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# SOCIETAL PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST READING CULTURE IN NIGERIA: A PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT**

*Reading has become an integral part of human life. This is because no society can develop socially, politically, educationally, technologically and intellectually without focusing on reading and learning as a basis for development. Nigeria is currently approaching a freezing and lowest point as a result of poor or lack of reading habit which resulted in problems such as Boko Haram phenomenon, kidnapping, kalare, corruption, abductions, gender-based violence, militancy and unknown gun men and drug abuse. It is against this background, that this paper examined the concepts of reading. The perspectives of reading and situation of reading culture in Nigeria were examined. The paper also discussed the current societal problems in Nigeria. The benefits of promoting reading culture in Nigeria as well as the initiatives towards reviving reading culture in Nigeria were also discussed extensively in the paper. The paper concluded that for Nigeria to advance politically, economically and technologically, reading should be given due attention by the government and other stakeholders. The paper recommended that National Library of Nigeria should sustain the readership promotion campaign as reading adds quality to life, provides access to culture and cultural heritage, empowers and emancipates people's attitudes and way of engagement.*

**Keywords:** Reading, Reading culture, Benefits, Societal problems, Libraries

## Introduction

The challenges of cultivating the culture of reading habit have hindered the growth and development of contemporarily society socially, politically, educationally, economically, technologically and intellectually. Despite that 21st century has made access to reading easily and conveniently through technology which enhances development globally in digital revolutions and innovations characterized by fifth industrial revolution thereby connecting cyber, virtual and physical space. This advancement in digital technology has also made communication, collaboration, information flow and work easier. For example, self-driving cars, online shopping and drone delivery services are digital technology system that continues to solve some of the world's biggest problem faster with fewer errors and better result. However,

in Nigeria, problems of Boko Haram phenomenon, kidnapping, kalare activities, corruption, nepotism, abductions, banditry, militancy and unknown gun men as well as drug abuse are currently freezing and lowering development which has greatly and collectively affected the growth of the nation especially with the provision of atmospheric condition to read and the habit to read in peaceful manner.

Before the advent of writing, the pre-literate man in his relatively stable and open society communicates mostly through verbal and inter-personal means for understanding and sharing of views and opinion among each other. Oral tradition forms the most valuable sources of information for reconstruction of the past; and even those people who have developed the art of writing still use historical sources which are based on oral information. Studied by UNESCO (2022) revealed that the origin of reading would be incomplete without making reference to orality as an important component of literacy and literary development because written documents were still read out loud and vocalised. Adamu (2023) argued that reading had existed in the European Middle Ages (476-1453) but remained restricted and largely limited to the Clergy and the medieval Schoolmen who tirelessly copied and recopied Aristotle.

Alex-Nwecha and Horsfall (2019) stated that oral documentation remained the sources of preservation of information resources until the arrival of the moveable-type and Guttenberg's printing press and movable type in about 1455. Until Johannes Guttenberg's invention, the only way to reproduce text was copying by hand, a laborious task left mainly to monks in their monasteries. The printing press made books a mass commodity and precisely for that reason, literacy became a mass phenomenon and standardized typeface made reading an easier activity because readers no longer had to deal with the idiosyncrasies of another person's handwriting. The errors so frequently made by scribal copyist were eliminated. Thus, thousands of people could have access to the same presumably error-free standard edition of a text (Adamu, 2023).

At the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, a joint committee was adopted by Member countries to provide a basic Education for the people as prescribed in the Declaration that was adopted in the conference. The conference influenced the definitional aspects of the literacy goal by broadening the discussion to that of mastery of the 3 R's (Reading, WRiting and ARithmetic), but also in terms of other knowledge, problem-solving and life skills. Today, reading has become an integral part of life because its shape mental, physical (competencies), moral and intellectual being of the individual as well as promote the socio-economic, political, educational and cultural destiny of a society because a reading society is a progressive one.

The author also blamed stakeholders for not making a policy statement on reading as a right; and the society for not responding to the call. He lamented that people read for achieving certain target like passing examination, assignment, aptitude test for employment rather than for enrichment of the mind or passion. Similarly, Wasiu (2011) blamed failure of reading to total collapsed in the educational system. He advised the government and other stakeholders in the education sector to take a proactive measure in reversing the trend. He maintained that adequate funding, good policies and welfare package should be given adequate consideration.

Poor reading has crippled the educational system to the extent that secondary school graduates cannot read nor write properly. Research has shown that a number of reasons are attributed to the failure of reading culture in Nigeria. Leonard (2011) in his contribution to education in Nigeria argued that high cost of fees, cost of textbooks, high rate of poverty among the people; societal problems, infrastructural decay and cultural belief are some of the causes of reading. He warned that if the trend continued in this way, the target of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) would be a mirage. Going by the 2020 report of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), the literacy levels in the country has steadily and gradually deteriorated as a result of activities of Boko Haram phenomenon, kidnapping, Kalare, kidnapping, abductions and drug abuse. The UNESCO (2020) report also indicated that the overall literacy rate had declined to 54.1% from 71.9% in 2010. The report is linked to the fact that Nigerians in all spheres of life do not appreciate the value of reading as a component of life.

The world Culture Index reveals that an average Nigerian reads less than one book in a year and only 1% of professionals read one non-fiction book per month. The study shows that 30 million Nigerians have graduated from higher institutions with poor reading skills (Otache, 2020). Nigeria is hoping to be among the giant economic Nations by the year 2030. In order to achieve the set target, reading culture must be given due attention as a key component to development socially, economically, and technologically. However, many of the Nigerian libraries are still battling with the problems of standards in terms of provision of information that would meet the needs of users. The inability of the Nigerian government to stock libraries with current literature posed serious challenges to reading, learning, research and scholarly development (Liman, 2022). Alex-Nwecha and Horsfall, (2019) on the other hand, observed with dismay the failure on the part of stakeholders in the education system which led to the total collapse of reading and learning in Nigeria. He argued that Many employers observe that the quality of university graduates has worsened during the 1990's... poor state of library services, poor quality library resources, outdated books, journals, abstracts, and other academic collections have hampered the progress of intellectual development (Alex-Nwecha, & Horsfall, 2019).

These concerns are worrisome because the level of literacy and literary development is gradually diminishing. Research conducted on Reading Abilities of Junior Secondary School Students in Kano state by Garba (2003) revealed that poor state of reading and learning in Nigeria can be attributed to the inability of the students to grasp what they are taught using English Language as a medium of instruction in all subjects in the school. This factor according to her is responsible for the falling standard of education amidst of other various factors. She recommended for provision of standard library equipped with necessary information resources that would bring to life the reading habit as a way of life for the people.

**Benefits of Promoting Reading Culture in Nigeria**

There is no doubt that a reading society is an informed and knowledgeable society that contributes to economic and all-inclusive development of the country. This is because reading has become an integral part of human life. This means that no society can develop socially, politically, educationally, technologically and intellectually without focusing on reading as an integral basis for development. Anunobi (2022) emphasized that reading adds quality to life, provides access to culture and cultural heritage. Reading empowers and emancipates people's attitudes and way of engagement. Reading also improves focus, memory, empathy and communication skills. Psychologically, reading reduces stress, improves mental health and makes one to live longer (American Health Magazines, 2022). Reading expands vocabulary and strengthens writing ability and sound intellectual endeavour. Reading expands the psychomotor and relaxes the nerves thereby making an individual to feel happy as well as makes the brain to function effectively. Reading helps to boost confidence and develop individuals' personality. Reading stimulates creativity and boost talent of individual.

Reading build literary talent and increase attention to learn new skills as well as updates mind to facts and figures. Anunobi (2022) reiterated that reading spread affection, love and curiosity in gaining wide knowledge as well as increase sense of belonging. Reading builds self-esteem and encourages imaginary thoughts. Reading helps an individual to grow in thought and action as well help in achieving life goals. Reading also develops individuals experience about problems and inspires, motivate and change life for better.

Reading culture provides foundational to individual and societal development. to effectively comprehend, interpret, and analyze written materials as well as expand vocabulary, which opens up opportunities for educational success and personal growth. It equips individuals with critical thinking skills, facilitating better decision-making and problem-solving abilities. As Anunibi (2022) argues that reading improves conversation skills, inspires dreams, makes you a better leader, gives fresh ideas, increases attention span, helps learn new skills, makes history easier to remember and help in problem solving skills. Reading also promotes reading literacy empowers its citizens to engage meaningfully in democratic processes, fostering a more informed and active population. A well-established reading culture nurtures a lifelong habit of learning, with individuals consistently seeking new knowledge and perspectives. According to Adamu (2022), regular reading habits, especially those encouraged from a young age, contribute significantly to cognitive development. Reading stimulates mental faculties, improves memory retention, and enhances focus. As individuals continue to engage with diverse texts, they develop more profound analytical skills, enabling them to navigate complex subjects with ease. The development of these skills has a ripple effect, impacting academic performance and career success. Anunobi (2022) again found out that elite did not read much outside their professional materials. It is important that people read other materials like; inspirational books, biographies, business books and so on. A good book can change your life.

Moreover, reading literacy is closely linked to improved communication skills. People who read regularly are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures, and writing styles. This exposure translates into better writing and speaking abilities, allowing individuals to express themselves more clearly and persuasively (Oluwabunmi, 2018). Strong communication skills are essential for academic and professional success, whether writing reports, presenting proposals, or participating in discussions.

**Societal Problems that Mitigate Reading Culture in Nigeria**

Poor reading culture portrays serious danger. Anunobi (2022) again lamented that reading habit in Nigeria is currently approaching a freezing and lowest point as a result of

activities of Boko Haram elements, kidnapping, kalare, abductions and kidnapping, militancy and unknown gun men as well as drug abuse which has slowed development in many parts of the country. The literature review examines various societal problems that posed serious danger to reading culture in Nigeria and beyond as follows:

*Kalare Phenomenon*

Credible sources have estimated that so many school activities were disrupted as a result of youths popularly called Kalare indulging in killing and destruction of activities in some part of Northern Nigeria (Daily Trust, 2021). The kalare used weapons such as stones, machetes, knives, arrow and sophisticated and high-calibre of gadgets to perpetrate killings. Research conducted by Hollander and Carr, (2020) revealed that youth with age bracket of 17 to 25 mostly uneducated mostly involved in the act of kalare activities in some parts of North east State especially in Bauchi, Taraba, Adamawa and Gombe State. In Gombe, the spate of kalare became pronounce during the second civilian administrator in the State. Many innocent individuals fell victims of attacks with the used of sophisticated weapons from the youth within Gombe metropolis and environs. These activities have prompted the closure of many schools thereby hindering reading and learning activities. Children that were supposed to be found in schools studying were forced to stay at home or scavenging on the street as a result of activities of kalare.

*Boko Haram Elements*

Boko Haram phenomenon has force many schools and community deserted because their ideology opposed to western knowledge. They intentionally killed and maimed civilians as well as destroyed schools thereby forcing children and women to live in IDP camps. Studying centres were disrupted in many communities in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. Many witnesses reported that Boko Haram killed many teachers and students studying in schools. The killings were often preceded by death threats or an invitation from Boko Haram "inviting" men and boys to denounce western education and join them in "the work of Allah". Those who refused to join were killed, and their bodies often left to rot in the streets, in wells or river beds. The activities of Boko Haram have force schools to be closed and people relocated from their ancestral homes to IDP camps. These activities have not affected the reading and learning activities but crippled the social and economic development of the affected communities.

*Militancy and Unknown Gun Men Activities*

The activities of militancy and unknown gun men in recent times have continued to cause civil unrest among separatist organisation, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its militia wing, Eastern Security Network (ESN). They have targeted government buildings and security personnel. They have also crippling the economy of the zone, while those who break the order are regularly attacked and killed. Premium Times (2022) reports indicated that the activities of the militancy and unknown gun men in the South east led to the destruction of police station, schools and worship centres. The most dangerous profession to serve the nation is police personnel. Every week, there are reports of attacks on Police station, arson and killing of officers. This callous activity has lowered development which as greatly and collectively affected the growth of the nation especially with the provision of atmospheric condition to read and the habit to read in peaceful manner.

*Banditry and Cattle Rustling Menace*

Banditry and cattle rustling activities have been a serious threat to public safety and security in Nigeria. Bandits and cattle rustlers are known to use small arms and light weapons such as Mark 4, German Riffle 3, Alexander Klashikov 47 (AK 47), grenades and mortars. Raids are well planned and executed with military precision characterized by the use of modern and destructive weapon. Reports on bandits and cattle rustling shows that weapons storming herders' settlements proliferate on daily basis in Nigeria and this bandits and rustlers comes with the mission of killing people and stealing cows. It also indicates that cattle were rustled from commercial livestock farms and traditional herders in Nigeria. Virtually all States in the Northern Region of Nigeria are affected by banditry and cattle rustling. In most cases, the rustlers wore military-style camouflaged uniforms and some of the rustlers have considerable experience in herding. Education and enlightenment have become a dependable platform for the dissemination of information such as security tips and criminality information and a tool for action and feedback mechanism. These activities have continued to cause serious challenge and setback to reading posed great danger to the growth and development of the country.

*Kidnapping and Abductions Issues*

People were mainly kidnapped and abducted by certain group of people for indoctrination in its ideology and for recruitment into its fighting force, while women and girls were abducted for ransom, sexual exploitation, forced marriages, labour and religious conversions. To date, the whereabouts of many of the victims kidnapped in recent times were still unknown, and those who have attempted to escape have been killed while some were beaten to death. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are also part of violation and societal problems experienced in recent times. Abductees have been subjected to various forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. According to United Nation (2021) various women and children were subject to repeated beating by some individual elements in the society which hindered them from participating in reading and learning activities.

*Sexual and Gender-based Violence*

Since 2009, sexual and gender-based abuse has continued to spread widely in northern Nigeria and especially in north eastern state of the country. Several forms of abuse, including sexual slavery, sexual violence, forced marriages, forced pregnancies and forced conversions. UNESCO (2020), reports confirmed that there are widespread of sexual violence against women and girls held by people in Bauchi, Yobe, Borno, Gombe, Adamawa and Taraba state. The study also revealed that owing to stigma, cultural and religious norms which deeply entrenched gender stereotypes, most victims have been reluctant to speak about sexual violence they have endured. Girls were forcefully removed from schools to marry against their wish. According to a report by the United Nations Human Rights Abuse in Nigeria (2020), women generally faced worse stigmatization than men and boys. Pregnant women, who gave birth while in captivity, or shortly after rescue, were stigmatized, together with their children. This action posed a great danger to the reading values of the nation and hindered its growth.

*Violence against Children and Use of Children in Hostilities*

According to report by United Nation (2020), the rate of violence against the children is alarming. Boys and girls are recruited for active hostilities instead of been in school to read. Some boys were forced to attack their own families while girls were forced to marry, clean,

cook and carry equipment and weapons. Some boys and girls were increasingly used as human shields. In Nigeria, children aged between 6 and 15 years who had been engaged in hostilities described the situation as horrible as many were surrounded by guns, and armoured vehicles. They were deeply traumatized, having experienced sexual violence and exploitation as against attending schools.

*Drugs Abuse*

There are several categories of modern drugs that caused societal problems and threats to lives of individuals in the society which affect physiological and mental ability of individual. These drugs alter the brain chemistry which interferes with an individual's ability to make decision negatively. Many young people have dropped out of school as a result of drug abuse. Some of these drugs according to Ali (2020) have destroyed the reading capabilities and learning faculty of the youth. Major drug substances that youths engage include: stimulants, narcotics, cannabis, depressants, analgesics, and sedatives, performance enhancing drug, hallucinogens and inhalants. These drugs have brought set back to the country educationally and intellectually.

*Corruption Problems*

According to Transparency International, corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain and each year since 1995, the organisation has published Corruption Perspective Index that scores the world`s nations out of 100 for their public-sector honesty. According to Jose Ugaz, Chair of Transparency International, "In too many countries, people are deprived of their most basic needs and go to bed hungry every night because of corruption while the powerful and corrupt enjoy lavish lifestyles with impunity" (Transparency International, 2017). Corruption is at the root of many of Nigeria's problems in totality. Corruption takes many forms and infiltrates all political institutions and economic sectors. It is so sad to hear that the government which is set up to build the country and fight any form of corruption is now stealing from her people. Chapter II Section 15 subsection 5, of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states thus: "The State shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power".

Ibrahim (2022) stated that the same constitution provides that education is right of every citizen. Every child must be educated from primary to university level free. Thus, reading and learning has equally become a right for everyone to be literate to contribute to socio-economic development of the country. However, due to corruption and inequality and poor distribution of wealth in the country as a result of corruption, provision of reading and learning materials, instructional materials and other facilities are neglected by those who are supposed to serve the country diligently.

**Initiatives towards Reviving Reading Culture in Nigeria**

In the past two decades, there have been various initiatives from government agencies, non-governmental organisations and individuals towards Reviving Reading Culture in Nigeria. For example, the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) initiated the Readership Promotion Campaign Programmes to educate, enlighten and inform Nigerians the value of reading as part of life. As such, various workshops, seminars, conferences and fora were organised in every geo-political zone of the country to create awareness among the general populace. Ikpahindi (2009) emphasized that the essence of the readership promotion campaign is to deepen readership among Nigerians. Anunobi (2022) also maintained that this year 2022 readership campaign was different from the previous years because vulnerable centres and grassroots were the most desirable because a knowledgeable society contributes positively to economic transformation and all-inclusive development of its members in the society.

This effort led to distribution of books, journals, tablets, smart phones, mini computers and other digital technology platforms to school children, Prisoners, vulnerable people at IDP camps and Motor Park across the country by National Library of Nigeria to boost reading culture among the populace to enhance a literacy society (Premium Times, 2022). In appreciating the value of promoting the reading culture among the people, the National Policy on Education (2004) made it categorically clear that libraries are one of the most importance education services, every state Ministry of Education needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in all educational institutions and to train library assistants for this service (NPE, 2004).

Therefore, every library is established with the basic aim of enriching the mind and intellectual well-being of every user as well as to promote the literary development of the individual and society at large. Many libraries, irrespective of their vision, mission and objectives have adopted various strategies to make reading a cornerstone for development. Among the strategies introduced by the libraries is the establishment of information literacy programmes in higher institutions of learning across the country to promote the reading abilities of students as well as researchers as well as reviving the readers club to boost value of reading and learning as a central element of academic achievement of individuals.

The Federal Ministry of Education has made the promotion of reading culture one of the top priorities. This is reflected in Pillar 10 (Library Service in Education) of the ministry for change in its ministerial plan for development. This is coming at the time in which Nigerians are reading less and greater percentage of the children have trouble with reading comprehension which have prompted the various readership programmes in schools, National Library of Nigeria and other stakeholders (Premium Times, 2022). The Ministry also initiated the funding and procurement of books, computers, electronic resources, and smartphones as well as Internet services to boost reading and learning capabilities across junior and senior secondary school through Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes in the country (Universal Basic Education, 2022).

The professional associations such as writers' association have also engaged the minds of the youth through weekly and monthly sensitization, workshop and talk show on readership skills to widening and sharpening the mental and intellectual capability of the youth. For example, the Arewa Writers, Jewel Writers engaged in weekly activities through mentoring and readership skills have assisted in engaging the minds of the youth. These initiatives have assisted in mentoring the youth and young writers to form the habit of reading and writing literally works for intellectual development moral value among the youth.

## Conclusion

Quality education cannot be achieved without reading. This is because reading is core issues in educational advancement of any nation. The level of literacy is determined by the level of those who are able to read, write and learn new ideas, skills as well as comprehend them. Therefore, reading and learning has become an indispensable phenomenon in moving the society forward socially, economically, technologically and globally. Although, the country is currently facing serious challenges of Boko Haram phenomenon, corruption, kidnapping, Kalare, kidnapping, abductions, militancy and unknown gun men and drug abuse. However, there is the need to change the perspectives of reading because reading has become the most desirable goals of that contributes positively to knowledgeable society, economic transformation and all-inclusive development.

## Ways Forward

1. Parents and guardians should encourage their children by providing instructional materials, text books and other academic resources to support reading and learning.

2. National Commission for reading and learning should be established so as to bring to life the good virtue of reading and learning in the country.
3. Libraries should be well equipped with both conventional and digital resources that would encourage people to read and learn.
4. there is the need to change the perspectives of reading to overcome societal problems that Nigeria is currently facing.

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