

The Poor Reading and Research Culture of the Nigerian Teachers and Students

Adejumo Muyiwa^{1*} Arinola Theophilus²

1.Department of Educational Technology and Library Studies, Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

2.Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

The target of this paper is to examine some important issues relating to reading and research among Teachers and Students in Nigeria. The paper is not intended to check the detail issues surrounding education sector but the key issues such as reading and research culture, some of the causes, challenges and way forward.

Keywords: poor reading, research culture

1. Introduction

It has become a common knowledge that the standard of education in Nigeria has fallen. In fact, the poor standard of education in Nigeria has become a regular subject of discourse among scholars and stakeholders in the education sector. One begins to wonder why this is so. The reason is not far-fetched. The poor reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and students, among other, is one major factor that brings about a decline in the standard of education. The fact that a reading mind is a leading mind is incontrovertible. In other words, a reading mind who doubles as a leading mind must be one who has a passion and curiosity to study to obtain knowledge through a planned and systematic collection, objective analysis and accurate interpretation of data with a view to arriving at a verifiable conclusion. However, the reversed is the case in Nigeria. Therefore, there is no gainsaying the fact that the poor reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and Students has become a cankerworm which has eaten deep into the educational fabrics of the so-called “Giant of Africa”.

2. The Meaning of Reading and Research

In the works of Fagbemi (1997), reading entails the ability to decipher letter and its intricate structures to make meaningful whole. Unoh (1991) defines reading as a complex language processing behaviour that entails interpreting or getting meaning from written or printed materials. Some things are common to all these definitions: the acts of interpreting, deciphering and processing of symbols as written or printed materials for information.

Research, in its own case is a scholarly endeavour oriented towards the establishment of the relationship that exists among the various variables that characterise the universe. It is an endeavour to study or obtain knowledge through the use of a systematic approach with the intent of clarification.

From the foregoing, it is evident that both reading and research are scholarly endeavour geared towards obtaining knowledge with a view to arriving at dependable solutions to identified problems.

3. Reading and Research Culture in Nigeria

It is apposite to take a cursory look into the concept of reading culture as it affects Nigerian situation. Reading and research entail the full development of reading habit as well as a habit of systematic investigation aimed at arriving at a dependable solution to problem to an extent that they have become a regular event in one's life. When reading and research become a culture, they have become part and parcel of the person. It requires no force or fuss to manifest itself. A society with reading culture is usually highly literate. While travelling on short or long distances, members of such society are usually found spending the time reading one magazine, novel or the other. Hardly any minute is wasted gossiping. Every opportunity is devoted to reading information pieces and news items are usually disseminated quickly through print in such a society.

From the analysis of what is meant by reading and research culture above, can we then say that Nigeria has a reading and research culture? A discussion on the reading and research culture of Nigerians cannot be separated from the literacy level of the people. Ahmed (1992) says that literacy is “the ability to read, write and compute, and it is the technology that holds the key to other technologies”. But then, what is the literacy level or rate of Nigeria? While some industrialized nations of the world are known to have close to one hundred percent level of literacy, unfortunately, Akinpelu (1992) opines that in Nigeria, between 50% and 70% of the populace are illiterate. This has not in any way created a conducive atmosphere for a reading and research culture to germinate and develop. However, this study centres on the poor reading and research culture among the few literate citizens in Nigeria, that is, teachers and students.

4. Reading and Research Culture among Nigerian Teachers and Students

It is more than obvious that the level of reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and students is nothing to brag about. In fact, the culture of reading and research is in a state of coma begging for help. It is pathetic and disheartening to know that most teachers who are supposed to be a repertoire of knowledge find it difficult to read a novel in a month. They do not see reading and research as a needed mental exercise necessary to fortify themselves academically and broaden their intellectual horizon. As a result of this unacademic practice on the part of the teachers, many students do not develop a knack for good reading and research culture. They, therefore, divert their attention to other unprofitable ventures which do not yield any positive result on their educational career such as watching of football matches, attending night parties, engaging in internet fraud, among others.

At this juncture, it is not untrue to state that the problem of the poor reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and students is not natural. It is caused. What then are the causes of this unwholesome academic practice? They include:

- Poverty
- Desire for material wealth
- Dearth of libraries
- Misuse of Technology
- Corruption

4.1 Poverty

Poverty is one major factor provoking poor reading and research habit among the lettered citizens of Nigeria. Only a few people live above the poverty line. The majority of Nigerian parents are too poor to send their children to school. They lack the needed money to buy books and pay school fees. Therefore, these children are often absent in schools where they are to learn and be imparted with the necessary reading and research skills. The resources which teachers collect as salaries are so meagre that it is difficult for them to buy books and carry out a research from it. The money is not enough to guarantee their families a three-square meal all through the month let alone embarking on an academic research which is not only time-consuming but also money-consuming. This, in no small measure, affects the reading culture of both the Nigerian teachers and students by diverting their attention to other activities that will ensure their survival.

4.2 Desire for material wealth

Next to that is excessive desire for material wealth among the Nigerian youths. Needless to say is the fact that the Nigerian society places high premium on materialism at the expense of scholarship. Reading and research which, in essence, are intellectual activities are no longer given adequate attention since, according to the vox populi, they do not culminate in riches. Students who are supposed to be engrossed in reading and research activities are fully involved in get-rich-quick activities. They want instant opulence and enjoy luxurious life. To achieve this, they often abandon their educational careers for the pursuit of money which they believe can be gotten in illicit business and politics. Teachers as well engage in businesses which could fetch them quick money to build mansions, buy a fleet of cars and also marry more wives. This further worsens the comatose state of reading and research culture in Nigeria.

4.3 Dearth of libraries

Besides, the dearth of libraries in schools and in public places adds to the decline in the reading and research culture among the Nigerian teachers and students. It is not an overstatement that libraries play an important role in the promotion of reading habits. A library is a place where ideas are formed and developed by an average scholar. It is a place designed for intellectuals to read and widen their intellectual horizon for the purpose of problem-solving. However, in Nigeria, libraries are not being established where they are needed. It is pathetic that most schools do not have a library. Where libraries are provided, they are not adequately stocked with reading resources that can affect the lives of citizens. Again, public libraries are not provided by state and local government. The National Policy on Education's provision on library is not being complied with. So, because of this shortage or absence of libraries, teachers and students seem not to be aware of the utilitarian values of library. Hence, they consider going to the library as a waste of time and energy. They rather go to the libraries only when they are about to sit for an examination.

4.4 Misuse of Technology

The fact that technology has done more harm than good to the educational development of Nigeria is indisputable. Technology, which should be harnessed positively towards educational development, has been abused by the Nigerian students. Instead of reading and gathering useful information from the internet, some students have resorted to playing game, engaging in internet fraud such as "yahoo-yahoo", etc. Through

technology, it is made possible to watch the English Premiership as well as the Spanish La liga matches. The ability to watch these foreign football matches made possible by technology has diverted the attention of Nigerian students. They prefer sitting by the television set viewing different forms of pornographic films and other unwholesome documentaries at the expense of reading and research. This has worsened the rate at which teachers and students read in Nigeria.

4.5 Corruption

One other cause of the poor reading and research culture is corruption. As a matter of fact, corruption, which is found in every sector of the Nigerian life, has made students to trivialize reading. In schools, many students indulge in immoral acts rather than face their studies diligently. Situations like trading sex for grades, sales of ungraded textbooks to students at high fees, using money to buy examination grades and cheating in examinations abound in our institutions of higher learning. Those who engage in these notorious acts consider reading and research a waste of time and energy. Other causes include lack of adult readers as models. When teachers evade reading and research, it will be difficult to inculcate the culture in their students. That apart, the cost of publishing books is too high. This makes Publishers sell books at exorbitant rate. So, most students who lack the financial wherewithal are left with a low morale to venture into reading.

What challenges do the poor reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and students pose to the development of education in Nigeria?

First, there is astronomical increase in the anti-social behaviour and other vices among the Nigerian youths especially, teachers and students. Corroborating this view, Rubin (2002) opines that “children with poor reading culture have a higher chance of anti-social behaviour, delinquency, school violence, bullying, hacking computers and examination malpractices.” In fact, the sudden increase in the rate of violence and terrorism in Africa and other third-world nations could be linked with poor reading and research culture. This is because anyone who is well-read will find it difficult to commit crime and foment trouble. In fact, there will not be time for such nefarious activities. It is only a student who is not versed in his/her academic field due to poor reading habit that will plan to engage in examination malpractice. Also, a well-read teacher will find it odd to aid and abet students to commit examination malpractice. Due to poor research culture, societal problems like epidemics, crisis, corruption, etc have become persistent and no lasting solution has been proffered to nip them in the bud.

In addition to that, poor reading and research culture among teachers and students has made the transmission of knowledge, moral, etiquette, values, culture and tradition from one generation to another a herculean task. Okebukola (2004) affirms that “through reading, human have the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation”: He states further that “reading allows one to listen to the wisdom of the ages”. However, the case of Nigeria is a sad and pathetic one. Because the Nigerian teachers and students do not have a flair for reading and research, the needed mores are now going into oblivion. The culture and tradition of our society is fast fading away. Teachers who should be the custodian of these mores are busy running after money while their students are left untutored. Since the Nigerian youths are ignorant of their salient culture and tradition, the society is no longer a congenial place to live in as it is fraught with series of crisis, discord, bitterness and acrimony. Leaders in the communities have been relegated to a mere stooges and puppets, thereby making the expected perfect serenity of the Nigerian society a mirage.

In the education sector, poor reading and research culture has brought about poor grades, frustration, dislike for school and failure to develop full potential on the part of students. Since most students have handled reading and research with levity, their performance in school has left much to be desired. Some of them are frustrated out of school while those who manage to graduate do not often have good result. In the area of research, students with poor reading and research culture often involve themselves in plagiarism. Plagiarism is an act of literary theft. It is the act of copying, reproducing or paraphrasing significant portion of someone else’s published or unpublished material and presenting it as one’s own. Through this act, many students have forfeited their studentship. As if that is not enough, students’ poor research culture has made the public lose confidence in certificate. It has been observed that certificate is no longer a proof of one’s competence. All these and many more are some of the incalculable damage which poor reading and research culture has done to the career of students and education sector in general.

Poor reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and students has left most of them uninformed. A soul that lacks the needed information will not lack one kind of deformity or the other. Little will one wonder the sayings that “if you are not informed, you are deformed” and “if you are not current, you are not correct”. Some students and teachers alike do not know their rights in the society. Some of them cannot discharge their civic responsibility because they are not informed. Many of our political leaders in Nigeria are not informed enough to lead the people. They so much depend on their ill-informed advisers who often mislead or misguide them when they need to make vital decisions. This does not augur well for our dear nation. Every sector of our nation’s life is affected by this unwholesome phenomenon of poor reading and research culture. Therefore, urgent and necessary steps are needed to be taken by all stakeholders to save the situation.

5. Ways of Improving the Reading and Research Culture of the Nigerian Teachers and Students

First, government at all levels should see it as a responsibility to establish libraries in schools and public places. Not that alone, these libraries should be stocked with current books. Students will no longer have excuses for not having a library in their various schools. Teachers should also encourage them to patronise the school library for their own good. Establishment of libraries in the public places will also change Nigeria from a television-watching nation to a reading nation. Rural areas should not be excluded. Mobile libraries should be established in all the nook and cranny of the country. This will encourage teachers, students and the people in rural areas to visit the library in their vicinity so as to get themselves better informed.

Similarly, since poverty has a major factor militating against the reading and research culture in Nigeria, government at all levels should regulate the price of books through subsidy. The prices of books must be subsidized so as to make it affordable for all and sundry. If this is done, students from a humble family will find the price affordable and the culture of reading and research will be resuscitated.

Inclusion of a reading course in the curriculum is another step in the right direction. Government should legislate on this and ensure that every student, irrespective of his or her discipline, should offer a compulsory reading course. Reading assignment should be given regularly to students. To further enforce this, reading specialists should be recruited in schools to teach reading skill and further boost the reading interest and habit of the Nigerian Students.

The Nigerian government should improve its funding of the education sector. This will make it easy for school managers and concerned authorities to establish, equip and maintain school and public libraries. Through the fund, adequate, current and relevant library materials and other computer instructional packages will be procured. Research funding should also be government's priority. This will encourage teachers to develop interest in research activities. This will activate reading and research habit in both the teachers and their students.

The Literary Awareness Programme (LAP) by Reading experts should be introduced and embraced in schools. This is a programme of regular reading aloud of children's story book to them. In fact, this is a catch-them-young programme designed to encourage early childhood literacy development. With this, at least 30 minutes should be set aside each day on the timetable for LAP or thrice in a week; usually after break. Interesting story books should be chosen. This will inculcate the good reading culture in the children right from their early childhood.

6. Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that reading and research culture of the Nigerian teachers and students is in a state of coma. This has not made Nigeria to be at par with the famous reading nations like Cuba, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America among others, in the area of human, material and educational development. The fact that this ugly practice is caused is obvious while its adverse effects on national development cannot be overemphasized. However, since reading, according to Oke (1996) "is for self improvement, pleasure, relaxation and a feeling of pride and prestige", efforts should be made by students, teachers, stakeholders and concerned authority to expedite action towards improving the reading culture of the entire populace. This could be done by implementing the suggested solutions above. If those suggestions are carefully implemented, the poor reading and research culture of the educated elite in Nigeria, without doubt, will be improved for better and Nigeria will find itself among the league of the reading nations of the World.

References

- Ahmed A. (1992) "Mass Literacy Education Policy and Delivery in Nigeria" *Education Today (September 1992)*
- Akinpelu J. A. (1992) "Education and Mass Literacy: Danger and Opportunity for Nigeria in the 21st century" *Education Today (September 1992)*
- Fagbemi O. (1997) "Literacy, The Reading Culture and National Development: Lessons for Nigeria" *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria Vol.9.No 1 (pp.168-178)*
- Oke E. (1996) "Analysis of Progress made by public libraries in Nigeria" *Nigeria School Library Journal 2(4)*
- Okebukola, F.O. (2004) "Reading: key to lifelong development". A key note address delivered at the workshop on readership promotion organized by the National Library of Nigeria.
- Rubin, Dorothy (2002) *Diagnosis and correction in reading and guiding reading instruction*. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Unoh S.O. (1991) "Reading for Intellectual Development: A psycholinguistic view" *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria*. Vol. 5 (pp. 11-21)