



**FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
MINNA**

**READING NATIONS  
ARE LEADING NATIONS:  
WHITHER NIGERIA?**

*By*

**PROF. SHITTU KELANI OKUNADE**

*B.A. (Ed.), M.A. (Ilorin), PhD (Kano)*

*Professor of English*

**INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES 69**

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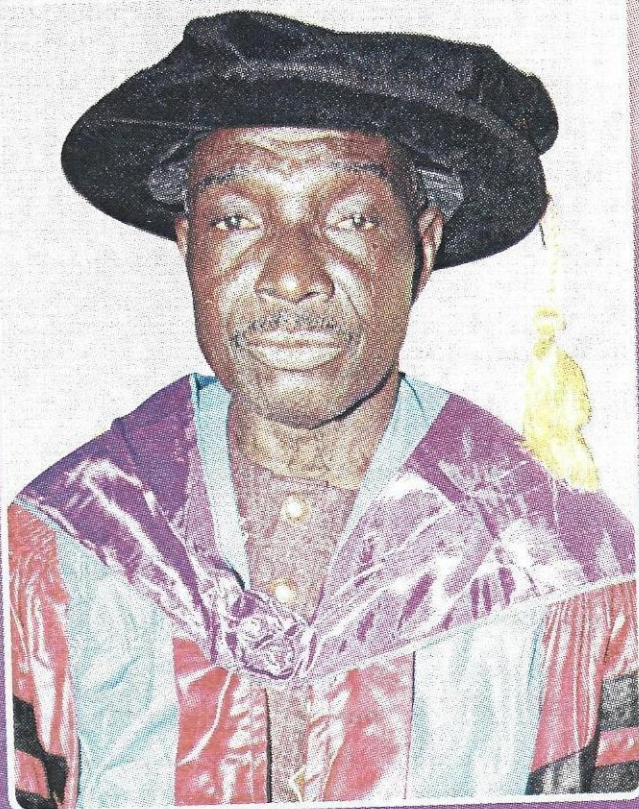
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**Professor Shittu Kelani Okunade**

*B.A. (Ed.), M.A. (Ilorin), PhD (Kano)*

*Professor of English*

## PREAMBLE

Reading occupies a unique position in the general development of man and his society. A society in which its members rarely read because they do not care or are not skilled enough to read will encounter serious problems in the future. Reading is crucial to participating fully in all facets of modern society. It adds quality to life, provides access to culture and cultural heritage, empowers and liberates citizens as well as brings people of diverse origins together. Reading is not just for school, it is for life. Reading has the capacity to transport cultures and ideas from one location to another. Reading is a transformation vehicle for every reading mind as new ideas and thoughts are taking in.

A reading nation is a leading nation. Nigeria unfortunately is not yet a reading nation. Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa with a population of over 180 million has a large percentage of her citizens as illiterates (65 Million, about 36%) UNESCO survey. In 2012, UNESCO drafted an action plan to help improve the literacy rate in Nigeria. The Nigerian constitution (1999), the Vision 2020 document and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2003) underline the importance of education as a vehicle of both individual empowerment and national development. However, National Literacy Survey (2010) conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria has shown a disgusting fact; seventeen states out of thirty six have youth and adult literacy (reading and writing) rates between 4.5 and 49.3%. Rather than ruminating unnecessarily on this hard reality of our situation, positive action should be taken to help ease the poor literacy rate.

Low literacy rate among Nigerians is a problem that needed to be resolved as soon as possible.

Traditionally, literacy means the ability to read and write. However, in modern terms, its meaning has been broadened to include the ability to use language, numbers, images, computers, and other basic means to understand, communicate, gain useful knowledge and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture. This broadened concept of literacy makes it a term that includes all of the communication and calculation skills needed in today's society (Cooper, 2004).

The key to literacy is reading development. It is a progression of skills that begins with the ability to understand spoken words and decode written words, and culminates in the deep understanding of text. Reading development involves a range of complex language underpinnings including awareness of speech sounds (phonology), spelling patterns (orthography), word meaning (semantics), grammar (syntax), and patterns of word formation (morphology), all of which provide the necessary platform for reading fluency and comprehension. In this quest for literacy acquisition the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been at the fore front of global literacy effort since 1946, advancing the vision of a literate world for all. It views acquiring and improving literacy skills including reading skills, throughout life as an intrinsic part of the right to education. The multiple effects of literacy empower people, enable them to participate fully in society and contribute to improved livelihood.

## WHAT IS READING?

Reading has been described in various ways by different people, writers and scholars alike as a complex process (Oyetunde and

Muodumogu 1997). The World Encyclopedia (1995) defines reading as the ability to recognize letters and groups of letters as symbols that stand for particular sounds. It is the art of making meaning or sense from printed or written words. Shittu (2010) defines reading as a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols with the intentions of constructing or deriving meaning. It is a tool for acquiring knowledge, communicating and sharing information including ideas. Reading ability is one of the avenues for personal advancement in social, civic and economic development.

### **The Relevance of Reading to National Advancement**

Reading is central to education and learning. Through reading a learner has access to a far greater volume of information than any one teacher or group can provide. The learner may access such information at his convenience and, for unrestricted periods (Ahaotu, 2010). Reading is certainly crucial to both educational advancement and gainful employment.

Literacy skills, reading inclusive, are crucial for effective participation and survival in the sophisticated technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Muodumogu (2010), a nation's level of technology development or under-development depends largely on its level of advancement in literacy development. World record shows Finland as the world's most literate nation and Singapore the first nation among nations of the world based on reading assessment result. They are followed by South Korea, Japan and China as examples of reading nations where proficiency in reading empowers the masses by enhancing their ability to take decisions that affect their destiny and civilization while enabling the generality of the people to acquire competencies for the effective and efficient management of their resources (Onukaogu, 1997). This is a pointer to the fact that the

extent to which an individual or nation is successful depends largely on the ability of the individuals within the nation to read.

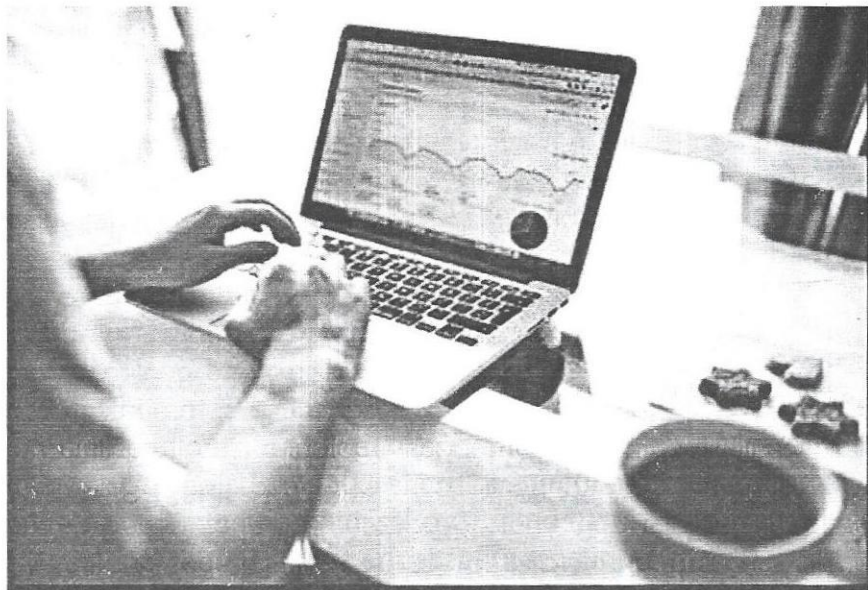
The above is a signal to why Nigeria remains underdeveloped after about fifty-eight years of independence and in spite of her rich natural resources. Nigeria cannot compete favourably with those reading nations because of the low reading proficiency of her citizens as the high illiteracy rate among her people persists.

Singapore, the top most reading country of the world, right from the time of her independence in 1965 has been an outstanding example. In spite of multiple hardships, her doggedness in institutions, pragmatic policies, clear vision, long-term planning, forward looking strategies, steadfast political will, and a relentless urge to improve has resulted in strong foundations for sustainable development. What is clear in the policy of Singapore is the commitment by the government to invest in education and to have a competitive advantage in English. The goal of every student in Singapore to become an effective communicator in English is a reflection of higher aspirations for the future where Singaporeans will continue to thrive into a globalised world while rooted in values that come from learning and appreciating the mother tongue languages. This is the story of a tiny country on the southern tip of Peninsula Malaysia. Its current size is 42KM long and 25KM wide. It is a leading nation because it is a reading nation. Nigeria unfortunately cannot compare her achievements favourably with Singapore.

Singapore's achievements include technological advances in computing, automation, artificial intelligence and precision engineering. Today, more than ever the state of Singapore's science and technology is a critical factor for her economic competitiveness and growth. Singapore government initiated its science and technology policies in the 1980's moving from a



low-skilled, low technology economy to a high skilled, high technology one. Today, the drive for Singapore to become a hot bed for technology has been supported by government funding and cutting edge facilities seem promising. Singapore has come out second in the rankings of the Global Information Technology Report 2010-2011 by the World Economic forum. This is unlike Nigeria where education is not adequately funded.



Source:[https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+technological+innovations+in+the+education+sector+in+singapore&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjU7\\_CQxtHdAhUrJcAKHa-XAysQ\\_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=626#imgrc=Gmwijf1iRX-B\\_M:](https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+technological+innovations+in+the+education+sector+in+singapore&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjU7_CQxtHdAhUrJcAKHa-XAysQ_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=626#imgrc=Gmwijf1iRX-B_M:)

In similar manner, Finland ranks as the most literate country in the world. The study that came out with this result was conducted by John W. Miller (2016) President of Central Connecticut State University in New Britain. Monolithic culture values reading. Miller found out that the opinion that the kind of literate

behaviours exhibited by Finland are critical to the success of individuals and nations in the knowledge – based economies that define our global future. Nigeria did not feature in Miller’s study. Today, Finland ranks among the most competitive economies in the world. In the 1990s, knowledge through reading drove economic growth and transformation and in less than a decade, Finland became an ICT (Information and Communication Technology) specialized economy. Alongside electronics and high technology Finland is one of the world’s leading wood producers. All these achievements are possible as a result of strong focus on education, particularly reading over many decades. Sound reading culture has laid the foundation for the high level of technological adoption and innovations. Finland is acclaimed for being one of the least corrupt countries in the world unlike Nigeria one of the most corrupt nations of the world.



Source:[https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+technological+innovations+in+the+education+sector+in+Finland&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjfteLyxdHdAhVpCsAKHVoSDdcQ\\_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=626#imgsrc=caJKAkGEoT7aGM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+technological+innovations+in+the+education+sector+in+Finland&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjfteLyxdHdAhVpCsAKHVoSDdcQ_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=626#imgsrc=caJKAkGEoT7aGM:)

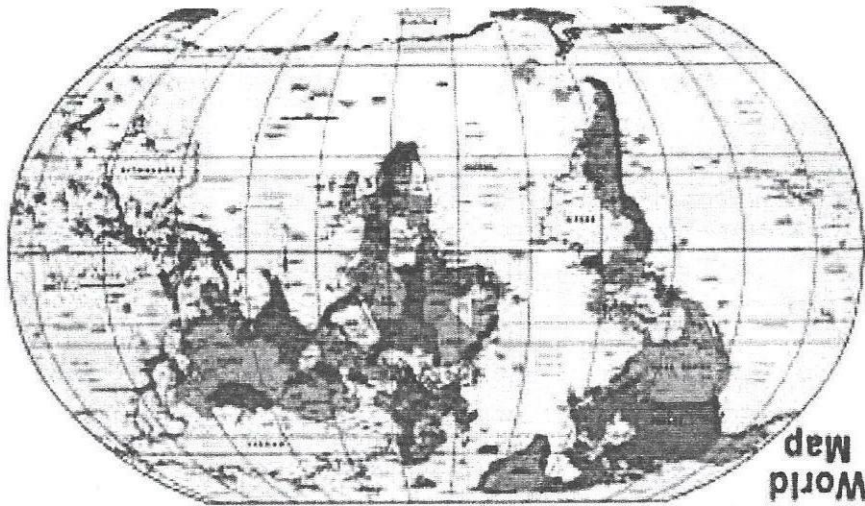


important than oral or written communication because it was believed that only through reading could children come to understand the national essence and their duty to safeguard it. In other words, reading was not only taught as a way to expand horizon or pursue interests but rather to inculcate in students the social and political values deemed appropriate by the authorities to enable citizens to become patriotic and strive for the development of the nation. Few places have done more than Japan to define today's technological landscape. The laptops we all work with was first produced by Toshiba for the mass market. The emoji we also use in our email was also a Japanese invention. Japan is home to almost 10% of the world's most innovative companies. Other innovations include calculators of different types, television, music gadgets, computer accessories and android robots. Japan is also noted for aviation research and development of space station and satellites among other inventions. In 2018, according to CNN.com Japan invented the calorie scanner which can be used to measure the nutrients of a meal all these are in addition to the automotive and electronics inventions the Japanese are noted for.

These three nations just discussed are selected from the 51 countries studies by John W. Miller and reported in "World's Most Literate Nations" March 9, 2016. Among the countries studied are the Nordic Countries (Finland, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Sweden) which rank 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, while the U.S and Canada rank 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> respectively. Most of the countries studied are the leading nations of the world and many of the constraints preventing Nigerians from developing positive reading culture such as poverty, lack of parental encouragement, shortage of reading materials, dearth of libraries and technological innovations are non-existent in those countries. Those reading nations are also leading in technological

development that puts them ahead of other nations. No wonder they are tagged as "developed countries". Where is Nigeria? And that is the question.

World Map



Source: [https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=map+of+the+world&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enNG806NG806&source=lmms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjwI7AznHDAHVOF8AKKHUTZDfcQ\\_AUID!gB#imgrc=ts1Xclw-usrgM:](https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=map+of+the+world&rlz=1C1CHBD_enNG806NG806&source=lmms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjwI7AznHDAHVOF8AKKHUTZDfcQ_AUID!gB#imgrc=ts1Xclw-usrgM:)

## The Reading Culture of Nigerians

There is no gainsaying the fact that readership has been declining in Nigeria in the last few years (decades). Youths have not taken reading seriously and this has affected scholarship in the country. Rather than reading, our youths prefer browsing the internet and social media. The advent of this technological gadgets has adverse effects on the reading culture of our Youths. There is no doubt that acquisition of knowledge is at the centre of reading. A former Executive Secretary of National Universities Commission (NUC), Professor Peter Okebukola, once asserted that through reading humans have the tools to transmit knowledge to each

succeeding generation. It enables one to listen to and learn from the wisdom and people of the ages. This is emphasized by many different religious traditions. For instance, Islam holds acquisition of knowledge (Literacy, reading, etc) in high esteem. The holy Quran reveals that the first communication (injunction) between Allah and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was knowledge based – Iqraa, meaning “read” or recite” (Quran 96:1-5). Similarly, it has been asserted that every child must become fully competent in reading to succeed in school. Reading is the foundation of much enjoyment in life and is closely related to vocational efficiency. Students and employees in every field must read to keep abreast of what is happening in their fields. They must rely on written or digital words to convey information and data. The ability to read well is absolutely critical to success in life. But unfortunately youths find it difficult to devote their time to reading rather they prefer to roam on social media. Some decades ago, Nigerian youths took reading very seriously and standard of education was high. But these days reading culture is gradually declining leading to its consequences showing clearly in the fallen standard of education.

In the words of Sisulu (2004), reading is one of the building blocks of learning. Becoming a skilled and effective reader enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. Reading benefits are not just for school but for life. Reading in all its variety is vital to being better informed, having a better understanding of ourselves as well as of others. It makes man a thoughtful and constructive contributor to a democratic and cohesive society. The advanced nations of the world see a high level literacy as a major source of their competitiveness and social maturity. Unfortunately, the lack of a widespread reading culture among Nigerians has been the bane of our development and international competitiveness. The economic, social and political

development of Nigeria depend on producing literate citizens that are able to read widely and apply same practically for development. It is therefore pertinent to make our present generation to be aware of the advantages of reading and ensure that they are imbued with the sense of literacy required in the modern society.

### **The Reading Culture of Nigerians compared to other Nations**

The World Culture Score Index has rated Nigerians as one of the countries in the world that has the lowest reading culture. A recent survey on hours of reading per week per person by the World Culture score index showed that India is leading in reading culture with a score of 10.42 hours per week, followed by Thailand with 09.24 hours and China 8hours. Only two African countries, Egypt and South Africa were listed in the survey, with Nigeria not being listed at all. One of the reasons for this poor reading culture according to the National Librarians/Chief Executive Officer of the National Library of Nigeria, Prof. Lanre Aina is poor funding of libraries.

When we talk of reading culture, we mean a love for reading and a habit of reading among citizens. Habit is an act that a person does regularly or usually often without thinking about it because you have done it so many times before and it is learned rather than innate (Ogugua, et al). But the reality on ground in Nigeria today is that a vast majority of Nigerian youths have not developed the habit of reading to help them keep abreast of current happenings around them. Rather, they prefer to spend useful hours on the internet on irrelevancies.

The foregoing appears to explain why Nigeria remains underdeveloped after many years of independence in spite of her

vast natural resources. Currently, Nigeria occupies the 9<sup>th</sup> position amongst the most illiterate nations of the world. Unfortunately, the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria is still elusive because not much is being done to improve the literacy level of Nigerian youths (Muodumogu: 2006). A pointer to this is the lack of adequate funding of Education. In the last few years less than 10% of the national budget had been allocated to education as against 26% recommended by the United Nations.

### **Factors Responsible for Poor Reading Culture among Nigerians**

Reading, whether for academic purpose or for pleasure has been seen to be the key to lifelong learning. While this is hardly a subject for contention, yet, modern Nigeria is becoming bereft of well-read people (Olasheinde, Akanmode, Alaiyemola and Babatunde, 2015). Nigerians just do not seem to read anymore, except reading newspapers and weekly magazines or glancing through the labels of products they want to purchase in super markets. This type of reading cannot be compared to reading novels and prescribed texts where creativity and ability to think for oneself is required. You will agree with me that the retention and application of knowledge comes from the reading widely of good books which can enrich a person mentally, emotionally and morally. Research has shown that many Nigerians hardly ever read, maybe either because they are deficient in reading skill or do not have the resources, or that they do not just appreciate the advantages and values derivable from reading and the effects or consequences of not doing so. Many, especially students hardly read unless for examination purpose. Those who have graduated from school seldom read and those who do spend very little part of their leisure time doing so. This lack of positive reading culture constitutes an effective barrier to Nigeria's development and



international competitiveness. The scenario painted above is as a result of the following constraints:

### **Poverty**

Poverty is the cankerworm that has eaten deep into the development of our society. An insignificant percentage of the Nigerian populace live above the poverty line. For example, most parents find it difficult to perform their role in aiding the development of their children's reading culture. They have to pay school fees and at the same time buy prescribed texts for their children. The prescribed texts are so expensive that most parents cannot afford them. This constraint negatively affects the reading culture of most Nigerian children. In the reading nations poverty is not as prevalent as it is in Nigeria and children are exposed to a variety of reading materials early in life.

### **Lack of Parental Encouragement**

Most parents are from backgrounds where no importance is attached to reading. Most of them do not read. So, they cannot inculcate reading culture into their children. Children from such homes usually have their first contact with books and regular reading at school at a rather late stage of growth. Literacy is high in those reading nations and this makes the parents to adequately encourage their youths to read being literate themselves. In Nigeria, we also need to make parents aware of the critical importance education, reading in particular, play in the life of our children.

### **Shortage of Reading Materials**

Availability of varieties of reading materials will aid development of reading culture. A situation where this is lacking would hinder students from having varieties of books to select from and deny them the opportunity of engaging in extensive and intensive

reading. Olasheinde, et al quoting (Willies: 2008) state that schools and colleges need to be supplied with books that will sustain the reading interest of students across the curriculum.

### **Dearth of Libraries**

There is paucity in the number of well-equipped school libraries in Nigeria, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Iweje, 2014). Rooms established by Native Authorities for reading are now extinct and there are no more public libraries, and where available, they are stocked with obsolete materials. Some have been turned into offices for District Heads where local and administrative activities are conducted.

### **Technological Innovations**

Sanders (2007) states that the distraction by the fallout from technological innovations in the world today, such as the easy availability of the entertainment media, games and computer units are responsible for the decline in reading culture in our society: Arua and Nwaebein (2014) state also that there is a high decline rate in the reading culture of Nigerians. They examined reading culture among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, and found that 60% of students read prescribed textbooks only during examinations. Browsing and watching television have taken most of their time, and very few (21%) buy novels to read for knowledge and pleasure.

Ayanbimpe (2012) also states that with the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (LCT), children are seen carrying their phones and texting messages, listening to music, and browsing the net. They neither study nor read. This technological advancement has adversely affected reading culture in Nigeria. Another factor related to modern technology is the low level of computer literacy among Nigerians. Access to

the internet is still poor and this hinders access to online reading resources such as e-books. The small percentage of Nigerians who are computer literate, particularly the youths are involved in the distractive and wrong application of ICT devices. This has produced some negative effects on the reading habits of such people. This internet obsession has caused many of our youths to waste valuable time surfing irrelevant websites instead of engaging in serious reading. Many youths prefer to spend most of their time in cyber cafes browsing, playing video games, chatting with friends and watching obscene films (Olasheinde, 2015).

### **Depressed Economy/Economic Recession**

A depressed economy will find it difficult to perform its responsibilities to its people. It will hardly be able to adequately support or fund the education of its citizens, that is, it will not be able to provide relevant infrastructures and materials like libraries and reading materials (books) and so on. In the reading nations of the world education is well-funded and all the necessary infrastructures are in place. Like e-library in which collections are stored in digital formats as opposed to prints, microforms or other media.

### **Consequences of Poor Reading Culture**

It is a known fact that any student/person who has developed positive reading culture is sure of success at school and later in life. The connection between reading ability on one hand and educational and life success on the other is not debatable (Olasheinde, 2015). In essence, educational success requires successful reading. There is no doubt that any individual who failed initially in reading has failed academically and intellectually because positive reading culture is the backbone of education. An individual who has done well in school is the one that can

contribute to the growth and development of his society after. An individual who cannot read shall definitely affect the nation's economic, social and political development negatively. He thus becomes a burden on the society.

### **Benefits of Developing Reading Culture in Nigeria**

Literacy can contribute to economic growth of a nation, reduce poverty, reduce crime, promote democracy, increase civic engagement and prevent diseases through information provision. A literate person is an asset to his nation. When an individual is literate he has the opportunity of improving himself and making his life exciting and fulfilled. Reading enhances the acquisition of knowledge and can develop man's potential and skills. But the absence of positive reading culture can limit man's ability to achieve his heart's desires, truncate his career and relegate him to the background. A nation where reading culture has been fully developed would have the life of a large percentage of its citizens transformed. The impact of good reading culture on the individual and the society cannot be overemphasized. At the individual level, Isaac, (2007) enumerated the following as benefits:

- Reading as an active process makes an individual to use his brain. By reading, he thinks more and he becomes smarter.
- It is a fundamental skill builder. Every course of study has a number of reading materials relevant to it.
- Reading improves vocabulary. While reading good books, one is exposed to the use of many new words in the language in which the books are written.

- It affords individuals the opportunity of seeing other cultures and places. Extensive reading is crucial here as the individual has his horizon widened as he sees what other cities and countries have to offer before visiting them.
- Reading helps an individual to become better informed and more of an expert on the topic read. This expertise translates into higher self-esteem.
- Positive reading culture improves creativity. By reading more books and being exposed to new and more detailed information one's creative mind is challenged and developed.
- Reading improves reasoning skills – An individual who reads a lot has his memory often challenged and he reasons about the numerous facts, ideas and details he encounters in the books he has read.
- Reading apart from improving one's vocabulary and critical thinking, also makes one a better writer.
- Apart from keeping one engaged, reading makes one to use his leisure hours wisely, minimize stress and boredom.

In summary, reading is the foundation of literacy. So, for literacy to be functional, durable and development oriented, good reading culture is crucial. In addition, as the events of the world are not static, reading enhances one's cognitive ability, broadening one's understanding and also expands the readers' knowledge to be able to cope with new challenges of life.

## What is Development/National Development?

Development is a quantifiable phenomenon measurable in terms of GDP, GNP and per capital figures. It is the process of improving the quality of all human lives within three equally important focus areas:

- Development as a vision: this is a vision or description of how desirable a society is.
- Development as a historical process: this is about social changes that take place over a long period of time due to inevitable processes.
- Development as action: this involves deliberate efforts to change things for the better.

National Development can be viewed as the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people by providing basic needs like quality education, potable water, transportation, infrastructure, health and other needs (Emenanjo, 2010). All these three important aspects are what propel reading nations to greatness. Unfortunately, these are not the case with Nigeria.

In essence, national development is a total human development which emphasizes a full realization of the human potential and a maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all citizens (Upah: 2010). For example, literacy, especially print literacy (reading) could be harnessed to make individuals become thinkers and actors who can possess the courage as well as the ability to interrogate the political, economic, cultural, social and religious assumptions they encounter. It is through good reading culture that an individual acquires knowledge and skills that will

eventually make him useful to himself, the community and the entire nation in which he finds himself. Nigeria needs this kind of development in order to meet the needs of her citizens. The fact remains that literate labour force is a source of productivity for national development. This is an embodiment of sustainable development.

### **Reading Culture and Development**

Reading culture is the kind of culture that regards reading and studying as the basis of growth and development. It is the habit of continuous and dedicated reading of information resources by the citizens including children, students, and adults for knowledge acquisition which will be applied practically for development. This is so because reading sharpens the intellect, makes one reason rationally, objectively and propels one to greatness in life. That is why readers are regarded as leaders by Scholastic International.

Positive reading culture has a pivotal role to play in the social, economic and technological development of any nation. It is a very essential ingredient in the task of nation building. It is a potent political weapon in the development of any country. The developed countries of the world like Britain, and America employed reading and research to achieve their technological breakthroughs. Developing countries need to follow the footsteps of those developed nations by imbibing positive reading culture that would enable them to acquire substantial information that could be utilized for national development. In the light of this awareness, we need to re-examine the way we teach reading to our youths and our various assumptions with a view to developing a new set of Nigerian youths with positive reading culture who will be able to take Nigeria to greater height in the future.

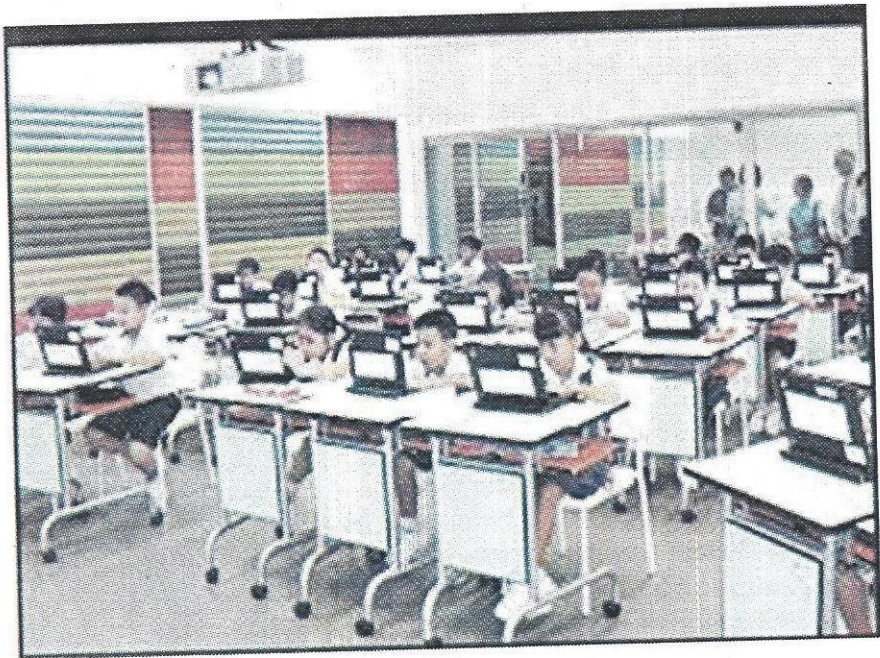
## The Role of the Teacher in Developing Reading Culture in Children

It is an indisputable fact that the school plays an important role in developing the reading culture of children. But the fact remains that schools cannot and should not be expected to perform the entire task of developing perceptual skills, providing desirable experiences and motivating children for life-long reading. In as much as the school is expected to do everything possible to produce literate members of the society. It should be done in conjunction with other agencies who have responsibility for the onerous job.

The major factor in the reading programme in any school is the teacher. He has the task of being the role-model. He is to create a situation where learning should be challenging and at the same time pleasurable. The teacher's interest in books can serve as a motivating force since children like to imitate their teacher. Unfortunately, reading is not taught or included in the school curriculum but if the rudiments of reading like phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension could be taught early in inculcating the culture of reading into a child, the foundation for lifelong reading would have been laid. Apart from the teacher, other school leaders like the principal can also assist in developing and maintaining an effective reading culture in the school through programmes like school-wide-reading and so on.

In the reading nations, the teacher creates the circumstances and conditions within the classroom that support learning. The teacher must plan and support activities and experiences that encourage reading and he must include in his lessons activities that involve reading many kinds of books and materials. To be able to do these effectively, he must have been adequately trained in the methodology of teaching generally and reading in particular.





Source: [https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+technological+innovations+in+the+education+sector+in+singapore&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjU7\\_CQxtHdAhUrJcAKHaXAysQ\\_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=626#imgrc=5EcNM6gEZjomSM](https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+technological+innovations+in+the+education+sector+in+singapore&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjU7_CQxtHdAhUrJcAKHaXAysQ_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=626#imgrc=5EcNM6gEZjomSM):

## Learning to Read

Many factors and elements interact as a child learns to read. However, within the process, two major tasks work together – decoding and comprehension. Decoding is necessary but not sufficient for reading. Reading does not occur unless an individual comprehends. Comprehension is the process whereby the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text (Cooper, 1986). Decoding and comprehension interact as an individual learns to read. Sometimes, most of the words a learner meets in a text (print) are already in their oral language (their vocabulary). Such words they understand when listening to a text being read to them and when they are interacting with a print (written text).

The task at the beginning of learning to read when they come across new words is how to recognize them. In the beginning of learning to read, a learner must depend on his ability to pronounce words. As the learner progresses in pronouncing words, he recognizes more words. As the learner stock words, he comes across a number of high-frequency words that occur more often in language.

Learners must develop a number of critical elements as they try to decode words independently. Some of them are:

- Oral Language
- Phonemic Awareness
- Concept of Print
- Phonics, etc.

### Oral Language

Children begin to develop oral language the day they are born. As they grow:

- They develop the sounds of language (phonology)
- They learn how words are formed and related to each other (morphology)
- They develop a stockpile of word meaning and pronunciation (vocabulary)
- They learn how language conveys meaning (semantics)
- They learn how individuals use language to achieve certain goals (pragmatics).

These aspects of language development form the foundation for reading that is decoding and comprehension.

Most children develop their use of language with ease (Snow, Burns and Griffin: 1998). For these children, the school must provide activities that support continued language development. However, some children come from environments with limited language models, or have neurological problem that obstruct good language base. For these children, the school must provide specific instructions and activities that develop oral language. For all learners, school-provided language development activities must include such programs as the following:

- Good language modeling provided by teacher's reading aloud to students and discussing what was read.
- Lessons that model uses of various types of language. For example, use of a photograph as the basis for discussion. Model expansion of language by taking children's comments and adding more descriptions to them e.g.

Child: It's a dog

Teacher: Yes, it is a dog. What else do you notice about the dog's face?

Child: A white spot

Teacher: Yes, the big brown dog has a white spot on its face.

Continued language development forms and expands the foundation for children to effectively develop their abilities to decode and comprehend. Weak or limited oral language may interfere with children's ability to learn to read.



Source: [https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=african+children+reading&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enNG806NG806&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7NHaztHdAhUWM8AKHfkuDXEQ\\_AUIDigB#imgrc=i2oWQ5TyyJuAQM](https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=african+children+reading&rlz=1C1CHBD_enNG806NG806&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7NHaztHdAhUWM8AKHfkuDXEQ_AUIDigB#imgrc=i2oWQ5TyyJuAQM):

## Phonemic Awareness

Directly related to oral language development is another important element that also helps children develop independence in decoding spoken sounds. Phonemic awareness is the knowledge that spoken words are composed of a sequence of sounds or phonemes. Research has supported the importance of phonemic awareness in relation to learning to read (Ball & Blackman, 1991). This means that the sounds of the language (phonemes) are represented by symbols or the alphabets (graphemes): For example, the word “cat” has three phonemes (k/-/a/-/t/) and three graphemes c-a-t. The word “goat” also has three phonemes /g-/əu/-/t/ and three graphemes g-oa-t”, but one of the phonemes /əu/ is represented by a two letter grapheme. The alphabetic principle, the idea that each sound of the language is represented by a graphic symbol should be

specifically and explicitly taught. Phonemic awareness is a part of learning the alphabetic principle. Understanding that words are made up of speech sounds, and being able to compare sounds in different words, divide words into their constituent sounds, and blend sounds together to form words, all form an important foundation for learning to read.

In the teaching of phonemic awareness, sound blending and word segmentation activities must be used. Activities adopted should be of the child's level of phonemic awareness. Sounds must be taught with the corresponding letter(s) of the alphabet. Small group instruction method can also be used for example: "big" /b/-/i-/g/. Similarly adding sounds as in adding /s/ to "smile" to make 'smiles'; and substituting sounds as in changing /r/ in "run" with /f/, /p/, /g/, /s/ (fun, pun, gun, sun, etc) needs to be taught. In addition, chants, jingles and songs ought to be taught. For example:

"There's a bird on our gate"

"There is a cat looking in our window"

"There's a dot on my book"

### Phonics Instruction

Phonics instruction could be used to teach children the relationships between sounds and letters. Phonics skills help children recognize words and decode new written words. This instruction focuses on the letter-sound correspondence so that children can learn that the three morphemes of "cat" correspond to the three sounds /c/ /a/ /t/. Knowing the relationship between written letters and spoken words helps children recognize familiar written words and decode new written words so they can apply their knowledge of the spoken words. Children must be made aware of the fact that English language contains many irregularly spelt words that do not follow the standard letter

sound correspondences. For example, the word “cat” has the letter /c/ pronounced differently in the alphabet of the English from the way it is realized in the word “cat” /k/.

In phonics instruction, children need to spend most of their reading/language arts time actually reading and writing. They should be given ample opportunities to apply what they are learning about phonics. Comprehension instruction and the development of prior knowledge, meaning vocabulary and oral language are necessary components of a balanced reading program that will produce thoughtful readers. Phonics activities for young children must include some opportunities to develop phonemic awareness, help them to apply what they are learning to reading and writing new words. Because readers eventually use larger-than-letter units to decode, some emphasis should be placed on helping children to focus on the onset-time units in words.

Making words is a manipulative activity in which children learn how to look for patterns in words and see how changing just one letter or adding one letter changes the whole word. Examples, children may be guarded to create a new version of an old song by changing some words in the old one.

#### Original Song

Twinkle, twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are  
Up above the world so high  
Like a diamond in the sky

#### New Version

Twinkle, twinkle little bat  
How I wonder where you're at  
Up above the world so high  
Like a tea tray in the sky

As you can see, the syntax and rhyming pattern of the original song were retained, but new words were substituted to create a new version.

## Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly with pacing and intonation. Fluent readers read aloud effectively and with expression as if they were speaking, while readers who are not yet fluent read slowly and word by word. To read fluently and with expression, readers must be able to easily recognize or decode individual words and divide the text into meaningful phrases and clauses. Fluency provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Children who cannot read texts fluently often have trouble fully comprehending the material.

## Fluency Instruction

Given the understanding of the importance of fluent reading, the question then becomes how we can promote fluency development within the classroom. Reading with expression is something for which we always strive as part of our literacy instruction. So, it is important during learners' formative years to provide them with extensive modelling of fluent reading and also provide them with numerous opportunities to practice oral reading in order to improve word recognition, speed and accuracy as well as fluency. Teachers should give support/help with unknown words. Oral reading practices may be increased through the use of audio-tapes, tutors and peer guidance.

## Vocabulary

There is no doubt that words are the currency of education. However, teachers are increasingly faced with diverse groups of learners in terms of current word knowledge, linguistic background, learning styles and literacy abilities. In the light of all these, teachers need to make word learning enjoyable, meaningful and effective. The question then is how does a teacher meet all these needs in a classroom of diverse learners? To meet all these needs, the effective vocabulary teacher should build a word-rich classroom environment. He should also provide

activities that support vocabulary growth. Children need to be guided to learn the meaning of words indirectly through constant oral and written language experience, including conversations with adults, listening to adults read aloud to them and discussing unfamiliar words, and also through reading extensively on their own. The teacher should also endeavour to teach key vocabulary words indirectly, for example by reviewing new vocabulary words in a text before students read the text. Lessons should also be provided on difficult words with multiple meanings, words that are spelt alike but pronounced differently, and idioms.

Word learning strategies need also to be taught, such as the use of the dictionary thesaurus and the use of context clues to figure out the meaning of words. Learners should also be encouraged and guided to make repeated use of new words in different contexts such as reading, discussions and writing.

### **Text Comprehension**

As important as word-level processes are to text comprehension, making meaning from text involves much more than just the processing of individual words. Comprehension process can be defined as comprising a set of meaning making skills, strategies and thought processes that readers initiate at specific points in a text to understand, apply and appreciate the author's writing.

Comprehension processes instruction is about encouraging young readers to be cognitively active as they read just like the way that mature, skilled readers are. The process begins with input from the teacher who models and explains the use of comprehension processes. Students then practice following the processes with other students.

For children to become good comprehenders, they need to



become fluent in word recognition processes to acquire an extensive vocabulary and to learn to be active like mature readers. As much as a teacher can teach word recognition, vocabulary and comprehension processes, fluent word recognition, extensive vocabulary development and good use of comprehension processes depends to a large extent, however, on young readers' ability to do a great deal of reading. Students must be guided to apply good reading strategies to enjoy maximum impact of extensive reading.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) suggests that instruction in early literacy needs to be organized and systematic. The areas recommended for focus are the ones already discussed: oral language, phonemic awareness, fluency and text comprehension. The NRP also highlights the importance of qualified teachers in developing successful readers. Snow, et al (1998) also state that the best defence against failure to learn to read fluently is excellent instruction from an exemplary teacher.

### **Reading at the Secondary and Tertiary Levels**

Readers at the secondary and tertiary levels of education we assume are readers in academic settings who most often read to learn and who need to be exposed to reading strategies like scanning, skimming, study reading and critical reading. This is the stage where learners learn to extract and integrate various needed information from the text and combine it with what is already known.

At these levels, it is the duty of teachers to stimulate students' interest in reading through the provision of suitable environment for continuous reading and exposing them to printed items maximally and modeling literacy (Muodumogu, 2006). There is

no doubt that teachers are a crucial factor in determining whether students would read or not. Unfortunately, many Nigerian literacy teachers are not well-groomed in the strategies needed to motivate students to engage in good reading culture. Teachers should give students at these levels appropriate instruction, good literacy model and a lot of comprehension practices.

### **School-Wide-Reading and Development of Reading Culture**

Apart from the role of language teachers as described above, all other stakeholders in the school should all work together with the classroom teacher to produce strong reading culture in the school. While the principal has the key responsibility in establishing and maintaining positive reading culture, other staff members and stakeholders also have roles to play in this process. Below are some ways through which reading culture can be fostered in a school as practiced in the reading nations of the world.

### **Creating Time for Reading Aloud**

Priority should be given to this approach. Reading aloud to children is very important in building the knowledge and language skills students need for success in reading. Listening to someone read aloud is an excellent way for students to become aware of words and expand their oral vocabulary which is the foundation for all other vocabulary learning. When a teacher reads aloud a text, he should stop periodically and discuss words that might be interesting, unusual or fun for children to think about. Books that are especially written to focus on certain types of words can be read aloud before students read them independently.

## Students should be given the Opportunity to Choose what to Read

When students are allowed to self-select and follow their own interests, reading follows naturally with most kids. Giving students freedom in what they read is key to text comprehension and development of independent reading skills.

### Classroom Libraries

Availability of plenty of books around children makes them develop love for books. Establishing a class library may be difficult to fund but it is the first place children often resort to when they need a book. Parents-Teachers Association can come to the rescue by cooperating with the school in this regard.

- Time should be set aside for independent reading. The school should find at least 15 minutes a day for self-selecting independent reading. This is ideal because giving kids the opportunity to read books of their choice is incredibly important.
- It is important to get parents involved by allowing students to borrow books from classroom library to read at home with their parents. Since some students come from homes with limited access to books, making sure kids have a book or two in their hands when they leave school means they have something to read with an adult at home.
- Teachers should be readers themselves. This will make kids know that teachers are readers too and they read what kids are reading too.

- The kids should be encouraged to talk about their reading. This will give them the opportunity to establish important reading relationships with their peers.
- Schools must organize book clubs within the school. This will serve as a perfect way to foster relationships around books.
- School-wide-reading should be exploited as a source of teaching kids how to summarise what they have read, thus writing is linked with reading.

Parents must always monitor what their children and wards do. The world has become a global village being driven by access to information which can be achieved through reading. So, parents have a role to play in helping their young children to cultivate reading culture because childhood is the appropriate period to begin to shape the life of these children.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, it is surprising that in most communities in Nigeria, once a school pupil cannot read, parents blame the teacher as if he is solely responsible for developing reading culture in the child. This is erroneous and unfortunate. Shittu, K. O. (1996) asserts that developing reading culture in children is not the sole responsibility of the teacher (school) but a joint responsibility of the school, the family, libraries, publishers, booksellers, the Government and the mass media. All these agencies work hand-in-hand to create the desired reading habit in children. It is pertinent to briefly discuss the role of all these agencies.

### The Family

Educationists believe that conditions at home influence a child's personal and social adjustment which in turn may promote or

hinder the child's ability to read. Mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts and grandparents, as well as other members and friends of the family provide the most important early experiences that build concepts and attitudes which create the successful reader. The disposition of the family toward reading influences the child's attitude towards books and reading. Parents who read and own books, who enjoy and appreciate reading themselves and who are fond of reading stories to their children usually produce children who want to read. An infant who is always kept on the mother's lap and read to – even if the story being read is not understood, learns that reading is a pleasurable experience, and that words and pictures must be interesting. Later, when the child grows up even on a different level, the attitude already created will continue. Staiger (1990) believes that reading to children should continue long after they have began to read for themselves. The quality and extent of a child's experience at home are important to his progress in reading. It is on this previous experience that the school builds. For this reason, parents hold the duty of endeavouring to set aside a daily period for family reading. Parents ought to spend time talking with their children, enjoying and sharing story books, discussing what is read or arguing about it. This is a useful way of developing vocabulary and of learning language structure. Thus, a parent or a member of the family who is fond of reading regularly to the child becomes a model to be emulated.

Chairman Sir, perhaps the most important parental contribution after setting the stage for reading is to make available reading materials in the family. Parents who desire to have reading children also make effort to provide them with reading materials recommended by the school. It is pertinent that parents should make getting books and reading materials for their children a high priority.

## **The Library**

Libraries, either public or school, have a lot to do in developing reading culture of children. In Nigeria today, libraries may not exist in so many places. A well-organized public or school library can positively influence the reading culture of children if well-utilized. Staiger (1990) asserts that money spent on books, journals and newspapers which students may consult in an open, pleasant, well lit atmosphere is as important as a playing field for educating young people. Staiger added that librarians who willingly recommend books and assist students in finding materials cultivate the soil of readership. They know that interesting knowledge when hidden on book shelves serve little purpose. Exposure of these is invaluable to the young reader.

## **Government**

To enable schools to accomplish more of their task of developing good readers, government must endeavour to give priority to the establishment of well-equipped school libraries for all levels of our educational system generally and for primary schools in particular because this is where the foundation necessary for the development of lifelong readership should be laid. Education should be well-funded by government and enabling environment should be provided for learning. But unfortunately, education has not been adequately funded in Nigeria and this has affected the provision of enabling environment for the development of reading culture in our youths.

## **Publishers and Booksellers**

There is a dearth of reading materials in Nigeria today. The cost of available ones is prohibitive. Keeping costs down and quality high is one of the constant responsibilities of a good publisher. Booksellers can be of great help in developing reading culture as some of them specialize in children's books. Others have

hinder the child's ability to read. Mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts and grandparents, as well as other members and friends of the family provide the most important early experiences that build concepts and attitudes which create the successful reader. The disposition of the family toward reading influences the child's attitude towards books and reading. Parents who read and own books, who enjoy and appreciate reading themselves and who are fond of reading stories to their children usually produce children who want to read. An infant who is always kept on the mother's lap and read to – even if the story being read is not understood, learns that reading is a pleasurable experience, and that words and pictures must be interesting. Later, when the child grows up even on a different level, the attitude already created will continue. Staiger (1990) believes that reading to children should continue long after they have begun to read for themselves. The quality and extent of a child's experience at home are important to his progress in reading. It is on this previous experience that the school builds. For this reason, parents hold the duty of endeavouring to set aside a daily period for family reading. Parents ought to spend time talking with their children, enjoying and sharing story books, discussing what is read or arguing about it. This is a useful way of developing vocabulary and of learning language structure. Thus, a parent or a member of the family who is fond of reading regularly to the child becomes a model to be emulated.

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sections where children can browse through and decide on which books to buy, while adults too do the same.

Publishers' association in collaboration with other stakeholders can embark on serious campaigns to improve reading culture. Invariably, if the reading culture of Nigerians grows, publishers and booksellers alike will make more money and the whole country will be better for it (Adefulu: 2007).

### **The Media**

The print and electronic media comprising the newspapers, journals, radio and television also have a lot to contribute to the task of developing children with effective reading culture. The media depend greatly on the written and spoken words and these are meant for the consumption of a literate public. The television, for instance, aids the task of producing early readers through programs like: Channels Book Club, Barney and Friends, etc. Newspapers and journals, apart from various columns on articles of interest to literate members of the society, create children's columns where articles, poems, rhymes, etc by young writers are published for the consumption of young readers. The availability of all these media in our homes and schools will go a long way in creating effective young readers.

### **Conclusion**

In this lecture, we have discussed the importance of positive reading culture to the development of any nation and that the development of our reading habits will improve the nation's human resources that will in turn facilitate the much desired sustainable development. We also noted that reading nations are leading nations and that a nation that takes the development of reading culture among her citizens seriously will be able to compete favourably with other nations in all the facets of development.

It is also emphasized that the habit of reading should be inculcated in youths from their formative years (childhood) and that competent teachers are crucial to the realization of this. We also debunk the wrong impression that it is the sole responsibility of teachers to make our youths positive readers for there are other stakeholders in inculcating good reading habits in children such as the family, the writers, publishers, libraries, booksellers, the media, civil societies, religious bodies, non-governmental organizations and more importantly government at all levels (local, state and national).

The hard reality steering us in the face is that Nigeria is not yet a reading nation but if we can make effort and eventually succeed in inculcating the reading culture in Nigeria citizens, there is hope that we can enjoy human capital development in the future and truly become a part of the ongoing global development.

### **Recommendations:**

We have discussed earlier on that for any society to develop and effectively harness its human and material resources, there is the need for sound education of the citizens especially in the area of reading proficiency among other crucial factors. It is through reading that a group of people can keep abreast of happenings around them and ideas both local and foreign. Reading has become more important, not only as a study skill but as a means for every person to gather information and develop the right attitude to life.

Most schools have failed to entrench reading culture in students. This is really disturbing because most school students come from illiterate homes. So, the school system should device various strategies to inculcate reading culture in learners. Among the

To improve reading culture in Nigeria, government should fund

The family also has a role to play. Parents and siblings should be models to children right from childhood. The family should endeavour to provide all necessary reading materials for children and if possible establish family libraries to afford children access to relevant reading materials. In addition, recommended reading materials should also be provided to motivate children to participate fully in reading instructions at school.

The importance of primary education as the foundation of formal education is not in doubt but the quality of teachers is the issue that needs to be tackled. This is so because a large number of our primary school teachers do not have what it takes to teach children how to read. So, if what is said in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) that "no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers" is true, the nation's teacher training needs to be re-examined with a view to making our teachers, particularly primary schools teachers well-grounded in the methodology of teaching reading. It is also not out of place to see that teachers at other levels of our education are also trained. In essence, the issue of whether the Nigerian child can read or not to a large extent depends on teachers, but it is not their sole responsibility.

possible strategies are: provision of a variety of books that are informative. It is our belief that learners will read voluntarily if materials are available. Besides the provision of relevant reading materials, establishment of school/classroom libraries in primary schools where the foundation for lifelong reading culture is laid is crucial. In addition, reading should be adequately taught through all the tiers of our education system and should be given a pride of place on the time-table (Shitu, 2010).

education adequately. The 26% of annual budget recommended by United Nations Organisation (UNO) to be expended on education should be taken seriously. The funding should impact on the provision of libraries for the various tiers of our education system. If education is well-funded, provision of adequate educational facilities and infrastructure will be easy. To facilitate the production of quality teachers, government should ensure that teacher training institutions admit sound candidates instead of left-overs. In the light of changes and new innovations and development in language teaching, regular re-training of practicing teachers should be organized by government at local, state and federal levels.

Federal and state government should establish modern publishing outfits where our writers could be encouraged to publish their works at reasonable costs "Government should make it a matter of policy to purchase copies of books published by these publishing firms for distribution to national, state and public school libraries. Copies of works published and which are supposed to be deposited with the National Library should also be distributed to schools as well. All these materials have a lot of contribution to make towards the development of reading culture.

Workshops on the teaching of reading should be organized from time to time to equip teachers with current methodologies of teaching reading. As a follow up to such training, reading should be included in the curriculum of schools as a subject.

Book development centres/agencies should be established by both state and federal governments for the development of reading materials. Such outfits as the Niger State Books and other Intellectual Resource Development Agency "should be

well-funded to produce reading materials for the development of reading culture in our children. We would also like to recommend that government should make available to schools e-resources for instructions on reading culture.

If the recommendations proffered above are taken seriously, Nigeria will surely develop a new generation of readers who will in the near future be able to engage in global competitiveness, thus joining the league of reading nations.

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## PROFILE OF THE INAUGURAL LECTURER

Professor Shittu Kelani Okunade was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 1953 to the family of Pa Shittu Okunade and Mopelola of Isale-Ora Quarters, Ogbomosho. He started his educational career at the Sadler Baptist Primary School in 1959. On completion of his primary education in 1965, he joined his elder brother in his business in Onitsha in the then Eastern Region. After a brief stay in Onitsha, he gained admission into St. Andrew's College, Oyo in 1970 and graduated in 1972 as a Grade II Teacher. He taught for sometime in Oyo North before gaining admission into Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo in 1974 where he read English and Physical Education. He had his National Service in Anambra State between July, 1977 and June, 1978.

Professor Shittu took up a teaching appointment with the Niger State Ministry Education in 1978 and was posted to Government Science Teachers' College, Wushishi. While on the job, he bagged his B.A. (Edu.) English and M.A. (Lit. in English) from the University of Ilorin in 1987 and 1992 respectively.

In December 1993, Shittu joined the services of Federal College of Education, Kano as a lecturer in the School of Languages of the Institution. At the institution, he served as the Head of Department, Language Arts between 1999 and 2001. He also bagged his Ph.D in English at the Bayero University, Kano in January, 2002.

Providence took Professor Shittu to Federal University of

Technology, Minna on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 where he was appointed a Senior Lecturer in the Department of General Studies.

He has served as Chairman and member of many committees in the University. Professor Shittu has held several administrative positions in the University: he served as examination officer, GST Department between 2006 and 2008, Deputy Dean, School of Science and Science Education 2008-2009, Head of Department, Mass Communication Technology Department, January, 2010-June, 2010, Deputy Dean, School of Information and Communication Technology July 2010-December, 2011. Coordinator, GST Unit October 2012-October 2014.

He has also contributed to the development of the community by teaching serving Grade II Teachers in the N.C.E. DLS Programme Organised by National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna and has been a Chief Examiner in English for NTI for several years. He has also served as visiting lecturer to Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University (IBBU) Lapai. He has served as facilitator in English at the National Open University of Nigeria Minna Study Center since 2010.

Prof. Shittu had his sabbatical leave at the Federal University, Dutse, Jigawa State (2014-2015). He was Chief Examiner and Moderator for Kano Polytechnic and College of Education, Kumbotso between 1996 and 2004. He also served as one of the moderators for Azare Journal of Education. He is currently an assessor for Kaduna Polytechnic.

Prof. Shittu is a member of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), English Scholars Association (ESA), and English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria (ELTAN).