

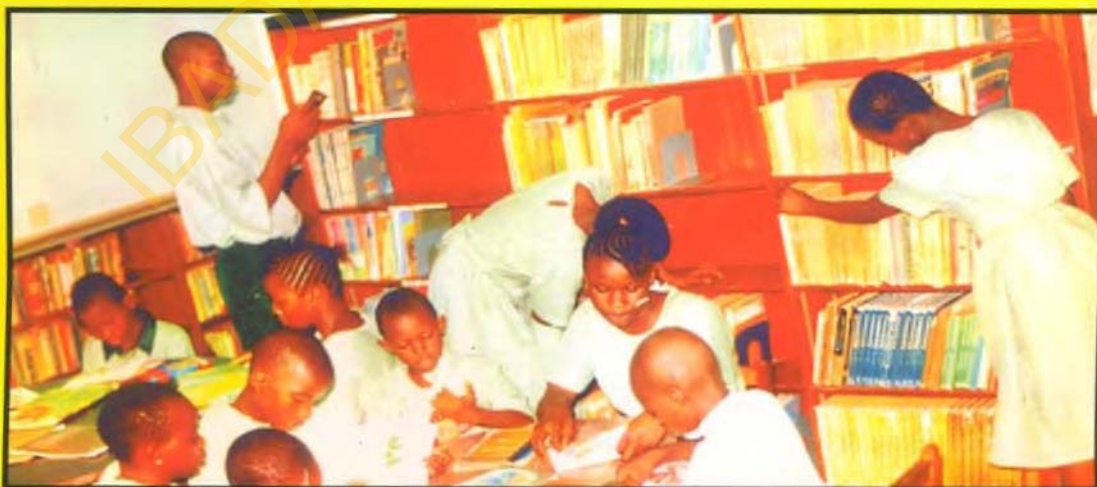
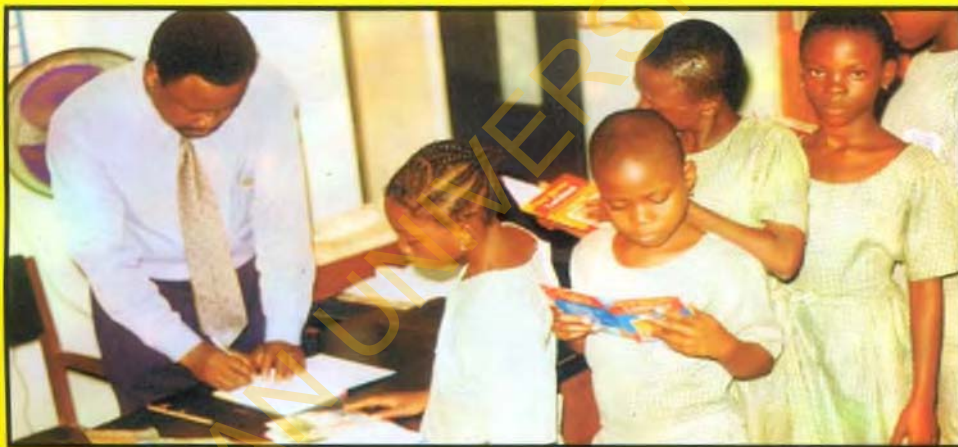
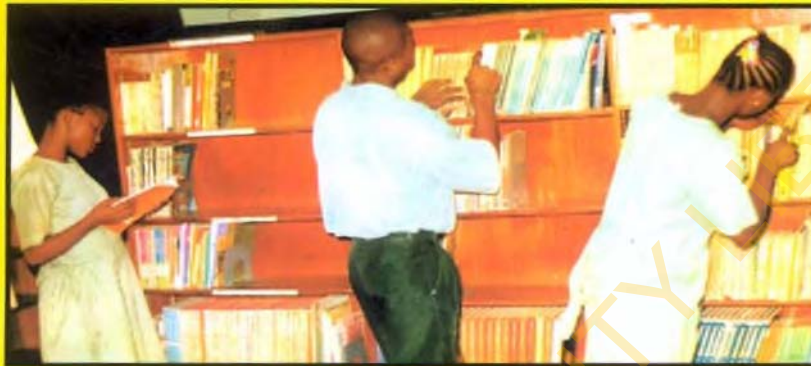


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READING AS CULTURE: PROMOTING! SUSTAINING!! INSPIRING!!!

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Abstract

Many librarians in developing countries complain of poor funding and lack of current books as factors that elicit low reading interests among young people. This interest cannot be stimulated where there is no motivating factor and the professionals are seemingly passive. This paper takes a look at reading as culture and explores how reading can be promoted, sustained and inspired by all in the bid for lifelong education. A model for reading advocacy by librarians, teachers, parents, health caregivers and educators generally is proposed. Suggestions are made on how librarians can, through partnership with different stakeholders; publishers, illustrators, reading tutors and classroom teachers get people especially young ones to love the art of reading, and for more community effort, partnerships and advocacy for reading programmes that will help bring out the creativity in people and build a sustainable reading culture.

Key Words: *Reading culture, Reading campaign, Reading advocacy, Reading model*

Introduction

We live in a world where technology has taken over pride of place, as the act of gaining knowledge from comprehending the meaning of written or printed words, or understanding by interpretation of signs (reading) is waning daily. The issue of reading as culture is going to be looked at from an advocate's point of view. This writer is a librarian by profession and the aim is to ginger the reader/listener to action, action to take reading as culture and advocate for that cause. The issue germane is how do we bring back a good reading culture?

First of all, what is culture? I asked two people randomly what they felt culture is. One of them said culture is the preservation of traditions. The second person said culture is the norms of a society that rules the day to day habits that are passed on from generation to generation. The Webster's Dictionary () says culture is the attitudes and values which inform a society.

Reading culture, the subject of this paper is the norms and habits that should accompany the act of reading, of comprehending the meaning of written or printed words. Igwe (2011) sees reading culture as "the kind of culture that imbibes reading and studying as the basis of growth and development. It is the type that sees continuous and dedicated reading of information resources by pupils, children, students and adults for knowledge acquisition, which will be applied practically for development".

What constitutes reading?

Reading is an act of decoding written or printed material. When you are reading it means that, you can actually comprehend and interpret material which is printed or written. Reading requires the ability to absorb, comprehend and imagine. Unfortunately, this is too much trouble for the masses today. There are different types of reading. There is silent

reading and reading aloud (oral reading). Silent reading involves reading what is written or expressed without making any sound. In this case, the comprehension is not articulated or voiced out, but rather internalized silently in one's mind. Reading aloud involves speaking the written or comprehended words aloud to one's own hearing and to the hearing of anyone listening. Reading material comes in various formats. There is reading material in print, in electronic format, in digital format, in picture format, in sign format and so on. Therefore, there is reading of print material, reading of electronic material, reading of signs, and even reading of body language.

Reading as communication is the one way process of getting information which you can process and make use of. Reading as habit is a process whereby without picking up reading materials in the usual formats, one walks along, sees and comprehends, reads and imbibes from what is going on around one. One as such gets into the habit of reading. As this continually takes place, a culture of communication, permanent communication is formed. It is against this background that the premise is made that a reading culture can be promoted and a reading cycle adhered to for life.

The Reading Cycle

When does one start reading? One starts reading from the womb. Yes, strange as it may sound, there is pre-natal or neo-natal reading. Researches have been carried out on this and it has been discovered that mothers who read to their babies while in the womb have brilliant children who are interested in reading, besides, early childhood literacy can have significant effects on young people's developmental trajectories into adulthood (Meyers, Zaminpaima and Frederico, 2014). The reading habit progresses to school and throughout schooling years and ends up eventually being a life-long habit. This habit, the individual exhibits till he dies.

Reading gives emotional satisfaction and also helps the student attain aesthetic pleasure and knowledge about the world; knowledge derived from books (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). The cycle of reading and gaining life-long knowledge can be promoted consciously right from the start of life. Mothers are especially well placed to handle this early child aspect of education, and fathers need to cooperate with them in this bid.

Librarians can also be promoters of the reading cycle, promoters of good reading culture. Librarians manage and process the books in their care, recommend books, direct users to the materials and resources they want to read. In this information seeking process, who is to read? Who is to promote reading? The onus is on librarians to be in the forefront of promoting a good reading culture. School librarians are particularly challenged to be reading culture advocates and ensure that the reading cycle is not broken.

Memories of Reading

To illustrate how reading culture can be promoted with positive actions, I will use myself as a case study and narrate my experiences, my memories of reading. As a child, I have memories of stories being read to us children in the house at bedtime. I remember in particular a series called Uncle Arthur's bedtime stories. Each night, a story was read, or parts of a story that was continued the following night. They were enjoyable times!

In nursery school, our teachers had story time for us, where stories and simple tales were read to us aloud. Janet and John series were favourites back then. In Primary school, Eze

goes to school, Chike and the river, Alawiye (Apa kinni si Apa kefa) i.e. parts 1 to six, and Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale by D. O. Fagunwa were books we read, or had read to us. In fact, it is mainly from Ogboju Ode that I learnt to speak Yoruba at about age 7 as we were brought up in my home speaking English as our first language. English was also the language of instruction at school. My mother was non-Yoruba speaking.

In adolescence during my secondary schooling, I remember reading books from the African Writer's Series, Mills and Boon Romance novels, Nancy Drew detective novels, and even more serious books like Lobsang Rampa, Perry Mason series and all kinds of literature in various genres – Drama, Poetry, Fiction, Non-fiction, all for leisure reading.

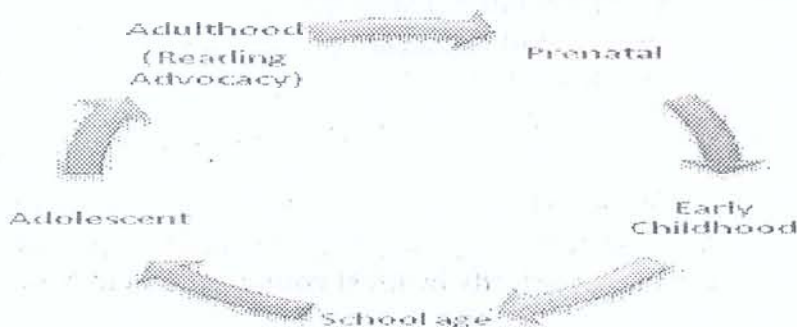
My mother's adage was "An idle mind is the devil's workshop" and therefore, if you had time to spare, you were to make sure you used the spare time reading. Reading the Bible was a foregone conclusion! We got books as birthday gifts from our uncles, aunts and grandparents. I remember my thirteenth birthday (much celebrated because it was the beginning of the "teen" age), and that I was given a book titled "" by Catherine Cookson. I adopted a phrase from it as my motto: "Never say die".

The penchant for reading in our home is not unconnected with the fact that my maternal grandfather was a well-educated man and must have instilled as much in his daughter, my mother that she took the pains to instill in us as well, My grandfather HRH Etifit Edyang wrote the first book in the Efik language way back in the early 1900s or thereabouts, titled "Sidibe". I have been trying to lay my hands on a copy of the book ever since even though I cannot read Efik nor speak much of it.

University life to date at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife), and the University of Ibadan, has seen me reading required textbooks, and conducting research as desired, but, always leaving room no matter how small for reading for pleasure or recreation. It is a habit I have formed. I always have a book to read for pleasure, no matter how long it takes me to read the book. Little wonder that I am a librarian today!

The Reading Journey - A Model

From the foregoing, one can see that a reading cycle has been followed, albeit unintentionally from one stage to the other. The reading pattern has changed from being read to, guided reading in school, to independent reading, that is reading by oneself by choice, to further guided reading in higher school with independent reading continuing and then the reader going through the cycle of reading aloud to children and so it goes on cyclically, for life. The reading journey starts from the Baby Stage, proceeds to the Early Childhood Stage, progresses to Reading and Writing Stage and results in the Book Lovers Stage which can unfold into the Reading Advocacy Stage (See Figure 1).



Reading Advocacy

Advocacy is the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support (American Heritage Dictionary). To become an advocate, you must be a believer in the value of library media programs. Reading Advocacy is a process which entails actively participating in activities that are aimed at bringing the importance of reading to people. This is through any medium of communication – talking, lobbying, and campaigning on air, in print and so on.

Maya Angelou, the renowned writer who passed away on May 28th, 2014 was a powerful library advocate and by implication, a reading advocate. She is reported to have found calm and inspiration in a small school library in her young years. She read books – they helped her get back her focus in life after a traumatic experience (<http://tclibraryblog.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/remembering-maya-angelou-library-advocate-among-other-things>).

The Guardian of Tuesday 15 October, 2013 reports that Neill Gaiman described extensively why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming. In the report, Gaiman (2013) also explains the importance of reading advocates for parents', teachers and educators' cooperation and collaboration in encouraging reading.

There are several angles to the reading advocacy issue. A Nigerian critic and author, Augusta Okon for example, proposes that film adaptations can revive reading culture. As blogged in a post by Simply SAMAD (2013), Okon believes that film adaptation can be done of material from any genre of literature – poems, plays, short stories, and even comics. The combination of film and literature will make one want to read the book, and this can revitalize the reading culture in Nigeria (<http://simplysamad.blogspot.com/2013/05/film-adaptations-can-revive-reading.html>). This type of activity is a form of reading culture advocacy. One should simply choose the method that best suit one's own taste and work on it.

The filmmaker, Tunde Kelani has in recent times been making film adaptations of books. He premiered a film "Dazzling Mirage", an adaptation of a novel written by Yinka Egbohare not too long ago in the University of Ibadan. It is such adaptations that can be a means to encouraging reading culture. Viewers are prompted to get the book and read for the added pleasure to be derived.

Another example of a Reading Advocacy project is the "Magical Books" project set up by a graduate of the University of Ibadan, Oluwaseun Aina (nee Oti). The Magical books project is a not-for-profit programme which seeks to promote a good reading culture among young children aged 4 to 15 years old, and adults who need to acquire good reading habits. The programme involves going to schools to sensitize students to the importance of reading for pleasure, and teaching reading skills where such are lacking. Summer reading programmes are arranged annually and the social media is also used to connect with the participants, volunteers and partners of Magical books (<http://magicalbooks4all>).

Conclusion

Reading Culture Advocacy is necessary for any forward looking community of people. The reading material need not be in a foreign language. Reading for pleasure is the key. It is sad that books are not considered priority by most young and old in Nigeria. An appeal

is herewith made to all stakeholders – parents, librarians, youths, the elderly, government agencies concerned, non-governmental organizations, and importantly, individuals – we can make a difference. If everyone made up his/her mind to be a Reading Culture Ambassador/Advocate (RCA),

I am proud to be a Reading Culture Ambassador/Advocate (RCA).. I am an RCA! Are you willing to be one?

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