

## Teaching Literacy through What Students Read

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**Abstract:** *Some studies focus the shift of paradigm in Nigeria with reference to students' attitude to reading. The emergence of mobile phones, the rapid growth of social media and the ailing economy are advanced as some of the reasons. Some scholars believe, however, that students do read nevertheless. This study is conducted to identify and promote literacy through what students read.*

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### 1. BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Literacy is pivotal to individual, corporate, community and national growth. The digital age is a busy dispensation that carries with it the need to develop reading 'programmers' that will match the time - spinning challenge young and adolescent readers face in 'sitting down to read'. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) define reading as:

*"The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associate with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society"*

Lending credence to this, The Reading Agency submits that:

*"We believe that reading can transform people's lives. The more you read, the more you know. The more you read, the more you imagine. The more you read, the better you understand and the better you can connect to people. Our mission is to inspire more people to read more."*

We could, from available literature, almost conclude that the dropping attention to reading is a global issue and it is evident in reports across nations and cultures. In a test of reading competence conducted in 2006, England primary children seem to be sliding down the international rankings. These teen agers had the 15<sup>th</sup> position out of 40 countries which included Russia and Germany in clear leading ahead of UK.. (Twist, Sainsbury, Woodthorpe, & Whetton 2007. Donbey et al 2010)

There had been different initiatives across the world with reference to providing remedy to the ailing reading standard. For example.

*"In 2001 The US Senate passed the No Child Left Behind Act. This included the mandation of Reading first, a programme to remedy reading failure in low-achieving schools. This consisted of direct instruction in the 'essential components' of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension), taught as separate skills, to children in Grades 1, 2 and 3.)Billions of dollars were spent on the programme, which involved nearly 6,000 schools." (page 12)*

Gee (2004) reports that: "Reading in the outside world is no longer confined to books. If they are to operate successfully out of school, children need to be helped to become effective and critical readers of multimodal text - of texts where the messages come through the visual images and the sounds as well as the written words. Working with such texts in school has been shown to increase engagement and improve comprehension of more conventional texts," .According to Troy and Kristen (2013), countless curricular documents, blue ribbon panel reports, professional books, and conference presentations over the last decade have centered on the idea of teaching students how to be literate across multiple forms of media and in a variety of contexts. It is sad to note that why literacy is on a super highway in very many other nations with the fast growing activities in the world of digital

literacy, some cultures and countries still battle with getting people; young and old, interested in ‘elementary literacy.’ Williams (2014) views Digital literacy from the perception of data gathering for possible literacy analysis. Data literacy is expected to showcase in the ‘expert’ the ability to work with, analyze and make arguments with data. The society in her view is digital driven and as such there must be a deliberate effort to take literacy to the next level of speaking and writing through data. To drive her point home, she reported in one of her researches “how City Digits; Local Lotto, a high school curriculum and supporting web application, supported students in building data literacy.” Buke, Jeffrey, Deborah, Mark, Andrew Nithya, Sansank and Mani (2006), Anderson &Quitney (2012), Bertot, Paul and Justin (2012) in separate studies; agreeing on the growth in decision making since over a decade as contingent on understanding the way of data and its interpretation submitted that almost all forms of planning must be preceded by data. Whether the plan is about improved transport system or housing, rural-urban migration or child – spacing, funding the primary, secondary or higher education and addressing the cancer of insecurity in almost every part of the globe with curtailing the menace of ethics and civility in criminal laden societies; a quantitative or qualitative data literacy is required.

**2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

One of the driving forces for this study is to assist students back to reading by searching for what they read outside the traditional text books. The digital age that provides for unrestrained access to online activities requires that students be engaged in all skills – listening, ‘reading’, speaking and writing. The study therefore seeks to assist the teachers to get students engaged in what they read and also help them develop the comprehension skills needed for independent study, academic skills, research and examination.

**Research Questions**

Two research questions were raised for the study:

- (a) What materials are read by the students?
- (b) Does what students read have significant relationship with their performance?

**3. METHODOLOGY**

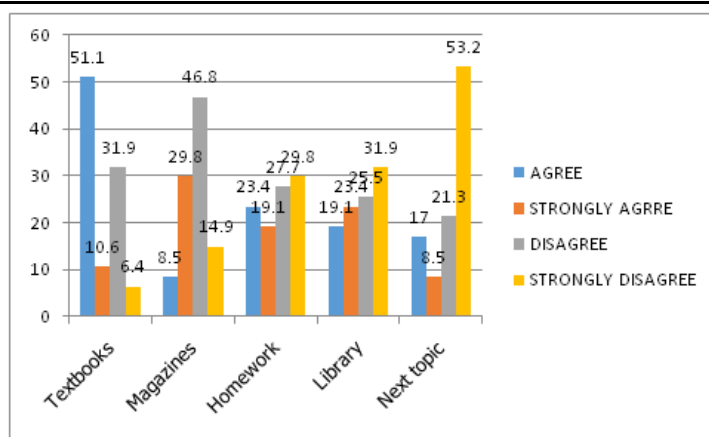
A descriptive survey design was used to analyse the responses of 47 students’ attitude to reading. The 47 students are of mixed gender and have the age range of between 16 and 19). All respondents are in the foundation class of a four – year degree programming the same university. They are in different programmes other than English. The choice of non- English studying students is deliberate to eliminate the perceived ‘intrinsic’ reading skill a student of English might possess. The university as an academic community is expected to promote reading culture in all students irrespective of their specialism. A 25 - item Likert type four - scale questionnaire tested at 0.05 level of significance was administered on the participants with the aim of getting them to respond to specific issues bothering on reading as well as definite items being read and its significance to their general study skills. The administration of the instrument was done at once within the range of an hour and all participants submitted their responses on the spot.

**4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**Table1.** *What materials are read by the students?*

Items	A %	SA%	D%	SD
Textbook	51.1	10.6	31.9	6.4
Magazines	8.5	29.8	46.8	14.9
Home works	23.4	19.1	27.7	29.8
Library (Social Media blogs)	19.1	23.4	25.5	31.9
Next topic	17.0	8.5	21.3	53.2

The chart shows what the students read with the percentage responses. From the chart, it can be seen that when agree and strongly agree are added together, majority of the students (61.7%) read text books, followed by homework and going to library (where they spend more time on multimedia devices for chatting, pinging, online interactions in facebook, whatap, yahoo messenger etc) to read one thing or the other 42.5% respectively, then magazine (38.3%) and next topic (25.5%).



**Table2.** Does what students read have significant relationship with their performance?

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	r	sig
Reading	47	11.94	3.49	0.495	0.00
Performance	47	2.34	1.01		

The r-value 0.495 is significant at 0.05, ( $P < 0.05$ ). It follows that there is a significant relationship between what students read and their academic performance. The positive value of r, indicates that the relationship is positive.

### 5. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief survey research tested the students’ level of literacy through students’ reading programmes, activities and habit.

Poor reading habit or cold attitude to study is perceived to hinge on the distractions caused by social media. This study confirmed this to a point but it (the perception) fell short of constituting the most vital reason for the sharp drop in quest for reading. We could see:

- (a) Reading is a vital expressive skill that requires systematic teaching to foster literacy.
- (b) The need to seek better method of teaching reading and study skills in a way that will be attractive to the young people with growing addiction to browsing.
- (c) The emergence of browsing as a language skill that could be used to the advantage of the teenagers to get them read without the learners’ consciousness that they are responding to a formal programme

This study has led the researcher to develop a programme called ‘Browsing Literacy’ aimed at helping students read while browsing. The approach is to have ‘an online literacy period’ when students would be allowed to choose any online forum or blog to participate in. The lesson will be ‘strictly’ informal but the teacher is present to control the server centrally and monitor discussion as well as answer questions.. Some stages of the programme would require that online topics be suggested. The students should search for blogs that discuss the topics or generate discussions among one another online using feedback audio gadgets (and video) of available.

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