

## **IMPROVING READING HABITS IN COMMUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA THROUGH THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.**

By

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### **Abstract**

The paper discussed reading, importance of reading, reading habit, benefit of good reading habit, causes of poor reading habit. The study took its bearing on public library services to improve reading habits in communities for sustainable development in Nigeria. Data for this study was collated by extensive literature review. Advantage of effective reading habit for sustainable community development were highlighted which include; empowering individuals, access to information, personal development, civic engagement, social inclusion, and economic growth which when attained will help to sustain development in communities and society at large. The paper identifies some strategies public library should use to improve reading habit among rural community members for sustainable development which include: readership promotion campaigns, establishment of reading clubs, providing enabling environments, equipped with current resources and modern technologies among others for extensive and varied information. The paper recommends that, all stakeholders; including government, public libraries, professional associations, NGO's among others should encourage the citizens to develop good reading habits to advance both as individuals and society at large for sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper concludes that, reading is a very essential skill that every citizen must imbibe for efficient and effective functionality in life.

**Keywords:** Reading, Public Library, Reading habit and sustainable community development.

### **Introduction**

Reading is a very important skill that every citizen must imbibe which will help them function well in life. A reading society is considered to be a literate society. A reading nation or person through the information acquired from reading helps for stability and sustainability in

socio-economic, and political development. Good reading habit is the way through which people, both young and old achieve success. Information is needed in all human endeavors as it is indispensable in human life, hence a basic public need for human and national development. Access to information is very necessary for the educational, economic, socio-political, and religious empowerment of the citizenry. Reading is a basic life skill needed by an individual throughout one's life. Reading gives the reader a wonderful insight into the environment and the world at large, wherever the reader lives, whether in the rural communities or urban settings.

Developing the habit of reading books and other materials gives one comfort even in a midst of loneliness. Reading develops creativity and stimulates the thinking process of the reader. Good reading habit feeds the creative mind and inculcates the universe of knowledge to the reader. According to Malipatil (2021), Malipatil (2021) reported that a lot can be gained through reading such as building or fixing things, enjoying stories, ascertaining the belief of others, and, developing one's ideas. It also provides one with all forms of information necessary for daily activities. Reading also contributes to the growth, development, and progress of individuals who consider reading as an inseparable part of an intellectual life.

Reading expands the understanding of things among people living in urban areas, in communities, and people in all works of life. People living in the rural communities need public library as a place to get information for their sustainable development. Rural communities in Nigeria is characterized by economic backwardness, poverty, high illiteracy rate, unemployment, lack of economic and social amenities such as roads, electricity, pipe-born water, hospitals, banks, industries, rural telephony, subsistence economy, among others (Anie, 2014). According to Basmo (2023) one of the top seven best places to read is in the library.

### **Public Library**

Public library is a library established and funded by either State or Local Government in a country. Malipatil (2021) states that a public library is a social institution open to all people of society without any discrimination and is meant for the dispersion of information. According to Malipatil, Dr. S. R. Ranganathan defines a public library as a public institution or establishment

charged with the care of collection of books and, the duty of making them **accessible** to those who require the use of them. Sadiku, Olarongbe and Tsafe (2018) submitted that a public library is wholly designed to render information services to the general public irrespective of status, occupation, sex, or age, and these services are meant to be free or attract a little fee. According to them, public libraries are funded by the government with tax-payers money and with the backing of legislation. Thus, it is free to all without any discrimination. Udo-Anyanwu and Wegbu (2017) define the public library as a government or public-funded library established to provide free services on an equal basis to the generality of the people without discrimination. According to Udo-Anyanwu and Wegbu, the public library exists for free and unrestricted provision of books and related materials to serve the vocational, cultural, and recreational needs of the members of the public particularly, those living within the environment or locality where it is established. Edom (2012) defined a public library as a tax-supported library serving the generality of the public without bias to gender, age, race, religion, level of education, etc. Edom emphasized that public library services are provided to people who are in need of information and knowledge for both individual and national development.

### **Reading**

Reading is the communication between the mind and the printed materials, which involves getting the message, meaning, and thought. Reading is a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information, or entertainment through the written word in materials such as books, journals, and electronic information resources. According to Ogonu and Owate (2023), Reading is the process of looking at a series of written/printed symbols from where meanings can be deduced using critical and evaluative thinking through voluntary reading for self and national development. They stated that reading is the process of looking at and comprehending the meaning of written and printed words from the usual representation of symbols. This involves recognition and sometimes verbalization of symbols, which represent sounds in human speech. Reading is a process that requires the use of complex thought procedures to interpret printed

symbols as meaningful units and comprehend them as thought units to understand a printed message.

Ogbonna (2014) posits that reading is several interactive processes between the reader and the text, in which the reader uses his/her knowledge to build, create, and construct meaning. According to Ogbonna, reading is one of the most useful skills in learning a language. It is how the unbounded field of knowledge lies open before the reader and he/she will be able to know new facts and relationships. Mikulecky (2011) states that reading is seen to be a complex conscious and unconscious mental process in which the reader uses a variety of strategies to reconstruct the meaning that the author is assumed to have intended, based on data from the text and from the reader's prior knowledge.

Reading is a complex communicative process of receiving and interpreting written words. It involves recognizing what is written and comprehending the matter and understanding the main and subsidiary points as well as links between different parts of the written material, which will help the reader to decode, comprehend, text, analyse, and respond which can be changed to information (Ogonu and Owate 2023). Reading is the process of looking at a series of written symbols and getting meaning from them (Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall, 2021). According to them, reading is a mental process in which someone looks into a written text and starts to absorb the information from the written linguistic message. Reading is the major avenue of learning. To read is to exercise the brain and increases the chances to assimilate better.

### **Importance of Reading**

The importance of reading cannot be overemphasized. Imbibing reading as a habit is a virtue that brings joy. The more we read, the more we are exposed to issues and solutions to the common problems we face as individuals and as a nation. Malipatil (2023), states that reading is important in education as well as in day-to-day life for the intellectual growth of a person. Reading is essential for those who seek to rise above the ordinary. Ajumobi (2017) asserts that readers are leaders. People who read more are likely to be leaders among their peers due to their

vast knowledge. Many interesting places around the globe are mainly known through reading about them. Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019) state that, reading a book is a magical portal to another universe. According to them, one is never too old, too wacky, or too wild to pick up a book and read.

Reading is not only for children or the extremely intelligent, rather, anyone who wants to read can read. Reading improves writing skills, reduces stress and tension, stimulates, and exercises the brain, enhances satisfaction, and enlarges the mind (Ogonu and Owate 2023). Reading helps to mold the entire life of a person. Other importance of reading are as follows:

- Reading enhances memory as it exercises the muscles of the brain which makes one smarter and more intelligent.
- Reading improves discipline as it helps to control one's thought, actions, and emotion.
- Vocabulary: The more one reads, the more one is exposed to more words. Regular reading ensures continuous learning as learning is a life-long process.
- Continuous reading helps the reader to have creative thinking that aids in critical skills for sharp and technical innovations.
- Regular reading makes one more informed, and the more knowledge one gains, the more powerful one becomes.
- Reading is a tool of self-improvement that leads to do-it-yourself techniques, acquisition, equipping oneself with skills for a better job, pleasure, and relaxation.
- Reading trains our minds and broadens our outlook. It is the process of transforming information into knowledge. Reading contributes to an individual's well-being and to the overall development of the nation.

Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019) outlined the benefits of reading as follows:

1. Reading enhances educational growth and national development
2. Reading enhances connectivity in the brain function, and that, regular reading may slow the effect of dementia.

3. Regular reading saves one from the stress of everyday life, helping one to keep body and mind at ease.
4. Sometimes, worrying about things in life may keep one awake for a very long time but, embarking on reading, even for a while can attract sleep to someone.
5. Regular reading enhances quality education. One can read books freely in the library.
6. Regular reading with high concentration helps one to be focused for good productivity.
7. Reading is a form of entertainment. Reading books can transport one to different worlds without paying airfare. In fact, reading is fun.

### **Reading Habit**

Reading habit is the process of building up positive reading attitudes among communities and individuals over some time. Reading habit is the act of developing the zeal for making reading a continuous process and life-long activity. According to Nyam (2015), reading culture is the ability to use reading as a regular activity and thus, the cultivation of an attitude and the possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular, and constant activity. Ailakhu and Unegbu (2017) posit that reading culture is having the habit of reading in every life and not just for school purpose. They further emphasised that, over time, reading ceases to become the uphill task of reading to pass the examination, rather it takes on an intrinsic value of reading for the sake of reading until an inclination to further reading is developed. The essence of good reading habits is to be encouraged to read as part of daily life and to establish the reading of books as a habit that will always be needed and enjoyed throughout one's life. Reading is a very important skill that every citizen must imbibe which will help them function well in life. A reading society is considered to be a literate society. A reading nation or person is always stable and developmentally driven.

Good reading habit is the way through which people, both young and old achieve success. Good reading habits should be inculcated among the citizens of the community through public library collections, readership promotion campaigns, and reading clubs among others. Public libraries should extend their services beyond the walls of the libraries, reach out to the

general public, and help them become serious-minded readers. Therefore, all stakeholders; government, public libraries, and professional associations among others should encourage the citizens to develop reading habits to foster development both individually and the society at large.

### **Benefits of Good Reading Habit**

The benefits of good reading habits for an individual's success in life and national development cannot be overemphasized. Reading not only relaxes the mind but, also develops the thinking ability of the human mind and keeps a person informed about current affairs. Good reading habit improves confidence in all ramifications and life endeavours. One should, therefore, develop the habit of reading to be information literate. Busayo (2011) states that a reading habit is a pattern with which an individual organizes his/her reading. Chettri and Rout (2013) state that the habit of reading provides an experience through which the individual may expand his/her interest and gain a deeper understanding of himself/herself and of others. It also breeds peace and harmony. Issa et al. (2012) stated that if one has practice of reading regularly without even thinking about it, a conclusion can be drawn that, good reading habits have been formed. According to them, a habit forms when an individual does something repeatedly without being conscious about it. Ibrahim (2014) attests that reading assists the reader's imagination and enhances their intellectual growth.

Ogbodo (2010) identifies three types of reading habits; hobbial, recreational, and concentration. In hobbial, one derives joy and satisfaction in doing it. Hobbial reading helps the person to satisfy his or her interests and aspirations. Reading for recreation or relaxation is common among the employed. This reading relaxes the brain to avoid mental fatigue. Concentration is result oriented which is done to obtain a specific achievement. According to Malipatil (2021), reading is important in education as well as in day-to-day life for the intellectual growth of a person.

Good reading habit improves an individual's vocabulary, pronunciation, knowledge, and lifelong learning. Good reading habit promotes self-education which helps in the modification of personality. Kaur and Jawald (2018) outlined some benefits of reading as follows:

- Books can expand one's horizons by letting him/her see what other cities and countries have to offer before visiting them, and give glimpse into other cultures and places.
- Reading improves the memory by stretching memory muscles
- Adding book reading to one's daily schedule and sticking to it improves discipline.
- Reading helps an individual to build self-esteem by becoming better informed and more expert in using his/her brain to become smarter.
- Reading improves vocabulary and exposes one to many new words.

Nations with good reading habits are more developed than nations with poor reading habits, as reading sharpens the mind, and makes one reason rationally and objectively in life. In fact, readers are leaders. A nation with good citizens' reading habits develop more than those with poor reading habit.

**The Need to Improve Good Reading Habits In The Communities Through Public Library**  
It is not an understatement that reading habit among the rural dwellers is tragically deficient when compared to those in urban areas. Yet rural dwellers are the "breadwinners" of the country those that feed the country because

### **Causes of Poor Reading Habit**

There are many factors that hinder the effective reading habits of people in Nigeria. Ogonu and Owate (2023) state that, when there were no handsets, televisions, and computers, people spent hours reading thereby cultivating the reading habit but now, with the advent of emerging technologies and other factors, people lost passion to read. According to them, various factors are seen hindering the development of good reading habits among members of the communities in Nigeria including non-functional public libraries, obsolete information materials, inexperienced professional librarians, lack of conducive library environment, poor funding from



the government and nonexistence of public libraries, high poverty rate, illiteracy, etc. Other factors include:

- Lack of public libraries: Some states and communities do not have functional public libraries
- The advent of modern technologies: the Internet, computer, mobile phones, videos, etc. have taken the attention of people from reading to surfing the internet, whatsapp messaging, and game playing among others. With these, people are glued to mobile phones, and video/film watching and are no longer interested nor have time for reading and thereby cannot develop reading habits. Social networking sites have created a huge impact on the lives of many individuals. The culture of reading is decreasing among people in communities as a result of the use of the Internet and social media. People use the Internet to retrieve any information they require. Again, some people believe or feel that the internet has the answer to all their information needs but forget that, most veritable information may not be online based but, is in print format thereby missing out on knowledge acquisition from books, journals, etc.
- Poverty: Poverty is one of the factors that inhibit reading habits in Nigeria. When people are poor, their primary concern is seeking ways to solve their immediate problems, to them, reading is not an issue and this affects their reading habit
- Attitude: Many Nigerians have a very poor attitude to reading. Most people lack interest in reading.
- Visually and hearing impaired persons are always challenged to regular reading though, they may be aided with specialised equipment. Public libraries need to update their collections and add e-books to their present collections. The users may be given access to the virtual collection through individual logins.

### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is an approach to growth and human development that aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet

their own needs. The aim is to have a society where living conditions and resources meet human needs without undermining planetary integrity (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). According to <https://www.un.org> (2023), sustainable development is how we must live today if we want a better tomorrow by meeting present needs without compromising the chances of the future generations to meet their needs. The survival of our communities and our shared planet depends on a more sustainable world.

Where development is sustainable, everyone has access to decent work, quality health care, and education. No one should be left behind due to disadvantages or discrimination. Therefore, read widely and extensively to know your right at all times.

Kulik (2025) stated that, sustainable development is an approach to social, economic, and environmental planning that attempts to balance the social and economic needs of present and future human generations with the imperative of preserving or preventing undue damage to the natural environment.

### **Advantages of Effective Reading for Sustainable Community Development**

Reading is a crucial skill that can contribute significantly to community development. Access to information and extensive reading can empower individuals to participate actively in their communities thereby, improve on their livelihoods and foster more informed and engaged citizenry. The following factors are outlined by AI overview as the good products of effective reading for sustainable community development:

1. **Empowering Individuals:** Reading skill is essential for accessing education, training, and employment opportunities. This can lead to increased income, improved living standards, and greater economic self-sufficiency within the community.
2. **Access to Information:** Reading provides access to wealths of knowledge, enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their health, education, and civic participation. This can lead to better health care outcomes, higher levels of education, and more engaged citizens.

3. **Personal Development:** Reading can broaden horizons, foster critical thinking, and enhance problem-solving abilities, ultimately empowering individuals to take ownership of their lives and contribute to the development of their communities.
4. **Civic Engagement:** A literate population is more likely to participate actively in civic affairs, hold elected offices, accountable, and advocate for social change. This can lead to more democratic and participatory society.
5. **Social Inclusion:** Reading can bridge divides and promote understanding between different groups within the community. By providing access to diverse perspectives and stories, reading can foster empathy and social cohesion.
6. **Economic Growth:** A literate and informed workforce is essential for economic development. Reading skills can enable individuals to acquire new skills, adapt to changing economic conditions and contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable economy.

### Strategies to Encourage Reading in Communities through the Public Libraries

Public libraries can use the following strategies to promote good reading habits in communities:

1. **Library Week:** This is setting a week aside to inform people about the importance and essence of the library, and the benefits and gains of using it (Ailakhu and Unegbu, 2017).
2. The public library can sponsor readership promotion campaigns in communities. This will be used to foster good reading habits in people of the communities.
3. Public libraries can organise readership promotion campaigns where the students and community populace will be invited to participate. As they participate, books will be given to them to read. This is to encourage participatory reading.
4. Public libraries should provide an enabling environment and current materials for extensive and varied information.
5. One of the strategies to develop reading habits is to start early as a child to read and visit libraries.

The following strategies are stipulated by Ogonu and Owate (2023):

1. Organize Regular Awareness Campaign: The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should be holding readership awareness campaigns in communities with staff of the public libraries. This readership campaign should be held at least, yearly to remedy poor reading habits among the citizenry.
2. Collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): Public libraries should collaborate with (NGOs) in promoting readership among people in the country. They can do this through organising workshops, seminars, and quiz competitions with awards, for the promotion of good reading habits in Nigeria.

Onuoha (2023) opined that strategies for improving reading habits include: book exhibitions; book talks; story talk hours, creative activities or creative writing; book clubs, drama, and mobile reading tents.

### **Role of the Public Library in Improving Reading Habits**

Public library services provide access to books, reading materials, and digital resources, fostering a love of reading and promoting life-long learning. The role of public libraries is very important in promoting reading habits in society because of the diverse information provisions to the user communities. Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019) outlined some of the roles of public libraries in promoting reading habits as promoting literacy, offering a variety of information resources, etc. A public library is a social institution that is open to all people in society without any discrimination and, is meant for the dispersion of information ( Malipatil, 2021). Public libraries are known to be peoples university and local gateway to knowledge because, it provides basic condition for lifelong learning, reading materials, and cultural development of individual in addition to The 1994 UNESCO Manifesto which, states the following missions of a public library:

- Supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels.
- Providing opportunities for personal creative development and stimulating the imagination and creativity of children

- Ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information.

Public libraries have always rendered services towards a better reading habit in the communities and the society at large. This they do as knowledge managers, preservers, and organizers of information, encouraging reading of these information resources for the development of persons and the nation. The public library is all about books, reading, learning, connecting, and playing. Public libraries are committed to helping both children and adults develop the skills needed to survive and thrive in a global information society.

### **Recommendation**

Extensive reading habit is very crucial for sustainable development in the country, it fosters literacy, enhances knowledge acquisition, and empowers individuals to contribute effectively to the progress of any community. In view of this, the study recommends the following:

1. People should start early in life to read and visit the library.
2. Good reading habits should be inculcated among the citizens of the community through public library collections, awareness and readership promotion campaigns, and reading clubs among others.
3. Public libraries should extend their services beyond the walls of the libraries, reach out to the general public, and help them become serious-minded readers.
4. Stakeholders including; government, and NGOs among others should ensure the provision of adequate funding and support to public libraries to strengthen them to encourage the citizens to develop reading habits to foster development both individually and the society at large.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, improving reading habit will promote literacy and education thereby, improve sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper has extensively discussed what reading and reading habit entail, importance of reading, benefit of good reading habit, causes of poor reading habit, effect of improved reading habit for sustainable community development. The role

of public libraries and the strategies they should use to encourage and improve reading habits in communities were identified. Reading is a very important skill that every citizen must imbibe which will help them function well in life. A reading society is considered to be a literate society. A reading nation or person is always stable and developmentally driven. Good reading habit is the way through which people, both young and old can achieve success. In fact, reading is an activity that is both fun and productive.

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