

University Library Literary Week: A Tool for Quality Reading Habit among Undergraduates in Nigeria

SOLANKE, Oluwayinka Esther (CLN)

University of Medical Science, Ondo State, Nigeria

Abstract:-The purpose of this study is to advocate for university library literary week in promoting quality reading habit among undergraduates in Nigeria. The study is a conceptual paper that employed the review of literature approach to collect, analyse and synthesize information majorly from primary and secondary sources taking the specific research objective into cognizance.

The paper found out that although there are pockets of activities being organised in this direction by academic departments and literary associations, the magnitude becomes more enhanced when university libraries are directly involved. It also found out that universities libraries, besides their statutory functions as repository and facilitator of access to educational and information resources, must in addition engender undergraduates' reading culture through promotional exercises such as the quarterly library literary reading week. The study further revealed that the method of achieving this will have to include organised forum for interactive sessions with undergraduates and literary celebrities; literary quizzes, read-a-book- per week, competitions that attract prizes, etc. It has implication for university library stakeholders in promoting good reading habit among undergraduates which make them to be globally competitive, and stand at par with their colleagues in other part of the world. The study fills an existing dearth in literatures on how university libraries can promote good reading habit in Nigeria via Literary Week.

Keywords: Nigerian Undergraduates' reading habit, Reading Culture, University Library Literary Week, University Library and Reading

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading involves interpreting written symbols mentally. It is influenced by a number of factors like the degree of exposure, level of education, and consciousness, age, status, home and public environment, cultural background, subject background, etc. It is the silent or loud vocalisation of written words. It entails the recognition and verbalization of symbols. It is an act that can take place internally or externally; a process that involves thinking and many complex skills such as the ability to identify letters and words as well as skim for information.

Reading takes place when the reader understands what has been encoded. It is an interpretation of text and ultimately facilitates teaching and learning process. It is also a process that requires the use of complex thought procedures to interpret and comprehend printed symbols as meaningful units in order to understand a written message (Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun, and Ogundipe, 2011). Reading is also an essential tool of success which everyone needs to possess in order to

become fully competent in life and discharge responsibilities (Sohail and Alvi, 2011). Busayo (2011) describes reading as a tool capable of transforming man's life and his entire society.

Similarly, Aina et al (2011) opine that students and employees in every field must read to keep abreast of what is happening in their fields. Sohail and Alvi (2011) argue that reading is an intellectual activity and reading culture is a gauge of human attribute. Behrman (2004) defines reading culture as an integrated pattern of reading behaviours, practices, beliefs, perceptions and knowledge. Furthermore, Magara (2005) describes reading culture as a culture where reading is of high value and appreciated in the society. It depicts a situation where reading is regarded not simply as something developed for school purposes but something useful in all aspects of life. Reading culture can only stem from the love of reading.

Usually, people only engage in regular reading if they have developed a strong love for reading. People with good reading habit or culture are lovers of books. Reading remains a powerful means of communication. The continuous engagement in reading can become part of an individual to the extent that it becomes a culture. While a healthy reading culture facilitates personal and social development, a poor reading culture, on the other hand, may result in low self-esteem. Rubin (2002) observes that individuals with poor reading culture have a higher chance of anti-social behavior. A healthy reading culture influences individual's personal development and by extension the society. As Igwe (2011) rightly note, reading is essential to full participation in modern society. It brings quality to life as well as empowers and emancipates citizen.

Statement of the problem

Holte (1998) notes that a situation in which a huge number of people rarely read, either for lack of reading skill or simply because they do not care enough to devote time to concentrate, will pose serious problems in the future. These serious problems are not farfetched from Nigeria and the West African sub-region as Aina, Okusaga, Taiwo and Ogundipe (2011) note that the level of reading in Nigeria is very low. This is in tandem with the findings of Henry (2004) which reveal that Africa has the greatest percentage of the 814 million illiterates in the world; and that 30 million Nigerians have graduated from high school with poor reading skills. Similar observation by Fabunmi and Folorunso (2010)

showed that reading culture of undergraduates in Nigeria is very poor.

It has therefore become a glaring fact that in Nigeria today and indeed West Africa, reading culture of students is relatively very poor. This has not only affected the patronage of libraries negatively but also reflected in the quality of graduates produced by our universities. It therefore makes it an issue of concern. To tackle this problem headlong, good reading habit must be inculcated in undergraduates in Nigeria and indeed, West Africa. A good reading skill will engender their acquisition of skills that are necessary for handling complex ideas or subject matters.

To achieve this, therefore, university libraries must be directly involved. Besides their statutory function as repository of research, educational and information materials and facilitator of accessibility to information materials must in addition engender the reading culture (Krolak, 2006; Igwe, 2011; Sohail and Alvi, 2011). This became important due to the identification of library as a facilitator of good reading habit in undergraduates (Aina et al, 2011; Ilori and Abdullahi, 2016; and Akabuike, 2017).

The University system also acknowledges the library as central to the achievement of its goals of teaching, learning, and research. The onus therefore rests on University Libraries to promote reading habits so as to facilitate excellence in learning and research among undergraduates. One sure way to achieve this is through promotional exercises such as the quarterly library literary reading week being canvassed in this paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the views of Okwilagwe (1998), reading is more concern with reasoning involving the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases and sentences, requiring all types of thinking such as critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, evaluative, judgmental and problem-solving. Olalokun (1999) agreeing with Okwilagwe thus posit reading as a multifaceted activity which links the eyes with the mind to come up with the interpretation and evaluation of written words. In the same vein, Fabunmi and Folorunso (2010) avow reading as the term used to refer to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli makes meaning in the mind of the reader. According to them, this involves the recognition of written or printed symbols which serve as stimuli and the recall of meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. To Mokatsi (2005), reading is a very essential issue which is not only about gratification but a necessity; a fundamental tool of education. This corroborates the views of Okebukola (2004) of reading as a tool for the transition of knowledge to each succeeding generation; which does allow one to listen to the wisdom and people of the ages.

Simisaye and Quadri (2010), quoting Fayose, submit that reading promotes a deep awareness and build up a reader

emotionally and intellectually. Reading eliminates educational barriers, allowing more equal chances in education via the promotion of language development, intellectual training and enhances the possibility of adjusting to one's personal situations (Ilori and Abdullahi, 2016). One of the major ways of acquiring information, the bridge between knowledge and ignorance, is reading. Tella and Akanade (2007), assert the ability to read as the heart of self-education and lifelong learning. According to them, reading is an art capable of transforming life and society. Busayo (2011) thus argues that reading as a tool is capable of transforming an individual's life and the entire society. Reading proffers a productive approach to improving vocabulary and language skills. It is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built (Habibu and Ejembi, 2011).

Reading is for life and not just for school. Ndikubwayezu (2009:11) agree that "reading, in all its variety, is vital to our becoming better informed, having a better understanding of ourselves and others, and to our development as thoughtful, constructive contributors to a democratic and cohesive society". Reading as an act is an enjoyable one which can form a part of an individual to the extent that it becomes a habit/culture; which once developed become very difficult to break. Sohail and Alvi (2011) maintain reading culture has one of the most powerful lasting influences in promotion of one's personal development.

In their study on ways of creating a reading habit for Uganda, Magara and Batambuze (2005) infer reading culture to mean a habit where reading is part of the people's living and constitutes a culture that is shared by members of the society. In the views of Gbadamosi (2007), an individual who habitually and regularly read books and other materials that are not necessarily for him to advance in his profession or career, is said to have a good reading culture. Reading culture is thus the habit of making reading a regular activity. To Akabuike (2017:5) reading culture "is the act of cultivating a positive attitude, interest and possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and constant activity".

Nssien (2008) identifies reading culture as the single most important determinant of a student's success in every level of education. Ilori and Abdullahi (2016) assert becoming a skilled and adaptable reader as factors that enhance the chances of success at school and beyond. Reading culture is thus the kind of culture that imbibes reading as the basis of growth and development. It is a type of culture that sees continuous and dedicated reading to information resources as a means of knowledge acquisition, which will be applied practically for development (Akabuike, 2017).

Advocacy for Effective Reading Culture

The importance of imbibing a healthy reading culture for individual's success in life cannot be over-emphasized. Aina et al (2011b:3) assert that the "acquisition of reading skills does not only improve confidence in language arts, but also in other subjects such as social studies, science, and mathematics

and so on". Just like reading itself, reading culture can be learnt, nurtured and cemented in the school environment (Fabunmi and Folorunso, 2010). While a healthy reading culture plays a pivotal role in individual development and self-esteem, poor reading habit can make an individual develop poor attitude to school and create self-esteem problems later in life (Iheanacho, 2007; Fosudo, 2010).

Aina et al (2011b:3) further observe that "when there were no televisions, handsets and computers, people spent hours reading books and traveled to lands far away in their minds". Their observations showed that "people have lost their passion to read because there are several other exciting options available, aside from books these days". They argue that this is a shame because reading offers a productive approach to development. Fabunmi and Folorunso (2010) also note that developed countries of the world were able to attain their height because, at a point in their history, they were able to give themselves to much reading and research via a healthy reading culture. They assert that most developing countries, especially in Africa, do not have a healthy reading culture. Hence, they lack substantial information that could be utilized for national development.

A study carried out in Atlanta, Georgia, by Higginbotham (1999), reveals differences in reading interest of students by gender. Males reported strong love for reading with stronger preferences for the categories of sports and science while females reported a stronger love for reading with interest in romance, friendship, animal stories, adventure and historical fiction. From these findings, one can infer that students in this school possess a healthy reading culture. A similar research on this in Nigeria by Henry (2004) reveals that 40% of adult Nigerians never read a non-fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school. The average Nigerian reads less than one book per year, and only 1% of successful men and women in Nigeria read one non-fiction book per month.

These findings by Henry are in sharp contrast to that of Higginbotham and goes to show that most graduates failed to develop a healthy reading culture while in school as undergraduates. Poverty, home background, method of teaching, mobile phones, internet, home video, corruption, noise culture and lack of interest were identified as causal factors for this (Fabunmi and Folorunso, 2010; Aina et al, 2011; Ilori and Abdullahi, 2016; Akabuikie, 2017). Sadly enough, there has been no improvement since the findings of Henry in 2004 till date as studies on literacy has reveal that the literacy rate of Nigeria dropped from 62% in 1992 to 52% in 2006 (Akabuikie, 2017).

While stressing the importance of this issue, Akabuikie (2017) notes that it is impossible for a nation to sustain itself if there were no great readers and writers birthed by healthy reading culture. She, therefore, opines and calls for a healthy reading culture as the way forward for Nigeria and other African countries. Although there are pockets of activities that are being organised in this direction by academic departments and

literary associations, in response to Akabuikie's clarion call, the magnitude becomes more enhanced when university libraries are directly involved.

The Role of University Library in Promoting Reading Habit among Undergraduates

The University Library is central to facilitating the actualisation of a university's core preoccupation of promoting excellence in teaching, learning and research. Libraries provide access to information materials that can improve reading skills. University Libraries, in helping their parent institutions achieve the objective of teaching, learning and research, by facilitating reading for information, passing examinations, pleasure and personal growth through their variety of information material collections (Ilori and Abdullahi, 2016). Dike (1993) asserts University Libraries as provider of materials that offer more extensive and varied information than classroom study alone cannot provide.

Meanwhile, there are several ways University Libraries can enhance reading habit. Habibu and Ejembi (2011) and Ilori and Abdullahi (2016) agree that university libraries have been encouraging healthy reading culture among undergraduates through:

- i. The provision of an enabling environment: University libraries facilitate opportunities for developing good reading habits through the provision of conducive environment that encourages meaningful reading, learning and research activities. They provide space, reading materials, reading tables and chairs, and a noise-free environment.
- ii. Provision of Reading Materials: University Libraries provide a wide range of reading materials. Apart from textbooks, access to search engines and ebooks, the library provides access to supplementary learning materials such as computers and audiovisual materials.
- iii. Library Orientation Programmes: This entails the coaching of fresh students on the use of library resources and services. It involves the fresh teaching of users information retrieval process such as the use of library catalogue, OPAC, indexes and abstracts
- iv. Library Week: University Libraries use Library Week to showcase their resources, facilities, events, contacts and services through different programs and events in a bid to promote healthy reading habit. It is a week laced with several colourful activities such as book fair, exhibition, due fine amnesty, etc

Although University Libraries do the above and lots more to instill healthy reading culture in undergraduates in Nigeria and Diaspora, Aina et al (2011b) maintain that the role of university libraries in promoting reading culture among undergraduates include the provision of opportunity to balance objective and subjective arguments as well as developing ways of self and critical thinking as well as independent judgment, especially through imaginative

literatures. This will ultimately help them develop creative and critical thought and healthy reading culture. Since literature explores all aspects of human experience, as well as understanding in human relations, persistent reading of literary works serves as the bedrock of education, and as an incentive for reading other academic materials.

Advocacy for University Library Literary Week in Promoting Quality Reading Habit

Ejikeme (2014) expresses no doubt in stating the level of development in a country as directly proportional to her literacy level. True literacy goes beyond just being able to read and write. It is the total education of the mind which according to Osundare (2009) “is what the eye is to the body as well as what the rain is to the land in a fit of drought, the supreme light-giver, the breezy down after a night of suffocating darkness. It is what clears a path through the jungle, the compass that takes us ashore from the rough and clueless waters”. Osundare emphatically maintains that a “country’s 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 literacy in all facets of the population.”

Reading for pleasure has been established as an important enabler for learning (OECD, 2009; Torgauten, 2012; Ejikeme, 2014). Students who enjoy reading literary materials, and therefore make it a regular part of their lives, are able to build a healthy reading culture. Literary materials do not only supply historical and cultural information, they raise the level of individual’s level of consciousness and critical sensibility; in addition, they explore all aspects of human experience and provides new worlds of experience. In other words, according to Torgauten (2012:5), “when travelling the literary journey, readers do not only pass time, they are enriched by new knowledge and enjoyment. Readers extend their inner worlds and furnish their minds with new possibilities”.

Our findings have further shown a just validation of Rajaratnam’s (2013) claim that there exists a strong correlation between reading literary materials and enjoyment; and that reading for enjoyment is an important precondition for becoming an effective reader with healthy reading culture. We therefore advocate that University Libraries in addition to their ways of promoting a healthy reading culture among undergraduates, should explore the use of literary materials and set aside a week tagged “literary week” for promoting reading and inculcating a healthy reading habit among undergraduates. Since literature explores all aspects of human experience and persistent reading of literary works serves as the bedrock of education as well as an incentive for reading other academic materials, a literary week could sow the seed of reading habit in undergraduates.

The week long activity should position reading as an enjoyable life habit that goes beyond a diet of textbooks and filled with activities that make reading interesting. The method of achieving this will have to include organised forum

for interactive sessions with undergraduates and literary celebrities, literary quizzes, read-a book- per week, competitions that attract prizes, etc (Carlyle, 2016). Although there are pockets of activities that are being organised in this direction by academic departments and literary associations but the magnitude becomes more enhanced when university libraries are directly involved. This will not only put University Libraries on the fore in promoting healthy reading culture but also help them facilitate excellence in teaching, learning and research among undergraduates and university community as a whole – their core preoccupation.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Reading is a principal means by which we learn every subject. It is the royal road to knowledge and an essential tool to success in all academic subjects. Undergraduates with good reading habit do not only excel in academic pursuit but stand at par with their colleagues in other parts of the world. To achieve this, therefore, university libraries must be directly involved besides their statutory function as repository of research, educational and information materials and facilitator of accessibility to these materials, they must, in addition, engender quality reading habit through promotional exercises such as library literary week. This paper thus recommends that:

- i. The Library Literary Week be done quarterly;
- ii. It should not replace Library Week;
- iii. It should feature activities such as:
 - a. interactive sessions with undergraduates and literary celebrities
 - b. literary quizzes,
 - c. read-a book- per week,
 - d. competitions that attract prizes, etc.

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