

'I Can't Read', Implication for 'Literacy for All' Policy in Rivers State

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Abstract

The 2023 'International Literacy Day' celebration brought to limelight the magnitude of the number of non-literate Nigerian adults, that is those that cannot read and write. The figure is staggering. This paper investigates the issue of I Can't Read among students, and the implication for the quest for literacy for all global citizens. It examines the various challenges this can pose, and the remediation for illiteracy in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The paper adopted Social Learning theory and the descriptive research design. Data was derived through triangulation, both primary and secondary data was utilized, in addition to content method of data analysis. The findings reveals that some persons have gone through the schooling process without acquiring the basic skills of reading and writing, and this has dented the drive for literacy for all citizens. The paper concluded that there has to be a change of narrative to reduce the number of illiterate adults in the state. Also the public school system has to undergo some revolutionary changes before any lasting academic career structure can be built for those students that 'Can't Read'. It recommends that the act of reading and writing should be prioritized, this requires the educational authorities going back to the drawing board to officially re-introduce remedial classes at the junior secondary school level to help brush up those experiencing inability to read and write, so as to stem the tide of the statement, 'I have finished', but 'I can't read' among students.

Keywords: Reading, Writing, Literacy, Illiteracy, Education, Can't Read

Introduction

Starting from November, 1966, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed 8th September as International Literacy Day. "To draw global attention to the status of literacy and life-long learning, as well as highlight the linkage between literacy and the development of individuals and nations". About three decades later, an international policy on education was adopted by agencies of the United Nations Organisation(UNO) at a World Conference in Jomtien, Thailand, specifically 1990 was declared the International Literacy Year, and with a "commitment to ensure the rights of all people to education and knowledge". Attendees representing various countries unanimously adopted "Education for All" as an international policy. They also endorsed a framework of action to meet basic learning needs of all people all over the world. Following this framework of action, Federal Ministry of Education(1990), affirms that "the functional significance of people's ability to read and write has made literacy one of the fundamental requirements of modern civilisation". This commitment was re-affirmed some years later with the declaration of Education for all by year 2000. The long awaited year 2000, came and went, yet, Nigeria did not reach the El Dorado of literacy for all.

In viewing Education as a tool for achieving Sustainable Human Development, another Forum on Education for All (EFA) was held in Dakar in 2000, six goals were adopted. Then UNESCO declared year 2003--2012 as Literacy Decade for achieving Education for All around the world. While Universal Primary Education was to be achieved by 2015, in line with the Millennium Development Goals 2, Target 4, Indicator 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. In other words, modalities were put in place by governments in every nation for eradicating illiteracy by the end of 2015. It was envisioned that all illiterates will become functionally literate. Irrespective of the fact that for the UN, access and participation in education is declared a fundamental human right to all global citizens. At all educational levels, reading and writing skill is the bedrock for entrance into the next higher level of learning. It opens learners up to other academic and professional opportunities. At the highest level of academic pursuit, reading and writing is a requirement, as its operational base is in deeper dimensional scale. The foundation for acquisition of higher skills within Nigeria and in other countries is enhanced by the ability to read and write, the latter has been pushed from nursery to primary 4, even to JSS level. Moreover, there is urgency for the achievement of Literacy for All in Nigeria, besides, the art of reading and writing has been adopted nationally as an important medium for the purpose of communication. Whether in art or science, ability to read and write is a useful tool for transmitting knowledge in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in Chapter 18(3), it states that; Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide; (a). Free compulsory and universal primary education, (b).Free university education,(c).Free adult literacy programme"(p.46). Inability to read and write hinders the achievement of the above objective and blocks the learning process of such persons. So, in trying to eradicate illiteracy the federal and state governments strives towards achieving this objective

The Universal Basic Education(UBE) scheme was launched on 30th July, 2005, and Rivers

State Universal Basic Education Law No.4, officially made education compulsory for all citizens in the state. Though laudable, to the effect that every Nigerian child has an inalienable right to pass through formal educational system and at least acquire literacy and numeracy skills based on the Sustainable Development Goals 4, Target 6. This is foundational to other levels of education. Formal pedagogical foundation begins with ability to read and write. Formal education is enhanced through this medium. Acquired skill gives room to exposure to immediate socio-cultural environment of learners and access to numerous economic opportunities within and outside their immediate environment. Creating platforms for attaining and obtaining higher skills in other pedagogical endeavours. In other word, access to higher level of education is enabled based on the ability to read or write, enabling one to build a better and solid platform for advancement and attainment of life-long learning. This is the more reason both young and old, male or females have to acquire reading and writing skills, as the benefits are numerous. As the saying goes that tomorrow's leaders were yesterday readers. Participation in the process of "teaching--learning lessons can be in the form of interaction involving students and teachers, students and the textbook,..Active student participation may also be in the form of reading, discussion, writing and compiling answers"(NTI 2012). A student that cannot read, cannot also interact with the textbooks, and cannot write down the outcome of their interaction with the teachers. Ability to read and write guarantees the right to effectively communicate in writing with others. At least students in JSS are expected to read words written by themselves, by teachers or the ones written in textbooks. Meaning that at the end of JSS, students can successfully acquire such basic criteria as ability to communicate not just verbally, but in writing also. With the assumption that even in the language of the learners environment, they should develop and gain mastery of reading and writing skills.

Every parent's aspiration is to send their children to school, their and desires is that these children learn. Parents longs to see some remarkable improvement and positive changes in the academic life of their children and ward. With the policy of EFA in place, the total number of pupils transiting from primary to secondary increased encouragingly, same also for those transiting from junior to senior secondary school, but despite the efforts to improve the literacy level and make learning accessible to many, some learners amongst them still turn out to be semi-illiterates especially those coming from public schools. Making mockery of the assumption that by primary 4, all pupils should have acquired the reading and writing skills. Though some students may have difficulty in reading during the early years of schooling due to several factors, such as; teachers strike or natural disasters such as floods, resulting in school closures lasting for month, students forced out of classrooms because of conflict, increasing the number of out-of-school children, amongst others. UNESCO (2022), asserts that "out of the top 10 countries that has out-of-school children, about 18.9 million of these children are in Nigeria, according to the World Bank and UNICEF Reports, this is the highest figure in the world. For these much number, inability to read is not their making, meaning that something must be done and done fast to pull them off the illiteracy pit. In 2015, Nigeria's literacy rate was put at 62.02%, with non-literate level of 38%, figures by the World Bank. In 2021, the figure reportedly jumped to 76% by 34%. In 2022 the country recorded a 31% illiteracy rate. According to Business Day NG(2022), "the number of illiterate Nigerians is now at an estimated 31 per cent". While on 8th September, 2023, the Editorial Board of PUNCH Newspapers carried the news that "Nigeria's literacy rate is still

too low." The national literacy rate is now 69% meaning that illiteracy rate is 31%. Low rate of achievement in the area of competence in reading and writing has been a challenge even after the adoption of education for all policy.

Secondary Schools across some states in Nigeria, including Rivers State decided to build up the foundation for a better reading culture. However, the beneficiaries of this UNICEF sponsored project were the bright and brilliant students, because during the various reading competitions those that can read and write were chosen across the selected schools to represent each state, while no particular attention was paid to help those who actually needed to imbibe the reading culture, that is the students who cannot read. How can we reconcile this with the policy of literacy for all? At every point in time and irrespective of one's age and location, inability to read and write legibly the language of the local and possibly international environment, is a limitation and an impediment to opportunities within formal educational set-up. With the understanding that students who are unable to read and write may pose a threat to the attainment of the goal of Education for All policy. In year 2020, as a classroom teacher in one of the Junior Secondary School in Rivers State, I had an experience that got me thinking for days. On this particular morning, I encountered one Michael, who having completed the Junior Secondary School two months earlier, sought for admission into this particular Senior Secondary School where he was asked to come along with his parents for an interview. The entrance requirement for admission into SSS1, was the reading of a passage from the SSS English Language Textbook 1, before his parents and the panel of interviewers. When I enquired about his admission status, he told me confidentially and with all seriousness, "Ma, I Can't Read". His reply was a revelation of the gaps in the schooling process. This is one of the cases of students who finished school, either from primary, junior or senior secondary school but cannot read, educated yet illiterate, a product of educational laxity and culpable negligence.

This brings us to certain recurring questions, how is it that the primary agent of socialization, the parent and the various teachers who handled the classes and attended to his classwork and assignments, from kindergarten, primary to junior secondary schools, did not notice the lapses? Did the student not undergo continuous assessment drill? If he did, why was this challenge not identified? After each test and examination, did the teachers not mark his scripts? Could it be an institutional factor, that a student should go through the JSS curriculum, coming out with no improvement in the area of competency in reading and writing? Why must we be concerned with those who cannot read or write, when we have millions that can do so? The theme for 2021 International Literacy Day is 'Literacy for a Human-centred Recovery : Narrowing the Digital Divide'. In line with the goals of the National Digital Framework of the Federal Government of Nigeria, to achieve 95% targets of digital literacy by 2030. Meaning that those that cannot read or write may not be able to access digital knowledge. If that is the case, then what can be done. Has the educational system any remedial plan for the 'Can't Read' students?

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives guiding this paper are to;

- i. Examine the nature and problem of the "Finished but Can't Read' amongst students in Rivers

State

- ii. Identify the implications posed by the increasing number of 'Finished but Can't Read' in the achievement of literacy for all citizens?
- iii. Suggest ways of remediation to the 'I Can't Read' scourge in secondary schools in order to achieve Literacy for All policy.

Research Questions .

- i. What is the nature of the 'Finished but Can't Read' problem amongst students in Rivers State?
- ii. What are the implications of having an increasing number of 'Finished but Can't Read' students, in the face of achievement of literacy for all citizens in Rivers State?
- iii. What are the ways of remediation to the 'I Can't Read' scourge in secondary schools in order to achieve Literacy for All policy?

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning theorists, such as Edward Tolman (1948) he belief that "much learning takes place outside the stimulus-response bond". Bandurra (1963) of Stanford University also propounded the theory of social learning. He suggest that observation mostly plays a primary role on how and why people learn. Bandura's theory goes beyond the perception of learning being the result of direct experience within the environment". There is also Observational or imitation learning theory, postulated by Albert Bandurra (1977). Learning takes place in a social situation and involves a model behaviour and its consequence, which vicariously brings changes to the learners. Therefore sequential phases that enables learners to learn takes the order of thorough practice. It follows the processes that requires paying attention to what is being taught. Next is the process of retention, retaining here is like one chewing and swallowing what is taught, in other word not forgetting what is learnt. Then there is the process of reproducing what has been learnt, in oral, written or practical terms. Finally there is motivation to put what has been learnt into practice, this gives a better view of both cognitive and social learning.

Under cognitive learning, students can benefit from the process by recognizing that they cannot read or write, this is a problem that can be solved within the school environment. Tolman, (1948), and Inyang, (2008), both advocates of cognitive learning, proposed the concept of latent learning and imitation. It occurs when a person or animal watches or hears another do or say something, then the person responds the same way. People learn by observation and imitation of what they see others do. Learning occurs when a student observe the positive behaviour of other students during classroom activities, especially the ones that involves reading certain stories such as in Bible passages, or during an exercise pertaining to teachers dictating new words, in which students are asked to write down the spelling in their exercise books. The words are later written on the board for students to see and assess themselves if what they have written is correct and correspond with the spelling of what the teacher has written. Dictation is another aspect of

learning, usually done in terms of practical drills whether in the classroom, at home, or play setting. It does go a long way in enabling students imbibe the reading and writing culture. In transmitting knowledge these methods can be adapted and utilized. The paper adopted the social learning theory as it relates with steps that enables the learning of reading and writing.

Methodology

The method of study adopted for this paper was the descriptive research design. Quantitative data was derived from primary sources, in addition to some secondary data. Five Local Government Areas were randomly selected, these are; Ikwerre, Obio/Akpor, Emohua, Gokana and Etche, all in Rivers State. Purposive sampling method was used in selecting two schools from each of the local government area, making it ten schools, headed by ten Principals. Ten teachers, regarded as optimally informed participants were randomly chosen, that gave us a total of hundred teachers. Also using multi-stage sampling approach, five students willingly identified by their teachers, were selected from each school, given a total of fifty students. Oral questionnaire was administered to them. Oral instruction is the most adopted method used in transmitting knowledge in both primary and secondary schools. The semi-structured interview was conducted, for Principals, while Students Learning Disability Questionnaire was distributed to teachers to solicit their response. Ninety-six out of a hundred copies was retrieved. Quantitative statistical technique of frequency count, and simple percentages was used for analysis of data, generated from response to the Questionnaire. Content analysis was objectively used for the semi-structured interview.

Conceptual Review

Literacy

Literacy is the ability to understand, as much as identify letters and word, interpretation, computation, and communicating with others through use of printed or written words, and material artefacts. The English Dictionary explains that literacy is "the ability to read and write", Global policy on Education for All requires 100% literacy rate. This rate of literacy should be functional. According to UNESCO (1978), functional literacy is ability "to participate in any reading and writing activity organised by one's social group or the community. While functional illiteracy (means) unable to participate in any reading and writing activity organised by one's social group or community". Human Development Index(HDI), of UNDP is "level of adult literacy and more years of schooling". So, if schools are providing universal basic literacy, then basic skill for communicating with others must be imbibed, especially through the process of writing. Conducive learning environment for acquiring necessary and basic skill for communicating with others through writing and receiving information by reading is very essential. Hence the need for improvement in quality of educational delivery system, as well as standard of teaching and learning these foundational skills. Enabling the exploration and harnessing of learners innate abilities. So ability to read and write legibly is now a rewarding bedrock upon which every other levels of education is anchored on. The celebration of 2022 International Literacy Day coincided with the disclosure by the federal government of Nigeria that the national literacy rate is now 69%, meaning that only 69% adults can read and write.

What is the fate of the rest 31%?

Reading and Writing

Reading involves identifying a letter or group of letters, making meaning of it, and its vocalization as spoken words, and communicating it to others. Writing on the other hand involves arranging letters, vowels and consonants, scribbling it on a board, piece of paper or any surface as readable word with meaning. A child that cannot read loudly or quietly cannot also write or answer a written test or write what others are saying. He can only copy down what has been written on the chalk board, or what others have written in the book. He cannot write out or transcribe spoken words. Reading is one of the basic skills acquired at the primary and junior secondary levels. This is necessary in view of other learning task to which he or she will be exposed to, throughout the academic period at the secondary level"(Ayodele and Adegbite, 2002; Ayodele, 1989; Eyisi, 2005). Reading and writing skills are closely related and very much connected, knowledge of one demands the knowledge of the other. It is the twin basic for any educational achievement, they are mutually exclusive. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are useful tools employed by humans for general communication. While reading is complemented by writing, listening and speaking are much more easier task to accomplish than the skill of reading and writing, which requires the attention of a teacher and some levels of commitment from students. Knowledge of it enhances effective communication across board. Besides, the learner's cognitive competence is developed, and he or she learn new values and skills, imbibe positive attitudes and character which are transmitted to the next generation.

Enhancing education that opens one up to acquire gainful skills, as well as being able to record in a written form present events that can be useful in the future. This is all about sustainable formal education. The issue of poor reading culture cut across all social strata. Speaking and writing are two different things. Speaking well does not guarantee writing well. There are persons who cannot speak well yet they can read and write well, while there are others who can speak a language like English or French very well, yet may not be able to put in writing what they have spoken. That is the irony facing basic education in recent years. Adequate knowledge of how to write is essential, not just the oral aspect of communication but also the ability to write. The written language is adopted in documenting business transactions, including deals, keeping records, relaying scientific/technological invention, and accomplishment. It is also useful for transactions in science, music and arts. Usually employed for processing receipts of sales, both at shops, local, state or international markets. These procedures embraces the art of reading and writing.

Revelation, chapter 1 verses 3, says "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy....." This means that knowing how to read is a thing of honour. Verses 11, of the same chapter says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last; and what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven Churches which are in Asia:..". Further more in verses 19, it says, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter". In the Old Testament Jehovah gave the instructions on necessity for acquiring the twin basics for educational achievement in Habakkuk Chapter 2 verses 2, "And the Lord

answered me, and said, write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it"(King James Version). Anyone that has developed the skill of writing is expected to also acquire the skill of reading what has been written. A student that loves to read may as well develop a positive attitude towards writing. Reading and writing go hand in hand, for they are essential for mastering other skills. Re read and write one's own stories or other people's own. Reading is a veritable tool for creating wealth and empowering the vulnerable members in the community. So, enhancing learning opportunities in the area of reading, writing, and record keeping is very important, more so recording an event that one witnessed, a competence to observe and write about ones experience. More harrowing is inability to legibly write approve language.

The 'Can't Read' and Causes.

The Can't Read students as the name implies, have issues with ability to read or write what others have said, or can they convey a message to others through writing. The interaction with textbooks is very much absent or non-existent, meaning that their reading culture is zero. Although, during any discussion they are competent, sometimes recollect what they heard, but they have difficulty in reading out or write out what they or others are saying or have said. The National Teachers Institute (2012), classified 3 categories of non-readers; (i). Cannot read or recognise the letters at all, (ii). Can recite sound without meaning, and (iii). Can read without comprehension. There are other categories such as; the weak readers, extremely weak readers and non-readers. What about a combination of non-reader and non-writer? The epi-centre of the whole issue of illiteracy in our schools is the cannot read or recognise the letters at all, that is the category of the non-readers. This is where the challenge is centred, these students struggle on a daily basis, dragging their academic feet in the mud of illiteracy. Dealing with students with deficiency as the "can't read" may prove challenging but it can be surmounted. Ordinarily at the point of entry into a new school, in both private and public schools, it is expected that they organize interview for new entrants, in the process of the interview, those 'can't read' are identified and remedial classes created for them.

There are so many reasons for the increase in the number of educated illiterates from the school system, that is those that have been to school yet unable to read and write. Some illiteracy problems are foundational, others are as a result of laxity on the part of parents and learners, while others are system-based, as most often it is not thr faults of the learners. When students miss the basic foundation of learning how to read, whether two, three, or four letter words, they may have challenge later. While others may have been introduced into the process, but because they are in the category of slow learners, and unfortunately under an impatient teacher, mixed with their own impatience with the learning process, they may end up not learning at all. Although how parents and teachers handle the situation will determine whether the condition of such students will improve or not. Due to lack of knowledge of the gravity of the situation, especially when students are unable to meet up with classroom activities. Those in positions to help, that is parents and teachers sometimes resort to name calling. You hear names like; 'Olodo', Goat head, 'Itiboribo', 'Agbaya', 'Empty vessel', 'Empty head', 'Coconut head', etcetera. Rather than solve the problem, these negative names create psychological wounds, and pushes these

unfortunate students deeper into their shells, and negatively affecting the academic performances. Also, the speed, if it is on the high, and style of teaching, may get the learners discouraged so that they are left behind. This is not to indict the teachers, but one would have wondered how a child will pass through primary school, enter JSS 1, 2 and then JSS 3 classes without the teachers noticing that the child has an impediment in the area of learning how to read and write and must be assisted. The problem is how do you identify such pupil or student in a large and over crowded classroom?

In some public schools that face the challenge of inadequate classrooms, the population of students in a class do exceed 150. Students that actually have learning challenge hide mostly in over crowded classrooms. They are very restless, jumping from one seat to another, often preferring back seats. Since they are not benefiting from what is been taught, they create some level of noise to distract classroom activities. They are the most unserious group you can encounter in any classroom, as they create an aura of big-boyism and big-girlism in a bid to cover up their inadequacies. These hide behind the crowd to distract the teaching and learning processes. Sometimes in trying to get attention from teachers they adopt the noisy tactic. This seemingly distractive tendency and cry for help, is a ploy to get the teachers to probe into their pathetic state and inner fear. Observant teacher can easily identify them, enter into their chariots, and help them overcome, as well as navigate through the learning processes.

Unfortunately some teachers out of impatience see these acts as a distraction to the classroom activities. Those involved are often punished or alternatively sent out without realizing that they are more comfortable outside than inside the classrooms. Some prefer serving one punishment or the other, rather than sit inside. Having been thrown out from each of the classroom, they converge at the toilet areas or hidden parts of the school premises. Such places are fertile grounds for recruiting green horns into cultist activities in secondary schools. Idle students are more conditioned to easily join cult groups than those seriously engaged in the classrooms. Joining cult gangs also encourages them not to make any meaningful effort to acquire the basic skills of reading and writing, so as to escape the trap of illiteracy. The sitting arrangement in these classrooms does not help the situations either, the seats are so clustered and jammed, packed with over 150 students in a classroom meant for 35 to 40 students, which is UNESCO stipulated standard. The 'I Can't Read' students engage in all forms of examination malpractices, adopting different tricks for passing test and examinations.

Findings and Discussion

1. What is the nature of the 'I Can't Read' problem amongst students in public schools in Rivers State?

Table 1. Showing the % response on the nature of the 'I Can't Read' problem in public schools.

Item/ Statements	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%

1.Can you read what others have written or what you have written, and write what others are saying and what you have said	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
2. Does any of your teachers know that you cannot read very well?	16 (32%)	34 (68%)	50 (100%)
3. Did you confide in or inform any person, friends, parents or teachers about your inability to read and write?	11 (22%)	39 (78%)	50 (100%)
4. Has any of these persons that you confided in made any attempt to help you to learn how to read letters and words in the past ?	13 (26%)	37 (74%)	50 (100%)

Source:Field work 2023

While seeking the opinion of the students on the question, Can you read what others have written? 62% replied in the positive, while 38% answered in the negative. When we turned the question the other way round, that is if they can write what others are saying and what they have said, the same percentage gave the same response. Some realized this anomaly earlier in primary school, and cried out, some to parents, some to teachers, who took some steps to help them learn how to read, while 78% of those with reading challenge did not even know their state, and so did not confide in anyone, therefore no attempt was made to help them. Often the affected students do not understand the urgency in knowing how to read and write, and so they keep on postponing the help that should have been given. In suggesting means and ways of remediation for students with difficulties in reading and writing, 26% of students agreed that they have received help from their parents and teachers, while 74% have not.

A Principal in one of the junior secondary school shared her story during the interview session. "In 2009, I noticed that some students recopied the questions on the chalkboard into their answer scripts, both vowels and consonants were jumbled up as answers to the questions. My interrogations revealed that these students need extra help if they are to make any head way in the academic journey. About ten of them were carefully put on serious lesson during break hours, at the end of the term a remarkable improvement was achieved. The affected students actively participated with much enthusiasm. We could not have achieved this feat in an over crowded classroom. Meanwhile, if there was no individual attention, nothing would have changed for them. The same way they were before the remedial lesson would have been the same way after the lesson." To make an effective impact, these special learners must be

identified and given special remedial attention. Protected from the crowd of those who may not understand why they cannot read and write. This is a far cry from the general lessons usually organised sometimes in schools to help reduce the percentage of citizens in the illiteracy bracket. These opportunities are often dashed on the altar of financial gain for those whose main motive for lessons in public schools is to make profits. This kind of lessons has been a loss to the students who would have been bailed out of illiteracy. A loss to the Universal Basic Education system in Rivers State whose aim is; "Education for all is the responsibility of all".

2. What are the implications of having an increasing number of 'Finished but Can't Read' students, in the face of achievement of literacy for all citizens in Rivers State?

The challenges are so numerous, firstly they cannot independently pass their internal examinations and test without involvement in one examination malpractice or the other, this is a high way to fallen standard of education. Considering the national digitization drive of the federal government, the number of non-literates has to reduce if Nigeria is to find her place in the high-tech global arena. With a literacy rate of 69% (The Business Day NG, 2022) and the number of illiterate Nigerians estimated to be 31 per cent, Nigeria is seating on a time-bomb. Such a staggering number can destroy facilities kept in their custody, since they cannot read the manuals. During the interview with the principals, one of them shared this story with us; "A father noticed that his JSS 3 son in one of the public secondary school in Rivers State, could not read the content of a letter sent to his father. He was sent to start afresh in a private school. The father requested that they demote him to JSS1 to help him acquire the basic skill of knowing how to read words. After one full term, there were some remarkable improvement in his reading skill".(interview Extract).

The response on the question 'What steps did you take when you discovered that some of your students could not read or write? She replied; "At that stage I couldn't do much as the onus was on the teachers that handled such class, besides the figures released was so staggering, that is the number of illiterates in the school. I advised them to slow down a little and pay some attention to the identified students, as much as they can". The response on the question; How did you handle the can't read and write students in your school? 56% of the principals felt helpless and overwhelmed by the number of students in their school and completely ignored them. 32% of the principals took some steps to help but later abandoned the idea because there was no encouragement from both parents and the Ministry.

3. What are the ways of remediation to the 'Finished but Can't Read' scourge in secondary schools in order to achieve Literacy for All Policy?

Table 1. Showing the % response on the remediation to the 'I Can't Read' scourge

Item/Statement	Response Yes	Response No	Total
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1. Have you ever encountered in your class the category of learners who cannot write test/examination because they cannot read the questions and write the answers? .	80 (83.3%)	16 (16.7%)	96 100%
2. Where you able to follow up the identified students in order to rectify the anomaly ?	42 (43.7%)	54 (56.3%)	96 (100%)
3. Has there been any discussion with individual parent concerning their ward?	34 (35.4%)	62 (64.6%)	96 (100%)
4. Does your school have plans and programmes for remedial purposes for the can't read students ?	8 (8.3%)	88 (91.7%)	96 (100%)
5. Does your school have any incentive to motivate or encourage teachers to handle cases of Can't Read	10 (10.4%)	86 (89.6%)	96 (100%)
6. Has such issue been discussed during your School PTA meeting, or make a formal report to the higher authority?	12 (12.5%)	84 (87.5%)	96 (100%)
7. Where you satisfied with the steps you took when you discovered some of your students could not read or write?	47 (49%)	49 (51%)	96 (100%)
8. Did the steps taken bring any significant change in the learning behaviour of such students?	55 (57.3%)	41 (42.7%)	96 (100%)

Source:Field work 2023

On the question of whether the schools have any remedial programme for helping the slow or can't read students. 8.3% of the respondents have well established remedial measures for helping out, while 91.7% of the schools does not have. 43.1% revealed that they identified those learners having difficulty in reading and writing, yet there is no template on how to help them. While 12% of the respondents spent their time to identify them, and also took some corrective measures to help pull them through. At the end of the Term, the anomaly was rectified in most cases. The question of if the steps taken brought about any significant change in the learning behaviour of such students, 57.3% of the respondents agreed that it did, while 42.7% attest that there was no change. Some of the respondents attest that rather than help, victims are abused, insulted, ridiculed, flogged, advised to transfer to other schools, and worst of all they are compared with

their peers that can read and write instead of enabling them to improve and come out of the pit of illiteracy.

The first thing to do before any remediation can be given is identification. The question is how can we identify and handle pupils with difficulties in reading as they are better identified and handled at the early stages of schooling than at the later stage. Although, no time is too late to learn, but we also know that teaching two/three letter words is not in the Scheme of Work for SSS classes. Meaning that early detection is preferable. Some years ago the researcher was privileged to witness the process of early identification of those with difficulty in reading and writing in primary school 2. A teacher was appointed to painstakingly drill the pupils, those that showed signs of improvement were sent back to the normal classroom to join their peers. One of the threshold for achieving education for all is when pupils are made to understand why they must be literate. Unfortunately the learning processes has been impeded as students have not been made to understand the necessity and the benefits derived in acquiring knowledge. National Policy on Education attest that students have a role to play in their educational advancement. To confirm this, a teacher shared her experience with us. "I recall the experience of six year old Kachi (not his real name), who was at that time in Primary 2. A week after admission into this new school, he noticed that his classmates could read and pronounce words which he could not. His open cry drew the attention of the teacher to his plight and created room for help to come to him. Within the next two months he could beat his chest and proudly report back to his mother that he can read. What was the reason for this positive change? In comparison with the student that was about to be admitted into SSS1, who also confessed that he 'can't read,' although belatedly because he was to enter the senior secondary school where it is assumed that every student already knows how to read and write.

Often, the opportunity to make a difference in students life is not adequately used by some principals and teachers as there are no official plan or programme for helping weak or non-readers in remedying their conditions. There are no provisions in public schools to salvage the pitiable situation. In other words, public educational authorities have no place for the weak or none readers, rather they are prepared to go and acquire technical, vocational or trade skills based on the 6-3-3-4 educational policy. Even products of the informal educational system requires some level of ability in the skill of reading and writing. The fact that they will engage in bank transactions, negotiations with business partners, record keeping, as well as write quotation for contracts. A Tailor will take and record the measurements of the customers, the Carpenter work with precision so must know how to write and measure his work. The Plumber will write out list of what to buy, measures of his plumbing work, even a trader will write list of goods to buy, including reading labels of goods. With digitization of educational system, and the move from e-learning to age of Tech-savvy, an era characterized by technological adeptness, no pupil, student or adult should be found amongst the category of finished but can't read. The existence of 'can't read' students in our public schools supports a declaration of a state of emergency in the education sector. Something must be done fast, especially in the area of curriculum and scheme of work development, for teaching students how to acquire reading and writing skills within the UBE system. The skill has to be emphasized and not be assumed that every child in secondary

school knows how to read and write.

The National Teachers Institute (2012), categorised non-readers into three, one of which is the "Cannot read or recognise the letters at all". As a follow up, they advised that children who enter lower JSS classes with deficiency in reading and writing skills should be given special remedial instructions for effective implementation of the JSS reading programme. Further more, those lacking the skill of reading and writing "should be taught in a meaningful, creative and fundamental way. No student should be allowed to pass through the primary level without the ability to read and write". Having the skill to effectively reproduce in writing what has been taught (NTI, 2012). Some of them come to the junior secondary school short of this ability. But where they cannot perform these simple academic task what next? In helping non-readers, and non-writers remedy these deficiencies, the study took note of a private school taking some strides in this direction. The school have a standing policy on how to help students with learning deficiency. Assigning of class is done by taking into cognizance the three categories of learners in any classroom. Classes X, Y and Z are created based on students performance in Assignment or Home Works, Continuous Assessment, Quiz, Test, and in Examination. Class X was for those that scored 70 to 100 per cent. They are the fast learners, voracious readers, very interested in undertaking challenging tasks, they crack hard nuts, and so always impatient with teachers and any process that slows them, so, unprepared teachers are taken off guard. Class Y is for average students whose scores ranges from 50 to 69, these are average students who wants to learn. Often with a little push they move to the Class X. Finally there is the Z Class for those that scores 49 and below. These are the slow learners. If you over push, they quickly go back to their shells, some get discouraged. Teachers have to slow down in their teaching and explanation, come down to the learners level, painstakingly explain every step and every concept to their understanding. Students are taught how to 'dot the i's and cross the t's'. Apart from the Management of the school and the teachers, parents and students do not know the reason they are placed in these classes.

Here there is consideration for individual differences, which has to be valued and encouraged, and the children given opportunities to progress comfortably at their own speed, or pace, each peculiar case addressed based on its peculiarity. Unfortunately in most public schools even when cases that needs remediation have been identified, there are no such remedial classes. The most common system-based problem is the absence of remedial measures in the public school system. For those who cannot read at all, remedial measures such as, using "letter based approach which teaches how to sound out letters of the alphabet and combination, as a way of mastering reading"(NTI, 2012). If there is no remedy at the Junior school level, it becomes difficult for the student to cope at the senior secondary stage. Much more challenging at the tertiary stage were students are expected to carry out independent studies. How can they cope? No wonder students adopt and engage in all sort of illegal methods to pass each course. Research has also shown that inability to acquire this basic skill of reading and writing can be overcome when proper attention is given earlier enough. For those affected with low reading disability, adopting a mix teaching method can be of help.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The performance of students in the language of communication is a critical aspect for assessing whether educational standard is improving or falling. It is unfortunate that some learners still experience challenges in acquiring the needed skill. The Can't Read students must brace up to learn how to read and write, as It is a prerequisite for gaining more knowledge in other fields of endeavour. Teachers by reason of their position in the educational development of students, test, assess, classify and label these learners after termly and annual examination. There are fast learners, slow learners, fast readers, also non-readers, weak readers, extremely weak readers, then those who cannot read at all. Dealing with students with deficiency, that is those who 'can't read' the words of the taught language requires some levels of devotion from the teachers as it is considered that they may not be able to write it also. The failure of any student from acquiring the basic skill of reading and writing proves that his/her parents and teachers failed in their duty and obligations to identify the shortcoming and help them out

Most often gaffected students keep the problem to themselves, though their friends and seat mates do notice it, but since it is not seen as an important subject to be discussed, they overlook it. Affected students may not understand the urgency in knowing how to read and write. Like the Michael's case,, to an extent both the parent and his teachers were negligent, they failed to play their role in Michael's educational journey. From the study, we saw that some public schools still have illiterate folks in junior secondary, transiting to senior secondary schools. Educational authority and the public schools do not have any programme or policy for remediation for those who come to the JSS unable to read or write. Therefore, the paper recommends that ;

1. Students with difficulty in reading and writing should be identified early. Parents can also be of help in this early identification of learners as they spend time helping in their home works. The fact that the earlier they are identified, the earlier remedial steps are taken to ameliorate their situation. Teachers can help in identifying them especially within the first one year to enable them develop these important skills. Helping them remedy this weakness is a duty both parents and teachers owe these category of learners.
2. Efforts should be made by teachers and principals to identify those experiencing challenges in learning. Give supervised attention to the Can't Read students. Remedial efforts may move some to the next class after getting the necessary support.
3. Teachers should come down to the level of the learners, and where they are not meeting up, enter their chariot, interact with and find areas of weakness. Make adequate use of their capacity to identify, isolate and help those unwilling learners.
4. For real learning to be achieved reading and writing should be taken with all seriousness. The Rivers State educational authority and principals should go back to the drawing board to introduce remedial classes to help those with inability to read and write. Remedial classes should be provided at points of entry and in subsequent classes. A curriculum peculiar and tailored to the needs of this special candidates that are referred to in this paper as the Can't Read students should be adopted.
5. It is not all learners that are willing to learn, so those unwilling category of learners should not

be neglected or abandoned. Prodding, cajoling, motivating, pushing and encouraging them to learn how to read and write, which is the basic foundation for all school subjects and courses is a step forward and a step in the right direction.

6. Promoting reading culture in Nigerian local language will go a long way in promoting literacy even at the local areas, so as to stem the tide of 'finished but can't read' among students. As well as reduce the percentages of non-literate citizens.

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