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READING CULTURE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Purpose*: The study investigated reading culture and academic performance among first year students in some selected universities in Nigeria.*

Design/Methodology/Approach*: The study adopted a descriptive survey using questionnaire to collect data. The population of the study consists of 355 first year students which were randomly picked from some selected universities in Nigeria. A total of the 355 questionnaires were distributed only 309 were retrieved. Descriptive statistics, (mean and percentage) were used for analysis. A mean score of 2.5 and above and a percentage score of 50% were considered positive for decision making.*

Findings: *The study revealed the effects of reading culture and academic performance of first year students in some selected universities in Nigeria as follows: Helps them absorb information, understand complex concepts, express their ideas effectively, helps them to pass their examinations and helps them to think positively. Also, the study further confirmed the challenges affecting reading culture and academic performance as lack of time, unable to find books of choice, lack of reading habit, expensive hobby and love for mobile phone.*

Originality/Value: *The study recommends that universities should organize orientation for fresher's to enable them to see the importance of reading culture and current books should be acquired by the university librarians to stimulate reading culture.*

Paper Type*: Empirical Research*

Keywords: Reading culture, academic performance, first year students, universities

Introduction

First year students are students in their first year at an educational institution, usually at the college and university level. It is a common misconception that there is very little work to do in the first year. The first year is not all about fresher's week, partying, and making friends, rather they must stay on top of their studies. For these students to improve academically, they will have to embrace a reading culture to excel.

Reading culture is an environment where reading is celebrated, appreciated and respected. Reading is the bedrock of the curriculum and is paramount to a child's personal, social, and academic success, as well as their general wellbeing. The cornerstone of the curriculum, reading is essential to a student's overall welfare,

social, intellectual, and personal success. The culture of reading, according to Trávníček (2020), is a social reality that can only enjoy status and impact if a significant number of users or participants engage in it. It is anticipated that developing a reading habit from an early age will enable the students to turn to books or other reading materials for comfort, support, and assurance while dealing with difficulties in real life, such as boredom and frustration. Also, Owusu-Acheaw & Larson (2020), opined that reading is the act of interpreting written symbols or the reader's capacity to comprehend the writer's message. This means that reading is a process of searching for new ideas, consolation, or information to satisfy a specific need; it may also help people to become familiar with certain words, pronunciations as well as their usage in general. For first year students to strive very well in their academic pursuit, their reading culture is critical for their academic performance; the practice of reading in and outside of the classroom encourages literacy and assists young people acquire skills needed to flourish as well as enhances their academic performance (Udoh & Okereke 2023)

Academic performance is the extent to which a student has attained their short or long-term educational goals. Completion of educational benchmarks such as secondary school, diplomas and bachelor's degrees represent academic performance. It also demonstrates a strong work ethic and consistently puts forth their best effort. Actively participates in reading culture and contributes valuable insights. Shows great enthusiasm for learning and embraces challenges with a positive attitude. The ability of first year students to read is the foundation on which all other subjects are based. Failure to read will make students to become more and more lost academically. Hence they cannot perform well in any academic discipline without a good reading culture since reading is a searchlight for knowledge. It is the above premise that necessitated the need and the enthusiasm of to embark on the study.

Statement of the problem

By participating in frequent reading, first year students will, not only perform well in school, they will also expand their vocabulary, improve their writing skills, and sharpen their critical thinking skills. Students learn to analyze information, make connections, and draw conclusions, which are essential skills for academic success and everyday life. Reading is very strategic in daily life of the literate people and students' academic progression. There is no way any first year students can survive the academic rigors and demands if such a student cannot read very well or cannot read at all. It was the culture in the times past for pupils in the primary and students in the secondary schools, colleges and universities to be exposed and made to read widely and cover several class reading materials.

It has been observed that there are studies on reading culture and academic performance, but no study has been carried out onreading culture and academic performance among first year students in some selected institutions in Nigeria, hence the need for this study.

Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the effects of reading culture and academic achievement of first year students in some selected universities in Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges affecting the reading culture and academic achievement of first year students in

some selected universities in Nigeria?

Literature review

Reading culture and academic performance

Reading is perceived to be the key to human development and personal advancement in a world that changes daily. It contributes largely to the growth and development of the psychological, cultural, educational, as well as emotional aspects of an individual's life. It is expected that the acquisition of reading habits from the embryonic stage, may help the child to get relief, encouragement, and reassurance from books or any reading material when facing a real-life challenge such as boredom and frustrations. Reading is the process of looking at written symbols and making meaning of them or the ability of a reader to understand a writer's message (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014). This means that reading is a process of searching for new ideas, consolation, or information to satisfy a specific need; it may also help people to become familiar with certain words, pronunciations as well as their usage in general.

Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014) reported that good reading habits serve as a powerful weapon for Ghanaian students' academic achievement. Reading impacts the development of students' vocabulary; hence, failure to read fluently or constantly affects vocabulary and skills (Cain & Oakhill, 2020). This means that the acquisition of knowledge through reading depends largely on students' interest, competency, and readiness. Onyejiaku (2019) study on reading habits revealed that whenever a student adopts effective reading habit, his learning skills, his understanding of learning materials and his memory processing both test and examination are improved appreciably. The inability of students to have access to reading materials may be tantamount to reading famine in students' lives. Lack of well-stocked libraries, obsolete materials in the library, inadequate qualified librarians, poor reading environment, insufficient financial support from the government for procurement of relevant reading materials, absence of public libraries, illiteracy rate, as well as the level of poverty were the factors associated with poor reading habit among Nigerian students (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018).

Kevane and Sissao (2008) on how much do village libraries increase reading, revealed that rural communities in Burkina Faso such as Tuy Province of south – western Burkina Faso did not have either primary or secondary libraries, except shelf of books used by teachers. Adesulu (2016) pointed out that lack of reading habits, as well as well-stocked libraries, were recognized as the contributory factors to the 80 % failure rate recorded among Nigerian children. According to Dent (2013), the majority of the students were visiting the library to complete their school work; they obtained information about the world and also to do independent work through interaction with colleagues. These students visited the library for academic purposes, social and cultural. There are some pre-requisites for the promotion of reading – they include the following; the availability of relevant books in both schools and homes, serene environment, provision of time to read, support from parents and teachers. Kavi, (2015) findings established that out of 87 respondents, over half, 44

(50.6%) of them indicated more access to reading materials, another 26 (29.9%) indicated the need to make reading compulsory in the academic curriculum 26 (29.9%). On the other hand, 14 (16.1%) also indicated the need to have reading clubs in the school, while 3 (3.3%) indicated encouragement by family and friends for students to read.

Aramide (2015) suggests the following measures to improve reading, they include; assistance from the government through the provision of monetary incentives to parents with socio-economic challenges to enable them to provide relevant materials to their children, the building of libraries, and stocking them with suitable reading books. The rest are to encourage students to visit the libraries and access their resources to enable them improve their standard of reading. The provision of incentives to writers to engage good illustrators and to improve on the design; illustration, and production of children's material could be some of the measures to attract children to involve in reading activities daily. Issa., (2019) were of the view that guardians have a gigantic obligation to guarantee that their children/wards are constantly provided with the needed reading materials within the restrictions of their financial realities in order to improve their academic performance.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey using questionnaire to collect data. The population of the study consists of 355 first year students which were conveniently picked from some selected universities in Nigeria. A total of the 355questionnaires were distributed only 309 were retrieved. Descriptive statistics, (mean and percentage) were used for analysis. A mean score of 2.5 and above and a percentage score of 50% were considered for decision making.

Population of the study

Table 1

S/N	Higher Education in Nigeria	Population of first year Students
1	Lagos State University	92
2	Delta State University Abraka	71
3	Abia State University Uturu	89
4	Bayero University Kano	57
	Total	309

Table one above shows the population of students which were randomly picked for the study as: Lagos State University (92), Delta State University Abraka (71), Abia State University Uturu (89) and Bayero University Kano (57) respectively.

Table 2

Data Analysis and Presentations

The effects of reading culture and academic achievement of first year students in some selected university in Nigeria

S/N	Items Statement	A	SA	D	SD	X
1	Helps them absorb information	103	112	67	27	2.9
2	Understand complex	178	78	34	19	3.3

	concepts					
3	Express their ideas effectively	144	88	43	34	3.1
4	Helps them to pass their examinations	79	120	102	8	2.8
5	Helps them to think positively	121	143	42	3	3.2

Table 2 depicts the effects of reading culture and academic performance of first year students in some selected university in Nigeria in the following order: Helps them absorb information (2.9), understand complex concepts (3.3), express their ideas effectively (3.1), helps them to pass their examinations (2.8) helps them to think positively (3.2) respectively.

Table 3
Data Analysis and Presentations

Challenges affecting the reading culture and academic achievement of first year students in some selected university in Nigeria

S/N	Items Statement	A	SA	D	SD	X
1	Lack of time	126	123	36	24	3.1
2	Unable to find current books of choice in the library	117	122	23	47	3.0
3	Lack of reading habit	109	69	78	53	2.7
4	Expensive Hobby	111	145	18	35	3.0
5	Love for mobile phone	78	56	123	52	2.5

Table 3 shows the challenges inhibiting reading culture in the institutions under review as lack of time (3.1), unable to find current books of choice in the library (3.0), lack of reading habit (2.7), expensive hobby (3.0) and love for mobile phones (2.5) respectively.

Discussions of results

Result presented in table 2 revealed that the effects of reading culture and academic performance of first year students in some selected institutions in Nigeria include: helps them absorb information, understand complex concepts, express their ideas effectively, helps them to pass their examinations and helps them to think positively; a student's capacity to absorb information, especially new and complex information has direct correlation to how well he/she can read and assimilate. Learning at the level of the university is a complex and sustained activity, therefore rate of absorption is directly related to a student's reading proficiency. However, the results agreed with the work of Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014) who stated reported that good reading habits serve as a powerful weapon for Ghanaian students' academic achievement. Similarly, the findings are in line with the work of Onyejiaku (2019). His study on reading habits revealed that whenever a student adopts effective reading habit, his learning skills, his understanding of learning materials and his memory processing both test and examination are improved appreciably

Again, the communication of ideas (between lecturer-student and student-lecturer) is a dynamic, complex and sustained activity that can be perfected only where communicative competence is activated; students cannot even pass an examination without having studied, without having read, without being able to express themselves, and without being able to think logically, positively and profoundly.

This simply means that there is a strong correlation between reading culture and academic performance in the institutions under review.

Table 3 revealed challenges affecting reading culture and academic performance. The challenges include lack of time, unable to find books of choice, lack of reading habit, expensive hobby and love for mobile phone; when students lack time to study, when students are unable to locate relevant books, when students' reading habits leave much to be desired, when students are obsessed with expensive non-academic hobbies, and when the mobile telephone and the like become first line activities, students generally perform woefully in their academics.

The findings of this study collaborate the work of Akande & Oyedapo (2018).Who found factors such like lack of well-stocked libraries, obsolete materials in the library, inadequate qualified librarians, poor reading environment, insufficient financial support from the government for procurement of relevant reading materials, absence of public libraries, illiteracy rate, as well as the level of poverty as problems associated with poor reading habit among Nigerian students

Conclusion

First year students' reading culture and academic performance have been demonstrated to be significantly positively correlated. This suggests that improving one's reading culture might improve academic performance. Students who cultivate a strong reading habit may find success in their academic endeavors. Reading is very strategic in daily life of the literate people and students' academic progression. There is no way any first year students can survive the academic rigors and demands if such a student cannot read very well or cannot read at all. Therefore, all students should develop a strong reading culture in order to excel and advance academically.

Recommendations

The study recommends thus

1. Universities should organize orientation for fresh students to enable them to appreciate the importance of reading culture. Orientation would set direction and goals that will engender interest in fresh students to study, while also making them see the value and implications of having adequate reading culture.
2. Current books should be acquired by the university librarians to stimulate reading culture. An obsolete and or inadequate library system would imperil the learning curve; university and library management should ensure that current and relevant books are sourced and made available for library users. This is all the more important when we realize that reading culture is a product of books, availability of books, and availability of books in relevant areas.

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Comments

The work is publishable. I have done the editorial and the followings in order to make the work better and publishable.

- The study area is selected universities in Nigeria and not selected institutions in Nigeria. I have reflected universities in all the places

- The sample technique the author adopted is not suitable, I changed it to convenience sampling technique
- There was no literature discussion in the entire work, I have equally done that
- All the citation in-text reflected the reference list