

The Roles of Public Libraries in Reading Culture and Sustaining National Development

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the roles of public libraries in reading culture and sustaining national development. Qualitative methods was adopted in the study and information was gathered using textbooks, journals, published and unpublished journals, libraries and internet applications. Based on the theoretical review, the findings revealed that public libraries are social agencies charged with the responsibilities of identifying, acquiring, organizing, storing and disseminating information, recreational, cultural and other materials of the benefits of all and sundry in the community in which it is located in. Also, revealed that public libraries promotes reading culture among children and adolescents. Public libraries are fundamental to the development of literacy which is manifested in a viable reading habit and culture. The study recommended that there should be legislation on public library development in Nigeria. The existing public libraries should be renovated and stocked with adequate, current and relevant resources to enable them function effectively, efficiently and maximally. The staff should be sponsored for training to keep them abreast themselves with new development on their areas of specialization for maximum productivity.

Keyword: Reading Culture, Public Libraries, National Development.

Introduction

Culture is the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behaviour. James Spradley Anthropologist. Reading culture is the process of building up positive reading attitude among students and children over a period of time. The above assertion depicts the place of reading in the general development of MAN and his society. What is reading? In the words of Nssien (2007), reading is the act of a regular activity. It is the cultivation of an attitude and the possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and constant activity. Reading is identified as the simple most important determinant of a student's success in education and in our modern complex society. For any nation in the world to be developed, sizeable number of the citizens must be able to read and write. Development generally means the improvement of people's lifestyle through qualitative and functional education, income, skills development and fulfilled employment (Olanrenwaju, 2008). On the other hand, Wawie (2010) argues that, reading is important because it is central to development.

Little wonder, Sisulu (2016), asserts that reading is not just for school, it is for LIFE, it makes man to be a thoughtful and constructive contributor to a democratic and cohesive society. Furthermore, the absence of a widespread culture of reading in the case of Nigeria acts as an effective barrier to our development and international competitiveness. It is therefore a necessity to making the present generation more aware of the benefit and importance of reading and ensuring that they have literacy skills required in the modern society. No wonder late President Musa Yaradua of Nigeria outlined his development blueprints to Nigerian in what he described as “Seven Point Agenda” geared towards vision 2020. The aim of the vision 2020 is to make Nigeria one of the twenty/top target developed economies in the world by the year 2020. But retrogression is the case today! Nigeria population is predominantly youth, with young people under 35 years accounting for about 60% of the country’s over two hundred and sixty (260) million people (Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2008).

According to him in the year 2020 these young people will be the key driver of the economy and will be leaders in business and public services, but what are they today? Instead of the youth to be actively involved in reading for examinations, personal interest, pleasure, leisure, or for self-development, most of them are on the streets looking for money by all means playing games, betting-Naija Bet, Bet-King etc to cash out, watching movies, even into drugs. Look at the issue of VANDALIZATION for instance. Anyone who is knowledgeable enough to know that when he cuts an electricity wire, he also suffers the consequences of lack of electricity along with others, will think twice before he embarks on destroying electricity cables.

The same thing goes for being healthy. If a person can read and write, he will most certainly be able to avoid certain things that can harm him. He will be able to get information from different sources on what to do to be healthy. He will know how to take care of himself to stay healthy. Apparently, the nation benefits from this, because it is only those who are healthy that can contribute to the development of the country. The fact remains that, unless a solution is found to the dwindling reading culture of Nigerians the country will continue to battle with underdevelopment. That is why Okoro (2014) emphatically remarks that a country level of development is a function of its level of mental and cultural evolution as well as the state of its educational advancement, which is embedded on building a high level of reading culture in all facets of the population.

Literature Review

Reading

In the words of Essiqi (2015), “reading is a complex activity which links the eyes with the mind to come up with the interpretation and evaluation of written symbols”. In the light of this, Okoro (2014) posited that it is essential that children be introduced to the act of reading very early in life even before the child step in school. When this is done, the end result is that children are linked early enough with the joys of reading as a means of enjoyment, self-development, love of literature and learning. Reading has been and will still be a powerful means of communication. This can form part of an individual to the extent that it becomes very difficult to break. However, what children and adolescents read and why they read can be difficult questions to answer. The act of reading could be an interesting experience for children and

adolescents if they are properly guided. A reading habit cultivated early in life helps the child to grow into an independent adult.

Shabi and Udofia (2009), quoted Ezeokoli (2008), identified certain elements of reading habit which include these:

- Voluntary reading;
- What to read?
- Frequency of reading and
- Place of reading

In his autobiography “Gifted Hands” on internationally acclaimed Neurosurgeon Benjamin Carson (1990). Cited by Shabi and Udofia (2009). Challenge young people to evolve a sustainable reading habit. He shared a success story of how he, a non-reader became a fluent voracious reader through the effort of his mother and the encouragement of the libraries in the local areas. Today, he is a strong advocate for promoting of reading habits amongst children and adolescents. This is where the public library comes in.

Public Libraries

Ottong and Edem (2006), view that public libraries are more or less universal libraries. As the name implies, it is expected to serve the general public. They further explained that the public are managed, financed and supported by government. And provide rental facilities to members of the public, such as hall for event like wedding reception, public lectures and symposia. A public library is an organization established, supported, and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization (Nnah, 2019), she further identified examples of public libraries such as:

Akwa Ibom State Library Board, Uyo;
Cross River State Public Library, Calabar;
Delta State Library Board, Warri;
Lagos State Public Library, Lagos etc.

Public libraries have been defined by different scholars in different ways. Bhatt (2010), defined public libraries as the libraries that promote unrestricted access to resources and services, also free of charge to all residents of a given community, district or geographical region. In short, public libraries are social agencies charged with the responsibilities of identifying, acquiring, organizing, storing and disseminating information, recreational, cultural and other materials of the benefits of all and sundry in the community in which it is located in.

The Role of Public Libraries in promoting Reading Culture

The role of public libraries in promoting reading culture among children and adolescents. The aim of promoting a reading culture through the public libraries in Nigeria, is to get children and adolescents to read as part of daily life and to establish the reading of books as a habit that would always be needed and enjoyed throughout one’s life. Otike (2011) posited that it is essential that children be introduced to the art of reading early in life even before the child steps in school. When this is done, the end result is that children are linked early enough with the joys of reading. The library as an organized collection of books and other materials (both printed and non-printed) used for study, research and recreation repertoire of knowledge. The task of encouraging positive reading interest and sustaining a love for reading which will in

turn promote a reading habit or culture is not an easy one. This is where the public libraries comes in. the unique role of public libraries is that they are fundamental to the development of literacy which is manifested in a viable reading habit and culture. This is in turn provides a background for a life-long learning process.

Moreso, the act of cultivating reading culture should be introduced at an early stage in a child's life, because reading as reasoning involves the meaningful interpretation of word, phrases and sentences requiring all types of thinking such as creative, imaginative. The essence to have children or adolescent who can read and write as a well-informed people, they will build a great nation by have modern society. This adds quantity to life, provide access the culture and cultural heritage empowers and emancipate citizen as well as brings people together (Olanrewajar, 2008).

The Use of Public Libraries to Enhance Reading Culture.

The library is a vital repository institution in any nation, which houses information resources (print and non-print) for human development. Also, Bayard (2016), defined libraries as a collection of records of human culture in diverse formats and languages, preserved, organized and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of individual for information, knowledge recreation and aesthetic enjoyment. Also, these educational materials are not just provided, but to guide the users on how to use them to optimum advantage. The library staff must provide a conducive atmosphere for individuals and group learning. Over the years, public libraries in Nigeria have taken a more proactive approach to the promotion of reading and literacy. At the early stage, libraries were viewed as playing only a supportive role to education, but a position eventually emerged that of libraries as lifelong learning centres. On the strength of this assertion, public libraries moved away from the traditional role of passively waiting for readers to come and borrow books and make reference queries.

Sisulu (2016), outlined some literacy promotions strategies that could be embarked upon by libraries to achieve a viable reading culture as follows:

- Encouraging reading for pleasure;
- Promote the value of reading, and
- Build a strong library network; backed by an equitable book distribution. The end result will be a nation of avid, lifelong readers.

This requires that libraries must make reading visible everywhere. In essence, they should blow their own trumpets loud enough for the community to feel their presence and enjoy their services maximally. The initiator of the R.E.A.D (Rainbow Education for Advancement for Development), Kalago (2010), in her view, stated that to sustain or revive a viable reading habit among the populace, there was need for every community libraries to establish in every point of the country to get books within reach of those who need them. She further emphasized that, with the spirally cost of books and the worsening economic situation in the country, she suggested that it would be sensible for book to be made accessible through libraries at little or no extra cost to children and adolescents and the general populace in general.

In like manner, Schamber (2006) encouraged libraries involvement in literacy promotion and places no limitations on how libraries can be involved in literacy education. She suggested that libraries should offer literacy classes or one-on-one tutorial programmes especially for people

whom English is a second language. Also, that reading materials should reflect different cultures and interests. In addition, there should be provision of teaching resources and adequate space for tutoring. All these activities should be coordinated by a literacy librarian. Apparently, operations that go on the children's library at both school and public libraries are as varied and interesting as the personnel in the place. The children's library does not operate the same way adult libraries do. Seeking and using information is one of the main reasons and benefits of a library. Therefore, the library is a partner in the education of a child. In as much as one of the roles of public libraries is to pay more attention to its patrons, the librarian working in a children's library according to Bhatti (2010), must line up various activities to be able to achieve the goal which includes: storytelling, craft making, film shows, puppetry, talks, books, exhibition and book talks.

- **Library Week**

The reason for all these activities is to promote the objectives of the public libraries and to bring the library alive to the children and adolescents and to make them library users, both as a youth and as an adult in the society. If the library is made to occupy a significant place in life of a child, he or she would grow up with the concept and significance of a library permanently impressed into him or her.

- **Book Exhibition and Book Talk**

A low cost effective strategy organized so that children and adolescent can talk about the interesting books they have read. They could describe and bring out similarities in many characters, the librarian could read to them or each child in turn. However, a librarian could pick a book and talk on it; stimulate interest in the book and ask the children to read the book and could come back for further literacy analysis of the book.

- **Story-talk Hour**

Most schools and public libraries organize the activity for the evening of week day or Saturdays. Story telling is not new to some children who already have the opportunity at home. Story telling is a universal activity as old as time itself. This activity is important for children mental and emotional development. Our traditional folk talk tales and legends from different parts of the country could be used, which would appeal to young people's sense of adventure and imagination which would stimulate love for reading African authors.

- **Creative Activities or Creative Writing**

This is the activity that involves the creativity of the child. Children are encouraged to create puppets, either with paper, or clay. Puppets can be used to act in a story. Bhatti (2010), established a reading-writing connection which helps students to learn at all levels. She is of the opinion that writing comes naturally once it is preceded by reading. It is therefore, follow logically that a good reading habit is a precursor to good writing. After reading aloud session, or a story telling session, the students could be asked to write a short story or a different ending to the story they were told or read to. This would provide wonderful stimulus for reading youth.

- **Clubs**

The children librarian could introduce formation of clubs within the library setup. The clubs could be centered on hobbies of children like stamp collecting. The public libraries role here,

would be, to provide all reference and information materials for the chosen hobby. The club members would then build on the information with assistance of the librarian. In this way, they get to know the role of a librarian in both their recreation and educational lives. Examples of clubs: picture collecting clubs, stamp collection clubs, friends of the librarian, literacy club etc.

- **Quality Education for Social Transformation (QUEST 2009)**, reporting on a range of projects to promote a reading culture among young people in Africa, cited the success of the Minds Across African Schools (MAASC). The projects promoted reading in English through the distribution of suitable reading materials and the provision of an informal interaction forum which led to improved reading and writing skills among the children. In the cause of their interaction, the librarian exposed the children proper to library and information seeking skills.

- **Drama**

Drama presentation can be light or heavily involved. During the story telling hour, children would act certain parts in the story. Drama could also be organized where the children take home and learn their parts properly. The drama could be presented during end of year activities or special occasions in the school. While providing entertainment, drama sharpens hidden talents of the child.

- **Mobile Reading Tents**

Once in a month, on Saturdays or during the long vacation, tents could be pitched in a school playground with a lot of prior publicity and fun fare. Here, under the supervision of a senior librarian, the books are made available for reading. Story telling session, drama presentation based on theme from books which have been, impromptu speeches, book talks and read in turn with prized could be organized. The options available are as varied as the public librarians' imagination - there is no stereotype. Volunteers such as parents could assist the librarians.

Reading Culture and Development

According to Etim (2007) basic literacy means an individual's ability to read, write and speak English. Reading is the cornerstone of learning. Gbadamosi (2007), quoting Okwilagwe, described reading as reasoning involving the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases and sentences requiring all types of thinking such as critical, analytical, creative, imaginative evaluative, judgemental and problem-solving. Reading habit is the use of reading as a regular activity. It is the cultivation of an attitude and possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and consistent activity. Reading habit is identified as the single most important determinant of a student's success in education and in our modern complex society (Nssien, 2008). Reading culture is the process of building up positive reading attitude among students and children over a period of time. When an individual habitually and regularly read books and other information materials that are not necessarily required for him to advance his profession or career, he or she is said to have a reading culture. In the same vein, Gbadamosi, (2007:44), reading culture in essence, therefore is the kind of culture that imbibes reading and studying as the basis of growth and development. It is the type that seeks continuous and dedicated reading of information resources by pupil, children, students and adults for knowledge acquisition, which will be applied practically for development. Reading sharpens

the mind, makes one reason rationally and objectively as well as projects one for greatness in life. This is why Scholastic Inc describes READERS as LEADERS.

Development generally means the improvement of people's lifestyle through improved qualitative and functional education, incomes, skills development and fulfilled employment. Development also means that people should be able to read and write. In Africa, this is a problem as most people are illiterates, Nigeria inclusive. Investment in education is a productive venture. This is because an educated labour force is a source of productivity for national development. Nigeria needs this kind of development in order to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs. This is an embodiment of public libraries sustainable development.

Challenges to the Promotion of Reading Culture among Children and Adolescents in Nigeria

Language obstacle in the reading of individual language in the view of Nzealo (1984), is one of the major impediments which affects reading culture of individuals. The main problem of the acquisition of reading habit or culture among children has been the problem of understanding, thinking and constructing in a foreign language. The educated average Nigerian student cannot be credited with learning to read as early as he started building up verbal learning. The lack of opportunity to man for reading with the building up of verbal learning underlies the problem of reading difficulty of the average Nigerian students and this has glaringly affected his intellectual achievement. The observed trend indicated that people think best in their mother tongue.

Modern ICT and How it Affects Reading Culture

The decline in patronizing books began in Nigeria in the early (1980s) according to Ibrahim (2010), with proliferation of televisions and video players, it was uncommon to see young men and women carrying books in their pockets and purses, sitting under trees and perusing. In the past, thousand, who grew up reading the African writers' series and pacesetters and even Mills and Boons, not to mention other educational books, have gradually abandoned them to pursue interest in movie viewing/watching and more recently surfing, chatting on the net. Shuaibu (2008), has described internet as a greatest challenge that has faced conventional books. The decline in the reading culture may just be paving the way for the extinction of books, libraries are closing down and being replaced by internet cafes. He gave the case of the famous British Council Libraries in Nigeria as example to demonstrate this.

The British Council in Nigeria decided to phase out its libraries in Lagos, Kano, Abuja and Enugu and replaced them with Knowledge and Development Centres. The books shelves are gone, the books were labeled and auctioned and rooms were lined with computers. An optimist like Agada (2010), the President of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), who may not be considered a regular digital age fellow, said that books will always exist. "Publishing in books form will continue to exist" nevertheless, the only hope that in the next century, books will not be forlorn relics looking back at us from behind museum glass casing. It was observed by Osahom & Bolanke, (2018), that for most Africans, the traditional and social structure does not encourage the reading habit.

It is however, observed that one of the reasons why Nigerians do little recreational reading is that, the society is basically one with an oral tradition and recreation traditional takes the form of active participation in storytelling for children, in naming ceremonies, wedding, etc. The print culture has not yet caught on the populace. There is common remark about the ways Europeans think of Africans in terms of their relationship with books. The derogatory remark runs like this “if you want to hide something from African, keep it in a book” that is to say, Africans do not read. In a culture which increasingly demands instant gain and gratification, many of today’s young people have not been trained from childhood to develop the skill of reading for pleasure. This trait may have resulted part of failure of formal education to inculcate the reading culture in young people. This observation was made by Tahir (2002). When he said that “many primary school pupils today cannot read and write effectively”. Since primary school is the foundation of educations, there is no better place to start tackling the malaise of poor reading habit than in the primary school.

Notwithstanding, a story is also told of a professor in developed world, who had come to conduct a workshop for some African students in a certain university. During question time, a young lady asked the visiting professor the difference between ladies in African universities and those in developed countries. The professor looked at her smiling and said, there is one striking difference, if you go to ladies hostels in the developed world, their bookshelves are filed with books but the contrary is the case in Africa as theirs are filled with shoes and make ups. (Oji, 2011) quoted (Indyer, 2009), these assertions may sound derogatory but, they may easily be true. A visit to our higher institution of learning might prove this, the boys at our tertiary level of education are not free from those accusations either. Moreso, there is no reason of denying the fact that reading take a lot of energy from someone, but just like any other activity, it pays. It is against the backdrop for the benefit of reading that (Oji, 2011), quoting Charles Jones, makes this remarks, “you meet and the book you read”. A lot of the problems the children are facing are tied to the fact that they fail to read.

Strategies for Improving Reading Culture in Nigeria

The task of improving as well as developing reading culture in Nigeria, the strategies include:

- **Giving Educational Priority Attention in National Human Capital Development:**

The improvement and development of reading culture in Nigeria has to start with adequate funding of the education sector. UNESCO has given a minimum percentage of twenty six. Nigeria should start from there and the fund should be properly utilized. The great resources for development is the human resources, so adequate funding by all should be provided for the development of reading culture.

- **Integration of Information Literacy Education in the Curriculum:**

In primary schools, there is the teaching, reading and writing. As a continuation, there should be the inclusion of information literacy education as a subject in the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools.

- **Creation of Library Period in School Timetable:**

Library utilization periods should be included in the timetable of primary and secondary school. It should be in such a way that at least a class will have two (2) hours in a week, which is for library use. In boarding schools, evening prep, which is usually between 4-5pm, should be set aside for library use.

- **Establishment of Family Libraries:**

Parents have a role to play in the development of the reading culture of their children. (Okoro, C. C. 2014) revealed that 70% of the problem associated with the poor reading culture of our children is traceable to many social and environmental factors, including parents and guardians, they should always monitor what their children and wards do. Many of them watch movies, play games, which they are now addicted to. So parents should establish private libraries at home in order to encourage the reading habits of their children.

- Philanthropists and other spirited individuals should come up with the establishment of non-governmental organization for promoting reading culture etc.

Strategies for Reviving Public Libraries in Nigeria

The task of improving and reviving public libraries in Nigeria is for all and sundry. In many States of the Federation, public libraries experience neglect and lack of adequate support from the government. To revitalize this ugly state of affairs, engaging the government in public library services is necessary. This is pertinent because according to Jiboyewa (2008), governance of the educational system cannot be separated from the political leadership in the society at larger. Since government is the principal transmitter of values to all sectors, including education, thus, government should actively engage in public library services, the following strategies need to be adapted:

- National Legislation on Public Library Development:

According to Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Public Library Manifesto (1972). “The public library should be established under clear mandate of law, so framed as to ensure national-wide provision of public library service ...”. For public library to flourish and purposefully, their mandate. There is the need for legislation to back their establishment. The legislation should include the provision of rural reading rooms and reactivation or introduction of mobile library services. To achieve this noble objective, National Board for Public Libraries need to be established.

- Provision of Adequate Funding:

Another important way to revive public library is the involvement of government in public library services for national development is provision of adequate funding to support their services. The legislative act should compel the three tiers – Federal, State, and Local Governments to act adequately support the public libraries to actualize the government national development plans. Adequate funding determines the success of public libraries in their support for national development. Adequate funding is key to effective functioning of the public libraries. Funds are also used to recruit and train staff, funds are used to provide adequate, relevant and up-to-date collections, funds are used to create rural reading rooms and provide mobile library services. Funds are equally used to provide information and communication technology facilities as well as regularly pay for subscriptions to e-resources etc.

- Regular Collection Development:

Regular collection development is another important benefit of engaging the government in reviving the public library services. This is very imperative because the libraries need to regularly update their collections in order to meet the changing and expanding information needs of their clientele. With government regular support according to Bhatt (2010), libraries will offer unlimited access to books, child and adult programmes, computers, internet and other research resources. Since the public libraries collections are meant for all, their effective utilization by administrators, teachers, engineers, scientists, medical practitioners, auditors, industrialists etc. will ensure informed decision-making in government business. Ogbonna

(2009) observes that it is the function of the public library to provide those materials to meet their individual and group needs.

- Introduction or Reactivation of Mobile Library Services:

In the last two decades, mobile library services were some of the popular and most important services at the public libraries. Unfortunately, however, economic recessions and consistent out-of-budget compelled the libraries to suspend these important services. Introduction or reactivation of these people oriented services inevitably requires government engagement to revive the public libraries services. Although, the services are cost intensive but very beneficial to public enlightenment and promotion and sustenance of literacy among citizens especially the rural populace.

Methodology

This study adopted desk qualitative methods. In this study, information was gathered using textbooks, journals, published and unpublished journals, libraries and internet applications

Findings

The study examined the roles of public libraries in reading culture and sustaining national development. Based on the theoretical review, the findings revealed thus;

1. Public libraries are social agencies charged with the responsibilities of identifying, acquiring, organizing, storing and disseminating information, recreational, cultural and other materials of the benefits of all and sundry in the community in which it is located in.
2. Public libraries promotes reading culture among children and adolescents.
3. Public libraries are fundamental to the development of literacy which is manifested in a viable reading habit and culture.

Conclusion

The roles of public libraries in reading culture and sustaining or reviving national development are enormous. The challenges they face in fulfilling their statutory mandate are equally numerous. The fact remains that unless a solution is found to the dwindling reading culture in Nigeria, the country will continue to battle with underdevelopment. Apparently, Nigeria needs to improve her literacy level because literacy is the forerunner of development. Therefore, the existence of functional public libraries with well-equipped modern facilities cannot be ruled out, for sustainable human national development.

Recommendations

In order to have functional public libraries in promoting sound reading culture and the revival of same, we need to actively engage the government in public library services system in Nigeria. Therefore, the following recommendations offered:

- i. There should be legislation on public library development in Nigeria.
- ii. The existing public libraries should be renovated and stocked with adequate, current and relevant resources to enable them function effectively, efficiently and maximally.
- iii. The staff should be sponsored for training to keep them abreast themselves with new development on their areas of specialization for maximum productivity.

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