua, Emerole, Egwim, Anyanwu & Haco-Obasi, 2015). Also, reading culture can be best explained as a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through written words (Redcare, 2018). Promoting reading culture based on these definitions, demands often and regular routines of finding meanings from words in hard and soft materials. It is a skill that develops minds and gives pleasure to people. Principals, teachers and parents are to encourage students/wards on this salient feature of learning.

Ways of promoting reading culture among secondary school students

Concerted efforts towards reviving reading culture among students have been explored by the Reading Association of Nigeria, the Nigerian Book Development Council and Nigerian Library Association. To this end, the National Library of Nigeria has been sponsoring the readership promotion campaign in the country (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018). Highlighting the strategies for promoting the reading habits of secondary school students, Oji and Habibu (2011) note that, book exhibition, book talks, story-talk hours, creative activities or creative writings, book clubs, drama and mobile reading tents are the possible means of reviving reading culture among students. The researchers further suggested improved funding, establishment of libraries and associating reading with pleasure as ways which promote reading culture among secondary school students. Reinventing or promoting reading culture needs collective efforts from all and sundry (government, non-governmental organizations, principals, teachers, researchers' parents, students). Some of the stakeholders and their expected roles in revamping reading culture among secondary school students are enunciated here.

1. Government and non-governmental organizations

These bodies can promote reading culture among secondary school students by providing the facilities and conducive learning environment. For instance, organizing book

exhibitions, book fests, reading debates across schools, awards of excellence to the best readers, giving out scholarships, sponsoring field trips to educational centres, archival centres and prestigious institutions within and outside the country, are some ways that governmental and non-governmental organizations to facilitate reading culture. Stocking libraries with current and relevant textbooks in virtually all the school subjects, employing professional librarians and also ensuring their welfare is appropriately catered for will revamp reading culture among secondary school students.

2. Principals

Principals can promote reading culture by constituting young readers' club, authors' club, essay writers' club, editors' club, Journalists' club, current affairs' club, among others in their schools. Reading culture can also be promoted through establishing committees of staff in supervising these clubs. They can apply for grants from government, NGOs, philanthropists and donor agencies in order to build and stock relevant materials in the libraries in each of the blocks or classes in the school for promoting reading culture among students. School librarians and principals can help instill a reading culture in a school by ensuring that the library is well-resourced, well-staffed and well-equipped. These will serve as a catalyst for reading culture of the school (Puna Foundation, nd.). Principals should motivate young readers by giving awards, novels or gifts and also, institutionalizing motivational strategies to spur students' performance in secondary schools. To create a reading culture, the principal and staff need to understand the impact of reading on students' achievement, understand a shared vision of the school's reading culture, know why a good reading culture is important to students, know what an engaged reader looks like, and fully support the library and its resources, services and programmes (Puna Foundation, n.d.).

3. Teachers

Teachers have many roles in promoting reading culture among secondary school students. They should make it a routine in their classes for the students to read one after the other. Teachers can help students develop good metacognitive strategies for reading by getting them to monitor their own reading especially when they run into difficulties in their reading. The following are metacognitive strategies that teachers can help students use to improve their reading (Santrock, 2007)

- Overviewing text before reading
- Looking for important information while reading and paying more attention to it than other information; asking oneself questions about the important ideas or relate them to something one already knows.
 - Attempting to determine the meaning of words not recognized (using the words around a word to figure out its meaning, using a dictionary, or temporarily ignoring it and waiting for further clarification).
 - Monitoring text comprehension.
 - Understanding relationships between parts of text.
 - Recognizing when one might need to go back and reread a passage one did not understand, to clarify an important idea, or to underline or summarize for study or a passage that seems important to be remembered.).
- Adjusting pace of reading depending on the difficulty of the material.

They can supervise all clubs that support reading culture in the schools and help in fishing out those that are lazy, for rehabilitation; and even those that cannot read, for proper drills. Stick and carrot relationship should be encouraged by teachers in their quest to rejuvenate the dying reading culture among students. A student that has the power of reading novels, textbooks or any material within a specific given time in a school should be encouraged by teachers. In classrooms, teachers can set examples by asking students to read loudly every day, creating time for reading on the time table, having plenty of great books on display, sharing his/her own reading, and reading in front of students. These are possible ways of promoting reading culture among students (Puna Foundation, n.d).

4. **School counsellors, educational psychologists, social workers, school consultants**

These specialists have roles in identifying students with low interest in reading through researches, outreach sensitization, using psychological tests, designing work plan for reading culture among students, using techniques that will enhance memory retention, organizing workshop on promoting reading culture among students including enlightenment on strategies for encoding materials like:

a. **Activities:** Students should always be engaged in the learning process by performing learning tasks. For example, reading text, assignment, exercises, summarizing, answering questions, thinking, demonstrating, paraphrasing, writing essay either in school or outside the school and also to show that there is exposure in reading.

b. **Organization:** For a student to develop reading culture, he/she needs to imbibe coherent pattern in reading, arrange the construct in order of classes, things, or places; by so doing standard of his/her reading culture will be stimulated.

c. **Elaboration:** It is the increase in number of books someone reads that will improve his/her interest in reading culture. Students are to be encouraged in reading variety of books that will improve their vocabularies, and enhance their lexis and structures.

d. **Mnemonics:** This involves using devices to aid memory by summarizing information through picking the first letters in each words of a sentence or using some other forms of acronyms, abbreviations to help learners remember; for example UNICEF for United Nation International Children Education Fund, would definitely improve reading culture among students of secondary schools.

e. **Rehearsal:** Constant repetitions enhance practical skills; students are to be encouraged to read books always. It may improve their interest in learning other things.

f. **Techniques:** Counsellors should employ techniques in handling students that have difficulties in reading and even those that can read. Using techniques like **SQ4Rs** can also promote reading culture. The full meaning of these alphabet are: **S** stands for Survey, meaning go through the material; **Q** stands for question, meaning find out information by probing; first **R** stands for read, meaning look at words and understand their meanings; second **“R”** stands for recite, meaning say a piece of writing aloud from memory; third **“R”** stands for write; while, forth **“R”** stands for review, meaning reconsider in order to make changes.

g. **What to do before, during and after reading:** Principals, counsellors, teachers, parents and students should note that before reading a material there is a need to (POQ)

meaning Preview, Outline, and Question himself/herself about the headings of the material. While during reading, the reader should RUA; meaning to Read for learning (permanent change of behaviour), Underline difficult words and Answer all the questions in the material. After reading a material, students are to recite, review, review (3Rs) again and again. By so doing reading culture can be maintained and performance of students will improve.

h. **What to read:** During school life, a student is expected to read widely in order to develop the horizon of his/her brain. A student can do that by scheduling his/her priority, indicating the subject that comes first in order of task at hand. Eighty percent of his/her readings should be from his/her field of study. Textbooks in the relevant field of study should constitute his topmost priorities (Tukur-Hamman, 1997). This is followed by audio and video lectures delivered by renowned experts of the field; then the remaining twenty percent should be for other fields of study. A student can make a good choice if only a teacher comes in to teach or help; teacher will be in a good position to prescribe textbooks that are relevant to the students' field. Interestingly however, knowing what to read in a particular field of study is a blessing to a student.

i. **Where to read:** A comfortable environment that is free from distraction will be the right place a student is expected to go. A place like library, classrooms, lecture theatres and rooms. Kukwi, Christ and Agaga (2012) opine that libraries, study lounges or private rooms are best places for study. Finding a good place to study seems like an easy task whereas it is not that simple. Learners need to find a place where they feel at ease, where they will be comfortable in order to study. If the learners are not comfortable, they will not work hard as they will be tired easily, and if they are too comfortable as in a bed, they will fall asleep. Choosing a place where there is no disturbance and where there is good ventilation is recommended. In the morning a student is advised to get a quiet place to face his study before going to class or library for study. While in the afternoon, library or a silent and cool place will be the appropriate place for a student to stay. In the night, a classroom that is free from distraction and where there are lights and good seats are recommended for study.

j. **How to read:** When students find themselves with books to read, at times students may be misguided when they come across a book they feel they are expected to read from cover to cover. Many of the books people read excluding literary textbooks are not designed to be read from cover to cover. Having selected a book, one should read a back cover or introduction to see what the book is all about (Tukur-Hamman, 1997). It is also recommended that the book should be surveyed in order to determine the structure, organisation and the plan of the chapters. The reader should also look at the title of the book, read the introduction, the summary and the main heads, as these are the main ideas (Sambo, 2008). There are suitable times for reading different materials. The mind is most active after a period of rest. This is the period for reading difficult subject matters like mathematics, and science subjects. Students should read simpler subject matter when their concentrations and comprehensions are low. Also, students are to fit in their reading materials with their level of concentration. If a student can read in the night, he/she should reserve his/her time for the night for more concentration (Tukur-Hamman, 1997). Students are advised to comprehend materials or subject areas of their concern.

Mathematics and science subjects have some peculiarities in terms of formulas, professional terms and the like; students are to take their time in reading difficult concepts in the morning or when they are having more concentration. Students should take break while reading, move around to stretch their legs in order to refresh their memories.

k. **Why do people read:** Reading is so significant to lives because it takes people out of darkness to light. Students are encouraged to read their books for learning, for passion, and for guiding others. Reading is a key to life; whosoever that reads refreshes his life and will stay longer. Students' future can be assured if they are productive in reading and publishing.

l. **Skimming and scanning in reading:** Skimming is an idea of reading a text quickly to get a general idea or meaning, while scanning is a reading in order to find specific information in a text (BBC, n.d). A student can go through a material at hand quickly in order to get new ideas or information. People read most books to find out some specific information or to find out if the book is worth reading in details. In such circumstances, skimming is very useful. Normally, the first line in every paragraph suggests what the paragraph contains (Tukur-Hamman, 1997). Students can go through a material quickly in order to understand the main points and have an idea of the subject matter. This is especially used in newspapers and novels, while textbooks related to his/her field needed special attention.

m. **Thinking:** Critical thinking and critical reading are two good features for a serious minded student. If a student wants to develop good study habit, he/she must be careful while reading. Critical thinking is an ability of a reader to evaluate information or ideas in the course of his/her readings. If a student takes a material with the aim of evaluating it, it shows that, the student is serious. Critical reading is a way of discovering ideas, knowledge, and information in a text. Reading should not be a mechanical and unthinking process. Some people find it useful to visualize what they are reading as this helps them to remember what they have read. It is also useful to ask yourself questions in the course of reading and answer them at the end of reading.

5. Parents

Parents should stand their grounds to nurture interest and ideas in their wards, instill in them story reading books; they should reinforce their children by rewarding them with gifts and praises. They should take their time to teach them reading or employ professionals to coach them at the tender ages so that, laxity can be ward off from them.

6. Students

Students have a vital role to play in promoting reading culture in schools. They should be encouraged by the principals, school counsellors, teachers, parents to develop a good study habits, regular class attendance, prompt doing and submission of assignments, constant revision of lessons, using summary jotter for important points, group discussions, regular favourable reading and learning time and using dictionary. Students should sift the chaff in the course of choosing what to read, when to read and how to read; conducive reading place and judicious use of time are good habits that can improve students' performance in schools. They should get guardians, mentors, advisers or coordinators that will help them in monitoring or tracking their reading cultures. Students are to assess their pace in reading materials for good academic performance.

Importance of reading culture among secondary school students

The significance of readership among all and sundry especially secondary school students cannot be over emphasized. As the saying goes, readers are always leaders. Reading leads to success in examinations; it leads students to discover their potentials; it takes students out of ignorance; it illuminates their ways; and gives them skills of writing. It leads students to scholarship; it gives foresights to students; readership promotes skills, vocabularies and gives protective measures against illiteracy and ignorance. Reading develops minds and takes students to discover new ideas. Students that know how to read can surf internet for information. Ogugua et al. (2015) said that benefits of reading culture involve increase in memories, discipline, vocabulary, creativity and skills to the individuals (students); it promotes tolerance and enhances educational growth and development of the nation.

Challenges of reading culture among students in secondary schools

Achieving good reading culture among secondary school students is faced with many challenges. Stakeholders are expected to provide the enabling environment, enough reading facilities needed by the students, good supervision, monitoring, evaluation, teaching and counselling by the principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, educational psychologists, communities, non-governmental organisations, researchers, security agents, philanthropists, individuals and religious leaders.

1. One common challenge that keeps on reoccurring in schools is examination malpractice. It has become like canker worm that eats away the glories of a nation state.

2. Another prevailing challenge is the negative attitudes of either storekeeper in ministries, agencies, parastatals and establishments. These personnel sell government teaching aids (like textbooks, novels, white/black boards, chalks, modules,) to book sellers in bookshops; this ugly trend can be stopped by educational stakeholders in ministries, agencies, parastatals, establishments and communities.

3. Paucity of professional guidance counsellors, educational psychologists, and school consultants in schools has been a challenge to the government, principals, and proprietors over the years.

4. Good reading culture has been marred by poor funding, and low motivation of professional teachers.

5. Unnecessary attachment to paper qualifications in the country has been a huge problem among Nigerians as it inhibits good reading culture among students.

6. Unqualified teachers have approached teaching industry without pedagogical trainings; this will wind down good reading culture among students.

7. Unproductive use of technological gadgets like cell phones and the like, in facebooking, whatsapping, tweeting, pinging, chatting, messaging rather than reading is also a grave challenge.

8. Unmindful and uncaring parents that are not tracking the progress of their children after school can also add to the bad reading culture among students.

9. Non accessibility of scholarship from philanthropists, donor agencies, individuals, traditional institutions and the like can add to poor reading culture among secondary school students.

10. Outdated and inadequate library facilities have also been a problem to teachers and students in schools.

11. Students with psychological disorders (dyslexics, agrammatists, agrapahia), lazy students that do not read regularly, that do not do their assignment promptly and those that lack focus, may not value the high reading culture. The challenges are multifaceted and multifarious.

Academic performance of secondary school students

Standardizing reading culture among secondary school students is a thing of concern among educationists. The meaning of academic performance can be seen as the scores or grades received by a student from tests, examinations and other assessments. Effective and efficient reading culture can improve academic performance among secondary school students if the strategies, methods and techniques outlined in this article are implemented by concerned stakeholders.

Conclusion

Promoting good reading culture among students in schools is a responsibility of all and it cannot be achieved if the stakeholders (government, principals, teachers, counsellors, students, individuals, researchers, non-governmental organisations, and philanthropists are not putting their best towards education in the country.

Recommendations

Based on these submissions in this article, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should increase budgetary allocations to education sector so that this problem of reading culture would be tackled in secondary schools.

2. Government should provide enough funds for procuring learning facilities, awarding best readers so that reading culture will be promoted among secondary school students.

3. Government should organize workshops, seminars, and summits for teachers to improve their teaching skills and techniques of promoting reading culture among secondary school students.

4. Principals should promote good reading culture among secondary school students; they should establish, motivate, monitor and control committees on reading culture in their schools.

5. Principals should reward outstanding teachers that have excelled in safeguarding this goal of future leaders in their schools.

6. Principals should organize quarterly workshops/summits for teachers and students on how to revive good reading culture, attitudinal change towards readings, value reorientations for future challenges.

7. Teachers should adopt positive change in discharging their duties (teaching students on good reading culture) in schools.

8. Guidance Counsellors and Educational Psychologists, should adequately use psychological test inventories, interviews, and researches in identifying students with

special needs (poor reading culture) and advance appropriate steps in solving their problems.

9. Communities should establish reading centres, and public libraries in their communities for promoting reading culture among students.

10. Politicians, non-governmental organisations, philanthropists, individuals should engage in supporting schools, grant scholarship, and build public libraries for reviving reading culture among secondary school students.

11. Researchers should conduct researches in identifying factors inhibiting strong zeal of reading culture among secondary school students and find out possible solutions to the problem.

12. Security agents should protect, maintain relative peace in schools for good reading culture among secondary school students, as insecurity breeds violence and crimes.

13. School based management committee (SBMC) should pay attention to promoting good study habit among secondary school students.

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