LANGUAGES, LITERATURE, AND THE SURVIVAL OF NIGERIAN PEOPLES

(A BOOK OF READINGS)

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Reading, Writing and the Rise of the Screen Culture

BY

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Introduction

Reading and writing are the hallmarks of the educational enterprise in the sense that almost all that is done therein has to do with these two fundamental skills in the human learning interaction, it is at very early stages. As a foundation or cornerstone of the individual’s educational background, when done well, breeds competence in subsequent educational development. This fundamental need as provided by the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1998) states among others that right from the pre-primary education level, the child should be taught the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play. At the primary level the first goal among others is to inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. This is obtainable as the child learns to read and write. The situation in Nigeria today is that most primary schools are failing to teach reading skills such that many children who enter the secondary school are unable to read and write. This inability to read compounds problems for both teachers and learners as they proceed to higher levels. For most of these children, reading is at the frustration level.

Borne out of this fact, this paper makes an in-depth examination of these issues with an attempt at making a way forward.

The Concept of Reading

According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1996) reading is a skill or an activity of getting information from prints and books. Put simply by Oyetunde, Awotunde, Wuyep and Ango (1996), reading is an ability to draw information from prints resulting in the interaction between the reader’s background experiences and text information. In other words, reading entails constructing or building meaning with the combination of information from the printed page and the reader’s store. Here Oyetunde et al. stressed that teachers should emphasis the concept of reading as a making meaning activity, the goal of reading is to make sense of print.
Reading enables people to break loose their limited draw on those of others people as well. This makes it possible to make progress previously documented discoveries to make progress otherwise. The fact here is that the reading skill is basically well developed children are given a key tool with which to grow. The orientation towards reading and literature unprecedented accomplishments in the human society.

Development A sound Reading Culture

Reading is the foundation stone for learning and need to develop before any other in the learning process. Trends among children and Nigerians generally have been described by Olu-Aderounmu et al (2004) as the cause of the reading culture. This source observes that this is not unique to boarding facilities in our school system. Because the present situation whereby the boarding abolished makes the management of study and time discipline associated with this rather permissive day school.

Andzayi (2004) in his opinion seems to believe the reading culture in Nigeria is the prevalent oral-culture Nigerians unfavourably disposed to reading others. This source observes that there are serious reading trends in the Nigerian educational system ranging from methodology and reading materials, non-rich home backgrounds, allotment of reading lessons at foundation stages to facilities. The oral-culture has actually thwarted this since they view reading as a difficult task, not for prescribed examinations.

Delving into historical perspectives Arogbofa (1979) boom era of the early 1970's has also contributed to the reading culture of our people. With this era came the belief that they did not necessary need to go through the hard work big in life. Moreover this boom introduced materialism illiterates being conferred with honorary degrees and account of their oil sourced wealth. The implication of the boom, Nigerians had a sounder reading culture.
Following from the foregoing is the overwhelming need more, than ever to
rehaul this fundamental ability with the view to inculcating sound habits in our
Youth. The Vanguard education weekly column (May 24, 2007) highlighted the
strategies and/or activities for promoting good reading habits as story telling,
reading stores, dramatization or play acting, exposure to renowned authors and
story tellers as well as creative writing debates, quizzes and of course,
ere establishment of libraries and reading corners.

In a recent workshop for education stakeholders from the southwest geo-
tical zone on strategies for inculcating reading habits in the nations teeming
populations, the Vanguard paper reported the contributions made towards solving this
problem. At this workshop an articulated procedure for developing good
reading culture was evolved. It was advocated that training for sound reading
habits should start at the very early stage of the educational career.

To cater adequately for the above therefore, reading should be made to
take a stand on its own on school timetable at the beginning stage of the educational
system. This will help correct the error of assuming that since reading is an
essential requirement and an aspect of language it’s taught along side with the English lessons. It is important
for the language teacher training curriculum should have embedded in
apprropriate teaching techniques and methodologies to make teachers well
trained in the rubrics of teaching not only reading but also writing.

Andzayi (2004), Highlights one fundamental reading technique among others.
This is termed as the language experience Approach (LEA), a method of teaching
reading course According to Umatul and Oyetunde in Andzayi (2004) the
language experience, approach (LEA) makes use of familiar materials or language
bases on the learner. The child thus learns to read beginning with his own stories which
are based on his own experiences and spoken language. This approach to teaching
reading is based on the principle that children learn better when they are given the
opportunity to express their own thoughts verbally and in writing. In this way they
gradually read what others write too. The inherent fact here is that children read
meaning making if it is about their own experiences.

According to the advocates of the LEA it enhances creativity and love of
reading in children; it is most useful even without adequate language textbooks
as the learner dictates his story which the teacher writes on the board or, wall
surface. The approach is a systematic five steps procedure as follows:

1. the teacher asks the child to tell a story or draw a picture and say
something about it.
2nd step – the teacher writes as the child call each name as he writes it.

3rd step – the teacher and the child reads the story.

4th step – the teacher guides the child to draw the story to peers or parents.

The fifth and last step involves the child or the teacher and the child to read the story to peers or parents.

The steps involved in this approach empowers the learner and makes teaching of reading which may be time consuming. Moreover, when this teaching is done systematically, it endures an enduring disposition in future reading habits.

Other methods of teaching reading include the variation of the LEA. Others include the phonic alphabetic methods as well as the interactive methods. It behoves the language teacher to get well acquainted with these methods and appreciate their usability in handling reading situations.

Related to teaching methodology is the problem of imparting the reading skill from the foundation level and because the austere situation whereby learners are taught, the language textbook does not augur well for the development of reading. Reading should be done with the learner actively involved between the print material and his sensory perception. Teachers or other brilliant students read, it is an exercise. Enriching the learners’ literary environments can create awareness in the beginning learner and a sound reading culture. Parents are by this advice, commensurate to their ages just as the thorn. In sum it all Ayodele (1984) asserts that the richer the printed materials) the better the promotion of language and a sound reading culture. As a boost to the above, the library is a sine-quo-non in assisting the teacher to promote intellectual growth.

Another strategy as contained in a recent research that teachers should give reading and writing a basis as this will get students to consult and read that this is likely to lure students in to more reading meaningfully engaged away from unnecessary activities.
Teachers and other helping professionals in the school, like the school guidance counselors should through group guidance schemes expose students to learning accessories like dictionaries, novels, magazines and newspapers. Appropriate use of these educational accessories forms basis for making progress in the educational career. School guidance counselors are challenged to use psychological principles to help the students in management of their study. As custodians of value reorientation in our schools system, the guidance counselors should evolve remedial programmes to carry along student with poor reading culture. This is considered necessary because reading disability has been found to produce personality maladjustment, loss of self esteem and social prestige which epitomizes in delinquencies and other unsavoury acts; such students try to compensate their loss of social prestige with these acts (Ikonne, Oko and Onimindingo 1992).

Counsellors above all should show empathy and forbid an attitude of contempt and ridicule towards poor students who need psychological help to overcome their reading problems. In line with this Dawa et al. (2005) advised that counselors should use a multiplicity of approaches like rational emotive therapy, systematic desensitization along with study habits counselling in order to erode the deficiency suffered by such students.

The Concept of Writing

Writing as construed by Oyetunde et al. (1996) a process that begins with ideational and linguistic preparation, which entails preparing students to have what to say (ideals) and how to say it (language use). The writing art therefore begins with preliminary language skills like listening and verbal arts. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English again defines writing as an activity of creating pieces of written work such as stories, poems or essays. From this, we can say that writing is an important language art that equips an individual to express himself in a literate essay. A well-developed writing culture (skills and appreciation) forms a sound basis for formal communication of ideas, facts and messages through print and documentation. It is virtually impossible to make any reasonable progress in education if the writing skill is left undeveloped. This is why Oyetunde (1996) asserts that the student who is unable to write a literate essay is not likely to satisfy either traditional or recent standards of educational accomplishment. It is therefore important to develop fundamental writing skills in students to make them positively poised for educational and human interactions.
The Rudiments of Writing

According to Oyetunde et al (1996) writing is as such beginning with a sound background in language begins with an alphabetical base followed by speech, dictation and word bank methods) punctuation and dictation.

As a fundamental language art, the rudiments at the foundation level of the child's education i.e. development of words from letters and subsequently follow these steps to nurture this art into maturity.

First, writing the pupils' idea on the board and contribution of ideas on a given topic. Secondly, the teacher organizes the highlighted ideas and explains to the pupils how to go together into what is called paragraphs, so that they understand the context of what they write.

The third step involves introducing the student prepared by the teacher to give a holistic idea of the essay in writing and makes students list the ideas to them all.

The fourth step involves giving group work. Each group produces an essay similar to the teacher's model essay. The secretary or his leader of each group presents such essays. Following presentation by the teacher encourages pupils to make constructive comments, points in each essay. These comments should center on the opening, middle and end as well as the validity of appropriately words and sentences were used.

The teacher having made a thorough writing experience in groups now charges each pupil to write his/her contribution to the class later. The teacher guides and weakens the essay as how to write. If the pupil already and has ematic art then the teacher emulates and produces. Research findings by Bello (2006) supports this language skill arguing that it's the most articulate art of writing. This approach emphasizes participation, relatively permanent impact on the learners.
Rationale for Developing the Duo Educational Skills

The preceding sections have portrayed the art of reading and writing as key language skills that are very crucial in educational programmes. Almost all interactions between teachers and learners take place, via paper and the print media. Developing these two skills earlier at the beginning stage of one's education and nurturing them to maturity is quite useful. The two are treated as a pair in the sense that they seem to act like twin brother in the human communications process, one facilitates the other and poverty in one reflects on the other. In looking at the rationale for these two skills, they may be treated as a pair in some situations.

To obviate the inadequacies that poverty of language can cause in both spoken and written work, there is an overwhelming need to reawaken and develop a sound reading culture among our youth. In support, Imo (2001) asserts that, "reading maketh a man" while constant reading maketh a full man for the modern world.

The report made by the chief examiner released by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) generally feature lamentations on students' poor performances epitomized in the rubrics of writing like poor spellings, punctuations and grammatical inadequacies. Following this reports are suggestions for remediation, which centres on developing grammatical base that can only be attained as the individual imbibes a good reading culture.

It is also needed in the management of some psycho-social threats to educational development like the perennial examination malpractice syndrome which in spite of government promulgations and decrees has not seen the dawn of human solution. In line with this Rotimi (2004) observed that, any attempt to tackle this problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria must resuscitate the reading culture among students, he believes that, the cankerworm cannot thrive in the face of well-formed reading and writing cultures.

Other vices like delinquency, drug abuse, cultism and some personality disorders arise because the individual records failure in the art of reading and writing, resulting to loss of self esteem which he tries to compensate by indulging in such art to at least gratify himself. Developing this pair of language skills in the youth will not only give them self fulfilling experiences but will also keep them well focused and meaningfully engaged as they proceed from one level to the other in their educational career.
The Rise of the Screen Culture

The screen culture encompasses the television and other relevant forms of the media. The computer invention and the Internet also known as the World Wide Web (WWW) can be described as screen technology. A typical feature of what we term as screen technology is the visual characteristic whereby the screen technology appeals to the hearing and sight senses. The screen media came along the education process as well as communication and entertainment and has brought unprecedented changes in the human learning process. These changes are positive while others have negative and far reaching effects on youth. The advantages of the screen culture are varied and include:

- It is highly informative and since the education process is information oriented and receiving information to effect positive changes, the screen media enhances educational programmes.
- Use as teaching aids, most of literacy works in the classroom and other subjects are put on tape, Compact Disc (CD-ROM) or even acted to give a clearer view of the subject content.
- Teachers use multimedia screen applications that enhance student learning, since the same media to learn by reading, seeing, hearing and performing the subject content.
- Among the devices of the Screen Technology, the computer offers tremendous opportunities to make our children over come their learning difficulties. A good example is the:
  - Computer:- Based or Aided Training which includes completing excises based on instructional software. The software enables the individual to learn how to read sentences, write and provide feedback on pronunciations and spellings. It provides a unique learning experience especially in reading languages. This learning process enables the learner to receive immediate correct answers and additional information on incorrect answers upon scoring.
- The use of electronic book like the e-book, electronic newspaper, multimedia encyclopedia put on CD-ROM for easy and comprehensive access. The reference text uses text, graphics, sound, video and interactivity to explain a topic. With this screen device a computer can provide a unique learning experience.
encyclopedia and different versions of the dictionary are easily referenced during research studies and school assignments.

- In a similar vein the screen media allows for digital versions of newspapers and magazines (e-zines) distributed world wide on CD-ROM and DVD-ROM.

- As taken from Amuche (2005) the screen media has achieved wonderful feats in the entertainments and other industries.

The multimedia computer games use a combination of graphics, sounds and video to create a realistic and entertaining games situation. It is also suitable medium of showcasing one's cultural heritage to the larger world which can be interestingly educative.

- The music industry also sells interactive multimedia applications on CD-ROM and DVD-ROM, all of which are useful for education; an experience that is both educative and entertaining.

Other benefits of the computer device for educational process include the result sheet application for grading students in each subject and for over all performance.

As rightly put by Bishop Odili (2007) in Beyond Frontiers Magazine, the screen technology is no longer foreign but has become part and parcel of human reality. It is now a global phenomenon and a major challenge to corporate organization with the schools at the fore even though the school system in Nigeria is reportedly several years behind those in developed countries. We therefore need to take advantage of the information communication galore presented through the screen media, not only to keep abreast with out foreign counterparts but also to reap the inherent benefits.

Reasoning along with the dualist philosophers however, one would always find that no matter how good a thing is, there is at least a subtle aspect of negativity around it. The negative influences of the screen cultures are perceived as follows:

- The ever-increasing poor academic performance of some youth is blamed on their imprudent use of the screen media, especially the television and home video. Much more time is devoted to this than to reading; this has a dampening effect on students' appetites for reading and school work generally.

- Morally, the screen media has been criticized for projecting destructive values. These anti values erode useful religions and moral values, which used to form solid bedrocks for sound educational development, especially for feeble-minded individuals. Lots of students' behaviours or manners now depend on what they learn from movies no matter how absurd!
Actors and movie stars are fast becoming role models for our children. The Nigeria child sometimes gets inordinately scared of some screen movies, contrary to the provisions of the Afro rights schemes. Movies that may project divorce, violence, and sexually provocative scenes end up influencing negatively the growing child. According to Ogbonna (2002) this is capable of personality disorders and maladjustment linked to early childhood; the child's thought pattern is a product of what available information, the computer jingle of "garbage in garbage out", the child takes in and presents.

The foregoing testifies to the fact that the screen technology really frightening heights that may have negative influences. Freedom of access and inputs of even immoral, phonographic mass media really makes them learner unfriendly.

Having x-rayed both sides of the coin, it can be seen that the negative influences of this modern technology, it has not only negative influences.

In fact, as noted by Obilikwu (2007) if one chooses to ignore the opportunities of the screen technology because of what he perceives as negative influences, he might be doing so at a great peril. Instead, they can use these facts to decipher what they really want as choices. But for the inexperienced youth the positive negative influences, he might be doing so at a great peril. Instead, they can use these facts to decipher what they really want as choices. But for the inexperienced youth the positive negative influences can be used properly for his benefit, dangerous and use can never remove the use of a thing.

The Need for Regulatory Censorship

Everybody is involved either in investing into or using the technology. The returns of this investment could be handsome. Then, it takes a lot of wisdom to be able to choose the things we want to use that will not harm our way of life and protect posterity in the face of explosive human invention as at yet that can match the alluring exchange of diverse spheres of human life like politics, cultural revival, and of course education. It has been revolutionized into instruments of values and anti-values. It is therefore apt to teach our youth and educators as well the beneficial ways of using the screen.

The growing children below the age of 18 years need proper control on the evil influences to guide character malformation and dampen the explosive and pervasive influences of the screen.
use cannot be left loosely hanging in parental hands. There is a serious call to enact a censor Board for the Nigerian movie industry as well as for foreign production. This board should work to ensure that only quality movies come into the market for the growing child. Movies contrary to the Nigeria cultural settings and inclinations should be prohibited for the youth aged below 18 years.

The activities of the censor Board however should not be too arbitrary but set adequate media ethics based on sound value orientation and reorientation schemes that will ensure the optimum utility of the screen technology invented by human ingenuity.

Conclusion

The issues raised in this paper have far reaching implications for all stakeholders in the educational process. There is emphasis on reawakening some basic issues in the training methodology of language teachers. The language teacher trainees’ curriculum should be diversified to cover different methods of teaching and nurturing both the reading and writing skills which are very essential in the human socio-educational interaction.

The rising trends in the screen culture can really be a boost and an opportune remedy in developing and maintaining sound reading and writing cultures. It is added advantages to enable our youth excel educationally. The government, non-governmental agencies, educational administrator, teachers, parents and students alike should thus, take up the challenge of investing both time and resources in the tremendous opportunities offered by the screen technology to improve the quality of our education and life generally.

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