

Poor Reading Culture among Teens in Public Schools: Role of Location Variable

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Abstract

The study determined poor reading culture among teens in public schools in Nigeria and the role of location variable. It made use of a descriptive survey design. A total of 400 teens, including those with special needs participated in the study. Three objectives served as a guide to the study. A questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. It was found that poor reading culture has consequences that usually manifest in the academic and overall life of teens. Results also showed no significant difference in the mean ratings of urban and rural teens' location on the consequences and remedies of poor reading culture. Finally, the menace of poor reading culture can be remedied by good teaching skills, a conducive teaching and learning environment, making reading materials available and affordable, among others. Among the recommendations made are establishing well-equipped libraries, including a subject called 'Reading Culture' in the curriculum, subsidizing the costs of reading material, establishing standard reading competitions, and handsome rewards for winners, and creating an inclusive environment to cater for those with special needs.

Keywords: Public schools, Reading, Reading culture, Teens

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the best and only legal means to achieve excellent academic performance and extract knowledge from written materials. Fabunmi and Folorunso (2010) defined reading as the process of looking at and comprehending both the covert and overt meaning of written words from the visual representation of symbols which facilitate the teaching and learning process. It is a process which requires the use of complex thought procedure to interpret printed symbols as meaningful units and understand them as thought units in order to understand the exact message (Ogugua, Emerole, Egwim, Anyanwu, & Haco-Obasi. 2015). Reading exposes the learner to a vast and in-depth knowledge of the content of a given subject or course of study. Poor reading culture is the absence of the desire to read or the inability to develop and sustain a sound reading programme. Igwe and Uzuegbu (2013) defined poor reading culture as the lack of appreciable level of interest, hunger or appetite for reading or inability to create and invest enough time and conducive' environment for reading. Poor reading culture has to do with the lack of interest in or incompetence in discovering, establishing and utilizing good strategies, atmosphere and qualities that can enhance reading and comprehension. The teen may not be interested in reading about current global issues as recently concerning the coronavirus (COVID-19)

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pandemic or read to get a good grasp of the content of a given subject or course of study. Such may have dire consequences. The term consequence means the outcome or resultant effect of an action or attitude. Consequence refers to a phenomenon that follows and is caused by some previous phenomenon (Collins Online Dictionary, 2017). It is a situation brought about by another situation. It is an effect that is, something produced by a cause or necessarily following from a set of conditions (Fatsis, 2015). Some of its synonyms include outcome, result, upshot, sequel, effect. It usually has a negative connotation and presupposes a cause, earlier action or situation.

The consequences of poor reading culture are many and can vary from one location to another. Among these consequences is poor performance in internal and external examinations. Poor performance in examinations among teens in schools are gleaned from records of external examinations of candidates who sat for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) May/June WASSCE of six consecutive years (6yrs)2010-2015. They revealed that there had been consistent mass failures over the years. None of these years recorded up to 50% pass; the highest is the year 2015 with 38.68% (Fotubo, 2015). Others are as follows: 2010=24.94%, 2011=29.17%, 2012=31.28%, 2013=29.17%, 2014=31.28% (WAEC, 2015). These percentages refer to those who got five (5) credits and above, including English and Mathematics. Most teens either do not want to read, prefer entertainment activities or do not have the environment that ignites or supports good reading culture (Ogwu, 2010). A situation Christian (2012) captured again by saying that despite the irrefutable connection between reading and academic success, it is somewhat amazing how little time our culture devotes to this vital skill. This scenario cuts across teens including those with special needs. The consequences can also affect others negatively if they do not read about the issues as the case of COVID-19 as earlier mentioned. The teens may not understand some of the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic. There is need to remedy these situations.

Remedy is anything or action employed to tackle an unpleasant or ill situation. In medicine it is a medication, surgery or any other action utilized for the successful curing of an ailment. To remedy a situation entails to set it right, to restore it to normalcy (Daly, 2014). The idea of remedy brings to mind the existence of an undesirable, unpleasant or abnormal situation. Poor reading culture is an unpleasant situation which if not remedied will lead to poverty of true academic excellence or even a serious mediocrity in academic endeavour, resultant emotional and serious social issues. This in turn can bring lack of development in the different facets of human life. Thus remedies to poor reading culture refer to whatever can be done to reduce appreciably or if possible eradicate poor reading culture and in turn enhance good reading culture among teens in schools. It can vary from one location to another.

Location in terms of urban or rural dwelling can affect teens' development of good reading culture. Students in urban areas tend to develop better interest in reading than those in rural areas (Lone, 2011). The reason could be that urban dwellers seem to be more informed on the need and benefits of education and the place of reading with regards to academic success. There are so many distractions that are mainly hinged on farm work and distance from the state capital that the local governments are not helping to bridge. Also, reading materials are usually more and easily available and accessible in urban areas than in rural areas. Location therefore is a key factor in studies bordering on reading culture or educational problems in general. Due to low patronage in the rural areas availability and quality of reading materials are likely to be higher in the urban

settlement than the rural ones—the low patronage in the rural areas being as a result of community differences in levels of education and nature of work between the rural and urban areas (Cartwright & Allen, 2002). Furthermore, the internet may not also be accessible in the rural areas making access to online reading materials impossible. These conditions are likely to hamper the ability and hunger of rural teens to read and consequently deny them access to vital information and precautions on burning issues as the COVID-19 pandemic spread. They may not be able to read some of the precautions required to avert the pandemic. Even when journeying to the urban areas is possible the vulnerable ones among the teens may suffer because such journeys may be very difficult if not impossible for them.

Statement of the problem

From the above discussion, it has been deduced that poor reading culture has serious consequences on the lives of in school teens. The school system tends to be producing people that are literate but effectively ignorant (Oyewole, 2017). In this twenty-first century, poor reading culture has metamorphosed into a notorious educational problem whose effects pose great danger to teaching and learning and the general development of the society not only in the present but in the future. Thus it is a menace that can no longer be ignored if the educational life of a nation or country is to remain healthy and robust. In addition is the current COVID-19 pandemic which they must read firsthand to know precautionary and safety measures they should take and also enlighten their parents and neighbours. These and many other issues constitute the major consequences of poor reading culture. Also, these consequences can surely be remedied or tackled. The unfortunate situations created by poor reading culture have become innumerable and dangerous that they can no longer be ignored. There is also the issue of location in terms of rural and urban among these teens as it affects their reading culture including those with special needs.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, the objective of this study is to empirically examine poor reading culture among teens in public schools in Nigeria based on location. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the consequences of poor reading culture among teens.
2. Find out the remedies of poor reading culture among teens.
3. Identify the influence of location on the consequences and remedies to poor reading culture.

II. Theoretical Basis of the Study

The free voluntary reading theory of Steven Krashen

The free voluntary reading (FVR) theory of Krashen(1992) states that if students spend more time reading and enjoying materials they will read better and this in turn will lead to more reading. This, according to Hopkins (2008) “will be of tremendous life-long benefit to the students. It will also motivate students who lost interest in reading to read because students are free to make choices of the materials they want to read, thereby improving students` attitude toward reading. According to Krashen, research suggests that the following factors are relevant in free voluntary reading which helps to improve students` reading culture.

Students read more when lots of interesting reading materials are made available (Krashen, 1992). One reason for which Krashen's study may have succeeded is that if a large supply of interesting reading materials were available in class students did not have to bring their own books each time. Interesting readings include comics, magazines, and newspapers. There is good evidence from the first language research literature that this kind of "light reading" is a conduit to heavier reading. Those who have done lots of light reading find "serious" reading to be much more comprehensible and enjoyable. Krashen believes that students read more if they have a quiet, comfortable place to read. This is not a luxury, rather is an important factor for language development. Noting that eating and reading go well together, Krashen suggested that refreshments be provided in the school library in order to encourage free reading. Krashen is of view that students read more when they see others read, and when teachers read interesting books aloud to them. He also believes that rewards are not necessary to encourage reading; the best incentive appears to be supply of good reading material and a comfortable quiet place to read. Free voluntary reading is not only important to the development of the nation but also very vital in the education of the child. Thus reading for pleasure will lead to more reading and strong desire or interest to read. And less frequent reading or not reading at all will surely reduce reading interest and desire. Hence poor reading culture will consequently lead to poorer reading culture.

Consequences of poor reading culture among teens in public schools

The phenomenon of poor external results among Nigerian students and in this case teens, especially those in senior secondary schools that are in public schools including those with special needs is a matter that has become a source of worry to successive governments and major stakeholders in the education sector in the country. The visually impaired ones among them may not have enough brailled materials and may need the services of other teens to read which may not always be available. Nalusiba (2010), Owusu-Acheaw and (2014) and Ogunbanwo (2014) observed that there is strong connection between poor reading culture and poor academic performances among students. Poor reading culture is said to be the reason for mass failures in examinations (Hunky, 2019). Poor reading culture among the teens can lead to poor performances in internal and external examinations. Students have some-related factors such as students' inadequate preparation and poor coverage of the syllabuses, failure to adhere to instructions, lack of understanding of the demands of the questions, illegible handwriting, poor spellings, examination malpractice among others as possibly originating from poor reading culture which in turn is likely to be responsible for the poor performance of students in the examinations. The nature of the dyslexics among the teens is a contributory factor. Indecency and corruption have equally been viewed as consequences of poor reading culture among teens in schools. Kayuni (2017) observed that some students knowing that they did not read the modules and in their desperation to pass their examinations resort to offering their teachers sex or money for marks. Arguably, no student who has a healthy reading culture will imagine and entertain such thoughts in his/her mind.

Again, poor reading culture increases school dropout rate among teens. Oyewole(2017) strongly believes that the increased rate of school dropout especially among boys is fuelled by poor reading culture. It is therefore admissible that if reading culture appreciates dropout rate will depreciate remarkably. If in-school teenagers cultivate good reading culture they will not wish to leave school or the educational pursuit. Disgust for school and learnedness wherever it exists will likely have poor reading culture as its source. There is

a strong connection between high school dropout rate and poor reading culture. Such can lead to serious emotional disorder among the teens.

Currently, and globally there is coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Among other lockdowns, teens in public schools including those with special needs were sent home from schools. The problem now is, due to poor reading culture teens may not even read to know the real situation of things. One finds them even pronouncing the official names of the pandemic wrongly—covik-one nine, convid 19, corono one nine — among others and even not helping their illiterate or semi-illiterate parents to understand the situation because they did not read about it. They may fall prey to wrong medications because the information they have is based on hearsay. If they do not read about it, they may not get to know about the real situation of things and what to do or how to do the right things thereby putting their lives and those of people around them in danger which may have been avoided if they had read about them.

Remedies to poor reading culture

Reading culture can be inculcated and enhanced to a large extent in the lives of in-school teenagers. Establishment of well-equipped and state-of-the-art libraries in schools will encourage and inspire good reading culture. The inclusion of library periods in the school timetable and development of family libraries can help promote good reading culture (Igwe, 2011). Bassey(2018) posits that reading culture among Nigerians would improve with the provision of modern libraries stocked with books and materials relevant to contemporary happenings. Reading should be compulsorily taught and made part of assessment at all levels of education, sale of books in schools should be re-introduced, government should strive to initiate the free distribution of books among students, parents should be involved in the efforts to inculcate good reading culture in their children (Egong, 2014). Since the internet and social media are highly commanding the attention of teens they can become veritable instruments for improving reading culture. Giving assignments to students on internet, creating reading group and other learning activities through ICT will go a long way in promoting the reading culture (Bassey, 2018).

Parents should create good reading environments at home and set good reading examples for their children to follow, teachers should know the type of books children can enjoy and include such books as priorities in the list of recommended texts, librarians should develop skills and device ways of attracting children to the library and expose them to the joys and benefits of reading, radio and television houses in the country should include in their programmes ‘Children Reading’ at least once or twice a week(they should make sure that interesting books are read on the air), the government needs to be aggressive on the issue of establishing /improving libraries in schools. Again, the government should start free distribution of books to school children and utilize the myriad of opportunities created by information and communications technology to improve reading culture, especially among learners. More brailled materials can be provided for the visually impaired. Books provided can have CD versions of them attached. Finally, the government should make a policy that reading periods be created in school time-table (Tella & Akande, 2007).

Location as a predictor of reading culture among teens in public schools

Location either with regards to rural/urban settlements or with regards to the position of a school within an environment or particular building within a premises can influence reading culture either

positively or negatively. In most cases urban students tend to be more appreciative and dedicated to reading than their rural counterparts. Fayad(2011) in a study titled: 'Reading habits of urban and rural college students in the 21st century' found that higher percentage of urban students enjoyed reading more than rural students. This is not surprising as students in urban areas are likely to be more exposed to variety of interesting books than their rural counterparts. Also urban students are likely to know the importance of reading in education than their rural colleagues. Urbanization is usually and for the most an added advantage to students worldwide. Kachala(2007) identified lack of reading materials, poverty and absence of conventional libraries in the rural areas as some of factors responsible for poor reading and consequently high rate of illiteracy among rural Malawians.

III. METHOD

Embarking on this study was approved by the Department of Educational Foundations of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This study utilized the descriptive survey research design. This design according to Nworgu (2015) aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner a certain characteristic, feature or fact about a given population. This design was considered suitable since the study is aimed at identifying and describing poor reading culture among teens in public schools in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State.

This study was carried out in Nigeria, precisely in Enugu Education zone of Enugu State, South East Nigeria. Enugu State is one of the 36 States in Nigeria. Nigeria occupies an area of 920,000km²(360,000 sq miles) with a population of approximately 200 million people out of which over 26.6% are teens. It is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh largest population in the world (CIA World Fact Book, 2018). The study area covers a combination of rural, semi-urban and urban settlements occupied by people of different socio-economic classes—low income, middle class and very affluent families or backgrounds. The area equally contains people from different ethnic groups and African nationalities.

The population of this study is made up of 31 public/government schools within the area of the study. A total of ten schools were selected for the study based on location. Five schools each from the rural and the urban settlements areas selected to ensure level geographical and socio-economic spread. The semi-urban settlements were grouped under urban settlements. A total of 400 teenagers in public schools participated in the study. These were drawn from the ten secondary schools selected for the study (40 students per school). The entire population was used since it was manageable and contains the required characteristics needed from the study's population. This is acceptable by Ali (2006).

The instrument used for the gathering of data for the study is a questionnaire. The researchers developed the questionnaire titled Poor Reading among Teens in Public Schools in Nigeria Questionnaire (PRCTPSNQ). The PRCTPSNQ has two sections: A and B. Section A seeks information on the respondents' demographic data. Section B is made up of 20 item statements and a four-point scale which ranges from Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2) to Strongly Disagree (SD = 1). The 20 item statements are arranged in two clusters A and B; each cluster contains ten item statements structured to elicit information from the respondent on the consequences and remedies to poor reading culture among teens in public schools based on location. The entire item statements are simple, direct, and understandable to the

respondents and take less than 40minutes in completing them. The questionnaire aimed to obtain data on the feelings, views and perceptions (Nworgu, 2015) of teens in public schools on the consequences and remedies to poor reading among teens in public schools based on location.

Data used for the study was collected in Enugu Education zone of Enugu State of Nigeria using the instrument developed for it(questionnaire). Working with experienced research assistants 400 copies of the questionnaire was distributed to the target students. 393 students accurately completed and returned their questionnaires; hence a very high return rate of 98.25% was achieved. Thanks to the experience and efficiency of the research assistants. Descriptive statistics utilizing mean and standard deviations were used in the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire. The analyses were used to address the research questions. Only mean scores of 2.50 and above on the four-point rating were accepted.

IV. RESULTS

Demographic data of the respondents

Three hundred and ninety-three students returned their copies of accurately completed questionnaire. 198 of these students were from schools located in the urban part of the area of study while 195 were from the rural part (Table 1). Also the 393 students that returned accurately completed questionnaire are made up of 202 females and 191 males (Table 2).

Table 1. Location of students

	Urban	Rural
<i>N</i>	198	195

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation scores of students on the consequences of poor reading culture among teens in public schools.

S/No.	Item Statements	\bar{X}	SD
1.	Students find it difficult to cover their texts.	3.07	0.93
2.	Students generally have poor attitude towards effective study.	3.10	0.99
3.	Poor reading culture brings about poor performance in examination.	3.06	1.04
4.	Most students are poor in vocabulary.	3.10	0.84
5.	Students usually see the library as a boring place.	2.93	0.94
6.	Poor reading culture makes students to encounter difficulty in understanding	2.83	0.90

	words and concepts.		
7.	Most students don't understand complex sentences	2.77	0.92
8.	Students generally prefer to buy other things than books	2.65	0.95
9.	Students usually make good grades in those subjects they like reading.	2.69	0.91
10.	Sincerely speaking, poor reading culture easily leads to dropping out of school.	2.74	0.92
	Cluster Mean	2.90	0.46

Consequences of poor reading culture among teens in public schools

Since the means scores of all the items in Table 2 are all above 2.50 set out as the criterion for acceptance, it follows that teen students are of the opinion that: students find it difficult to cover their texts, students generally have poor attitude towards effective, poor reading culture brings about poor performance in examinations, most students are poor in vocabulary, students generally see the library as a boring place, poor reading culture makes students to encounter difficulty in understanding words and concepts, most students don't understand complex sentences, students generally prefer to buy other things than books, students usually make good grades in those subjects they like reading, and sincerely speaking, poor reading culture easily leads to dropping out of school. The overall cluster mean of 2.90 with a standard deviation of 0.46 means that the respondents agreed that there are consequences of poor reading culture among secondary school students.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation scores of students on remedies to poor reading culture among teens in public schools

S/No.	Item Statements	\bar{X}	SD
11.	Establishment of a school library manned by a professional teacher librarian will improve students' reading culture.	2.89	0.92
12.	Parents need to teach their children how to start reading from an early stage.	2.85	0.91
13.	Time for reading in the library should be included in the school timetable.	2.78	0.94
14.	Adequate availability/provision of the required reading materials will aid good reading culture.	2.77	0.97
15.	Encouraging students to make reading part of their leisure/hobby will lead to good reading culture.	2.75	0.92

16.	Teachers should always engage students in fervent reading and writing activities.	2.84	0.93
17.	Conducive reading environment should also be created at home for students.	2.75	0.96
18.	Invention of phones/computers/internet browsers solely for reading will aid good reading culture among students.	2.88	1.04
19.	Prizes should be awarded to students who are proficient in reading and writing.	2.95	0.97
20.	Good teaching skill/conducive teaching and learning environment will help to inculcate good reading culture in students.	3.04	0.96
	Cluster Mean	2.85	0.49

Remedies to poor reading culture among teens in public schools

The mean scores in Table 3 show that students agreed that: establishment of a school library manned by a professional teacher librarian will improve students' reading culture, parents need to teach their children how to start reading from an early stage, time for reading in the library should be included in the school timetable, adequate availability/provision of the required reading materials will aid good reading culture, encouraging students to make reading part of their leisure/hobby will lead to good reading culture, teachers should always engage students in fervent reading and writing activities, conducive reading environment should also be created at home for students, invention of phones/computers/internet browsers solely for reading will aid good reading culture among students, prizes should be awarded to students who are proficient in reading and writing, and good teaching skill/conducive teaching and learning environment will help to inculcate good reading culture in students. The overall cluster mean of 2.85 with a standard deviation of 0.49 means the respondents agreed that there are possible remedies to poor reading culture among teens in public schools.

V. DISCUSSION

Consequences of poor reading culture among teens in public schools

Findings from the study shows that poor reading culture has consequences; and most predominant among the consequences are difficulty in covering texts, poor attitude towards effective study, vocabulary poverty, seeing library as a boring place and above all poor performances in examinations. This is ideally in line with Ogunbanwo (2014) who discovered that poor performances in examinations are the main consequences of poor reading culture. Also, the result is in agreement with Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014) who concluded in a similar study they carried out that reading habit has an influence on academic performance. This influence is

independent of location as can be observed from the overall mean values of rural and urban students. Thus general academic mediocrity and especially poor performances in examinations is a central consequence of poor reading culture.

Remedies to poor reading culture among teens in public schools

The result from the study further revealed that the prevalence of poor reading culture among secondary school students can be remedied or curtailed. Findings further revealed that good teaching skills, conducive environment, good rewards, invention of reader-customized ICT gadgets, the establishment of standard libraries manned by professional teacher-librarians and parental involvement are inevitable remedies to poor reading culture. And this is in congruence with the findings of Fabunmi and Folorunsho (2010). They found that suitable reading environments, parental involvement, and standard libraries will help tackle poor reading culture and enhance good reading culture. Remedies to poor reading culture are therefore possible and achievable.

Implications of the study

The results of this study have implications for both teenage students and all involved in their education. Hence governments, proprietors of private schools, school administrators of schools, students, parents, other stakeholders in education and the general public should be conscious of the reality of poor reading culture; its consequences and remedies. And this consciousness should inspire and lead to sincere and dogged effort towards tackling the consequences of poor reading culture by deploying the remedies unveiled by this study as well as other relevant actions that can help curb this educational problem. Implementing such remedies as suggested through the findings and other measures that can enhance good reading culture will surely make for better education and a civilized society.

Limitations of the study

Some limitations should be considered while utilizing this study. The first of such limitations borders on the sample size which was obtained from a particular zone. Another limitation of the study is the fact that information used was obtained on the basis of perception/opinion which can be misleading due to dishonesty on the side of the respondents while providing the information. One more limitation of the study is that majority of the respondents in the rural areas could not actually understand the concept of reading culture. Also the study was confined to public schools hence there is no knowledge of what the opinions of teen students in private schools on the issues investigated would be. Further survey or investigation should be carried out on the causes, consequences and remedies to poor reading culture among secondary school students. A replication of this study can be done in all parts of the country, for instance in each of the six geopolitical zones so as to accommodate the diverse nature of the country and give room for a more accurate generalization on the issue. A longitudinal study on same subject-matter should be undertaken so as to ensure the efficacy of the results of this very study.

VI. CONCLUSION

Poor reading culture has consequences that usually manifest in the academic and overall life of teen students. And these consequences cumulatively bring about academic mediocrity and paucity usually manifested in their very poor if not abysmal performances in examinations as well as engagement in fraudulent means to

pass examinations and other academic assessments carried out on them. Poor reading culture can hamper the proper formation of teen students in character and learning. The menace of poor reading culture can be remedied. And the measures that can remedy the situation include good teaching skills, a conducive teaching and learning environment, and making reading materials available and affordable, among others.

Recommendations

Well-equipped library facilities [with state-of-the-art information and communications technology(ICT)] with reading materials that meet up with contemporary secondary education requirements and standard and manned by professional teacher-librarians should be established in all the secondary schools in the country. A subject named 'Reading Culture' whose content is all about how to acquire reading skills, engage in and enjoy sufficient and meaningful reading should be added to the curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria. Governments, private proprietors, all stakeholders in education, charity organizations, philanthropists and every person capable should channel serious efforts towards making books (especially required texts) and brailled materials free or at least up to 80% subsidized at the primary and post-primary school levels of education in the country. Parents/Guardians should endeavour to create conducive reading environments at home and encourage their wards to start reading early enough in life. Time for reading should be included in the school timetables and thoroughly monitored to ensure that it is used judiciously. Reading clubs and competitions with handsome rewards for excellent performances achieved through good reading culture should be inculcated into the main academic life and extracurricular activities of secondary school teen students in the country.

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