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School Variables and Students' Reading Culture in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District

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Abstract

The study determined the influence of school variables on students' reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. Three research questions and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 22,372 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in the study area; with a sum total of 85 public secondary schools. A sample of 1237 students was selected from the study population through a multi-staged sampling procedure, representing five percent of the study population. A self-structured questionnaire developed by the researcher entitled "School Variables and Students Reading Culture (SVSRC)," was used for data collection. Mean and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research questions while Dependent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses, at the degree of freedom of 1236 and at .05 significant level respectively. Analysis of the study revealed that there exist a very high positive and significant influence of classroom physical climate, availability of literacy materials in schools and study habit guidance in schools on students' reading culture in the study area. The study recommended among other things, that Government should expose learners to literacy materials and provide guidance on their utilization.

Keywords: School Variables, Students, Reading Culture, Public Secondary Schools

Introduction

The school is a social institution designed for training of citizens for national development. At any level of education, be it primary, secondary or tertiary, reading is very common and it is the primary thing that should characterize a student's life. It is the objective of the FRN (2013) to use the 6-3-3-4 system of education to make individuals self-reliant, productive and efficient, thereby contributing to a great extent to national developments. On this note it is expected that students in public secondary schools should be able to develop reading culture that is capable of improving their academic status and acquisition of worthwhile knowledge/skills. Bond and Tinker (2003), remark that proficient reading is necessary for success at all levels of education. It is an essential tool for learning a large portion of subject matter throughout successive school levels.

Reading is very strategic in the daily life of the literate people. There is no way any individual can survive the academic rigours and demands of schooling if the person cannot read very well or at all. It was the culture in the times past for pupils in the primary students in the secondary,

and other learners in colleges and universities to be exposed and made to read widely so as to cover several class reading materials. Today, students no longer boast of the number of reading materials they cover within a given period but can tell you the number of home video films and fun oriented television programmes they have watched on daily basis.

Edward Lee Thorndike 1874 -1949 is one of the greatest contributors to learning theories. He propounded the Stimulus Response Theory, which links sensory activities (events) to behaviour. The theory states that there exists formation of bonds or connections between stimulus and response (S-R). Stimulus in this context refers to the source of energy that is capable of activating sensory organs. Thorndike believed that stimulus and response are connected by neutral bonds. The author was of the view that learning occurs through trial and error, hence constituting the basic form of learning. Thus, this theory serves as a theoretical framework to habit formation. According to this theory, three crucial elements are required for habit formation to occur in an organism: a stimulus, which elicits behaviour; a response, which establishes bond; and reinforcement, which brings about repetition and consequent habit formation. Reinforcement is a vital element in the language learning process as it increases the likelihood that a positively reinforced behaviour will occur again and again and eventually become a habit.

Stimulus response theory is relevant to this study in that it is explicit on what influences students reading culture in public secondary schools. The teacher in this context is the organism; the stimulus is the reading material while the response is the students' reaction to reading. Reinforcement could be in terms of extrinsic approval and recognition or intrinsic self-satisfaction. Thus, the theory by implication reveals to us that the extent to which reinforcement is used by the teacher to motivate the students will determine the students' habitual response towards reading. It also implies that there must be a connection between the stimulus (reading materials) and the response (students' reaction to reading) for a proficient reading culture to be developed. This is because absence of literacy materials influences students' reaction to reading.

Reading is not only an indispensable tool for learning but also forms an integral part of any learning situation, and consequently, the bedrock of education. Therefore, access to information is crucial to individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Information is sine qua non to educational growth and, according to Yusuf (2007), bridges the gap between knowledge and ignorance. One of the major avenues for acquiring information is reading. Reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built. It offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary, word power, and language skills. Tella and Akande (2007) assert that the ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning, and that it is an art capable of transforming life and society.

Adetunji (2007) described reading as the act of translating symbols or letters into words or sentences that have meaning to an individual. It is also the understanding of what is seen in a text

through visual senses and the ability to process information from materials and obtain meaning from it. Reading, according to Hornby (2000) means to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols. Reading is a unique human activity that is characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reader. The reader seeks to understand the meaning of a written text; evaluates its significance and uses what he or she has read to enhance his or her knowledge, effectiveness or pleasure. Voluntary reading is important not just for personal uses and life-long education, but even for learning in schools. It requires a lot of reading to become a fluent reader. In its broad meaning therefore, Ogbonna (2014) stated that reading literally refers to the ability to recognize and understand characters or speak words that may be printed or written on paper and other formats of recording human knowledge. Reading is the ability to obtain meaning from words. The ability to read and write is called literacy, and a person who can read is said to be literate, while a person who lacks the ability to read is said to be illiterate.

Reading culture is the key-stone upon which the lives of some eminent successful personalities and students are laid in order to sustain lifelong learning. Great minds have made impact on the world through reading culture which they developed as important part of their routine activity. In support, Akinbola (2007), quoting from the submission of the Nigeria University Commission (NUC), stated that reading culture is a sustained regime of reading textual and non-textual materials for the purpose of broadening the horizon of knowledge within and outside one's disciplinary interest. A student must read beyond and show interest in reading information resources outside his chosen career and vocation for such a student to be included among those that have good reading culture.

Furthermore, reading culture is a culture where reading is highly valued and is also a habit among members of the population. Magara and Batambuze (2005) opined that a reading culture means that reading is part of a specific culture and a habit that is shared and highly valued by a society. It is valued in the sense that it is considered important in order to gain the information which is needed for everyday life. Gabriel, Basse and Randy (2004) added that reading culture is the stage where reading becomes a complete self-directed pleasurable activity, whose goal is to engender lifelong love for reading. Reading is an internalized habit and a means of relaxation, culminating into life-long learning. Secondary schools students must inculcate reading as part of their value system in order to be adjudged as people that have reading culture. For instance Nigeria has launched several programs on reading campaign in order to bring about improvement in the nation's reading culture. However, these campaigns "into alia" have been unrealizable because the nation's value system is not centered on reading and articulation of knowledge but on certification.

It must be noted, that the ability to read and write alone among public secondary school students does not lead to reading culture. Reading must play a significant role in a student's day to day

life and become a way of life in order to constitute reading culture. Furthermore, secondary school students must engage themselves in active reading whether in school, outside school, during examinations and otherwise for reading culture to be attained. Consequently, for a reading culture to be possible, reading must be part of all aspects of life, and not just limited to school or work (Magara & Batambuze, 2005). In support, Oguntayo (2008) asserts that most of the students only read when it is unavoidable such as when they are in school studying to pass examinations and once they pass, they bid goodbye to reading. This is why some students in public secondary school are said to have poor reading culture. Furthermore, reading culture involves a functional practical aspect, where people read for the purpose of improving their knowledge or helping themselves to improve their situation (Murethi & Kipchumba, 2005). The importance of reading culture as a vital tool for personal and national development, highlights the need for its proper development among Nigerians in particular and other students.

Developing reading culture fosters love for reading among learners because it enhances positive reading habit. Habit is a tendency to repeat an act again and again. Habits are regularly repeated behaviour that required little or no thought and is learned rather than innate (Encyclopedia Britannica). The habit of reading can only be cultivated through constant or regular and dedicated reading of information resources by children and young adults because it enhances the acquisition of knowledge which can be applied practically for development. According to Gbadamosi (2007), reading culture evolves when an individual habitually and regularly reads books and other information materials that are not necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career. Becoming a skilled adaptive reader enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. Anybody who cannot read finds it difficult to solve the problems of everyday life. It is believed that people who read always find the solutions to the mysteries of life and living.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school education is the bedrock and foundation toward the acquisition of higher level knowledge and skills. This level of education is expected to foster the worth and development of the individual. Again, secondary school education in Nigeria is geared towards achieving the development of the society and equality of educational opportunities to all children, irrespective of any real or marginal disability. Sadly the researchers observed that students' performances in tests and examinations have been so poor and discouraging. For instance, the report from the West African Examination Council (WAEC) 2016 showed that only 53 percent of the students or candidates had credits in 5 subjects and above, including English and Mathematics while 47 percent failed. This abysmal failure may be linked to poor reading culture. Reading is not considered as a relevant leisure activity by most students, as it does not form part of children's social interaction.

As observed by the researchers, most students prefer giving some form of financial inducement to teachers in a bid to pass. Some students make extra effort to get themselves registered in a special centres, sometimes called “miracle centre” in order to perfect their arrangement for examination fraud. This happens as a result of poor reading culture. Some students prefer watching of home videos, chatting through cell phones, video games and other viewing gadgets to reading. Scholars and authors, have observed this situation, and attributed the poor state of reading culture among students in public schools to socio-economic background of parents. The question which has arisen therefore is weather the aforementioned phenomenon could be the only source of this problem. Thus, to fill the gap which other researchers failed to address, the present study sought to find out the influence of school variables on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to determine the influence of school variables on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. In specific terms, the study sought to ascertain.

- The influence of classroom physical climate on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.
- The influence of availability of literacy materials in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.
- The influence of study habit guidance in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- 1) What influence has classroom physical climate on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?
- 2) What influence has availability of literacy materials in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?
- 3) What influence has study habit guidance in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- 1) There is no significant influence of classroom physical climate on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District
- 2) There is no significant influence of availability of literacy materials in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District

- 3) There is no significant influence of study habit guidance in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Method

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The population of the study comprised of all the 22,372 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in the study area. A sample of 1237 students was selected from the study population through a multi-staged sampling procedure which was five percent of the total population. The rationale for using five percent was due to an enlarged population, and also to have a valid and reliable study done. The instrument used for the study was a validated researcher's made questionnaire entitled: School Variable and Students reading Culture (SVSRC), which was structured to conform to four point rating scale. The questionnaire contained three sections. Section A was on demographic data of the respondents. Section B was designed to collect information that represents items under the independent variables while section C contains items, under the dependent variables. The instrument was validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation and its reliability after the use of Conbach alpha (a statistical measure of internal consistency of instrument was 0.85. The instruments were administered to the subjects in their respective schools with the help of two research assistants. The retrieved copies of the questionnaire were collected and analyzed using mean and standard deviation in answering the research questions while Dependent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses, all at 1236 degree of freedom and at .05 significant levels.

Decision Rule

In answering the research questions 1 -3, the mean scores used to answer the level of influence school variables have on students reading culture were adopted from Uzoagulu (2011) interpretations as follows:

- 0.5 to 2.4 – very weak negative influence
- 2.4 to 5.0 – weak negative influence
- 5.0 to 7.4 – weak positive influence
- 7.4 to 9.0 – moderate positive influence
- 9.0 to 12.5 – high positive influence
- 12.5 to 16.5 – very high positive influence

In testing the null hypotheses, the calculated t-values were compared with the critical t-value at .05 significant levels. Where the former was greater than the later, the null hypotheses was rejected and otherwise retained.

Results

Research Question 1

What influence has classroom physical climate on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Table 1: Mean score of classroom physical climate and students reading culture (N = 1237)

Variables	x	SD	Remark
Classroom physical climate	15.07	1.91	Very High positive influence
Students reading culture	15.26	2.11	

In Table 1, the result indicates the mean scores of 15.07 and 15.26 for classroom physical climate and students reading culture. The result shows that classroom physical climate has a mean score within 12.5 and 16.5, which indicates a very high positive influence of classroom physical climate on students reading culture. This result therefore implies that students in the study area tend to develop the culture of reading when the classroom physical climate is favourable and conducive for reading.

Research Question 2

What influence has availability of literacy materials in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Table 2: Mean score of availability of literacy materials and students reading culture (N = 1237)

Variables	x	SD	Remark
Availability of literacy materials	15.05	1.88	Very High positive influence
Students reading culture	15.26	2.11	

Table 2 shows that availability of literacy materials and students reading culture show mean scores of 15.05 and 15.26 respectively. From the decision rule, it is observed that the mean score of availability of literacy materials falls within 12.5 and 16.5, showing that availability of literacy materials has a very high positive influence on students reading culture. It therefore implies that availability of literacy materials make students to place high value on reading.

Research Question 3

What influence has study habit guidance in schools on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Table 3: Mean score of study habit guidance in schools and students reading culture (N = 1237)

Variables	x	SD	Remark
Study habit guidance in schools	15.13	1.97	Very High positive influence
Students reading culture	15.26	2.11	

The result in Table 3 shows that study habit guidance in schools and students reading culture show mean scores of 15.13 and 15.26 respectively. From the decision rule, it is observed that the mean score of study habit guidance in school falls within 12.5 and 16.5, showing that study habit guidance in schools has a very high positive influence on students reading culture in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. This implies that reading tends to be highly valued by students when they are properly guided by school counsellors on how to develop effective reading culture.

Hypothesis 1: Classroom physical climate has no significant influence on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Table 4: Summary of Dependent t-test Analysis on the influence of classroom physical climate on students reading culture (N = 1237)

Variables	X	SD	df	t-cal	r-crit	Decision
Classroom physical climate	15.07	1.91	1236	253.9	1.96	Significant
Students reading culture	15.26	2.11				

Significant at $P < .05$, $df = 1236$

The result on Table 4 indicates a calculated t-value of 53.9 and a critical t-value of 1.96 at the degree of freedom 1236 and at 0.5 significant levels. Hence, since the calculated t-value is greater than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of classroom physical climate on students reading culture in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This implies that students tend to develop positive reading culture when the classroom physical climate is favourable, well equipped with facilities/equipments for students to read.

Hypothesis 2: Availability of literacy materials in schools has no significant influence on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District

Table 5: Summary of Dependent t-test Analysis on the influence of availability of literacy materials in schools on students reading culture (N = 1237)

Variables	X	SD	df	t-cal	r-crit	Decision
Availability of literacy materials	15.0	51.88	1236	281.1	1.96	Significant
Students reading culture	15.26	2.11				

Significant at $P < .05$, $df = 1236$

The result on Table 5 indicates a calculated t-value of 281.1 and a critical t-value of 1.96 at the degree of freedom of 1236 and at .05 significant levels. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of availability of literacy materials in schools on students reading culture in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This implies that students tend to be active readers when literacy materials are available in schools for them to read.

Hypothesis 3: Study habit guidance in schools has no significant influence on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Table 6: Summary of Dependent t-test Analysis on the influence of study habit guidance in schools on students reading culture (N= 1237)

Variables	X	SD	df	t-cal	r-crit	Decision
Study habit guidance in schools	15.13	1.97	1236	253.7	1.96	Significant
Students reading culture	15.26	2.11				

Significant at $P < .05$, $df = 1236$

Table 6 shows that the calculated t-value of 258.7 exceeds that critical value of 1.96 at the degree of freedom of 1236 and at 0.5 significant levels. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that study habit guidance in schools no significant influence on students reading culture in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This implies that students tend to cultivate the culture of reading when they are properly enlightened and guided by school counsellors on how to develop effective study skills/habits.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the influence of school variables on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. Discussion of the results of this study was primarily based on the five research questions and hypotheses that were formulated for the study.

Classroom Physical Climate and Students Reading Culture

The results from the research question one and hypothesis two showed that there is a very high and significant influence of classroom physical climate and students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. The reason may be due to the fact that the physical climate of the classroom is not conducive. A classroom without chairs, tables, windows that would allow cross ventilation can deter students from cultivating reading culture. This finding is in conformity with the finding of the study conducted by Hussain, Ahmad, Din and Khalid (2012), who found that unattractive and old school buildings with cracked classroom walls and floors, lack of desks and benches, lack of proper security system, lack of ventilation as well as classroom overcrowdedness have negative influence on students reading culture and performance. Macaulay (2000) also found that a well-structured classroom can enhance students' interest in reading. In relation to this finding, the researcher wishes to observe that students reading culture tend to develop when the classroom physical environment is well-equipped with facilities/equipment favourable for students to read.

Availability of Literacy Materials in Schools and Students Reading Culture

The results from research question two and hypothesis two revealed that there is a very high positive and significant influence of availability of literacy materials on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. The reason may be due to non-availability of a functional library with materials for the students to read; and not being able to access the material. This finding is in line with the finding of the study conducted by Ikonta (2002) and Offorma (2007) who found that availability of literacy materials and accessibility to these resources influence learners' performance and their development of reading skills. This finding is also in tandem with the finding from the study conducted by Ahmed (2004), which revealed that the utilization of versatile literacy materials enhances students literacy skills in reading, thus, enhancing the development of reading culture among students. In relation to this finding, the researcher wishes to observe that students' development of reading culture is determined by availability of literacy materials in schools, utilization and accessibility to the materials by learners.

Study Habit Guidance in Schools and Students Reading Culture

The results from the research question three and hypothesis three showed that there is a very high positive and significant influence of study habit guidance on students reading culture in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. The reason for this may be that students are not guided by the school counsellor on how to develop personal study schedule and reading skills. This finding is in agreement with the finding from the study conducted by Hudesman, LoveDay, Wendell and Griemsmann (2006), which showed that students in structured counselling condition in schools had higher reading ability than those in non-directive counselling condition at the end of every semester. Again, this finding is in line with the finding

from study conducted by Francis (2007), who examined the positive effects of school counselling on students reading habit. Therefore in relation to this finding, the researcher wishes to observe that students tend to develop positive reading culture, when they are guided by school counsellors on how to develop personal study schedule and reading skills.

Conclusion

Through the results of this study, it is concluded that students reading culture in secondary school would be strengthened by exposing them to literacy materials, a conducive and favourable classroom physical climate as well as proper study habit guidance in schools by school counsellors. Systematic implementation of the above school variables can empower our students to become lifelong learners and to have a successful career. Secondary schools where reading culture is instituted will be able to produce students who are productive, thus, making them unveil the potentials.

Recommendations

- (1) The Akwa Ibom State Government in collaboration with State Secondary Education Board should make the physical climate of the classroom favourable and conducive by providing good chairs and tables among other things for the students as this will make the students comfortable thereby promoting effective reading culture.
- (2) The Ministry of Education through the agency of the State Secondary Education Board (SUBEB) should expose the learners to literacy materials by ensuring the release of literacy materials in public schools, provide guidance on their utilization and the materials made affordable and accessible. This will encourage students to develop a long lasting reading culture.
- (3) The school counsellors should always provide prompt guidance to students' on how to develop personal study habit/skills. This can be done through organising individual and group counselling sessions, where they will encounter students individually and in smaller groups. This will afford the students and the counsellor an opportunity to share information at close quarters, and such guidance would help convince the students on the importance of developing reading culture.

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