

INVESTIGATING COLLEGE STUDENTS' READERSHIP ATTITUDE TOWARDS PROSE FICTION IN THE COLLECTION OF GANI BELO LIBRARY, ABEOKUTA

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on readership attitude of students in the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta. A total of 500 copies of the questionnaire were administered to sampled students-users of the College Library, school by school. 480 copies were returned and analyzed. The analysis showed that male students used the prose narrative texts more than the females. Ironically, these male students only used such for class assignments. Majority of the users visit the library to read Newspapers and borrow the available prescribed lecture texts for general study in English. Only few readers claimed to have used prose fictions within the library collection for pleasure. Recommendations were made on how to improve the student's readership habits through the provision of valuable and popular fictions for the use of the readers by the College and departmental libraries.

INTRODUCTION

A library in any society is the store house of knowledge that is set in place by trained, experienced professionals to disseminate information to users. In any academic environment, especially in institutions of higher learning as ours library is a true representation of the image and the totality of that which the institution stands for. In other words, library could be likened to a great central workshop where scholars and lecturers alike should have their place, that is, workshop. No wonder then Banjo in Garba (1995) remarks that the library contributes and speeds up the educational development of the community.

The library to him: *"implants, opens up minds, fires imagination, releases the breaks of ignorance, and refines dynamics of progress"*

In this modern time, the Nigerian society would make do with trained citizens who would think and reason critically, extensively and objectively. To achieve these current demands and challenges of educational exposure, libraries nowadays then should aim at stocking relevant and current book materials especially those which would stand the test of time in spite of all odds.

Book materials that users would need to transport them far and near even when they are within the walls of the libraries. This objective could only be achieved through the purveying of literature texts, particularly prose fiction and non-fiction narratives. This, apart from enriching teaching-learning activities, opens the windows of reader's mind by bringing into focus norms and cultures of other people around the globe. This could be possible as literature provides vicarious experiences of the excitement in innumerable characters and situations encountered in such books.

Background to the study

The role of a library, particularly an academic library, becomes more hectic and relevant when its major objectives are to acquire needed resources that cut across the whole of the

schools in college community's teaching-learning needs. The college library has to put into consideration all needful resources that would promptly cater for the targeted users' educational, cultural emotional, social and psychological demands.

In all academic libraries, the highest percentage of the annual vote allocated to libraries is expended on book materials as these can be said to be most dependable and convenient instrument ever devised by man. With the books the human mind has been able to conquer time and space as

“They add in no small way to the emotional, cultural, educational and psychological development of literate people and those who care to read them ”

Book materials have served humanity in various ways. They provide information and recreation and education books have helped to bridge the gap between the past, the present and look into the future as well. Within the college library, there are different types of books. There are books meant to be used as course text for lectures, teaching and learning of lectures and students. There are reference texts which provide quick information for research purposes. And of course, other books are for creative fictional events. This last category falls under prose fiction and non-fiction materials which learners read voluntarily for pleasure and recreation needs. The library, despite its voluminous acquisitions strength as regards books, still deems it fit to acquire volumes of imaginative narratives for the comfort and pleasure of its users. This study therefore sought to investigate how well the students make use of this magnanimous gesture by the college library and how well, if at all, these students use the prose novel, in the collection of the college library as regards intensive reading. This is possible because literature provides vicarious experiences of the excitement which innumerable characters and situations encountered in books. This is so because literary works embedded in the prose genre develop readers' imaginations and help them to consider people, experiences or ideas in new ways, in a library.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Fayose (1995) submits that *“a reader's personality will be enriched by the various experiences he encounters in books and he will see himself and his immediate world in new life”*

She further supports this that *“an average African will never leave his environment but can visit other parts of the world and other countries and get to know what happens there through his readings”*.

Ubakwe (1986) in Mohammed (1996) postulates a model of Nigerian readership abilities under three broad ways viz: Multilingual, modular and functional readership.

Multilingual readership refers to a situation when a reader, for example a Nigerian reads, using the mother tongue (first language), English as the second and any other Nigerian language than the mother tongue, he is a multilingual reader. The modular to Ubakwe refers to as the educationally homogeneous group belonging to most of the educational tiers of N.P.E. while the functional readership is solely the purpose for which reading is undertaken. Four of such purposes identified are: learning to read, reading to learn, reading to survive, and reading for pleasure. Closely related to functional readership model is the readership attitude, which is the concern of this study.

Many studies according to Garba (1996) have been carried out on the patterns of library use by undergraduates. These studies show that students neglect the resources of the library for so many reasons.

No adequate incentive for them to read beyond their course books. Lack of proper library orientation to the use of library's for users even when the library might have been well stocked. Faculty members do not promote students' use of the library by failing to provide reading list to supplement lecture notes. It was further shown that most students spend their leisure hours on some other things but the library.

Other studies Olanlokun (1983), Imoje (1985) and Ducart (1960) in Garba (1995) confirm that students' use of the library is affected by the method of instruction and stress they go through, and that most lecturers too obtain information from the library once in a while, Olanrewaju (2000) due to lack of education in the use of library materials in the reference section.

Purpose of the study

This study sets to find out whether students, and which category of them, come to use the library materials. It further aims at providing answers to the following:

- i. Do students utilize prose narratives in the library for any other purpose than course of study?
- ii. Do literary students (in particular) value the wide variety of reading materials available for their literary and aesthetic tastes and development?
- iii. What is the relationship between student's sex and their readership habit?
- iv. What is the relationship between the course of study of the respondents and their readership attitude?

Statement of the problem

The problem of this study was to investigate the use of the acquired prose fiction in the library by the students in the Federal College of Education Abeokuta. The focus here was mostly on student-users of the library with hidden interest on literature students, those who the system, at least, expected to have had enough exposure to reading materials up to the level of being able to appreciate the importance of prose fictions to improving their language skills as their course of study demands.

However observations by the researcher as a librarian in charge of the circulation section for half a decade and personal oral discussions with some lecturers in the school of language revealed that the library resources especially the shelves containing literature textbooks have not been adequately utilized. The students' borrowers cards examined at the circulation desk for two months, too, did not shed any light into the dimming path of these students as well.

Objectives of the study

This study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- To find out whether students come to library for their reading voluntarily?
- To identify the types of novels they read aside prescribed course texts if there are any?
- To find out whether these students ever value the worth of prose narratives as acquired in the library?

- What was the frequency of usage of the library and its collections by sex and course of study?

The Scope of the study

The scope covered a randomly selected students from the schools and some of the regular users of the library. The researcher found it expedient to place a major emphasis on students combining English Language with other languages: French, Yoruba, Hausa, Primary Education Study (PES) and Social Studies. Some students who were noted to have been regular in the library too were randomly given the questionnaires to fill. These students who offered science based courses were used as well to represent the attitude of other non literary students on campus.

Methodology

Questionnaires and library readers book cards which were examined for a period of two months were the two instruments used in collecting the data for the study.

Data Analysis and Discussion

A data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed in simple percentage statistics. Presentation of the summarized items in the questionnaire was represented on the tables below. Discussion was made on the information gathered and analyzed. Subsequent conclusions from the study were made and recommendations were given for better improvement.

RESULTS

The questionnaire was specially designed to gather information on the students' reading interest towards prose in the library collection. It was to find out whether their readership attitudes was being influenced by their courses of study and their preferential reading tastes. It further aimed at knowing the reasons why they go for prose fiction narratives in the library or any other sources as may be indicated by the respondents. It also sought information of the reader's attitude according to the sex of the subjects. Results are presented as follows.

Table I: Classification of reader's attitude according to course of study

Reader's School	Readers Attitudes				
	Respondents	P F R F		P F N F	
		P F R F	%	P F N F	%
Arts & Social Science	87	22	25	65	75
Languages	150	88	59	62	41
Education	147	107	69	45	31
Science	50	15	30	35	70
Vocational	46	14	30	32	70
Total	480	240			

The table above shows that out of 87 students of Arts and Social Studies that responded to the questionnaire ---25---% were not in favour of reading prose fiction while ---75---% were in

favour. As for the 150 students studying languages that responded to their questionnaire, ---59---% signified their interest for prose reading while ---41---% hardly favoured it. The students that took part in the study from the School of Education out of the 147 that participated ---69--- to (102) shown positive attitude while the rest ---31% (45) had no taste for prose. From the school of Science out of the 50 respondents, only (15) ---30---% had a flair for prose the larger population (35) ---70% detested prose fictions. Vocational Education students never had positive attitude towards prose reading as ---70---% of them were opposed to it while ---30---% just 14 subjects liked reading it.

Table II: Classification of reader's preferential reading materials

Types of prose fiction	Total	Percentage
Humorous fiction	95	19.7
Realistic fiction	70	14.5
Satirical fiction	40	8.3
Serials publications	86	17.9
Prescribed prose texts	189	39.3
Total	480	100%

The above table reveals that 95(%) of the students preferred prose texts that consisted humour stories such as Romance, Thrillers, Detectives and Adventures (popular fiction) stories. % readers read realistic fiction % preferred satirical. % read serials titles while % readers read lectures prescribed text and lecture note.

Table III: Reader's purposes for reading prose fiction

Purpose	Responses	%
For pleasure, recreational and information	114	23.75
For class assignments and examinations	271	56.5
For research/projects	80	16.7
For sleep therapy	15	3.1
Total	480	100%

From the table above some of the readers 23.7% read for pleasure and information, a lot 56.7% read for class work assignments, 80 16.7% of the reader's used prose fiction for projects, while 3.1% of the need, they need to sleep.

Table IV: Reader's sources of prose fiction materials

Source	Responses	%
From library collections	89	18.5
From friends	102	20.2
From readers club	97	21.3
From personal collections	92	19.2
Other undisclosed sources	100	20.8
Total	480	100%

The table above shows that the largest population of reader's get their reading materials from friends and other sources aside library collections.

Table v: Classification of readers according to sex

Readers Sex	Number	%
Male	256	53
Female	224	47
Total	478	100

The above table reveals that more male reader's utilize library text more than their female counterparts as 53% against 47% female signified to have used library prose fiction text.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study may likely be affirming some of the previous findings of other researchers and on similar subject matter. For instance, the finding that students from the school of vocational study mostly secretarial study oriented students tend to belong to reluctant reader inconsonance with the findings of Mohammed (1996). It was also confirmed here that male students tend to use the library and its facilities more than female as discovered by Onifade (2002). Efforts should be put up by the library staff and respective lecturers to attract and encourage female users to use a library and prose narrative for better performances in spoken skills.

One of the tables shows that the largest crowd among the readers use prose materials for assignment and examination purposes. This idea should be discouraged while serious effort should be made by the literary lecturer to hammer on the unequal advantages derived in reading supplementary texts through General Studies in English classes. The library too should intensify its activities by giving an all embracing orientation and exhibition of all the newly acquired prose fiction text particularly the popular fiction genre of the prose to user periodically throughout the academic section.

The research further revealed that male readers above the age of poverty read humorous novels and for better social and psychological awareness. Since our college is expected to train teachers who will in turn go out to train our children and the youths, so the library, in conjunction with the departmental libraries, should endeavour to procure books that treat morals and could as well help to mould their spoken and written skills in the language.

The newly admitted students in all the departments seem not to know the category of books under prose narrative due to their close up back ground from the primary and post primary levels of schooling. These groups of learners should be given proper orientation preferably at organized debates by the school of language and education where topical issues such as values, qualities, varieties of literature text in all the language studies are discussed.

English department in colleges of Education should encourage fiction readership clubs amongst the literary students where prose and non-prose fiction text would be exchanged among themselves as in borrowing and lending activities with proper borrower amenities made available. This will promote reading rivalry and impact reading culture among the students. Government should encourage the importation of book materials, prose fiction and non-fiction inclusive instead of the endless importation of perishable and less valuable items to our various institutions of learning.

Since the society generally has acquired deficiency in reading, the mass media should endeavour to include a programme featuring book reviews on literary reading.

Results from the observations of the library: Readers statistics and the borrowers' book cards further confirmed the fact that students come to borrow lecturers' prescribed textbooks general study course. These texts are only the serious fictions recommended for study still course. Here there should be enough prescribed prose fiction work from the NCCE minimum standards to improve on the student's readership strength.

Humorous prose fiction offers good source of relaxation at stress times after hectic lecturer hours within the school environment. Literary lecturers should assist the college library in providing these profitable reading materials in the library for students' use because they form the basis for proficiency in the spoken language. Reading should be sponsored by the college library in collaboration with the members of the management staff where best readers of the year are equally awarded.

CONCLUSION

Effective reading of prose fictional works promotes moral, psychological, cultural and social development as well as increases reader's knowledge of things happening around and beyond them through extensive reading of such. It is therefore expedient to improve the reading habits of college students who are to be good teachers in the future. It has been widely noted, that a good teacher-reader kills the interest of the students in reading. It is pertinent for college library to sensitize the college communities on the good services available for their benefit through the acquired supplementary reading collections.

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