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**DWINDLING READING CULTURE IN THE INTERNET ERA AND THE
IMPERATIVE FOR LIFELONG READING**

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Abstract

This paper discusses dwindling reading culture in the internet era and presented a succinct imperative for lifelong reading. The paper examined reading, reading culture, lifelong reading, the internet era and its impact on reading culture and the imperative for lifelong reading. There is no doubt that the internet had contributed immensely to education for all. However, the proliferations of the internet and its resources such as social media have brought about shift in concentration from the reading pattern adapted from the inception of civilization to technology freaked society. It emphasized that proliferation of internet and digital media have changed the reading habits and as such it is fast disappearing into the thin air. It also expressed how the internet seems to have reduced the interest in reading of printed materials, vocabulary development, general knowledge and broadmindedness which individuals get from having good reading habits. The paper further identified the format of information resources to read and how to cultivate and sustain life long reading. The paper concluded that right attitude must be inculcated in a child right from infant and parents must encourage their children to read. The study recommended that individual, librarians, book sellers, publishers, teachers, government, mass media and the entertainment industry have distinctive roles to play in restoring our reading culture.

Keywords: reading; reading culture; internet; internet era; lifelong reading.

Introduction

Background to the Study

The use of internet and related digital media has exploded globally in the last few decades due to advancement in technology. Despite the positive values of the internet and these digital media, especially in the areas of providing access to information resources over geographical distances without barriers; reading, which has been identified as an academic activity for knowledge transfer, is presently stifled by the persistent use of the internet; and the culture of reading is fast fading away into the thin air due to this fray.

Reading is an individual's ability to identify symbols and the connection of suitable meaning to them. It is a conscious attempt towards comprehending and obtaining knowledge. It is also a systematic, deliberate task of gaining precise knowledge geared towards a criterion (Kojo, Agyekum and Arthur, 2018). Reading also adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. To appreciate the world and things around us, we read books, newspapers and others. Once we have been taught to read and have developed the culture of reading, we can explore the wealth of human experiences and knowledge. Reading is an intellectual activity which is possible only if a man forms the habit of reading and practices these from childhood. Reading of books is the most suitable medium through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation (Issa et al., 2012). As Gallo (2007) pointed out, reading books, yield their best to the individual if they read them at the time at which a particular masterpiece may ideally be chewed and digested.

Nkordeh et.al. (2017) described reading culture as the process of acquiring positive reading attitude among students and children over a length of time. When an individual regularly reads books and other materials such as magazines that are not necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career, he is said to have a reading culture.

The Internet is becoming the dominant force in the information world, transforming the ways in which information is aggregated, stored, searched, and retrieved (Ngugi and Mberia, 2014). The internet is the communication platform on which digital media content can be delivered to a wide variety of devices, including desktop computers, wireless laptops, smart phones, and other

mobile devices. The emergence of the Internet has created an extraordinary change in the reading culture. It has made its existence, fully or partially, in the reading behavior of the people. Over the past few decades, the growth of digital media, the rise of the Internet, and the proliferation of mobile devices have combined to burst open the very meaning of mass media (Bolter & Grusin 2000; Lister et al. 2009).

Due to technological development, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air (The Hindu, 2004). Students now lack the skill of reading; instead they spend more hours on electronic media. Browsing the net, playing with handsets and passing non-stop SMSs seem to be the order of the day, thereby making reading a book or any other piece of written material in a quiet or peaceful corner of a library or home become an archaic idea for most school children and adults (The Hindu, 2004). Obama (2008) in his speech pinpointed that children cannot achieve unless they raise their expectations and turn off television sets.

With the growing amount of digital information available, people particularly young adults are found spending more time reading electronic materials (Liu, 2005; Ramirez, 2003 in Ngugi and Mberia, 2014). They add that growing amount of reading time is spent more on skimming and browsing for information on the internet. On the other hand, the nature and purpose of reading seems to deviate as well from the traditional reading methods, which are brief, linear and less structured. They further observed that people are less engaged in the extensive reading and lack the ability to read deeply in the hypertext environment. Some researchers argued that the growth of electronic media may give negative implication to the fact that people are less engaged in extensive reading and lack the ability to read deeply and to sustain a prolonged engagement in reading (Liu, 2005 in Ngugi & Mberia, 2014). According to them, internet seems to have reduced the interest in reading of printed materials, vocabulary development and general knowledge, broadmindedness which individuals get from having good reading habits.

In People's Daily Online (2007) as cited by Loan (2011), The China Research Institute of Publishing Science survey finds that the number of Chinese reading traditional books has fallen while the number reading internet publications has increased sharply. The results discover that book reading rate was 60.4% in 1999, 51.7% in 2003, and 48.7% in 2005, falling 11% in six years. Although the popularity of book reading continues to fall, online reading has grown

rapidly, from 3.7% in 1999 to 18.3% in 2003 to 27.8% in 2005. Also, Perryman (1997) reported that Americans book reading habits is decreasing as the results of a study show that those who do not read a single book in a year doubled from 1975 to 1990 (8% to 16%).

Loan (2011) further reiterated that a significant proportion of the youth especially college students uses the Internet and they are potentially the largest group of users. They are well versed with the new technologies and their application in present networked society and are commonly known as the net/second generation students. The Internet has fixed deep roots in their lives than all other technological innovations. Broddason (2006) also argued that there was not only decrease in book reading but overall print reading due to the introduction of Internet. He reported that the percentage of youths reading newspapers daily were 89% in 1968 and in 2003 it was confirmed that only 40% are daily readers of newspapers. The findings of all the studies reveal that Internet has impacted on reading habits positively as well as negatively.

Nkordeh et.al. (2017) explained that recent statistics had shown that there has been a rapid decline in the reading culture of Nigerian students. Youths tend to spend their time online chatting, posting selfies, keeping up in the latest entertainment news and exhibiting celebrity mania and all these tend to have negative impact on their reading culture. Although, these internet technologies can be an alternative source of education with the introduction of web based technologies, e-learning facilities, online encyclopedias and blogs which have immensely helped in serving as an alternative to education amongst Nigerian youths, however, research also showed that only a few actually use them for educational purposes. The authors concluded that even though the social media had negative impact on the reading culture of youths, it also provides an alternative source of education but most Nigerian youths are not making full use of these opportunities and this has to be rectified by creating awareness on its benefits.

Statement of the Problem

What is Reading and Reading Culture?

Reading had been described by Ngugi and Mberia (2014) as one of the oldest habits of human civilization. It is the identification of symbols and association of appropriate meaning with them (Palani, 2012). It involves word recognition, comprehension, engagement and fluency. Reading

is a cornerstone for success not just in schools but throughout lifetime. Through reading, we acquire new ideas and knowledge, obtain needed information, relax the minds, and improve our command of language and vocabulary. It also serves as a good companion that provides pleasure, expand our horizons and enrich our lives.

Reading does not only increases our knowledge, but it also builds maturity and character, sharpens our thinking, and widens our awareness in social, economic, political, and environmental issues. It also helps in mental development and is known to stimulate the muscles of the eyes. One of the major means of acquiring information is through reading. It is an irreplaceable weapon for all - round growth and the fulfillment of one's potential. Reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built. Reading is a very essential way of learning and achieving any global academic breakthrough (Hassen, 2016). It was asserted by Tella and Akande (2007) 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. According to Nweke (1990) reading has important roles to play in the development of the individual. Reading is the key to unlocking future success (Inderjit, 2014).

Reading culture, on the other hand, is the process of acquiring a positive reading attitude among students and children over a length of time (Gbadamosi, 2007). When an individual regularly reads books and other materials such as magazines that are not necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career, he is said to have a reading culture. However, it is a fact that youths of today, in Nigeria, for instance, lack interest in reading. They prefer to spend hours on the social media, chatting, browsing the net, and all sorts of other things hours on end, thereby, making reading a book or any other piece of written material to seem to be an archaic idea for most youths (Eke, Omekwu & Odoh , 2014).

Kojo, Agyekum and Arthur (2018) postulated that if one develops the culture of reading regularly, then good reading culture has been formed. This is because a habit is formed unconsciously when an individual does something many times, and it then becomes a normal part of their life. According to him, many students do not belong to the category of those with a good reading culture; but, they rather prefer to be on social media than spend time acquiring knowledge through reading.

What is Life – Long Reading?

Lifelong reading is one that takes place throughout one's lifetime which is borne out of the passion and the desire to obtain information for enjoyment, educational, career and professional development geared towards all – round positive change. Lifelong reading introduces the fact that reading is not something that is time or classroom limited; rather a continuous reading activity throughout a lifetime. Frequent reading is related to the development of sophisticated language structures: higher levels of comprehension, improved word analysis skills, and fluency in significant amounts of voluntary reading, are associated with greater interest and skill development (Irving, International Reading Association, 2000).

Dwindling Reading Culture in the Internet Era

In this age of proliferation of Internet, technology is slowly taking steady control of individual lives and the passion to read is vanishing day by day (Igbokwe, 2012). Instead of complementing reading, it had dampened the reading zeal of Nigerians especially the youths. With the growing amount of digital information media (facebook, email, myspace, togo, youtube, whatsapp, LinkedIn, wikis, blogs, twitter, etc.) available, a year old child, for instance, prefers skimming on handset and gets accustomed to it that even at age three or four, he/she prefers handset to reading picture books. Also, young adults are found spending more time skimming and browsing the Internet and other electronic media and this has adversely affected the culture of lifelong reading among all.

Kojo, Agyekum and Arthur (2018) noted that the intensification of the use of social media among tertiary students has no doubt affected their reading culture negatively. Furthermore, the nature and purpose of reading seems to deviate from the reading methods, which are brief, linear and less structured. People of all ages are less engaged in extensive reading and lack the ability to read deeply in the hypertext environment. Some researchers argued that the growth of electronic media may have negative implication on extensive reading and this may hamper the ability to read deeply and to sustain a prolonged engagement in reading (Liu, 2005 in Ngugi & Mberia, 2014). It had been argued that education is a bridge to the future, an agent for human capital formation, a manpower industry that produces the knowledge and skills necessary for development (Adegbesan, 2010). It is therefore pertinent to note that education could be

enhanced through reading as it is interrelated with the total educational process and hence, educational success requires successful reading.

It must be noted that the use of Internet for educational purposes is of immense benefit especially for global relevance and currency. However, when it comes as a substitute for good reading competences, it should be a cause of concern. Internet seems to have reduced the interest in reading of printed materials, vocabulary development, general knowledge, and broadmindedness which individuals get from having good reading habits. In the light of the foregoing, it is imperative therefore, that reading is considered as a lifelong process that must be embraced by all ages (be it infant, youth, adult or old) irrespective of the cultural, social, political and ethnic affiliation of the individual. Also, reading should not just be for the purpose of passing an examination but rather a passionate habit for relaxation, enjoyment, general information, professional and personal development that will enhance positive change in the lives of individuals (Ngugi & Mberia, 2014)

According to Oji (2007), many parents, in particular, are concerned with their ward's social media habits such as browsing on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, telegram, palmchat, WhatsApp and other social media sites because they believe that their wards hardly have enough time to read or concentrate on their studies. The growing incidence of tertiary students using the internet not necessarily for academic purposes, but for social activities is worrying.

Nkordeh et.al. (2017) further reiterated that it was a fact that Nigerian youths of today now lack interest in reading. They prefer to spend hours on the social media, chatting, browsing the net, and all sorts of other things hours on end, thereby, making reading a book or any other piece of written material to seem to be an archaic idea for most youths (Eke, Omekwu & Odoh, 2014). Shehu and Shehu (2014) in their study on the challenges of Social Networking on Students' Reading Habit in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria found out that whenever a picture was posted on Facebook, it would get about 240 likes and 53 comments in 24 hours but if an article was posted, it would only be able to garner about 16 likes and 5 comments over that same 24 hour period. He felt very worried that many youths spent their time scrolling.

The Imperative for Lifelong Reading in the Internet Era

For reading to be meaningful, it is essential that young people learn not only to read but cultivate reading behavior for lifelong learning (Inderjit, 2014). With the growing amount of digital information available and the increasing amount of time that people spend reading electronic media, the digital environment has begun to affect people's reading. There is a general saying that "if you want to hide anything from an African, hide it in a book". Despite the benefits of Internet especially in the area of global relevance and currency, providing limitless and vast amount of information resources, it seems to have reduced the interest in reading of printed materials, vocabulary development and general knowledge. Web browsing and skimming have some limitations when compared with reading. Also, the Internet has done more harm to the reading habits of all. It is not organized collection; it takes time to locate and access information; sometimes subscription is required to access information; it doesn't have quality control; and it has fewer archival materials.

Igbokwe, et.al. (2012) posited that it was important for everyone to develop the rudiments and culture of reading always so as to survive in life. Not only this, reading must not be restricted to a particular period in one's life, but must be an activity throughout lifetime. Olukemi (2010) advised Nigerian youths to imbibe the reading culture in all their endeavours. She lamented that lack of reading culture among youths nowadays has greatly affected quality of graduates being produced by the nation's higher institutions. The Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu, who flagged off 2018 readership promotion campaign organized by the National Library of Nigeria in Abuja, said the readership promotion campaign became necessary following the obvious decline in reading culture among Nigerians. The minister who spoke through the Director, Education Support Services, Mrs. Justina Ibeh, said the entrance of modern technology had become a big threat to reading among younger generation (Eze, 2018).

Lifelong reading is imperative for the following reasons:

- **To function well in the society:** Many people (especially adults) could not function well in the society because they could not read. For example, instructions on medicine bottles, road signs, filling out applications and following maps are daily activities that many

people are finding difficult to cope with due to the fact that they cannot read. In order to function well in the society, it is imperative to be a lifelong reader.

- **For career advancement:** As part of job performance requirements, there are reports and memos which must be read and responded to from time to time. Promotion examinations are also conducted in most cases. All these require cultivated reading skills to succeed. Poor reading skills increase the amount of time it takes to absorb and react in the workplace and limits one in accomplishment. Hence, the need for lifelong reading.
- **It develops the mind and imagination:** The mind is a muscle that needs exercise. Understanding the written word (by reading) is one way the mind grows in its ability. Teaching young children to read helps them develop their language skills. It also helps them learn to listen. Reading helps children and adults focus on what someone else is communicating. It also expands the imaginative ability in children; in that they can reason beyond what they see and their minds can explore the world and predict what would happen next.
- **It helps in developing a good self- image:** Non-readers or poor readers often have low self - esteem of themselves and their abilities. They exhibit attitudes like self – dejection, isolation and other behavioural problems. Hence, it is expedient to read.
- **To be abreast of current happenings around the world:** Everyone has the right to information about what is going on in their environments. Among other means of gathering information is by reading. This helps in making rational decision and brings about transformation.

Formats of Information Resources for Lifelong Reading

S/N	What to Read	Purpose of Reading
1	Picture books, children’s poetry, children’s graphic novels, etc.	For developing children’s mental ability and reading skills from age one to school going age.
2	Textbooks on subject areas	For academic and intellectual development
2	Dailies (Newspapers), magazines	To be abreast of happenings in one’s environment and around the world

3	Reference materials e.g. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps, atlases, etc.	To be consulted from time to time for specific information
4	Bibles, Quran, Christian novels	For spiritual knowledge and growth
5	Novels, prose, poetry and literature texts	To develop the reasoning faculty and boost ones' sense of imagination

Cultivating and Sustaining Lifelong Reading Culture in the Internet Era

In cultivating and sustaining lifelong reading, efforts must be made to catch children young and stimulate the right attitude in them early in life before their minds get preoccupied with other things. Individuals, parents, school teachers, librarians, government, non – governmental organizations, authors, publishers and the media have their roles to play.

On the part of individuals, it is essential that young people learn not only to read to pass an examination or interviews, but they cultivate lifelong reading behavior for personal, professional, cultural development and to be abreast of current happenings around them and for fun/relaxation. Children should pick attractive materials, easy to comprehend, having pictorial and graphic representations. It must be understood that reading brings about information which assist in making wise decision and dispels one's state of ignorance.

As for parents, they must introduce picture books to children at infant when they begin to show interest in coloured or picture objects. They should also show good examples by engaging in reading; mentoring and guiding their children to read; setting up mini libraries for their children; convincing their children on the importance of reading; providing appropriate reading materials that suits their ages and information needs; discouraging addiction to television and social media; making time table to give room for leisure and reading; offering books as prizes & rewards and buying interesting books for their children.

Okundu (2005) in Ngugi and Mberia (2014) pointed out that reading culture should be inculcated at an early age among children. This is because reading and reading culture develop over a prolonged period of time and an early promotion will be able to mould them into lifelong readers. The challenge is therefore to ingrain the habit of reading in children so that it is as

important as sports and any other hobbies. Perhaps then, the impact of negative media will be directly reduced.

Furthermore, school teachers as well have many roles to play in cultivating and sustaining lifelong reading. They are the very people with whom society has entrusted the task of equipping the next generation to go beyond the present. As such, it is their duties to encourage students/pupils to develop positive attitude to reading right from elementary level; engaging them to read independently and as a group; introducing students to books especially for assignment and projects; assisting redundant readers by pairing them with intellectually sound students; giving prizes to students and organizing reading competitions among others. Considering that teachers play a pivotal role in helping children to develop and maintain a positive attitude towards literacy learning and reading, they should demonstrate a passion for reading and act as model readers for their students (Ngugi & Mberia, 2014).

The mass media likewise have their roles to play in sensitizing the general public through the radio and television. They can also organise reading competitions and quizzes that will be aired on radio and television which will encourage all. Also, programmes on readership promotion can be organised by inviting successful readers of all ages to speak and encourage the public on the need and benefits of lifelong reading.

The role of the entertainment industry cannot be overemphasized given its popularity among young people. Adegbilero-Iwari Idowu, an academic librarian with a passion for public libraries, suggested in his blog, *Blograrian*, that “in this era of **Reality Shows**, shows in reading and literacy under-scoring the values of libraries can be sponsored on network or national television stations by corporate organisations”. He further stated that “Nollywood can have what is called “**Nollywood Year of Reading (NYR)**” where films and soap operas are devoted to Reading and Library. The NYR can come up every 5year or 3year to start with” (Adegbilero-Iwari , 2017).

Libraries have big roles to play. The annual readership promotion campaign organized by the National Library of Nigeria should be accompanied with action on the part of librarians and library managers. Libraries must innovate with creative services and information materials that their user communities cannot do without. They must become hubs of communities and points of convergence for young and old, rich and poor. Adegbilero-Iwari (2017), in his poster accepted

for presentation at 2nd AFLIA conference in Yaoundé, suggested modern library services that can catalyse readership and personal development. Some of them are loanable technology services, Makerspace/FabLab, Wifi/Internet services, Local history service, story-telling service, cultural day, public information service and borrow a librarian service among others. Furthermore, publishers and booksellers alike in the book industry can also collaborate to encourage readership campaign.

The government at all levels is an indispensable body in sustaining lifelong reading. They are strong force whose involvements would make a lasting impact among all through the following: giving free books to students; strengthening library services through the provision of relevant and up to date information materials; reading advocacy programmes, building reading communities/ reading associations, etc. among others. Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), Book Aid International and Education Trust Fund (ETF) are some of the governmental and non - governmental organizations that provide incentives to educational institutions that are geared towards reading.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The imperative for lifelong reading in the Internet era had been demonstrated through this article. There is no doubt that the internet had contributed immensely to education for all. However, the proliferations of the internet and its resources such as social media have brought about shift in concentration from the reading pattern adapted from the inception of civilization to technology freaked society. Hence, people are no longer interested in reading books and this has negatively affected the reading pattern of many people.

It is imperative to note that lifelong reading stimulates the mind and imagination, enhances career development; improve one's language and vocabulary; keeps one abreast of current happening, helps in relaxing and renewing the mind among others. Skimming and browsing the Internet for information cannot be replaced with reading. A lifelong reading habit is imperative for all – round success. Thus, it must be embraced throughout lifetime.

In order to cultivate and sustain lifelong reading, every individual from infant to adult have his roles to play. Right attitude to reading must be inculcated in a child as early as age one when the child has attraction for pictures, at this stage, parents can introduce picture books to the child.

Teachers who are the role model of students in educational institutions also have their crucial roles to play by introducing students to literature text reading, group reading, giving assignments to students from textbooks, and organizing quizzes and reading competitions among students.

Librarians across different types of libraries must also make libraries user – friendly for readers; granting opportunity to readers to borrow books; acquiring, processing and making accessible relevant and up-to-date information that will motivate readers to consult textbooks and other information materials.

The government and the mass media can further strengthen lifelong reading by donating books to school; supporting library services through adequate funding; organizing awareness programmes on reading; organizing quizzes and competition on the media (radio and television).

Parents, teachers, lecturers, librarians, the government at all levels (Federal, State and Public) and the mass media are urged to rise to the task of restoring our reading values.

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