

**STRATEGIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE READING
CULTURE FOR LIFE-LONG DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE NIGERIAN
YOUTH**

BY

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ABSTRACT

After providing an overview of Readership Promotion Campaign (RPC) in Nigeria, the paper opined that reading culture in Nigeria is today in double jeopardy. Of course, the recent “viewing culture” adopted by most Nigerians is seen as the most serious threats to previous efforts made by governments, organizations and individuals in the establishment of effective reading habit.

The paper provides strategies such as, home, school partnership and special programmes, as well as how the ICTs can be effectively used to complement and advance reading culture. Specifically, activities such as Mothers’ involvement in reading and readership programmes, book talk, talk shows, profiling were proposed. The paper concludes that with effective funding, training and monitoring and evaluation, reading culture can adequately be established

“He who does not read is not better than he who can’t read”

From a Billboard in Lagos

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt to the fact that education at all levels is the key to national development. It is when the citizenry are educated and enlightened that they can themselves develop and could meaningfully contribute their quota to the general development of their country either as leaders or the led. It is in this spirit that nations of the world try to give education a top priority in their developmental plans and programmes.

Discussing on the importance of Education, Mohammed (2001) quoted Erese (1983) in which he categorically mentioned that education should be a privilege of every citizen of any country; an effective instrument for development; a strategic tool for liberating the masses of people from ignorance, disease and poverty; a dynamic forum for encouraging progress, unity and overall betterment of a people; and only equality of education opportunity is the guarantee for building up egalitarian society. This position presupposes that in order to ensure sustainable development of any nation, the education of the children, youth, and indeed parents becomes very necessary.

It is a fact that the beginning of acquisition of education is learning how to read and write. Reading is described by Holderness (2002) as an activity characterized by the translation

of symbols, or letters, into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reader. The goal of reading are wide-ranging, but essentially the reader aims to understand the meaning of a written text, evaluate its significance, and use what he or she has read to enhance his or her knowledge, effectiveness, or pleasure. Reading is indeed, one of the mind's most complex achievements, adequately described by the cognitive psychologist Ulrich Neisser as externally guided thinking"

Since the invention of printing, books have served humanity in various ways. Many scholars such as Fayose (1995:1) and Ibrahim (1994:5) have extensively discussed on the importance and place of book. However Clarence S. Bay's famous quotation has however aptly summarized most discussions on the importance and place of book when he observed that: *"The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else that he builds ever last. Monuments fall; nations perish, civilizations grow old and die out; and, after an era of darkness, new races build others.*

But in the world of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again, and yet live on, Still young, still as fresh as the day they were written, still telling men's hearts of the hearts of men centuries Dead".

Similarly, the American critic Harold Bloom said justly: "Books are what is left of us". Commenting on Bloom's quotation in his celebrated article titled Beyond Literacy, Richard Hoggart, former Asst. Director-General of UNESCO rightly observed that "I take it he meant that in and through books we encounter, from minds usually more gifted linguistically and imaginatively than our own, explorations of the wonders, the delights, the terrors, the moral weight of our experiences as reflective and valuing human beings. These are creative encounters-with Shakespeare, Milton, Jane Austen, Dickens, and the host of others. There is no substitute!

Of course, it is in view of the above summarized immeasurable values of the book that many successive governments, organizations and individuals have over the years mounted Programmes and activities in order to see that the Nigerian populist are not only educated but have effectively cultivate life-long reading culture. So, the recent effort of the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) in relaunching Readership Promotion Campaign (RPC) is not only timely and appropriate but more relevant than ever. This is because, today, reading culture is, through out the World, in double jeopardy. The first jeopardy is of course the one which every one of us is already aware of, and now, the jeopardy of the almost total take over by what is now popularly refer to as the viewing culture. The Nigerian Children and Youths, and most unfortunately the Adults are today more glued to Television than books. The Nigerian films and what is called the soyayya films, T/V and video games, e.t.c. have taken the place of book.

Disturb by this trend, Hoggart (2002) sorrowfully laments that the revolution in communication technology is obviously hugely liberating in ways almost too many to count. But-and there is always a but-we need to remember that information is not necessarily knowledge; to turn one into the other needs an act of will, information is an inert mass. And knowledge does not automatically bring judgment; that needs a further act of will. We have all met people, and will meet many more, full of information and of knowledge but in judgment-“wisdom” might be a better word-sadly in adequate. He therefore aver that in a society marked by so many persuasions, most of them wooing if not cooing, we all need to develop a well-muscled critical sense. We all need critical literacy!! Similarly, Cheng (2001) recommends that in the face of a knowledge-based society, we must strive for life-long learning so as to equip ourselves with the many challenges ahead.

2.0 AN OVERVIEW OF READERSHIP CAMPAIGN PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

There have been many efforts over the years by various arms of Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations and International bodies towards inculcating reading habit and establishing future reading culture among the Nigerian populist. Although the history of Adult education and literacy dates back to 1930s, major grounds were only gained when the government of President Shehu Shagari launched the first national mass literacy programme in 1982. However, the failure of the programme led to relaunching in 1992 by the government of President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. This time around a National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education with an Executive Secretary was inaugurated.

Although they are very laudable initiatives, the two Programmes failed to succeed because they were merely designed just to combat illiteracy. No plans were made to consolidate the newly acquired skills of reading and numeracy and develop up to the point where they can read on their own for pleasure or profit. Because of this Fayose (1997:3) notes that many new literates relapse into secondary illiteracy before they are able to master the skills acquired from literacy classes.

Because all these Programmes were directed towards adult in the exclusion of children and youth, and because there were no plans put in place to sustain and thereby inculcating reading culture among the Nigerian populist, the National Library of Nigeria as the apex library in the country mounted one of the first and successful Readership campaign between 1981 and 1985. The campaign included a 15-state National Reading week culminating in a National Seminar on Reading in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Book Foundation (NBF), founded in 1991 was an umbrella organization for key participants in book development to facilitate a vibrant book industry in Nigeria. In 1994,

the NBF started Annual National Book Week in order to sensitize the Government, organizations and individuals on the importance of the book to national development. The foundation set up in 1996 three reading promotion pilot projects in the North, South-Eastern and South-Western parts of the country

Similarly, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) organized a Young Readers' Club (YRC) in every state, which was launched in 20 states of the Federation.

The Children's Literature Association of Nigeria (CLAN) was another body, which concentrated on encouraging the love of reading among and providing suitable materials for children. Other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the promotion of reading include the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN), the Association of Nigerian Authors (A.N.A), the Network for Promotion of Reading (N.E.P-READ) and Women Writers of Nigeria (WRITA).

From the above foregoing, it is clear that these are very laudable efforts on the path of establishing reading habits among Nigerians. However it is important to, at this juncture, pose the following questions: are these efforts still in place? What successes have they recorded? And what problems are they encountering? Ndakostu (2000:9) notes that there is certainly no lack of effort on the part of spirited individuals, organizations and governments in promoting the essence of inculcating the reading culture in the young generation. However, at the official level, action does not back up the stated intentions. Many authors have cited funding as the most serious problem impeding reading culture not only in the country but even the developed countries. Other problems associated with the failure include lack of availability of suitable reading materials, absence of well-designed activities, trained staff and effective monitoring and evaluation.

3.0 STRATEGIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE READING CULTURE

In this information age dominated by high-tech Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and as earlier mentioned by Hoggart, so many persuasions, most of them often wooing if not cooing, the need to device strategies to effectively compete favourably with an emerging digital age is paramount if not most. In the light of this therefore, this paper presents below, nine strategies for successfully promoting sustainable reading culture for life-long development in Nigeria.

3.1 HOME PROGRAMME FOR THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE

It is significant to realise right from the onset the importance and place of the home to children's learning. Parents are children's earliest teachers, and strengthening parents' ability to stimulate their children and encourage them to learn can set the stage for adult success. Without belabouring the importance and place of the home to children's learning, it is pertinent to observe that until the impact of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics upon reading theory, the concept of reading readiness was widely accepted. It was thought that children needed to reach a certain developmental stage before they could start to read. Nowadays, learning to read is seen more as a continuum. Children can be introduced to simple books as soon as possible and move through stages along the continuum at an individual pace.

Therefore, parents should be encouraged to develop their children's awareness of written language by reading books to them from early age, to play word games, and sing songs and rhymes. These activities are very necessary because as collaborated by research conducted by Goswami and Bryant (1990), children's awareness of rhymes and phonological patterns influences their later ability to develop reading competence. This is why most nursery teaching

emphasizes the value of nursery rhymes, chants and songs, in successfully preparing children to learn to read. It has also been established that parents engaging in these activities when a child is young helps to promote a love of reading and boost performance in school, as well as improving a child's attention span, concentration, and interaction with other people. Similarly, Research conducted in Britain and the United State as way back as 1987 and 1983 respectively suggests that child's attitudes to and success in literacy reflect the influence of the home culture and the attitudes of the home and community to reading.

However, because children seem to achieve reading competence through participating in regular patterns of behaviour, which involves the essential skills, competencies, and strategies that are inherent in the four stages (Inexperienced, apprenticeship, i.e. less experienced, Independent i.e. moderately experienced, and experienced) of reading development, parents need to establish Programmes of reading with their children. In the light of this, parents should be encouraged to:

- Become active partners in helping their children learn to read, often with guidance from booklets or workshops
- Become active members of libraries
- Become aware of various reading resources available in libraries
- Regular visits to libraries, enquiring about their children's reading needs
- Establish regular patterns of reading, book sharing, story telling, and e.t.c at home with their children. Don't forget that Ben Carson M. D, the most celebrated paediatric Neurosurgeon in the world today attributes part of his success to his mother for making him read two books every week while in fourth grade.
- Give books as gifts to their children, especially during special occasions such as birthdays, sallah and christmas, e.t.c

3.2 SCHOOL PROGRAMME FOR THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE

The role the school plays towards effectively socializing and educating the child is also not an issue to be belaboured. Apart from the classroom and other curricula activities, the school establishes and encourages pupils/students to participate in other extra moral activities, one of

which is belonging to various societies, clubs and associations. Though voluntary, Mohammed (2002:1) notes that they are usually recognized by the school authority as more or less a formal institution. In addition to promoting unity and cooperation among the pupils/students, these associations also promote educational, social, cultural, religious and general welfare of the pupils/students.

One association that is established to help in the promotion of reading culture in schools is the readers club, often associated with literary club or even Quiz and Debating club. It is regrettable to note that most of the activities that are carried out under this association are directed just towards quiz and debating competitions. It is obvious, as is evident in our schools that there is no well-planned and coherent activities set to achieve the goal of establishing life-long reading habit among the pupils/students. In view of this therefore, the following activities are proposed for adoption by reader clubs:

(i) ***Book talk; Reading book, Story telling***: Under this activity, members of the club are asked to periodically sit together and read aloud books to themselves. In another instance, a member may be requested to stand up among members and give a talk on a book he/she has already read. Here, members should be introduced to the idea of naming the title author, place of publication, publishers, date of publication, theme, sub-themes, characters, and e.t.c of the book to give talk on. Story telling is of course a situation where a member will give an account of some happenings

(ii) ***Exhibitions***: This activity calls for periodical display within the school of books, comic stories, newsmagazines, e.t.c. Teachers and pupils/students should be encouraged to participate. A week can be declared as “Book open week”. Before inviting publishers and vendors to

participate, teachers and pupils/students should be asked to bring those interesting reading materials they have or about to read for the display.

(iii) **Talk shows:** Closely related to exhibition is talk show. This is a situation in which eminent personalities, such as Authors, Illustrators, Editors, and Officials of organizations related to reading and literacy Programmes, are invited to give talks on some aspect of book, reading, e.t.c

(iv) **News Group:** Most book clubs concentrate only on reading books at the detriment of other information resources. Current information can only be derived from Newspapers, Magazines, and news from electronic media. Therefore, it is necessary to form within the readers club, news group. The work of this group is to source news from these media and shares it with the rest of the members.

(v) **Profiling:** This activity should rest squarely on the patron (s) and those in charge of managing literacy or readers clubs. The patron should watch members of the club closely in order to pin point the area of interest of each member. It will indeed interest patrons to see that members have varying literacy needs. While some may be inclined to Fictions, Adventure stories, Realistic stories, Biographies, other may like Poems, Folktales, and yet others may prepare current events, news stories, e.t.c. Profiling helps to properly direct members to their desired goals. It also helps to group members under common interest, thereby serving them effectively and efficiently

(vi) **Management Issues:** Adoption of effective management techniques is very necessary if reader clubs are to be sustained and successful. It is therefore important for patrons and those in charge of readers clubs to have not only management skills, but also qualities such as true love of children, knowledge in children's literatures and library resources.

It is very important to state here also that patrons and managers of readers clubs should set up effective feedback mechanism. This will no doubt serves as a means of measuring and evaluating not only members' performances but also activities and procedures. Assignments, assessments and follow-ups should carefully be used.

3.3 ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE

Adult literacy programmes are already in existence in Nigeria. However, many writers observed that despite the very grandiose plans for combating illiteracy in the country, the programmes failed to record meaningful success. Perhaps this is because most of the Programmes failed to mention how literacy is going to be sustained. Lack of provision of adequate and relevant reading materials for this audience at both mass literacy centers and libraries could also be associated with the failure of the programme. Therefore, in order to enrich and consolidate literacy programme, Chetty (2003:18) recommends:

- Setting up of regular reading groups in the evenings for adults either to listen to books being read or to read the books themselves
- Organizing book clubs for middle-class audience
- Providing supplementary reading materials to adult learners.
- Organizing group tours to public libraries

3.4 PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME FOR THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE

The importance of building partnerships with all those sectors interested in Promoting reading is very relevant and necessary. In support of this Rosenberg (2003: vii) notes that there is a need to form alliances with all those who not only promote reading but also reap the benefits of a literate population. It is in the light of this that this paper proposes the following types of partnership

- (a) Home-School-Library Partnership: This is a partnership between parents, school authority and librarians, each one fully involved in the reading programme. There has to be cooperation and coordination between and among them.
- (b) School-Library-Association partnership: There are many associations that exist which have the promotion of reading as their focal point. ANA, RAN, WRITA, CWAN, just but to mention a few. It is pertinent that both the school and the library should be in partnership with these associations by inviting them to the school and library to participate or sponsor programme
- (c) School-Library-NGOs partnership: UNESCO, UNICEF, Carnegie, NBF and other non-governmental organizations are ever ready to sponsor well-proposed programme and projects. Schools and Libraries should therefore make good proposals and approach these bodies

At present greater interactions is seriously needed between literacy providers. Vakkai (2004:18) hopes that with all eyes focused on the same goal, success will not be far off. The journey may be long and difficult but the first step has to be made. The society will be better off when empty vessels are filled with important knowledge.

3.5 SPECIAL PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE

These are programmes to be set up and maintained by Governments-Local, State and Federal. The programmes should be directed to particular group of people, locality and time. For instance, Reading Recovery Programme can be a special programme directed at those adults who have gone through adult literacy but notice is made on their deteriorating reading fluency. Or Target Audience Reading Programme can be mounted just for women, disable, prisoners, e.t.c. Special projects such as Reading Clinics Apenten (2003:47), Book-Box Ngumo (2003:50), Reading Tents Nsubuga (2003:66) and Reading Café can be established in areas where people usually frequent.

3.6 THE PLACE OF ICT IN THE PROMOTION OF READING CULTURE

The Information revolution happening today, especially as a result of Information and communication Technologies (ICTs) should not be seen as supplementing the book culture, rather, it should be seen as not only complementing but also advancing reading process. ICTs can effectively be used to advance the course of reading. In fact, Holderness (2002) remarks that today's readers have become literate in a wide range of areas. They have to learn how to "read" film and video, cartoons, comics, and advertisements, and to be able to access texts stored on and presented by computers, hypermedia packages, and the www-internet.

To prove that ICTs can be used to further reading habit, this paper provides below a list and summary of six web sites that are dedicated to the promotion of reading

1. <http://www3.Sympatico.ca/alanbrown/>

This web site is titled **JUST FOR KIDS WHO LOVE BOOKS**. It is ideal for young Users and promotes interest in reading for leisure. It has information about popular Children's authors and interviews with them

2. [http://www. Amble side. Schoolzone.co.uk/ambleweb /literacy. html](http://www.Amble side. Schoolzone.co.uk/ambleweb /literacy. html)

LITERACY HOUR ACTIVITIES is the title of the above web site, created by a British School for children, teachers and parents. It is an interactive English lesson on homophones, poetry, comprehension.

3. <http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rtroom/>

Aiming to promote interest in art and art history in young users, **THE @ART ROOM** web site gives art teachers resources, activities on various topics

4. <http://www.kiddy house.com/snails/>

ALL ABOUT SNAILS is the title of a web site that is designed for young readers. It explains the basic characteristics of snails, including diet and habitat, and includes snail-related activities.

5. <http://www.Marine.rufgers.educ/pt/actities/ifqs.http>

The above web site is titled **LOOKING FOR THE GULF STREAM**. It is an educating exercise in satellite image reading

- 6 <http://www.Synergyed.org>

3.7 TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Rigorous training programme should be put in place in order to actualize the speedy achievement of sustainable reading culture. Rosenberg (2003: vii) warns that it should not be assumed that teachers and librarians already have the skills necessary to engage in reader development. In fact, she re affirmed that lack of appropriate skills is often cited as limiting factors in most programmes.

Training programme such as pre-service, in-service, workshops, booklets should be organized on continuum. Training here should emphases acquiring specific skills for specific purpose. Working with children, prisoners, slow learners, adults, women no doubt call for acquisition of different skills. Equally important is the need to acquire skills on identifying and evaluating reading materials for the specific groups identified above, as well as knowing the stages of their developments and needs.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The above suggested strategies are by no means exhaustive. However for these and other strategies to be fully implemented and produce the desire vision and goals, government at various levels should be fully involved. Funding has been cited as one of the major problems of actualizing the establishment of reading culture. Therefore, government should be ready to provide adequate funds, logistics and enabling environments. Of equal weight is the need to set up, at different levels, effective mechanism for proper monitoring and evaluating programme and projects on reading.

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