

# READING CULTURE AMONG TEENAGERS IN URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

The place of reading in the general development of man and society cannot be over emphasised. However, where the habit or necessary enabling supports are inadequate or absent, the future of such society is endangered. This study investigated the influence of reading culture among the teenagers and their academic performance in relation to the level of economic development. It used the cross sectional survey dataset of 2015 among students from four urban secondary schools that were selected through a systematic sampling technique in a Metropolitan City of Lagos, Nigeria. Overall, only 482 questionnaires were 'processable' out of the 500 targeted. The attrition rate was due to literacy level and lack of willingness for completion of the interview. Only descriptive and multivariate statistics were employed in the analysis. The results revealed that reading culture and parental monitoring are statistically significant to student's academic performance (P-value = 0.000). However, the fear of unavailability of jobs is a disincentive to reading habit among the subjects. Also, the issue of peer pressure, inadequate library facilities and multiple assignments show negative correlation with reading habit. While the study conclude that good reading culture is vital to academic achievement, parental monitoring and government support in terms of modern library facilities could enhance good reading habit, high academic performance, reduction in school drop-outs and that can enhance productivity for economic advancement.

Keyword: Teenagers, reading culture, academic performance, economic development.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The place of reading in the general development of man and society cannot be over emphasised. However, where the habit and necessary enabling supports are inadequate or absent, the future of such society is endangered (Durkheim, 1956; Igwe, 2011; World Banks, 1999). While education gives meaning to life, remains a social process for capacity building, socialization, social integration, development and maintenance of society, it is built on reading culture. Where a larger proportionate of the population rarely read or lack the require skills for reading, the quality of life, both socio-political and economic empowerment of the people suffer (Holte, 1998; Ruterana, 2012; Sisulu, 2004).

Nigeria education indicators are very poor and great variations exist between gender, and geo-political zones (United States Embassy in Nigeria, 2012). Currently, the literacy level in Nigeria is estimated as 56.9% for adult and the country shares up to 10% of the total global out-of-school-children and young adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills who have little hope of ever joining the formal workforce (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2012; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2010). Seventen out of 37 states failed to achieve education for all (EFA) goal of 2015 and adult literacy levels were very low in some states namely Bauchi (14.5%) and Jigawa (24.2%), to name but two. While great emphasis is being place on mass literacy, adult education, formal and nor-formal education especially as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2004) and other Federal Agencies, there is conspicuous laxity in the promotion of reading habit of the citizens.

The importance of reading cannot be overemphasised. It represents the connector between the past and the future, a window of wealth of knowledge or expansion of knowledge horizons and gateway for transformation of the society (Chettri & Rout, 2013). Reading shapes moral, moderates behaviour and attitude towards development. It is indispensable ingredient of education and thus development.

Thus, reading is regarded as indispensable instrument for equipping citizenry with knowledge, skills and attitudes required for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and sustainable development. While the major yardstick for academic performance is the examination result, the underlying factor of academic success is reading and understanding. However this is fast declining in Nigeria (Agbama, 2015; Ruterana, 2012). Among the teens, reading would represent an agent of transmission of appropriate norms, values, ideas and skills from generation to generation. It is regarded as activity done over and over again to acquire or upgrade knowledge, skills and attitude and represents a fundamental building block of learning and general development of a society. This suffices to say that the economic, social and political health of any country is contingent upon building citizens with reading culture.

The stages of formal education follow through a progressive pattern from primary to the tertiary level. Secondary education is the intermediate stage between the primary and tertiary levels of education. As a very important channel because it influences to a large extent the quality of the input to tertiary institutions and ultimately the output from tertiary institutions, it is mostly flooded with teenagers in ages of 13-19 years. The absence of an active reading culture has made majority of Nigerian teenagers and youths to degenerate intellectually and lose the essential values and virtues of human dignity, integrity and decency. No wonder, there is high rate of social decadence, unemployable, unskilled labour or jobless and conspicuous lack of lacks the intellectual capabilities for creativity and productive ventures. Specifically, an individual who has no solid foundation at the secondary level, it becomes difficult to perform within the larger social structure. Thus, the study examined the influence of reading culture among the teenagers and their academic performance in relation to sustainable economic development.

## **2 METHODS**

The study used the cross sectional survey dataset of 2015 among students from four urban secondary schools that were selected within Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria, through systematic sampling technique. Four secondary schools were selected from a list of forty registered schools in a local government area (LGS) randomly picked among 20 LGA in the state. The four schools were distributed into public and private secondary school on 50:50 ratios. The sample size determination technique used suggested a sample of 500 respondents. Overall, only 482 questionnaires were 'processable' out of the 500 targeted. The attrition rate observed (3.6%) was due to literacy level and lack of willingness for completion of the interview. Only descriptive and multivariate statistics were employed in the analysis.

## **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The survey covered secondary students ranging from age 13 and above. The average age shows that majority of the respondents are in the age 15 years. Out of the total respondents interviewed, 4.8% were 13 years and below. As earlier indicated, majority falls under the age group of 14-16 years while only 6.8% were 17 years and older.

The proportion of the studied population by gender revealed relatively a 57:43 male to female ratio. This is however not to suggest that the secondary school has more male than female but perhaps more male obliged to answer the questions compare to the female. The Nigerian secondary school is distributed into Junior and Secondary School. The junior segment comprise of three classes namely: JSS 1, JSS 2 and JSS 3 While the other segment comprise of SSS1, SSS2 and SSS 3. The study only focused on the Senior Secondary School (SSS1 to SSS3). The result of the analysis shows that less than 10% of the interviewees are in the lower level (i.e. SSS1). Over 50% were in the middle class (i.e. SSS2) and the remaining in the last highest class (i.e. SSS3) as indicated in the table below.

Majority of the students with higher academic performance indicated that poor academic is due to inadequate reading (and reading time) while less than 30% said believed there are other factors affecting good performance prominent which is peer pressure. The frequency of reading and the duration show that less than 50% read what they were taught in school very often, similar proportion also confirmed they do so but sometimes. Although, library facilities are meant to enhance academic performance as well as updating of knowledge, few of the respondents indicated that they often find it difficult to read in the library, 27.9% visit the library very often and rarely (37.4%) and almost 6.1% would not use library facility.

Self-assessment of academic performance was used to evaluate respondents' academic successes. Since grading is always done in percentage in Nigerian secondary school like other institutions (colleges, universities, etc), respondents were asked to indicate their levels on a scale of academic performance: fail (0-44%), Pass (D = 45-49%), Credit (C= 50-59%), Good (B = 60-69%) and Excellence (A=70% and above). Observation revealed that majority of students (58%) performed below while 49.1% belongs to A and B classes of grade. Those in the failure level are 12.2%. The involvement of parents in academic performance of their ward is vital (Gayle, 2010; Mustard, 2006). Since the parents are the first educators the children come in contact with, impacting positive attitude to reading at the early stage adds a lot of meaning to their lives (Gayle, 2010; Mustard, 2006). It is thus very vital for parents to get involved in their child's academic work. The result shows that 34.6% of the students were supported by their parents in reading culture while others are not.

Table 1. Background information, Reading habit and Academic Performance of the respondents.

| <b>Selected Variables</b>              | <b>Freq</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Academic Performance (%)</b>           | <b>Freq</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--|-------------|----------|---|-------------|----------|
| <b>Age Group</b>                       |             |          | 0-44                                      | 59          | 12.2     |
| 10-13 years                            | 35          | 7.3      | 45-49                                     | 95          | 19.7     |
| 14-16 years                            | 398         | 82.6     | 50-59                                     | 126         | 26.1     |
| 17 years & above                       | 49          | 10.2     | 60-69                                     | 78          | 16.2     |
| Total                                  | 482         | 100      | 70 & above                                | 124         | 25.7     |
| <b>Sex</b>                             |             |          | Total                                     | 482         | 100.0    |
| Male                                   | 272         | 56.4     | <b>Reading Culture</b>                    |             |          |
| Female                                 | 210         | 43.6     | Poor                                      | 172         | 35.7     |
| Total                                  | 482         | 100.0    | Good                                      | 310         | 64.3     |
| <b>Classes</b>                         |             |          | Total                                     | 482         | 100.0    |
| SSS 1                                  | 43          | 8.9      | <b>Frequency of reading</b>               |             |          |
| SSS 2                                  | 311         | 64.5     | Very often                                | 203         | 42.1     |
| SSS 3                                  | 128         | 26.6     | Sometimes                                 | 249         | 51.7     |
| Total                                  | 482         | 100.0    | Rarely                                    | 30          | 6.2      |
| <b>Parent's Educational attainment</b> |             |          | <b>Rate of reading outside Class work</b> |             |          |
| No formal school                       | 57          | 11.8     | Very often                                | 184         | 38.2     |
| primary Education                      | 85          | 17.6     | Sometimes                                 | 161         | 33.4     |
| Secondary Education                    | 243         | 50.4     | Rarely                                    | 108         | 22.4     |
| Tertiary Education                     | 97          | 20.1     | Not at all                                | 29          | 6.0      |
| Total                                  | 482         | 100.0    | Total                                     | 482         | 100.0    |
| <b>Have Regular reading hours</b>      |             |          | <b>Usage of Library</b>                   |             |          |
| Yes                                    | 279         | 57.9     | Very Often                                | 135         | 28       |
| No                                     | 203         | 42.1     | Sometimes                                 | 212         | 44       |
| Total                                  | 482         | 100.0    | Not at all                                | 135         | 28       |
| <b>Parental support</b>                |             |          | Total                                     | 482         | 100.0    |
| Yes                                    | 167         | 34.6     | <b>Reading habit</b>                      |             |          |
| No                                     | 315         | 65.4     | Yes                                       | 292         | 60.6     |
| Total                                  | 482         | 100.0    | No  | 190         | 39.4     |
|  |             |          | Total                                     | 482         | 100.0    |

Source: Field Survey 2015

Only one hypothesis was formulated to confirm the interconnections and significant contributions of each of the suspected factors of reading culture on students' academic performance. Chi-square test was employed as an inferential statistics in testing the hypothesis. It helped to ascertain the goodness of fit between observed data and expected outcome. This is made possible by the random nature of the sample. In this test, concerned is given to the Pearson Chi-Square in explaining the probability of the obtained significant value.

If the value is less than 5% (i.e. 0.05), it is assumed that there exist a significant association between the two variables concerned. This is generalized to imply that there is an association between the variables in the Population from which the sample was drawn. The result revealed Pearson chi-square test statistic ( $X^2 = 10.077$ ) with P-value less than 5% (0.039). It demonstrated that the reading habit contributed significantly to academic performance of students. Besides, the p-value is far lower than the alpha level of significance of 0.05 (i.e.  $X^2_{tab} = 1.96$ ).

If reading is vital to education, it is indisputably crucial for development. It can be perceived as the connector between the past and the future, a window of wealth of knowledge or expansion of knowledge horizons and gateway for transformation of the society (Chettri & Rout, 2013). Reading shapes moral, moderates behaviour and attitude towards development. Its relevance as instrument for equipping citizenry with knowledge, skills and attitudes required for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. While the major yardstick for academic performance is the examination result, the underlying factor of academic success is reading and understanding. However, this is fast declining in Nigeria (Agbama, 2015; Ruterana, 2012). Among the teens, reading would represent an agent of transmission of appropriate norms, values, ideas and skills from generation to generation. It is regarded as activity done over and over again to acquire or upgrade knowledge, skills and attitude and represents a fundamental building block of learning and general development of a society. This suffices to say that the economic, social and political health of any country is contingent upon building citizens with reading culture especially among the teenagers who are young in minds.

Table4.3.5 Chi-Square Tests.

| <b>Have a reading culture/Academic Performance</b> | <b>Value</b>        | <b>df</b> | <b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b> |
|--|---------------------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square                                 | 10.077 <sup>a</sup> | 4         | .039                         |
| Likelihood Ratio                                   | 10.108              | 4         | .039                         |
| Linear-by-Linear Association                       | 3.823               | 1         | .051                         |
| N of Valid Cases                                   | 482                 |           |                              |
| <b>Source: Field Survey 2015</b>                   |                     |           |                              |

Academic performance is germane to economic progress and fundamental tool in the hand so policy makers (El Massah, 2015; Hojo, 2012; Mlambo, 2011). Education is an ingredient of human capital formation and determinant of income or wage which imparts family wellbeing. Thus, it can be used to normalize income gap or inequality. Higher academic grades/achievement could enhance productivity; change the level of income and of course the socio-economic status of family and the standard of living (Chettri & Rout, 2013; El-Massah, 2015; Hojo, 2012; Mlambo, 2011). Succinctly put, high quality performance graduates (engendered by reading) are those who form the manpower of a country and responsible for its economic and social development.

#### **4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Observations from the study indicated that reading culture contributes significantly to academic performance of students. It shows that the more emphasis is laid on reading culture the more likely the academic performance improves. Reading habit is indispensable to the achievement of good academic performance and important ingredient of economic empowerment. The authors however recommend a national reading plan and competition among in-and out-of-school teenagers with

adequate support and monitoring from parents coupled with establishment of state of heart library facilities and provision of affordable books. These could arouse teenagers' interest in reading and has potential for sensitizing them on the relevance of library utilisation.

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