

READING CULTURE AND THE NIGERIAN CHILD

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the reading culture and the Nigerian child. Attempts were made at defining reading, reading culture and who the Nigerian child is. It has given some attention to what the reading class Teacher should do to lay a solid foundation for reading and nurture the seedling (activities for reading) in the child. Finally, useful recommendations which are believed would help schools and homes plant the seed of the reading culture in the life of Nigerian child were highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Many people are not aware of the importance of reading and reading culture to the Nigerian child. Preparing children to read according to Umolu (1986). is best developed as part of parents normal interaction with children in day-to-day activities. The average Nigerian child has minimal experience of print interpretation unlike children in the developed countries that are daily fed at home and in their societies with print. They are able to gain some basic knowledge before they begin formal schooling. The situation for the average Nigerian child is different. He comes from an illiterate home where there are no provision for reading and writing. He is from a society where he has to make a living for himself and also support his family through hawking goods at a very tender age, the child has little or no chance of gaining basic reading talk less of reading culture. For us to move forward comfortably without taking false steps like the toddling child, we need to be clear about the meaning of the terms; reading, reading culture and who the Nigerian child is. In order to be able to develop good reading habit in Nigerian child, this paper therefore, will focus on how we shall plant the seed, water and care for the plant of the reading culture. Practical suggestion on how the child can properly be nurtured and helped by the parents, reading teachers and government were presented.

WHAT IS READING?

Reading is defined here as the interpretation of print. It is a process of obtaining meaning from written language. Reading is also regarded as interacting with language that has been coded to print. Therefore, reading is a language process. (Umolu, 1986).

Wilson and Charmers (1988) stress that reading entails the processing of information in written and printed materials. From the above definition of

reading, it is obvious that reading is one of the highest functions of the human brain and of all creatures on earth only human beings can read. Reading is one of the most important functions in life, since virtually all learning is based on the ability to read.

Specifically, reading entails the acquisition of letters with the following sub-skills by the child. Recognition of letters and groups of letters that represent the sounds of English through phonics. Recognition of words and sentences (through the look and say, and look and do methods). Recognition of unfamiliar words from shape and knowledge of letters and combination of letters that represent the sounds of English through phonics. Reading from flash cards cut out and assembled letters. Reading from charts and diagrams, etc. reading from simple rhymes, poems and stories.

Outside the School, the child needs good reading ability in order to cope with the challenges of his everyday living. The child needs to read stories, newspapers, manual letters from friends and relations. As the child grows older, he may be required to fill forms, read signs, advertisements and instructions in medicine bottles or labels. Reading provides the child with enjoyment. It serves as a means of widening the child's intellectual horizons and developing in him a more stable and natural personality. If reading as a skill is so important, the next question is, whether every Nigerian child is able to read? And if yes, we would like to find out whether it has advanced to such a level that we can conveniently consider it to have become a culture.

THE READING CULTURE

The reading culture entails the full development of reading habit to such an extent that it has become a regular event in one's life. It has become part and parcel of the person. It requires no force to manifest itself. It has been widely acknowledged that a child who comes from a home where books are found and are read, is much more likely to be ready to read than a child who comes from where there are few or no books (Umolu, 1986). A society with a reading culture is usually highly literate. While travelling on short or long distances, members of such a society are usually found spending their time reading one magazine, novel, or the other. Every opportunity is developed to reading. Pieces of information and news items are usually disseminated quickly through print in such a society.

THE NIGERIAN CHILD

The Nigerian child does not come from the sun; neither does he land from the star. He is a product of the society. Can the child be different from the society? That is the problem. That is why the teachers, parents and societies must take up the challenge and make the Nigerian child different. Fagbemi (1997), stated that the high illiteracy level in country has not made for a positive attitude

among the citizens to a reading culture. When you can not decipher a letter from another, a reading culture cannot be possible. That unfortunately is the problem facing at least half of the Nigerian population. Since the average Nigerian child has not emerged from a society with reading culture, we now have the task of planting that seed of reading in the Child, water it and ensure it develops to fruition.

INTRODUCING A READING CULTURE IN THE NIGERIAN CHILD.

There is a question agitating one's mind with regard to this subjects matter. For example, how shall we plant the seed of reading culture?

HOW SHALL WE PLANT THE SEED OF READING CULTURE

The three pillars of the child's education must involve the home, the school and the government. We want to concentrate on the technical role of the schools and perhaps, the home, since the government's role is straight - forward in terms of provision of facilities and motivation.

The "How" shall be discussed under 3 sub-headings, namely:-

1. Planting the seed of reading
2. Watering the seedling of reading and
3. Caring for the plant of reading

PLANTING THE SEED OF READING

This is the stage of foundation laying of reading. It starts from activities for development of listening skill. From these we move on to activities for the development of speaking skill. It is after the child must have been drilled in the acts of listening and speaking skills that one move on to reading.

FOUNDATION LAYING ACTIVITIES FOR READING

In choosing activities for reading, the reading teachers take a number of factors into consideration. For example, the amount of pleasure derived is very important, because they learn much faster if the activities is being enjoyed also the activities that the reading teachers arranged to give children practice in letter, word and sentence recognition, spelling, sentence making, letter and word sound and so on. Here are a number of activities for the nursery and primary child where the foundation is laid

a. Bingo Game

The Teacher has thirty-six cards; there are six children with six different cards to match the teacher's thirty-six cards. The first to claim his cards from the teacher wins. The teacher turns up one card at a time. The child who recognizes and presents its equivalence claims it.

b. Jigsaw Puzzle

Provide boxes of jigsaw puzzle for the children. They can practice the building up or fixing of the jigsaw pieces.

c. What – is- Missing Game

Draw a list of objects on a chart and let something be missing from each line.



d. Odd Man Out Game

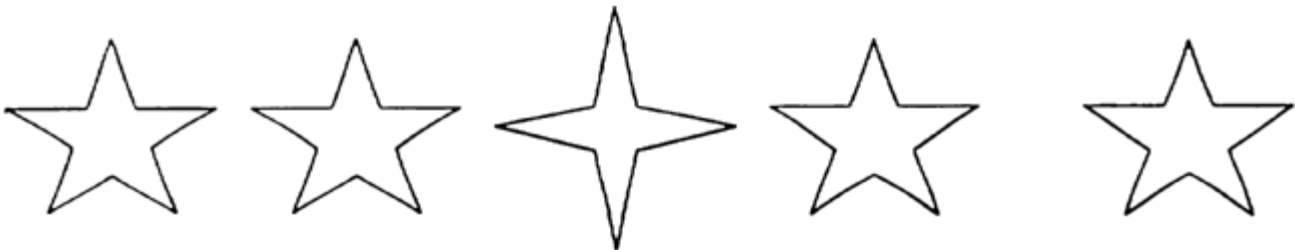
A list of objects drawn on a chart with one item per line odd. The Child is to identify the odd member.

WATERING THE SEEDLING OF READING

In watering the seedling of reading, we need to note all the skills the child must acquire during the foundation stage especially, the fact that the child can now use the language orally for different purposes.

Three methods of introducing reading are:

- the phonics method
- the look - and - say whole - word method
- the look - and - say sentence method.



The Phonics Methods

The Child reads a new word by saying aloud the Sound associated with each letter and putting the Sounds together in the correct order. For example apple, ball, cat and so on.

Guidelines:

- i. Phonics instruction is a listening activity based on sound. Teach the children by matching pictures and objects with letters.
- ii. Concentrate on initial letters first, that is, letter beginning a word – consonants in particular. Note also that consonants often have one letter representation while vowels have different letter representation.

- iii. Teach the Children only one letter – sound association at a time. This order of presentation has been found useful by experienced teacher of children e.g. Ff, Mm, Ss, Dd, Bb, etc.
- iv. Select a key word for each letter. The Children then have to associate each letter with the key word, which should be concrete objects. For example, Bb-Bell, Dd-Door, Ss-Salt, Mm-Mat, Bb-Bell etc.
- v. Introduce letters representing consonants first before going to letter representing vowels. For vowels draw attention through example to the different sounds e.g

English Letter	Phonetic	Examples	
	a	(ei)	-c <u>a</u> ge, l <u>a</u> cc, d <u>a</u> te, l <u>a</u> te
	aa	(æ)	-b <u>a</u> g, <u>a</u> xe, r <u>a</u> t, c <u>a</u> p
	ee	(i:)	-s <u>e</u> e, f <u>e</u> es, s <u>e</u> ed, t <u>r</u> ee
	e	(e)	-p <u>e</u> n, l <u>e</u> g, e <u>l</u> bow, e <u>g</u> g

Look - And - Say Whole - Word Method

Under this method the child is taught to recognize the whole word, not to build it up by pronouncing individual letters. A child is helped to learn by remembering the overall shape of a word. For example

Book 

Bell

Pencil
etc.

Look - And - Say Sentence Method

The look - and - say sentence method develops from the look - and - say whole - word method. The child learns to recognize the overall shape of the whole sentence and not individual words.

The teacher starts from short familiar sentences to longer ones with variations. For example:

Come here.

Sit down.

Touch the ball.

What is your name?

Whatever methods are used, the teacher must be sure to make them effective and must produce result.

CARING FOR THE PLANT OF READING

According to Umolu (1986), another excellent way to help pupils understand the value of reading for communication is for the teacher to make a Literary Awareness Programme (LAP) as part of her daily classroom schedule. To do this, a teacher must spend about ten minutes each day reading to the pupils from a good storybook. Just as children learn to value their oral tradition through story telling in the villages, they may also learn to value reading when their class teacher reads them to regularly. The entire teacher needs to implement Literary Awareness Programme, is a supply of interesting books and the ability to read stories in a way that both she and the pupils derive pleasure from them.

How to Organize Literary Awareness Programme

To organize Literary Awareness Programme, the teacher must set aside about 10 minutes each day on the timetable for Literary Awareness Programme, usually after break. The teacher shall choose simple and very interesting children's storybooks and ensure the books have large clear and beautiful pictures. During Literary Awareness Programme, the teacher teaches children to be good listeners, select stories that you and the children will enjoy. Organize Literary Awareness Programme under a tree outside the class or children sitting on a mat around you, or sitting in a semi-circle in the class. Show them the picture of the cover page to start with, and stimulate a discussion of the expected story in the book. Set a purpose for reading and listening by ending the discussion with "Let us find out what the story is about." Hold the book in such a way that the pupils can see the pictures as you read, or show them picture on each page. Read with facial and body expressions and a bit of drama to show the children that you enjoy it and to make the story seem real. At the end of loud reading, ask the pupils to discuss the story. Let them comment on and express their own opinion.

LITERARY AWARENESS PROGRAMME FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

One of the follow-up activities is for the teacher to ask them to draw the pictures or sketches of what they like best in the story. She shall then place the storybooks in a conspicuous but safe place in the class for the children to see, so that they can attempt reading on their own later.

DIFFERENT CHILDREN HAVE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

For some children, it may be through construction, drama or creative work. Just as children learn to speak by living in an environment where speech is part of life, so there must be visible evidence of labeled words in the classroom. For some children, the approach may be through the joy and pleasure of stories and rhymes well read from well written and well illustrated books. For some children, it come through interest in drawing and writing. Nowadays, more

teachers especially in private schools are using the children's drawings and recorded comments as a basis leading to development of skills and reading.

This just confirms that reading and writing are acquired from a background that is meaningful to the child's own experience. There must be opportunities for learning and teaching – through the creative activities and conditions of the classroom arrangements.

READING MATERIALS

The most suitable reading materials at the pre-school and primary stage are those, which deal with the child's direct experience at home and school – daily life and living. The teacher seizes opportunities for associating daily events with written words. For example, there may be written reminders about putting away pencils, washing of plates, clearing up the school compound. Also, a job chart can show whose turn it is, to do what: e.g.

JOB CHART
Ibrahim – clean the table
Ladi – sweep the classroom
Joy – ring the bell

There will be notice on: Our shop, book corner, home corner, etc. labeled things like children's name, door, window, tables, etc. All these aid in encouraging reading. Old and dirty charts and notices should be removed and changed from time to time.

The book corner should have lovely picture books of traditional stories and folk lore and other well known overseas books: e.g. I love to read: The Hungry Spider, and other folk tales. The teacher can make books for groups of children or individual children in connection with current or individual interests. There will be newssheets on the wall, or short wall stories displayed and read to the children. Through all the above, the child is learning to read informally and gradually in a play way method.

Having a set of dull reading books, should be discouraged. It is better to have a variety of few but good, well-illustrated books than just one large set of dull books. Readers must be bold, colourful and exciting to children.

CONCLUSION

The writer has tried to examine under what conditions children could form good reading habits. A strong point has been made in this write-up that the Nigerian child has not been granted to develop any reading culture. It is true that some children are privileged enough to some reading culture. The number of such children in Nigeria is insignificant.

As a matter of fact, every Nigerian child should be encouraged to imbibe a reading culture. The home and the school should work hand-in-hand to ensure that the child imbibes the required reading culture. The economic situation of the country is not helping matters in any way. This is why the government must do something positive to make books available and affordable.

Parents need not leave the whole task to the school. Apart from actually buying the books, parents should reinforce the efforts of the school by encouraging the children to do extensive reading at home, by showing genuine interest in what children read and by reading aloud to the younger ones who are still learning to read. Parents interest is a highly motivating factor which should be judiciously used. By the time children have imbibed a reading culture, this would help them throughout life. Apart from improvement and development of language skill, their horizon would be broadened for life.

Also every school today should aim at fastening a continuing love for reading rather than developing superficial reading skills. In order to be able to achieve this, the teacher must be imaginative, patient and tactful; she must have a positive attitude towards teaching and love for the children under her care. The above suggestions will boost and improve the reading culture in Nigeria. Teachers should make reading for our children such a fun subject that children will prefer reading to watching television. Our duty as teachers to help the children unlock the world by giving them the greatest gift of reading for fun, and for information, not only in passing examinations and getting certificates. By the time children have imbibed a reading culture, this would help them throughout life.

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