

**Reviving Reading Habits in Nigerian Youths:  
the Roles of the Home; the School and the  
Government**



**Linguistics**

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**Abstract**

To an average literate Nigerian, the standard of education in the country is drastically falling and one of the factors responsible for this is the poor reading habits of the Nigerian youths. This paper examined the concept of reading, its importance and the expected roles of the home, the school and the government as agents of socialization in promoting reading habits among Nigerian youths. The paper concluded that if there is no quick intervention to revive reading culture among the Nation’s young generation, the country’s educational system may keep on producing half-baked graduates that are inimical to the development of the country as a whole.

**Introduction**

Reading as a concept is as old as education itself, if not as human race. It is a phenomenon that emanated from the invention of writing during the paleolithic age and has been steadily growing in intensity and scope across ages and generations. The inception of formal education further established the indispensability of reading among human race while the introduction of creative writing especially, the novels, brought glamour into act of reading. And since then, no generation has deemed it fit to jettison the idea of reading because of its uniqueness in the process of civilization and human development in general. Rather, there had been concerted and continuous efforts towards improving reading knowledge and skills among the citizens of the world in different languages using different means and styles.

Examples of such efforts abound as evident in the formulation of various reading theories; establishment of various methods of teaching reading; identification and treatment of reading errors; analysis and provision for the means of remedying reading problems etc. through serious intensive and extensive researches across time and space. Similarly, various governments, especially in advanced countries, have been expending huge amount of money in order to improve reading skills and knowledge among the citizens through funding of different reading programmes; establishment of reading clinics and building of libraries in schools, colleges and cities. Then what is this reading and what is unique about it that warranted committing so much effort, time and funds on its acquisition?

## What is Reading?

Reading has been with man from time in memoriam and it has been popularised by the inception of formal education and the invention of printing press. Since then, it may be hard for any literate person to claim ignorance of the knowledge of reading and what reading itself implied. However, citing opinions of some scholars and researchers on the meaning of reading may not be out of place here

Longe (1979:92) described reading as ‘a specialized and complex skill involving a number of more general or less skills. The first of which is the ability to recognize stylized shapes, the second is the ability to correlate the patterned shapes or ink marks on paper with language... while the third is the ability to identify the ink marks on the paper by way of the formal elements of language say sound or word with the meanings they symbolized’

Kolawole and Adelabu (2004:156) see reading as a process of interaction between the writer of a text and the readers who are trying to make meaning out of what the author of the text has encoded. They identified four stages of reading namely recognition, comprehension, retention and recall. These stages are very basic to any reading at any level’

Similarly, Bond, Tinker and Wasson (1979) described Reading thus:

*Reading is the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli to recall of message built up through the reader’s past experiences...reading process involves both the acquisition of meaning intended by the writer and the readers own contribution, in form of interpretation, evaluation and reflection of these meanings.*

Unoh (1999:247) has this to say about reading.

*Reading is an indispensable tool of learning in various hierarchies of modern educational systems and even though it is possible for people at various rungs of the educational ladder to get on without possessing advanced reading skills, effective learning at schools and more advanced educational institutions demands the possession and application of at least minimum skills required for specific reading tasks.*

According to Okwilagwe (1998:1) It (Reading) should be more of reasoning *involving the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences requiring all types of thinking such as critical, analytical, creative imaginative, evaluative, judgemental and problem solving...reading process involves your acquisition of the meanings, intended by the writer and your contributions inform of interpretation, evaluation and reflection about these meanings.*

Gertinde Hilldreth (1965:14) stated that 'Reading is a mental *Process involving the interpretation of signs perceived through the sense organ*' (as cited in Ogundepo, 2011.p.14) Again, (Ogundepo 2011) asserted that reading like its related language skills; listening, speaking and writing forms part of a complex information processing system. Information is passed from the writer to the reader. The meeting point is the printed text;

A close look at the various definitions given above will reveal some facts about the act of reading. It is an act that pre supposed existence of some conditions such as.

- (i) a writer or encoder
- (ii) something to write on
- (iii) The text
- (iv) The reader

The idea could be diagrammatically represented thus Writer - Information - Text - Reader

Therefore, reading requires the reader to go into the inner most mind of a writer to bring out his intention which is symbolically represented on the paper. Thus, the definition of reading given by Olatayo (2010) that 'reading can be regarded as deliberate and meaningful interpretation of what is graphically represented by hand or by printing. A mental process through which material that is encoded in written form is meaningfully decoded' presents the meaning of reading in its simplest form.

### **Importance of Reading:**

As reflected in the various definitions of reading cited above, the importance of reading in human communities can hardly be over emphasized and be eroded by time and space. It is an essential tool of development that transcends ages and periods. It has been, and still is and shall remain an indispensable ingredient of educational growth, technological advancement and cross fertilization of ideas globally in all forms of human endeavours.

The uses of reading are many. It is a means of intellectual development that advanced learners apply in every academic task irrespective of his specialization. They draw on reading skills in order to obtain the experiences they would use in accomplishing assignment, term paper, research report or examination (Olajide 2004). Similarly, reading ability determines how candidate tackles an examination question (James 1985).

It has also been established that reading is an indispensable tool of learning in the various hierarchies of modern educational system and even though it is possible for people at various rungs of educational ladder to get on without possessing advanced reading skills, effective learning at schools and more advanced educational institutions demand the possession and application of at least minimum skills required for specific reading task (Unoh 1995) and in addition, the

relationship of reading ability to scholastic success is not open to dispute. Achievement in reading is necessary to achievement in school; (Karlin 1964; Unoh 1995: 247).

Apart from the academic and scholarship relevance, reading equally increases the instinct of nationism and nationalist (Olajide 2004) and thereby develop strong sense of patriotism in citizens. Likewise, it is found to be of therapeutic value (Olajide 2004) in the lives of the teaming readers across the globe. Reading also is a means of achieving emotional stability and resolving emotional conflicts as well as a means of enjoying leisure and sharing vicarious experiences and of developing the various attributes of the human personality (Unoh 1995).

Ibrahim (2009: 267) stated that ‘creative writers are instruments for training the minds, they provide knowledge dealing with many and varied problem(s) that confront people, stimulating them to further response in their reading. People meet with new ideas and their minds assimilate many of these without laborious efforts, they acquire a broadening fund of facts and information about a variety of subjects, learn the lives of other people and about life in other lands and so, their sympathetic understanding of others is nurtured’.

If the above facts are the objectives of the creative writers, they could as well be taken as the impacts that the writers expect their writing to perform in the lives of the readers, the impact or influence their work should have in the collective conscience of a society or people of the world in general depending on the content of the writing. Therefore, reading creative writing can afford the readers all the aforementioned benefits.

The value of reading in human life is inestimable and definitely, anybody that lacks reading ability has lost not less than fifty percent of his value and potentials as human being. Reading interest (ability) can influence the personal and social adjustment of human organism for good. While... lack of interest in reading (or lack of ability to read) can contribute to personality maladjustments (Unoh 1995). In summary, a nation with a vibrant reading culture will keep on progressing in all spheres while a nation with poor reading culture will remain stagnant, if she does not go into extinction.

### **The Expected Role of Home**

Home, as the child’s gateway to the entire world, has a great role to play in this regard. As the first point of call of every child, it is a place where foundation for the personality of a child is laid. If the foundation laid at home is sound, adequate and appropriate, the child will develop an amiable personality that will engender great achievement in all life endeavours including reading. If every Nigerian child is brought up in an environment that is not only conducive to reading but also stimulating formation and development of reading habits, the reading situation among the citizens will change positively and the country will become a reading nation.

Unfortunately, the situation in Nigerian average home is far from being conducive to laying sound foundation for reading. On the condition existing in most of Nigerian homes, Okwilawe (1998) has this to say:

*It is true that most of us are from poor homes or have very poor social economic backgrounds. This situation makes it almost impossible for us to have the basic facilities necessary for the development of good reading habits. Sometimes we do not feed properly, have no money to buy books, live in so noisy and poor environments where reading can not be done effectively (p.20).*

As portrayed in the observation in the above quotation and other similar research works, most Nigerian homes are too poor to offer the condition necessary for developing keen interest in reading. However, a critical look at the income and social economic background of most of the homes will reveal the fact that rather than poverty in its real sense, attitude and misplacement of priority are responsible for failure to provide basic materials that can spur reading interest in the children in some homes. The clarion call now is for those homes to have a change of attitude and strife to provide the condition that will stimulate reading interest in the children in such homes.

Home as the first teacher should not only make provision for adequate and appropriate reading materials but should equally make provision for formal language training that will situate the child in a right and rich linguistic context that will serve as a sound language background for the child thus putting him on a sound footing in reading programmes in the school. Adults at home could equally set example by devoting time to recreational reading and encouraging the young ones to follow suit. Children should be encouraged to use part of the time they spend on computer and other electronic gadgets on reading.

In addition, parents should endeavour to closely monitor the reading programmes designed for their wards in the school especially at formative stage, and offer useful advice where necessary. They could also be volunteer donors of the materials needed for effective teaching of reading in the school, if the need arises.

Parents who are well to do could also sponsor reading competitions and programmes in schools. If reading competitions among pupils and students are organized on regular bases and the participants are reasonably and handsomely rewarded, that could serve as motivation for pupils and students to take keen interest in reading. Ditto for other reading programmes in the School. If they are well funded through the help of the parents and well wishers they could serve as sources of inspiration for developing permanent interest in reading.

## The School

As asserted by Lawal (1995: 89) ‘The teacher can influence the child’s attitude towards books, making reading either a source of enjoyment or unpleasant experience’. Thus the school, though, a surrogate parent or a care taker exerts greater influence on the life of a child. Evidence abound to show that an average child believes strongly in ability of the school to mould his future appropriately than any other agents of socialization. Hence most of the instructions given by the school are religiously carried out while most of the information received is taken as the gospel truth. Therefore, the school is in the best position to instill everlasting reading interest in the young ones if it so wished. The school has numerous ways of carrying out this responsibility. One of such ways is to design a series of effective ‘catch them young’ reading programmes for their pupils or students.

One salient fact that the school should realize is that the practical side of reading should groom the learners for the task of obtaining information from the ever-increasing volumes that they confront. Hence, practical reading sessions should be organized for learners (Olajide 2004). But it is unfortunate that in Nigeria, there is no systematic and organized programmes for teaching reading after primary school. The teaching of reading is merely observed during the comprehension lessons. This is grossly inadequate since it can hardly inculcate permanent reading interest in the learners. To form and develop genuine act of reading, the learners need to be exposed to series of reading exercises to ground them well in the act of effective and productive reading. (Lawal 1995) postulates that distinct reading programmes should be introduced in schools both at primary and secondary levels.

Similarly, the school should endeavour to select reading materials that are adequately and appropriately relevant in terms of learners’ linguistic background social experiences, cultural interests and psycho social development. Selecting such materials will go a long way to inculcate reading habits in the learners. The point being emphasized here is that teachers of reading... should select materials that appeal to the learners both culturally and linguistically (Olajide 2004).

If a target text lacks cultural relevance, learners would not find reading it convenient (Obah 1985) and likewise the more complex the linguistic structure of the text, the more greatly it repels the learner readers (Nultal 1988,). Thus, the act of selecting appropriate reading materials for learners is essential for reviving reading habits among Nigerian youths. It should be noted that a judicious choice of reading materials can... help pupils and develop good taste and permanent interest in reading for pleasure and the expansion of knowledge (Unoh 1995).

Closely related to the issue of judicious choice of reading materials is the application of appropriate methods of teaching reading. In Nigerian schools, the problem of inadequate teaching of reading ties up with that of unsatisfactory methods of teaching reading (Unoh 1995). Even at the primary school level where there is no evidence of teaching reading at all, evidence abound to show that most of the teachers there are not well grounded in the knowledge of modern methods of

teaching reading let alone of using them appropriately in their classes. There may be need for the school to update the knowledge of its staff on different methods of teaching reading through in service training, seminars and workshop. The relative effectiveness of the methods used in the schools should be established and improved upon since pupils performance is affected by a good or bad method of language teaching (Ubahakwe 1995)

It is not enough for the school to select appropriate reading materials, such materials should also be made available adequately. The school library should be equipped with relevant reading materials and they should be readily available for the learners at will. In addition, the librarian must be given opportunities for further training, by which they would be able to meet the reading challenges to be posed by the learners and their teachers' (Olajide 2004) And also, the school authorities should encourage the library to improve its services by organizing seminars, workshop symposia and orientation programmes which would promote reading awareness among learners (Olajide 2004). In essence, the school should endeavour to inculcate reading habits in the learners through the appropriate and adequate use of the library.

## **The Government**

The role of government in promoting reading habits among Nigerian youths is colossal. The first and the foremost is the need for reawakening of reading programmes in the nations educational curriculum. As of today, reading has not received a befitting attention in our educational curriculum. Reading should be given a separate status in the teacher training curriculum and it should be taught as a part of every subject in school (Olajide 2004).

Other roles of government in promoting reading habits among Nigerian youths are adequately summarized by (Olajide 2004:110) thus:

Governments and general lovers of literacy should embark on schemes that would promote reading not only in Nigerian College of Education, but also other institutions of formal learning. They could make more grants available to the institutions for the procurement of relevant reading materials and conduct of useful research into reading. They could also institute prizes for outstanding performance in and publication on reading comprehension among learners and teachers... encourage the college to open reading clinics.

More importantly, government should ensure a strict adherence to all the reading programmes included in the curriculum and closely monitor their proper implementation at school level. Most schools in Nigeria are government owned and they should be made to carry out effective reading programmes that private schools must follow as a matter of government policy.

## Conclusion

Reading is the heartbeat of development be it personal or collective; individual or national. A reading nation is a progressive nation, (so say the people) but unfortunately, the Nigerian public is never a reading public (Aliyu 1991). This decline in reading culture is partly responsible for the so called falling standard of Education in the country. The situation today has gotten to the point that quality of graduates from our various levels of education is so low that in most cases, they are subjected to other forms of tests before they could be accepted for further studies or appointments outside Nigeria.

The situation needs a serious attention so that the necessary positive changes may be effected before it becomes a national disaster. This paper has examined the roles that the home; the school and the government must play in order to promote reading culture among Nigerian youths. The impacts of reading in human life are too numerous and crucial than allowing the habits to die off in our youths. The development of a love for reading is too important to be left to chance (Olajide 2004).

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