

Achieving and Sustaining Effective Reading Habits through Utilization of School Libraries in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper presents strategies for achieving and sustaining effective reading habits through utilization of school libraries in Sokoto State. After defining the concept of reading and reading habits, it traces the brief history of Sokoto State as well as development of reading in the state. The authors delineate the importance of reading habit, in terms accruing benefits and give a picture of the current state of school libraries in Sokoto State. The special programmes such as – early reading agenda for the infants and toddlers, kidsread program, read at school program etc – aimed at improving reading habits of children successfully accomplished in Singapore are described. Factors such as absence of well-built school libraries, non - creative attitude of school librarians and absence of reading period in the school time table are pointed out as bane to successful implementation of these strategies. Government policies on the establishment and development of school libraries in all primary and secondary schools, organizing special training for the school librarians on how to create and facilitate reading habits in schools, making the reading period compulsory in the schools time table and improving on the standard of living of the citizenry etc. are suggested as ways forward.

Keywords: Reading, Reading habits, Readers for life, School libraries, Reading initiatives, Sokoto State

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills individuals need to learn to succeed in life. Developing good reading habit is vital to the future of every child not just academically, but in everyday life as well. Reading combats the epidemic of poor access to vital information affecting today's

children. Strauss (2015) defines reading as a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to comprehend their meaning. Similarly, Ibrahim (2014) cited by Nuhu (2017) sees reading as the way individuals identify and perceive some signs (symbols, letters and figures), meanings,

messages or thoughts from printed or unprinted information materials.

On the other hand, Pritchard et al (2012) described reading habit as an attitude of constantly acquiring information, ideas, language learning and communication which are transformed into knowledge resulting to behavioural change. To buttress the point above, Nuhu (2017) posited that reading habit is attained when a reader is reading constantly and regularly, such that reading as activity now becomes his habit, to the extent of becoming habitual, typical consciously or unconsciously. Reading habit is therefore, a form of sustaining reading among individuals, groups, society and nations among others. It is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language (Doron, 2003).

The reading habit as a process requires continuous practice, creativity and critical analysis. Virgili et al (2013) asserted that constant reading can actually increase your brain power just like going for a jog exercises your cardiovascular system. They further stated that reading regularly improves memory function by giving your brain a good work out. In a nut shell, reading can make one to become literate, knowledgeable in various profession and occupationally skilful.

1.1 Brief History of Sokoto State

According to the official website of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto (www.sscoe.edu.ng/content/about-sokoto), Sokoto State is one of the States in the north-western Nigeria, borders with the Republic of Niger to the north, Kebbi State to the west and south, and Zamfara to the south and east. Sokoto state occupied an area of short-grass savanna vegetation in the south and thorn scrub in the north. A generally arid region that gradually merges into the desert across the border in Niger republic, it has limited rainfall from middle of May to middle of September and is subjected to the Sahara's harmattan (dry, dust-laden wind) from November to March. It is drained by the River Rima and its tributaries, the Sokoto being itself a major tributary of the Niger River. Sokoto is a city located in the extreme north-west of Nigeria, near the confluence

of the Sokoto River and the Rima River. As in 2006 it had a population of 427,760.

The name Sokoto (which is the modern/anglicised version of the local name, Sakkwato) is of Arabic origin, representing suk, 'market'. It was founded by Caliph Muhammad Bello in 1808/1809 and after 1812 became the capital of the Caliphate. This gave rise to the Hausa common adage; Sokoto Birnin Shehu ta Bello maida kasari zuma. Being the seat of the Sokoto Caliphate, the city is predominantly Muslim and an important seat of Islamic learning in Nigeria and West Africa. The Sultan who heads the caliphate is effectively the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims.

1.2 History and Development of Reading in Sokoto State

The history of reading in Sokoto State was traced to the pre-modern societies of the Islamic Caliphate with high literacy rates in writing and reading of Arabic manuscripts in the variety of literacy forms employed by religious and political leaders during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Northern Sokoto Caliphate. Furthermore, to Galadanchi (2007), reading culture in Sokoto State can be traced to the activities of indigenous scholars who greatly aid the ability to understand local indigenous knowledge system and the dynamic of intellectual discourse in the sphere of religion, politics, economics and the culture of the West African sub-region from earliest times to the present day. This has indicated that, even before the arrival of Western education in Nigeria, Sokoto people were already reading. This activity enjoyed eminent support with the invention of writing during the 4th millennium BC. Although reading print text is now an important way for the general population to access information, this has not always been the case.

2. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to corroborate the role of school libraries in achieving effective reading habit. The study has been carried out with the following specific objectives.

- To delineate the importance of reading habit, in terms accruing benefits,

- To examine the present state of affairs of school libraries in Sokoto state,
- To know about the special programmes aimed at improving reading habits of children successfully accomplished elsewhere,
- To know about the impediments to effective reading habits in Sokoto State, and
- To recommend initiatives and strategies to achieve and sustain effective reading habits.

3. Methodology

The methodology comprises mainly literature search and survey. The benefits of developing good reading habits have been identified from available literature, and by going through works of prominent authors in this field. To know about the present state of affairs of school libraries in Sokoto state, a sample of 24 schools, (14 primary schools and 10 secondary schools) were selected across Sokoto metropolis and the investigators personally visited and recorded details. Regarding special programmes aimed at promoting reading habits in children, the programmes implemented by the National Library Board (NLB) Singapore were taken as model.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Importance of Reading Habit

Strauss, (2015) identified five reasons for individuals developing and sustaining reading habits and the accruing benefits. They are examined below.

- **Reading develops vocabulary:** The more an individual reads, the more new words will find their way into his vocabulary. Reading allows for exposure to words and phrases that one might not use as part of normal speech. Parents should read aloud to their children in order to help them prepare to learn to read and develop rich language.
- **Reading increases attention span:** Encouraging good reading habits from an early age develops the child's attention span and allows them to focus better and for longer periods of time. Reading combats the epidemic of poor attention span in today's children.
- **Good reading habits prepare children for school:** Children who spend a lot of time

reading prior to attending school will have an easier time adapting to the reading-focused learning environment in their future classrooms.

- **Developing reading habits leads to a lifelong love of books:** Children who start reading regularly from an early age are more likely to enjoy reading later in life. This will serve them well throughout their education and beyond.
- **Reading encourages a thirst for knowledge:** Children with good reading habits learn more about the world around them, and develop an interest in other cultures. Reading leads to asking questions, and seeking answers, which means children learn more every day.

4.2 School Libraries in Sokoto State

A school library is a building that contains an organized collection of books and other information resources in primary and secondary schools for use by both the teachers and pupils/students. Nwakaegu & Juliet (2014) describe school library as a miniaturized intellectual powerhouse or information centre found in primary schools, secondary schools and teacher training colleges. In other words, it is a stepping stone towards a child's intellectual development. Jabo & Bande (2014) describe them as one of the most important education services every state ministry of education needs to provide funds for to be established and equipped in all primary and secondary schools.

A standard school library is a sine-qua-non for qualitative primary and secondary education and an instrument for the cultivation and enhancement of reading habit through the effective use of the library resources by pupils/students. It can serve the purpose of inspiration, communication among students and the fulfillment of programme in the curriculum. The proper utilization can enable students to seek knowledge in books in order that in the process, they may become efficient and enthusiastic readers. Also, the integration of new media like computers and Internet can encourage them to become adaptive users of multimedia resources.

The National Policy on Education has it that citizens should be given lifelong education via a restructured education system to develop the practice of self learning that can make the people to become actively literate and generally well informed through the introduction of Universal Basic and Compulsory Education for all citizens. In support of the above policy, the Executive Governor of Sokoto State, Right Honourable Aminu Waziri Tambwal in 2016 declared the state of emergency on education sector in the state in a bid to turn around the fortune of the sector. During his declaration he said 'The ultimate aim is to improve human capital capacity in the sector, eliminate inequality in access and radically improve numeracy and literacy.'

The above mentioned objective could only be achieved and sustained with the help of well equipped school libraries in primary and secondary schools. Against this background and considering the scope of this study, 24 schools (14 primary schools and 10 secondary schools) were selected across Sokoto metropolis for assessment. The schools were visited and on the spot assessment were carried out along with the schools heads/representatives based on the following criteria/indices:

- Availability or presence of libraries in schools
- Availability of separate building space for the library,
- Adequate stock of current books for children,
- Provision for library hour in the weekly time table, and
- Presence of professionally trained librarian.

Presence of Libraries

All the schools visited have libraries as their integral unit. The students and teachers are well aware of the libraries existing in their schools (Table 1). The heads of most of the schools interacted with, have undergone formal teacher training programmes and the institutions where they got the training, offer a general course on library studies as part of curriculum.

Table 1
Availability of libraries in the schools

Schools	Options	Frequency
Primary schools	Yes	14
	No	0
Secondary schools	Yes	10
	No	0
Total		24

Availability of separate building for the library

Most of the schools visited do not have separate building space for libraries, while some are occupied in temporary dilapidated structures (Table 2). Only in four schools a permanent building space is allotted to the library. This can be attributed to government's nonchalant attitude towards library development in the state.

Table 2
Availability of library building

Nature of Building Space	Responses
Permanent building	4
Temporary building	4
Not available	16
Total	24

Adequacy of book stock

The strength of collection is generally weak and only three school libraries visited have adequate and current publications for use by the pupils/students (Table 3). Two thirds of the schools visited have bare minimum of current books suitable for children.

Table 3
Collection strength

Nature of book collection	Response
Adequate collection of current books	3
Mostly out of date publications	5
Current books almost lacking	16
Total	24

Library hour as part of timetable

Library hour is a period earmarked for pupils/ students to visit and use the school library. Among the 24 schools visited only 6 have allotted a period on their time table exclusively for library use (Table 4).

Table 4
Library hour in the time table

Library hour in the Time Table	Responses
Available	6
Not available	18
Total	24

Presence of professionally trained librarian

A professional librarian is an individual who has gone through library school for training. In all the schools visited, only three professional librarians were found to be available. The consequence of this is that those school libraries manned by non professional librarian cannot make any meaningful impact on the utilization of the library facilities available.

Table 5
Availability of professional school Librarians

Professional School Librarian	Responses
Available	3
Not available	21
Total	24

4.3 Special Programmes to Improve Reading Habit

A good number of special programmes and initiatives have been formulated by various agencies in order to achieve sustainable reading habits. While examining the various programmes the initiatives formulated by the National Library Board of Singapore were found to be suited for the situation in Sokoto state. These initiatives were developed with the aim of building the physical and digital infrastructures to perpetuate learning and reading. These initiatives have helped Singaporeans to achieve reading as a lifelong learning habit and sustained it by the love of

reading (<http://www.rif.org/us/literacy> accessed 18th April, 2018). With these initiatives, Raneetha (2013) revealed that Singapore's literacy level in 2011 was jacked up to 96.1% which shows that Singaporeans are relatively well-equipped in reading skills. School libraries in Nigeria and Sokoto state in particular can employ the same reading initiatives under the Libraries for Life strategic plan of Singapore that nurture and support reading among children and young adults in informal, social and recreational contexts as highlighted below.

a. Early read agenda for the infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers

The focus of this programme is on setting a firm foundation for functional literacy so as to inculcate a reading habit in a child's early years. The Early Read agenda aims to bring together educators, parents and librarians working collaboratively to impart beneficial pre-reading skills to children. For instance, infants who have the pre-reading skill to distinguish the building blocks of speech at six months are found to be better at other more complex language skills at two and three years of age. They are also noted to be better at acquiring the skills for learning to read at four and five years of age. Hence, raising public awareness of the importance of early childhood literacy is integral to helping young children acquire reading skills.

b. kidsREAD programme

The **kidsREAD programme** is an initiative to promote early reading and language competence among children from low income families, specifically the 4 to 8 year olds. This can be achieved by enrolling children into reading clubs where they can be exposed to reading materials of any kind. The school library should provide for the right environment for the reading club to encourage reading in these children and provide them with the necessary literacy skills to begin school. The club allows elder students (i.e. 13 years and above) from secondary schools and junior colleges the opportunity to volunteer and help nurture the reading habit in the younger primary school children. This can be achieved through

collaboration between the school library and the Ministry of Education.

c. Read at School Programme

Read at School programme should be championed by School Librarians, hence reading for pleasure is an important enabler for learning. Pupils/students who read fiction for enjoyment performed significantly better in Reading Literacy, and that reading for enjoyment is an important precondition for becoming an effective reader. The Ministry of Education should take this active step in promoting reading as a means of boosting academic success in children.

d. Young Read Campaign!

School Librarians should encourage pupils and students to read and share the joy of reading by creating common topics of discussion and conversation amongst them in the school. This campaign should aim at building children thinking skills and give them room to express their creativity through communal reading, book discussions and other activities. The School Librarian can create young readers list and recommend a set of stories that are interesting and relevant to young minds for the annual reading campaign.

e. Quest

Quest is a reading programme with the objective of converting reluctant readers, particularly boys, to become readers and lifelong learners by leveraging on the current reading fantasy adventure stories. Quest can tackle the declining library loans of boys aged 7-12 years.

f. Junior Reading Ambassador (JRA)

Peer influence is a powerful factor in the development of children. Peer is one of the factors that influence the choice of a book that a young person picks up for reading. When a friend talks about a good book he or she has read makes them want to read that same book. JRA can be recruited each year from primary schools and trained by the school librarians in areas like storytelling, book talking, handling media interviews, and writing book reviews. The JRA initiative can promote the joy and benefits of reading to their peers at various public platforms.

g. Conquest Game

Conquest Game consists of country based adventurous stories that can nurture a lifelong readership among children aged between 10 and 15. This game sets young readers on a learning journey about country's history and culture while bonding with their peers. This can inculcate into children the habit of reading non-fiction materials such as history which is ranked one of the lowest among young adults while the adventure materials such as drama and poetry ranked the highest for fiction.

h. 101 Things for Teens

This programme can provide opportunities for young adults to connect with and learn from one another in new and refreshing ways. One special feature of these programmes is getting young adults to facilitate their own learning activity through video production, science exhibitions, gaming, public speaking and beauty tips could be selected by them for their learning activities. The value propositions for this programme were: (i) Young adults can teach (ii) Learn from peers and (iii) A reason to be engaged

i. Mobile Library (MOLLY)

Mobile Library reaches out primarily to the disadvantaged groups, including special education schools and homes for children and young persons. A bus can be converted to a library unit with books, library equipment, reading space and library staff on board in order to bring to the disadvantaged an opportunity to discover the joys of reading, and to increase their awareness and use of libraries.

j. Project Deliver Me

This can be established by the school librarian that will enable him reach out to people who are homebound. The beauty of this initiative is that it can be run by the community – a group of volunteers who either select the library materials or deliver the items to the homes of the physically challenged. This project will enable people with physical disabilities to have easy access to the wide range of library materials from the comfort of their own homes and at the same time, engages the community with meaningful volunteering opportunities.

4.4 Impediments to Effective Reading Habits in Sokoto State

It is an established fact that reading is gradually dying down with most people preferring to while away time laughing and joking than reading to widen their intelligence. This was supported by a saying that if you want to hide anything for a black man put it in a paper. This decline in reading among people has been blamed on the following factors (Olubukola, 2014):

- Lack of standard school libraries in primary and secondary schools and where they exist they are poorly developed and in shamble state.
- Lack of initiatives by the school librarians who always remain adamant and non creative.
- Many schools do not include reading times in their time table.
- Enormous commitments by parents to attend to family needs who hardly find time to stay at home to read for their children.
- Parents do not encourage their children to read by lavishing them with frivolous gifts instead of buying books and other reading materials for them as gifts.
- Offshoot of technological advancements that have brought about changes in family, social, and economic conditions.
- Poor reading habits occur in children and young people because reading is not considered a relevant leisure activity as it does not form part of children's social interaction and reading is considered a solitary pursuit and is not attractive compared with interactive activity on the Internet.
- There is also an overriding desire amongst young people to spend more time with their friends than to remain at home reading. Adults and children alike may enjoy television and films as a way of enjoying their leisure instead.
- Very few people patronize bookshops to buy novel due to the fact that they prefer to use

the social media in which writing is short and concise.

- Poor reading habits could be blamed on poverty as a result of low income and high demands of the people as a result, they cannot afford to buy books.
- Youth nowadays believe that google has most of the answers to their questions which they can find while reading on social networks and the internet.

4.5 Way Forward

There is need for the nation to develop the habit of reading or learning for better tomorrow as there is a nexus between literacy and economic prosperity. This can be achieved through the following measures.

- Government should make it a matter of policy for establishing and developing school libraries in all primary and secondary schools across the state in order to achieve the aim upon which the state of emergency was declared on education.
- School librarians should be given special training on how to create and initiate strategies in the library that will help the pupils/students to develop lifelong habits for reading with specific reference to Singaporean '**Readers for Life Programmes.**'
- Ministry of education should make it a policy that will enforce the management of primary and secondary schools to include reading time/library hour in their time table.
- Government should improve on the living standard of the citizens by raising their standard of living to reduce their work engagement and have time to relax with their families.
- Parents should develop the attitude of reading to their children at home at young age and encourage them to read fiction books and have time to listen to them as feedback.
- Parents should endeavour to buy reading simulation models or toys to their children in

order to prepare them for the use of more advanced technologies like cell phones, and ipads among others.

- Reading should be considered a leisure activity at homes and should be encouraged by parents.
- Children should be encouraged to form reading clubs in the school as well as interactive reading among themselves at their homes.
- Fiction, storytelling and adventurous books should be purchased from bookshops to equip school libraries and such items should also be purchased by parents and made available at home.
- Parents should be encouraged to save money to buy books for their children however little the resources are.

5. Conclusion

The initiatives highlighted in this paper are positive pointers to instil a love of reading among children and young adults, and to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of knowledge and learning. Readers for Life program can support effective lifelong reading in our schools and in our homes, with its focus on reading for pleasure as a sustainable and enriching activity, assisted by the School Libraries where by a whole nation of readers can be built.

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