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APEX JOURNAL OF GENERAL STUDIES RESEARCH (AJOGESTRE)

Vol. 1 Number 2, 2013

ISSN: 2276-9579

Apex Journal of General Studies Research

Volume 1, No. 2, 2013

ISSN:2276-9579

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The Roles of Women in Developing Reading Habit in Children

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Abstract

This paper examines the significance of women as a tool for efficient and effective roles in the reading performance of the child in nation building. Reading is seen as a tool for self-esteem, growth and development. The reading habit/culture/interest in children (youths) are deteriorating speedily in homes (Nigeria). They do not have interest in reading rather their interest is more in entertainment. There is a saying that, "if you want to hide anything from a Blackman, put it in a book" this shows our poor attitude towards reading. Hence, an attempt was made to examine the expected roles woman should play to revive this dying habit in children. Attempt was also made to examine some hindrances militating against women for not able to achieve their expected roles in imparting the reading culture to their children. The paper gave recommendations that educated women should strive more to inculcate reading interest/habit/ culture into children in their tender age; by creating time, interest and pay more attention to them. Since this is the formative stage of a child, they should assist them no matter how fatigued they might be, because reading contributes to the growth of the nation.

Introduction

It is important to know that reading is the easiest and quickest way of exposing an individual's life to the society. Reading will be seen as an act of extracting something (printed material) to get information about the thing read. Reading can never be too early or too late (age wise) for an individual because there is book for every age. The day to stop reading is to stop updating and to stop updating in an ever changing world, is to start decaying. Nothing is more important to achieving academic excellence than being a good reader. There is also a general

belief that readers are leaders while non-readers are non-leaders. Hence, there is need to acquire reading skills at a very early stage.

Reading is basic of learning and it is hoped that if children learn to read well in their early ages, they will read to learn. It is said, "Catch them young and they will grow with the habit inculcated in them". Proper development of a child starts from home. The home is the source of habits, culture, principles and maxims which govern both public and private lives. Man's attitude remains co-operative when still a child. But the moment the child steps into being a teenager, the child becomes an independent person. The reading habit/culture already inculcated at the early stage in the child's life cannot be easily forgotten or discarded.

The question now is who is the right person to inculcate this reading habit/culture at that early (tender) stage of the child? The answer is, the mother (an educated woman). Women are naturally closer to their children at their tender age because children spend more time with them and make them into what they want them (children) to be. They are their first teachers and children learn faster through observation and imitation. For this reason, women play great significant role in inculcating good habit/culture into their children. For a woman to lay a solid foundation (academically) for the child, she must be educated, which will enable her to impart general knowledge.

Education, a tool for women to develop reading interest in children

Education is a process whereby the knowledge, skill, attitude, culture, norms and behaviours are acquired for the overall development of people. Education is the backbone of the nation economy and technical development, (Ughamadu, (2008) as cited by Idiaghe and Okoh (2010)). He went further to state that every citizen needs education for his or her survival and for the development of the nation. Women who are also the citizens of the nation, should not be left out of being educated. The modern opinion of educated women as helpers in the upbringing of children academically, has superseded the traditionally accepted notion that, their (women) duties are those of childbearing and housekeeping only. Every home (man) wants an educated wife in order to lay a solid foundation for the upbringing of his children.

Education of the girl-child is an indispensable tool for the child's up-bringing and development (nation building). There is a saying that, "train a man, you train an individual or a soul, but train a woman, you train a nation". This is correct because the girl-child of today will grow up to have children that will be future leaders of tomorrow. According to Oputa-Imala, Oyegire and Elowo (2002), as cited by Arisi (2010),

Women constitute the nerve centre of the family unit, the main custodian of social, cultural and fundamental values of the society. Paramount changes are often through them. Girls are mothers of the next generation. Therefore, they require the best education for the best foundation for the future generation to sustain our civilization. (108)

Women are uniquely created for a unique purpose and this unique purpose is mainly to build (to build children who will build the nation). The objectives of United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as cited by Arisi (2010), lay emphasis on women education. That their education will enable them to improve their family health, standard of living, discharge their responsibilities more effectively within their homes and towards nation building. Looking at these objectives, it is very important that through quality education, a woman can perform excellently well in helping the child to excel in the child's reading skills at home before starting school. This implies that they (educated mothers) must have exposed their children to reading skills, provide enabling environment for them to read, have a regular time for their reading and also help them to see the value of reading as tremendous and of great asset to their lives – long learning.

Over the years a lot has been said about the dying reading attitude of reading among children (youth) in the educational system. From the field survey, we gathered that their some graduates out there that cannot speak simple and correct English language let alone to read. One of the aims of acquiring education is to develop the mind and not just to obtain paper qualification. Reading for the enlightened mind, goes beyond the school curriculum. Reading like culture, is a way of an individual's life of exposure to the society.

In the past, it was common for children (students/youths) to read other things out of their major disciplines. They read novels, magazines and dailys for pleasures, recreations and to improve their language skills, word power (vocabularies), learn new words, expression to write essays etc. The story has changed to concentrating on the use of modern gadgets of ICT. There are lot of distractions among them (children) which they have engage themselves with i.e watch films, play video games, internet and computer, television and the worst is the cell phones (handsets). Their main interest is entertainment and nothing else.

Children do not create time to read any more rather, they engage themselves with other things that give them the pleasure they want. Reading causes them displeasure, most especially when it has to do with their academics. Even in their academics, they do not read widely rather, they are content to read only their lecture notes and handouts when preparing for tests and examinations. No further reading to get more information about topics taught in the class. Meanwhile, education ought to be an all-round affair.

They lack reading habits because they were not taught by their mothers. Children tend to read more when they see other people read around them especially at home. According to Awoniyi, (1985) cited by Uche and Udo-Anyanwu, (2008) if adults are not reading, children may not be motivated to read.

Generally, educated women tend to have great interest in reading mostly for pleasure and recreation. This can encourage the children to imitate their mothers to start reading books early even when they do not understand what they are reading at this stage. It is at this stage the woman (mother) teaches the child how to read.

The preparation of a man's life is based on education which shows progress in development therefore emphasis is placed on sound and solid education. Is from this angle that this papers seeks to identify the roles played by women and those they are expected to play in developing reading habits in their children.

Expected roles to develop reading interest/habit in children by women

A lot are expected from women to inculcate reading habit/interest into their children at home (informal learning) before they are of school (formal learning) age. Majority of women enjoy the experience of reading to or with their children in order to motivate them into reading. As implied by Uche and Udo-Anyanwu (2008), this is called the Lapsit programme. This reading programme involves an adult introducing book reading to children in a fun positive manner. The programme is usually meant for children in pre-school age who are not able to read very well on their own yet. Reading at this stage is mostly pictorial or explanation. This adult teaches them how to open a book, hold it right and read the book to them. Reading at this stage could be a play-way method. This helps to arouse the mind and interest of the babies or toddlers.

Another role is provision of books to be read. Both recommended and non-recommended textbooks in school should be made available to the children at home. Most books used at this level should be well illustrated with bright colorful pictures that will arouse their interest. This will encourage the child to read even out of school (non-recommended) textbooks. When reading habit is already inculcated in the child, he/she will make use of libraries (where he/she can find interesting materials to read) always.

Parents should learn to buy books (novels) as gifts to their children rather than buying gifts such as computer/video games, handsets etc. Despite the fact that we are in the era of ICT (electronic media), parents should check/monitor how all these gadgets are used for the children's education. So that they will not be seen to be detriment of their studies or overshadow their studies.

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Women should be good readers before they can influence their children to read because children tend to imitate what they see one do than what is said to them.

Mothers (educated) should have interest in what is taught to children and how it is being taught by going through their school work after school hours. This will help the child to be very serious in school since the mother (woman) will check his/her work at home.

They should also play active roles in planning the school curriculum. This can open alternative opportunities for children to succeed in academics (Family & Education 1999).

Reading and discussing stories/issues from books with the children encourages reading among children. There is also need for women to encourage their children to participate in reading competitions.

Problems militate against these expected roles

Lack of time is the biggest barrier of most young mothers towards helping their younger children to read. Traditionally women's role is to care for the children. During the day, they work up themselves and will be so tired at night to help the children in reading. And this is the appropriate time for this group to read before going to sleep.

Women involvement with their children's reading appear to decline once the children have become "independent" readers (teenager) and ready to move to secondary school. After this stage, parents no longer monitor what or how much their children are reading.

Instead of women (mothers) to engage their children in reading, they ask them to go and watch cartoons in order not to disturb them mostly when they (mothers) are tired.

Another factor is the economic situation in many homes. Many parents wallow in poverty. They cannot meet the demands of the family mostly in academics (buying of books). They only manage to pay the children's fees, buy note books and forget about buying of textbooks.

In order to argument the daily needs of the home, most women are more concerned about making ends to meet. As a result, they maintain their source of income than bother about guarding the child to read. In fact, the child is at the mercy of the school teacher from 8.00am to 6.00pm during week days and in the hands of the lesson teacher during weekends (Saturdays and Sundays).

The value system of Nigeria society has changed over the years. The quest for material wealth has eroded the interest for search for knowledge. Father, mother and children are out there scrambling for money. No more interest for learning (education).

High cost of books is another major militating factor. The high cost of books has put off parents from buying all the recommended textbooks for their children. (Onifade, (2002) opines that, government policy is also negatively affecting the publishing industry in Nigeria, as a result of tariff barriers and high taxes leveled against them.

The enticement of electronic media has been identified as one strong major factor militating against the reading habit and children's performance in all aspects of life. They are so engrossed in these media that they have no more value for reading. As powerful as the television, radio and computer may be in a world of Information Communication Technology (ICT), they are no substitute to reading. Rather, they are meant to complement reading as a source of information, enlightenment and knowledge. The use of all these gadgets (mostly internet) has exceedingly reduced reading culture among youths (Gillani, 2003). He also quickly pointed out that the foreigners who were pioneers in using the internet are still reading.

Illiteracy on the part of some women (mothers) is another barrier against playing their role in inculcating reading habit in their children. Since they are not educated, they cannot teach their children how to read. Majority of such children, end up not having interest in reading.

Contradictions of reading methods vary mostly in the pronunciation of words. This can also cause confusion in the mindset of the child.

Conclusion

This study has tried to x-ray that the importance of reading in our society. Reading, plays a very vital role in the development of the human persons and the society we live in. As such, there cannot be any substitute to reading nor is it optional. It must be developed. And it is obvious that women who are educated are expected to play tremendous roles towards developing this reading habit in their children. But there are some barriers militating against them from attaining their aims. Despite all these barriers, women should do their possible best to ensure that solid reading foundation is inculcated in their children at their tender age. If the recommendations below are put in place, there will be great improvement of reading habits/culture in the children for qualitative education, self-confidence, self-esteem towards nation's development.

Recommendations

The barriers militating against women role in developing reading habit in children are numerous. These confounding variables are not beyond remedy, if the will is there among the women, home, government, the children (youth) and the society. To ensure a solid foundation of reading habit in children, the following suggestions will go a long way to revive reading culture in individual.

Reading habit is a necessity for educational development. It needs to be cultivated as early as possible; therefore, women (most especially present day young educated mothers) should do everything within their reach to ensure that they inculcate a solid foundation of reading habits and culture in their children at their early (toddler) stage.

They should encourage their children to develop the habit of reading at their tender age because this is the formative stage of a child, by assisting them no matter how tired they are. A solidly built reading foundation formed, will go a long way to help the children to read within and outside their homes, school subjects and area of discipline (in tertiary institutions).

Government should review the salary of parents (workers) so that, the rate of scrambling for money to make ends meet in the family will be minimized. So that the parents (mothers) will have a good time to attend to their children academically. This will also enable them to buy books for their children at an affordable price.

Government should also review the tariff and tax placed on publishers in order to reduce the cost of books publishing and selling.

Government should promote a national reading campaign targeted at primary school pupils to lay a solid foundation for their future. This will make both parents (mothers) and teachers to intensify the pupils' effort in reading. This should be accompanying with a system of book tokens as gift for their good performance.

Government should revitalize libraries both in schools and public places with current edition of books. They should build public libraries in strategic places where children (youth) can have easy access to reading. Mothers can also take their children to libraries so as to witness and experience the pleasure of reading in a library.

The three tiers of government and the private sectors, should encourage reading competitions among children in all levels of education. This will make reading culture to wake up from slumber.

Women should endeavour to reduce the rate of looking for material things (most especially career women i.e. Bankers) in order to have time to teach and expose their children to reading at a formative age (toddler). This is necessary in order to shape their little minds towards greatness because once they are used to reading at that age; it would be easy for them to continue later on in life.

Homes (parents) should strive to have a little collection of books (a small library) at home for children to use as a stepping stone into reading.

Women should help their children to make a time-table for reading mostly at night before they retire to bed. They should emphasize the value of reading to them. That reading helps to promote oneself in the society, to recover whatever one has lost and also is a measure of one's success.

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