The Decline in Reading Culture Among Students in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of Secondary and Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Reading culture is one of the most essential aspects of learning process. If left unattended, it affects not only the learner, but also a nation's economy, its leadership and key institutions in society. This study is aimed at assessing the decline in reading culture among students in Nigeria using secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Rivers State as a case study. Descriptive research method and systematic sampling technique were used in this study. Two thousand four hundred (2,400) questionnaires were used to obtain authentic information from two thousand four hundred (2,400) respondents comprises 800 senior secondary students; 800 tertiary institution students and 800 teachers across the study area. Four (4) research questions with nineteen (19) sub items were generated from these questions. The data collected were analyzed using the Assumed Mean Method. The results revealed factors contributing to the decline in reading culture among students in Nigeria including excessive use of social media and mobile phones by students; lack of well-equipped libraries and current reading materials in schools; Poor motivation and encouragement from teachers and parents; bulkiness of work/ materials during examination and high cost of books and reading materials. It also revealed that a revived reading culture among students would improve academic performance, critical thinking, communication and writing skills, better moral behavior in society, creativity and innovations, nation building/development by producing more informed and responsible citizens. The researchers suggested based on results obtained, measures students, parents and government can adopt to address the above challenges and they are: regular funding and upgrading of school and public libraries by the government and school owners; organization of reading competitions, book clubs, and reading festivals in schools; provision of relevance books at home and setting aside reading time for reading by parents; integration of reading programs and rewards into the school curriculum to motivates students; and training /motivating teachers to act as reading role models to influences students' reading habits in schools. Students in higher institutions tend to read widely for personal development and they are more affected by mobile phones usage and social media as compared to their secondary counterparts.

Keywords: *Decline, reading culture, students, secondary schools, tertiary institutions, Rivers State, Nigeria*

Introduction

Reading is indeed a culture that all learners, irrespective of levels must imbibe to achieve success. It can be described as the act of critically reviewing or going through what was taught either by a teacher or a lecturer. Reading could be done individually or as a group depending on the environment or circumstances surrounding it. There is a modern saying which goes "A reading nation is a growing nation". In other words, reading is as important as the life we are living because it distinguishes one student from another anywhere, they find themselves. Aina et al. (2013) explained reading, as one of the most fundamental building blocks of learning, that requires the use of complex thought processes to interpret printed symbols as meaningful units, and to comprehend them as a thought unit in order to understand a printed message. Oyeyemi (2005) described reading as a way of acquiring knowledge as well as tapping knowledge from superior minds. Reading refers to as an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader. It involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serves as stimuli for the recall of meaning already possessed by the reader (Nwobi et al; 2021). Palani (2012) suggested that, effective reading is important avenue of effective learning and it is interrelated with the total educational process and hence, educational success demands successful reading culture either at secondary or in university level.

The reading culture in Africa as a whole is so poor that a certain white man once said, and I quote, "if you want to hide anything from an African, put it in a book". What he meant by that statement is that a typical African does not read (Innocent, 2020). Reading as one of the instruments in education has attracted various definitions in addition to the ones stated above. Reading is defined as the ability to interpret and decode an array of words through a cognitive process (Ayoti, 2015; Enamen, 2015). It is the complex act of dealing with communication in written or visual form (Ogwu, 2010). It is an act of interpreting meaning from written words (Akande and Adeyinka, 2007; Nalusiba, 2010). Reading is a learning skill which aids all other learning activities (Nalusiba, 2010). Again, reading is the activity of someone who reads. To read is to look at and understand the meaning of written words or symbols (Aina *et al*., 2011; Ogugua *et al*., 2015). Akong (2014) enumerated some of the effects of poor reading culture including negative effects on the society and the individual; leadership crises and poverty. At the societal level, it creates knowledge gap and retards development. Similarly, a society with poor reading culture is bound to have leadership crises because of dearth of knowledgeable leaders. At the individual level, poor reading culture impedes personal development and success in life. It has killed and incarcerated a lot of people because they have refused to read warning signs or instructions. It is the reason why many students both in secondary and tertiary institutions are not performing well academically today. Poor reading culture equally breeds poverty. The difference between the rich and the poor is nothing but knowledge, opportunity and its rightful application (Onyango *et al*., 2015). Reading culture declination in Nigeria had made most students in both secondary schools and university to drop out of school since they can't compete with their peers at their various levels. According to Nwagwu (2025), Teachers and NGOs vindicated that SSCE students refused to read, but rely on "miracle centres" promoting examination malpractice, and when they get to the university without any reading skills; they struggle to pass examination and drop out. This implies that, reading culture declination can push learners to become drop out as well as irrelevant in the society.

A review of the existing literature has acknowledged the prevalence of poor reading culture in Nigeria. To be more specific, the poor reading culture among primary and secondary school students in Nigeria has reached an alarming state (Innocent, 2020). Most authors focused on primary, secondary schools or university; but this study compares both secondary schools, college of educations, polytechnics and universities across Nigeria.

This study aims at assessing the decline in reading culture among students in Nigeria and also identifying factors contributing to the decline in reading culture among students in Nigeria; suggesting measures parents and government can implement to promote and sustain effective reading culture among students in Nigeria; suggesting ways positive reading culture among students in Nigeria can add values to the society and also compare student's reading culture in secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Nigeria using Rivers state as a case study.

Materials and Methods

Reading culture is a key to national and societal development and its negligence may compounded leading to severe outcomes on economy, governance, innovations and many others elements which this research tries to uncover them. To actualize the aims of this study, four research questions were put forward by the researchers and they are:

1) What factors contribute to the decline in reading culture among secondary and tertiary institution students in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2) What measures can parents and government implement to promote and sustain a reading culture among students in Rivers State, Nigeria, comparable to global standards?
3) What positive impacts would a revived reading culture have on society if consistently practiced in learning institutions across Rivers State, Nigeria?
4) How does the level of reading culture differ between secondary and tertiary institution students in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Eight hundred (800) students {each from secondary schools and higher institutions (polytechnics, college of education and universities)} and 800 teachers were selected across secondary schools and higher institutions in Rivers State making a total of two thousand four hundred respondents. These students and teachers were obtained from systematic sampling technique and they were chosen randomly from different locations across the study area. The areas chosen were selected secondary schools in Obio Akpor, Eleme, Tai, Port Harcourt, Oyigbo, Okrika, Gokana, Ikwerre, Khana Local Government Area e.t.c. The higher institutions adopted were University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University, Rivers State Polytechnic, Bori; Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Eastern Polytechic, and Federal College of Education, Omoku. The instruments adopted were questionnaires and were rated as strongly agreed (4 points), agreed (3 points), disagreed (2 points) and strongly disagreed (1 point). The instrument's administration was guided by the researchers as students and teachers expressed their views on the decline in reading culture among students in Nigeria: A comparative study of secondary and tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data analysis and interpretation was done using an assumed mean method.

Results and Discussion

The table below shows five items for research question 1 (What factors contribute to the decline in reading culture among secondary and tertiary institution students in Rivers State, Nigeria?) and the opinions of two thousand four hundred (2,400) respondents recorded across different secondary schools and higher institution in Rivers State:

S/no.	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Samples	Weighted Mean	Remark
1.	Excessive use of social media and mobile phones reduces students' interest in reading printed materials.	1,075	1,025	200	100	2,400	3.28	Accepted
2.	Lack of well-equipped libraries and current reading materials in schools contributes to poor reading culture.	700	925	500	275	2,400	2.85	Accepted
3.	Poor motivation and encouragement from teachers and parents discourage students from developing reading habits.	775	825	550	250	2,400	2.89	Accepted
4.	The emphasis on examination preparation over wide reading discourages students from reading outside their textbooks.	500	750	850	300	2,400	2.58	Accepted
5.	High cost of books and reading materials makes it difficult for students to cultivate a reading culture.	400	750	925	325	2,400	2.51	Accepted

According to Udofot and Eke (2025), the weighted means from the above table, for research question 1 were formulated using:

Weighted Mean = $\frac{(No.of\ SA\ x\ 4)+ (no.of\ A\ X\ 3) + (no.of\ D\ x\ 2)+ (no.of\ SD\ x\ 1)}{2{,}400}$

And they are: 3.28, 2.85, 3.89, 2.58 and 2.51 respectively.

For an acceptable result, from the weighted mean method of data analysis, the Weighted mean must start with 2.5 (Udofot & Eke, 2025).

From the above result, for the 1st item, 44.8% go for strongly agreed (SA); 42.7% go for agreed (A); 8.3% go for disagreed (D) and 4.2% go for strongly disagreed (SD).The weighted mean of 3.28 was recorded showing a positive result. This result revealed that excessive use of social media and mobile phones reduces students' interest in reading printed materials

For the 2nd item, 29.2% go for strongly agreed (SA); 38.5% go for agreed (A); 20.8% go for disagreed (D) and 11.5% go for strongly disagreed (SD). The weighted mean of 2.85 was recorded indicating a highly positive result. The result vindicated that lack of well-equipped libraries and current reading materials in schools contributes to poor reading culture in Nigeria.

For the 3rd item, 32.3% go for strongly agreed (SA); 34.4% go for agreed (A); 22.9% go disagreed (D) and 10.4% goes for strongly disagreed (SD). The weighted mean recorded was 2.89 showing that poor motivation and encouragement from teachers and parents discourage students from engaging in a purposeful reading in their various institutions across Nigeria.

For the 4th item, 20.8% go for strongly agreed (SA); 31.3% go for agreed (A); 35.4% go for disagreed (D) and 12.5% go for strongly disagreed (SD). The result, with the Weighted mean of 2.58 revealed that emphasis on examination preparation over wide reading discourages students from reading outside their textbooks.

For the 5th item, 16.9% go for strongly agreed (SA); 31.5% go for agreed (A); 38.7% go for disagreed (D) and 12.9% go for strongly disagreed (SD). The result shows a weighted mean of 2.51, vindicating an acceptable result. The result revealed that high cost of books and reading materials makes it difficult for students to cultivate a reading culture.

The second research question "What measures can parents and government implement to promote and sustain a reading culture among students in Rivers State, Nigeria, comparable to global standards?" seeks to provide modalities parents and government can adopt to promote and sustain effective reading culture in the study. The following are opinions of the respondents:

S/no.	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Samples	Weighted Mean	Remark
1.	Regular funding and upgrading of school and public libraries by the government would improve students' access to reading materials.	1,125	850	300	125	2,400	3.20	Accepted
2.	Organizing reading competitions, book clubs, and reading festivals in schools helps sustain students' interest in reading.	975	875	450	100	2,400	3.14	Accepted
3.	Parents providing books at home and setting aside reading time for their children encourages a stronger reading culture.	1,225	775	250	150	2,400	3.28	Accepted
4.	Integrating reading programs and rewards into the school curriculum motivates students to read more outside their textbooks.	1,250	700	325	125	2,400	3.28	Accepted
5.	Training and motivating teachers to act as reading role models positively influences students' reading habits.	400	975	850	175	2,400	2.67	Accepted

From the above result, for the 1st item, 46.9% go for strongly agreed (SA); 35.4% go for agreed (A); 12.5% go for disagreed (D) and 5.2% go for strongly disagreed (SD).The weighted mean of 3.20 was recorded indicating a positive result. This result showed that regular funding and

upgrading of school and public libraries by the government would improve students' access to reading materials.

For the 2nd item, 40.6% go for strongly agreed (SA); 36.5% go for agreed (A); 18.7% go for disagreed (D) and 4.2% go for strongly disagreed (SD). The weighted mean of 3.14 was recorded demonstrating a highly positive result. The result revealed that organizing reading competitions, book clubs, and reading festivals in schools by school owners and heads helps sustain students' interest in reading. For the 3rd item, 51.0% go for strongly agreed (SA); 32.3% go for agreed (A); 10.4% go disagreed (D) and 6.3% goes for strongly disagreed (SD). 2.89 was recorded as the weighted mean revealing that parents providing books at home and setting aside reading time for their children would encourage a stronger reading culture in their wards.

For the 4th item, 52.1% go for strongly agreed (SA); 29.2% go for agreed (A); 13.5% go for disagreed (D) and 5.2% go for strongly disagreed (SD); and with the

Weighted mean of 3.28 revealing that integration of reading programs and rewards into the school curriculum would motivate students to read more outside their textbooks.

For the 5th item, 16.7% go for strongly agreed (SA); 40.6% go for agreed (A); 35.4% go for disagreed (D) and 7.3% go for strongly disagreed (SD). The result revealed a weighted mean of 2.67, showing an acceptable result. The result showed that training and motivating teachers to act as reading role models would positively influences students' reading habits in the study area.

The third research question "What positive impacts would a revived reading culture have on society if consistently practiced in learning institutions across Rivers State, Nigeria?" seeks to identify ways positive reading culture among secondary and higher institution students in Nigeria would affect the society positively and following are opinions of the respondents:

S/no.	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Samples	Weighted Mean	Remark
1.	A revived reading culture would improve students' academic performance and critical thinking skills.	1,550	600	150	100	2,400	3.5	Accepted
2.	Increased reading habits among students would reduce social vices and promote better moral behavior in society.	575	900	675	250	2,400	2.75	Accepted
3.	A strong reading culture would enhance students' communication and writing abilities, making them more employable.	1,375	800	150	75	2,400	3.45	Accepted
4.	Consistent reading in schools would foster creativity and innovation among students in Rivers State.	950	1,025	250	175	2,400	3.15	Accepted
5.	A revived reading culture would contribute to national development by producing more informed and responsible citizens.	1,050	950	325	75	2,400	3.24	Accepted

From the above table, the 1st item recorded 64.6% for strongly agreed (SA); 25.0% for agreed (A); 6.2% for disagreed (D) and 4.2% for strongly disagreed (SD).The weighted mean of 3,5 was recorded showing a positive result. This result revealed that a revived reading culture would improve students' academic performance and critical thinking skills across the study if duly enforced by various institutions involved.

The 2nd item recorded 24.0% for strongly agreed (SA); 37.5% for agreed (A); 28.1% for disagreed (D) and 10.4% for strongly disagreed (SD). The weighted mean of 2.75 was obtained demonstrating a positive result. The result revealed that increased reading habits among students would reduce social vices and promote better moral behavior in society based on the level of knowledge acquired at various levels of education.

The 3rd item recorded 57.3% for strongly agreed (SA); 33.3% for agreed (A); 6.3% for disagreed (D) and 3.1% for strongly disagreed (SD). The weighted mean of 3.45 was recorded revealing that a strong reading culture would enhance students' communication and writing abilities, making them more employable in the society they find themselves.

The 4th item computed showed that 39.6% go for strongly agreed (SA); 42.7% go for agreed (A); 10.4% go for disagreed (D) and 3.1% go for strongly disagreed (SD); and has the
Weighted mean of 3.15 proving that consistent reading in schools would foster creativity and innovation among students in Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

The 5th item recorded 43.8% for strongly agreed (SA); 39.6% for agreed (A); 13.5% for disagreed (D) and 3.1% for strongly disagreed (SD). The result revealed a weighted mean of 3.24, showing an acceptable result. The result showed that a revived reading culture would contribute to national development by producing more informed and responsible citizens who would defend and contribute greatly to the growth of the nation.

The forth research question "How does the level of reading culture differ between secondary and tertiary institution students in Rivers State, Nigeria?" tends to compare the level of reading culture between the secondary and higher institution students in Nigeria, also how they are affected by social media usage. The following are opinions of the respondents:

S/no.	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Samples	Weighted Mean	Remark
1.	Secondary school students depend more on textbooks and notes than on wide reading compared to tertiary students.	925	975	325	175	2,400	3.10	Accepted
2.	Tertiary students have better access to libraries and reading resources than secondary school students in Rivers State.	750	975	525	150	2,400	2.97	Accepted
3.	Students in tertiary institutions show greater motivation to read for personal development than secondary school students.	475	750	850	325	2,400	2.57	Accepted
4.	Secondary school students are more influenced by social media distractions	375	450	1,075	500	2,400	2.29	Rejected

than tertiary institution students when it comes to reading.

From the above result, the 1st item recorded 38.5% for strongly agreed (SA); 40.6% for agreed (A); 13.5% for disagreed (D) and 7.4% for strongly disagreed (SD).The weighted mean of 3.10 was recorded showing a positive result. This result revealed that secondary school students depend more on textbooks and notes than on wide reading compared to tertiary students, hence, quality books and materials should be provided to boost their efforts.
For the 2nd item, 31.3% go for strongly agreed (SA); 40.6% go for agreed (A); 21.8% go for disagreed (D) and 6.3% go for strongly disagreed (SD). The weighted mean of 2.97 was recorded indicating a highly positive result. The result revealed that tertiary students have better access to libraries and reading resources than secondary school students in Rivers State.
For the 3rd item, 19.8% go for strongly agreed (SA); 31.3% go for agreed (A); 35.4% go disagreed (D) and 13.5% go for strongly disagreed (SD). 2.57 was recorded as the weighted mean revealing that students in tertiary institutions show greater motivation to read for personal development than secondary school students.
For the 4th item, 15.6% go for strongly agreed (SA); 18.8% go for agreed (A); 44.8% go for disagreed (D) and 20.8% go for strongly disagreed (SD); and with the
Weighted mean of 2.29 showing that the item was fully rejected. This result revealed that the influence of social media on secondary school students is not as much, compared to their tertiary institution counterpart when it comes to reading.

Conclusion/ Recommendation

Reading as the name implies is as important as the life we are living because it positions a nation for a greater productivity in terms of man power and creativity. Reading culture declination by students in the above area had brought untold challenges ranges from poverty, insecurity, economic degradation, poor leadership due to lack of enlightened personnel in positions of authority. This study identified several factors contributing to reading culture declination including: Excessive use of social media and mobile phones by students; lack of well-equipped libraries and current reading materials in schools; Poor motivation and encouragement from teachers and parents; bulkiness of work/ materials during examination and high cost of books and reading materials. The researchers suggested measures students, parents and government can adopt to address the above challenges and they are: regular funding and upgrading of school and public libraries by the government and school owners; organization of reading competitions, book clubs, and reading festivals in schools; provision of relevance books at home and setting aside reading time for reading by parents; integration of reading programs and rewards into the school curriculum to motivates students; and training and motivating teachers to act as reading role models to influences students' reading habits in schools. Students in higher institutions tend to read widely for personal development and they are more affected by mobile phones usage and social media as compared to their secondary counterparts. I recommend this work to great Nigerian students, wonderful teachers in Nigeria and other researchers to use other methods to vindicate the authentivity of this study.

DISCLAIMER: (Artificial Intelligent)

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