

Developing Reading Culture for The Challenges of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper critically interrogates and assesses the importance of reading and its indispensable contributions to the educational development of the society. The paper also laments the fallen standard of education in Nigeria and addresses the decay and the rot that has characterised the educational system in Nigeria, which is a consequence of the dwindling reading culture among the Nigerian youths. An analysis of the recent Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination results conducted by both the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) was carried out. Result shows that the performance of students over the years in these examinations has been very poor as many of them failed to possess the minimum requirements for admission into higher institutions of learning. The paper thus made far-reaching recommendations that could enhance reading culture in Nigeria.

Keywords: Reading Culture, Education, Public Examination, Nigeria.

“The bee flies everywhere and carries home what she can use; and a studious man extracts from his reading what will make him better”. Erasmus.

The man who does not read books has no advantage over the man that cannot read them. Mark Twain.

Introduction

Government and its agencies at all levels in Nigeria have been resolute, daring and tenacious in their vigorous and relentless campaigns and crusade for the extirpation and eradication of illiteracy in Nigeria. On the other hand, both the government and the stakeholders in the educational sector have been lamenting profusely and endlessly the falling standard of education in Nigeria. The low literacy level in Nigeria and the decay in the educational sector have undoubtedly been attributed to the lack of reading culture in Nigeria. Frantic efforts are being made in the relevant sectors of the economy to enlighten and sensitize the public on the need to have a reading culture. Lack of reading culture is considered preposterous and inimical to the growth and development of Nigeria especially its nascent democracy.

Reading culture in Nigeria is dying fast or else, according to Daramola (2004) why do we find children hawking in our streets or our University graduates roaming the streets in search of employment? Similarly, Emejo (2004) is convinced that regrettably, “reading has been placed on the back burner in Nigeria” as many students only read for the sake of passing their examinations. He supports this with a popular joke that “if you want to hide something from a Blackman hide it inside a book and place it on the centre table. He may never find it because he will not read the book”. Adedeji (1983) had earlier expressed this view on the general apathy to reading. According to him, students only read the prescribed texts and for examination purposes. It is disheartening to note that subscription to literature in English at the Senior Secondary School level has reduced because of the volume of the prescribed texts to be read.

Students of today are just interested in the certificates. And they are desperate about this. They are materialistic and prodigal. They are not prepared for scholarship and academic excellence. All they want is money, pleasure, fashion and sex. Reading to them is a waste of time. No wonder they perform woefully in their examinations. The analysis of the 2009 Nov./Dec. Senior School Certificate Examination result shows that out the 234,682 candidates who wrote the examination, 234,680 candidates, representing about 98% failed to have 5 credits with English and Mathematics. The result also shows that 12,197 candidates, representing 5.2% made 5 credits and above while 4,223 (1.80%) got 5 credits with English and Mathematics. This result is an embarrassment to the nation.

The West African Examinations Council later released the May/June 2010 SSCE results. Nigerians were stupefied and stunned with the analysis of the results as given by the Head of National Office of WAEC, Dr Iyi Uwadiae. Out of the 1,351,557 candidates who wrote the examination, 677,007, representing 50% obtained 5 credits and above, while 534,841 candidates, representing 39.57% obtained 6 credits and above. The analysis also reveals that 451,187 (33.38%) had credits and above in English, while 560,974 (41.5%) had credits and above in Mathematics. The total number of candidates who obtained credits in English Language and Mathematics including at least three credits was 337,071, representing (24.93%). This analysis was greeted with shock and disappointment as stakeholders were

completely disenchanted with the dismal and sullen performance of the students. Those who failed this examination had hoped to find succour in NECO SSCE results.

Unfortunately a month later, it was another bombshell from the National Examinations Council (NECO) when it released the 2010 May/June SSCE result. According to the Registrar and Chief Executive of the National Examinations Council, Prof. Promise Okala, out of the 1,113,177 candidates who wrote the examination, 870,305 candidates (79%) failed to obtain credit passes in English Language as only 21% of the candidates obtained credit passes in English Language. The analysis further shows that 838,031 candidates (75%) failed Mathematics. Only 25% of the candidates passed Mathematics. The immediate implication of this is that at least 75% of these candidates are not eligible for admissions into the tertiary institutions all things being equal. This is disturbing.

In a similar development, the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) released the result of the May/June 2010 examinations. According to Dr Aworanti, the Acting Registrar and Chief Executive of NABTEB, a total of 63,612 sat for the examination out of which only 20,554 candidates representing 32.3% had 5 credits with English Language and Mathematics.

Also, the West African Examinations Council released the Nov/Dec 2010 WASSCE result. The analysis shows that out the 310,077 candidates who sat for the examination, 133,507 candidates (43.06%) obtained credit and above in English, while 151,569 candidates (48.88%) obtained credit and above in Mathematics. The analysis further shows that only 62,295 candidates (20.04%) obtained credit pass in English in English, Mathematics and three other subjects. The immediate implication of this is that only 20.04% of the total candidates who wrote the examination are eligible for admissions into the higher institutions. Again, this is worrisome and irritating.

Besides, the May/June 2011 WASSCE result shows that only 31% of the 1,540,250 candidates who sat for the examination obtained credits in at least five subjects including English Language and Mathematics. The result of the November/December 2011 examination was similarly inclined as 90% of the 104,187 candidates who sat for the examination failed English and Mathematics. However, there was a slight improvement in the 2012 WAEC/SSCE May/June examination results. The results of 112,000 candidates out of 1,672,224 who sat for the examination were withheld over examination malpractices. The result shows that 771,731 candidates representing (46%) have six credits and above, while 952,156 (57%) have five credits and above and 649,156 (39%) have credits in five subjects and above including English Language and Mathematics. This slight improvement was as a result of the pragmatic efforts put in place by the some state governors at improving the standard of education.

There is no cause for celebration yet as the performance is still a far cry from the expected. These obvious regular and indisputable records of poor performance are the outcomes of students' indifference and apathy to reading. This is why the *Nigerian Compass* Editorial (2012) says "we believe that students' poor performance is usually informed by poor reading culture".

Even in the tertiary institutions, library books are not used optimally as the purchase of handouts and other unconventional methods such as sexual, financial and material gratifications determine the performance of students in examinations. This is rather very unfortunate. Emphasis is no longer on the cognitive ability of the students but on the certificates, they parade even if they cannot defend them. And of course that trend in the Nigerian society will be antithetical to development. Where premium is placed on the

intellectual ability of the students, reading will therefore be a must for students who want to excel.

Reading Culture and Higher Education in Nigeria

The aims and objectives of higher education in Nigeria are clearly spelt out in the *National Policy on Education*. They include the following:

- (a) The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society.
- (b) The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments.
- (c) The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community.
- (d) The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

These objectives are to be actualized through:

- (a) Teaching
- (b) Research
- (c) Dissemination of existing and new information.
- (d) Provision of service to the community.
- (e) Being a storehouse of knowledge

All the educational objectives of higher education in Nigeria and the methods of achieving them cannot be realized in an environment in which reading culture is anomalous. Teaching, research and information dissemination can only be enhanced and sustained through extensive reading. Only then can individuals be empowered intellectually. To be well informed is to be knowledgeable and to be ill informed is to be deformed and academically incapacitated. According to Onokaogu (1997), reading empowers the mind, broadens the vision and deepens the reader's mind. Similarly, Nwagbara (2003) and Daramola (2004) agree that reading widens children's horizon and through it, knowledge and wisdom are acquired. This is in tandem with the submission of Okonkwo (2004) when she sees reading as an indispensable activity needed for the acquisition and utilization of knowledge. She believes that reading is a dynamic tool for empowerment and for an individual to intelligently source and distil information and proffer solutions to societal problems and also make concrete and informed decisions.

Reading, which the higher education powers, is a life-long activity. This is because education itself empowers one for life. This is why Abimbola (1979), in unequivocal terms, declared that reading like education and learning ends in the grave. This is because reading is fundamental to learning and learning is also crucial to survival, hence lack of reading is catastrophic. Reading, to him is a common article of trade found in many places like libraries and other information centres. Similarly, Unoh (1987) opines that reading "enriches one's perspective and broadens one's understanding of the people, events and things around him". The knowledge one acquires through reading has a way of affecting one's concepts, views and approaches to personal and societal issues which actually is one of the national philosophies. Higher education does not only prepare one for the present but also for the future life. And preparation for such future challenges begins with one's exposure to extensive and vigorous reading, which is the hallmark of academics.

One of the national objectives of Nigeria as entrenched in the *National Policy on Education* is to build a united, strong and self-reliant nation. Some of the national educational aims and objectives include; the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. For a nation to be united, strong, self-reliant and for its citizens to be independent and survive the societal and general life challenges, information dissemination and utilization are indispensable. This can only be feasible in an environment where reading culture thrives. Both Oyetunde (2004) and Imam (2004) agree that reading, which is a life-long activity, makes individuals independent and literate in many aspects of life. This is why they submit that reading must be done widely. Yakubu (1982) expresses a similar opinion too. According to him, “reading is the key to discipline, self-reliance and national unity. Reading maketh a full man”. That is why in the tertiary institutions, divergent views and opinions are welcomed on topical issues. Only those with superior arguments carry the day. Superior arguments are products of regular research through in-depth and extensive reading.

The Federal Government expressed worry about the quality of Nigerian University graduates when the Minister of Education said that only 20% of the Nigerian University graduates are employable. This is because the University education in Nigeria lacks quality control mechanism. Besides, students in tertiary institutions do not see any need why they should pay attention to research, which ultimately determines and influences their performances. The place of scholarship is being eroded away by students’ dismal perception of what learning is all about. Academic performance is determined by the quality of one’s academic input. That is why excellent students are noted for the quality of research conducted and for their voracious consumption of research materials. Such students dine, wine and literarily sleep with books because they know the worth of education. That is why certificates are awarded based on learning and character. The labour market is very competitive. There are only few opportunities for the best. The class of degree sometimes may not count. The tertiary institution one attends may not be very important. And one’s course of study may not be an issue. What counts is one’s productive capacity, ability to deliver, ability to defend one’s certificate, ability to proffer solutions to certain enigmatic problems with the knowledge one has acquired through adequate reading and research. This is reading without walls. Scholars cannot be made within the four walls of a classroom. This is because the classroom is limited. Scholars are baked with efforts from within and without the classroom.

Diligence and assiduity are the virtues that must be possessed by anyone who wants to distinguish himself or herself in the society and who wants to make serious and positive impacts on the society. It is diligence that makes a man to sit with kings. And old English proper says “take time to work, it is the price of success, take time to read, it is the foundation of wisdom”. Scholars and excellent students are known for diligence. It is diligence that will make a man go extra miles in studying and reading beyond the prescribed texts. Diligent students are friends of the library.

Besides, good reading has also been adjudged an invaluable and indispensable tool for achieving emotional stability. Hummel (2001) supports this:

Books are the cure for boredom, your ticket for a cruise around the world of ideas. If fate favours you with two semi-loads, don’t dump

them or squander them...you have just won the lottery. Stack them in your attic or garage or under your bed and read them as fast as you can... to yourself, out loud, to your sweetheart, to your children and to your grandchildren. Then call me... I'd like to borrow a few.

Obviously, therefore, literature through reading facilitates emotional development and provides diverse learning experiences that are capable of motivating the reader to have the right self concept and self esteem, the prerequisites for the manifestation of the total personality.

Furthermore, research findings have shown that most Nigerian adolescents question the "why" and the "how" of their existence. They have no sense of value. They hence engage in drugs, cultism, robbery and other forms of anti-social and deviant behaviours that predispose them to psychotic and neurotic disorders, whose consequences are often catastrophic. Educational psychologists, counselling psychologists, clinical psychologists, and psychotherapists are in concordant that adolescents' endemic restfulness, existential absurdities and psychological frustrations which often result in anxiety disorder (generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder), personality disorders (paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, histrionic and Narcissistic disorders), psychotic and cognitive disorders can be cured with logotherapy. Logotherapy, according to Uba (1989) is "primarily a method of psychotherapy for dealing with persons whose lives lack meaning". One of the techniques of logotherapy is that the client should be exposed to books on logotherapy, which has been termed 'bibliotherapy'. In essence, exposing the clients to a library of books on logotherapy is an indispensable therapy in solving the problems of the adolescents.

Conclusion

The place of reading in scholarship and in the intellectual development of man cannot be easily over-emphasized. That is why Turner (2004) said, "When you read stories about people who have achieved greatness despite humble beginnings, you often find that they were readers who unearthed the treasures in their local libraries". It is obvious therefore, that one's background is not a determinant of one's level in life. Anyone who wants to achieve greatness should be prepared to unearth the treasures hidden inside books. Books must be devoured wherever they are found whether they are kept in bookshops or in the libraries. The enabling environment, in terms of infrastructural facilities, well stocked libraries and power supply must be provided. Besides, excellent students must be well rewarded and emphasis on certificates must be downplayed. What should be stressed is the productive capacity of individuals. This is because individuals who are products of our tertiary institutions are invariably on their own both in the competitive local and global markets. Only then can we have literate and dynamic citizens poised for the development of the society.

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