

# **THE ROLE OF GOOD BOOKS IN THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Good books are essential in the life and development of the child. They are stimulus to his intelligence and imagination, an incentive to independent thinking and source of information and enjoyment. The paper discusses the quintessentials of a good book as well as the dearth of same for our schools and school libraries and recommends among others that the three tiers of government should commit themselves to building and equipping school libraries with quality books to complement and back up teaching and learning. Furthermore, the federal Government should subsidize the cost of publishing to make the cost of books cheap and affordable. Government should also make the importation of educational materials duty-free to encourage publishing. Parents on their own should take the lead in encouraging and inspiring their children to imbibe the culture of reading good books.

## **Introduction**

Education produces knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It is essential for civic order and citizenship and for sustained economic growth and the reduction of poverty. Education is also about culture; it is the main instrument for disseminating the accomplishments of human civilization (World Bank, 1995). Indeed, education acts as a formative agent, shaping the character, activities and values of a child. It also acts as a transmission agent passing knowledge, experiences and skills from one generation to another.

Books play basic and indispensable roles in assisting a child to learn. It provides the necessary ingredients for a child's intellectual needs, interests and aspirations. A book according to New Standard Encyclopedia (1981) is a long literary composition; or a collection of pages bound together. In terms of content, books are generally classed as fiction (literature plotted from imagination) or non-fiction (works of factual information).

Non-fiction books provide us with accounts and results of research, with compilations of facts and ideas, with various points of view on a topic, with the experiences of other people, with records of events, with instructions for performing complicated or structured tasks, and with advice and inspiration for conducting our daily lives.

Fiction books are inventions of an author's imagination. They include novels, short story collections and mysteries, dramatic works and works of science fiction as well as poetry.

Although the major purpose of a work of fiction is to entertain, fictions may also be instrumental in providing accounts of other times, places and ways of thinking and living. With the invention of printing on movable type in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Johann Gutenberg, books became universally available to the general population. Today, books have not only contributed greatly in creating a literate population but have also accelerated the spread of information and ideas throughout the world.

### **The Value of Good Books**

Books are indispensable sources of information, rapid dissemination of information, knowledge and skills which accelerate the tempo of development and functionality. Books are basic tools for instruction and education: they educate, inform and entertain. Through books knowledge is acquired, stored, preserved retrieved and disseminated.

Books have been extremely influential in shaping social and political events. For instance, the theory of Charles Darwin in *Origin of Species* (1962) led to governmental controls on the use of DDT and other pesticides (New Standard Encyclopedia. 1981).

Books supply an enduring record of man's scientific, social and cultural progress. Their range of subject matter is limitless, covering every field of human endeavour and achievement. Friedman and Halsey (2002) remarked that books are among the most powerful instruments man has ever created. In them, knowledge and ideas may be preserved intact despite the passage of time or the effects of wars and natural disasters. In addition to serving as sources of knowledge and tools of learning, books have long been valued for the pleasure and entertainment they provide.

The value of books in the life of a child has been highlighted by the International Federation of Library Associations' Committee on Library Work with Children (2000) when it stated that: *Books are essential in the life and development of the child. They are stimulus to his intelligence and imagination, an incentive to independent thinking and a source of information and enjoyment. Books are indispensable tools in education and a child who has learnt to use and enjoy them is better able to continue his studies when he leaves school. It is in childhood that the use and enjoyment books should be learnt.*

Indeed books aid intellectual development generally while books endowed with activities encourage active cognitive stimulation. A child's ability to solve any academic problem efficiently and effectively depends on his anxiety about intellectual activities. Books are important for the development of scientific concepts which is in line with the government's technological advancement,

Kalat (1990) stated that Piaget's theoretical stages of intellectual (cognitive] development are:

1. Sensory motor stage (0-2years)
2. The pre-operational stage (2-7years)
3. The concrete operational stage (7-11 years)

At the pre-operational stage, the child can identify and clarify objects based on their texture while at the concrete operational stage, the child develops rudimentary or mathematical form

of logical relationships. Good books help a child to eliminate perceptual difficulties. Lack of perceptual skills, according to Anagbogu (1988) hinders the understanding of numbers, space, time, quantity, movement, speed and geometry.

Books also enhance development in affective domain. As the child reads stories, he begins to perceive experience in and beyond the home environment and conceive of processes and emotions more exciting in everyday life. The child begins to enter imaginatively into other world as he reads imaginary stories about people and animals. It helps the child to develop curiosity. This inspires the urge to search for relevance until mastery is achieved through assessment and practical activities.

Books help children to acquire and develop the skill of fluency reading. Nwosu and Nwosu (1992) Stressed that reading is the road to learning and that the development of human resources through education calls for efficiency in reading and learning. The importance of acquiring reading skill is encapsulated in the words of Okebuokla (2004)" which states that every child needs to become fully competent in reading in order to succeed in school and to discharge responsibility as a citizen of a democratic society.

Books play indispensable roles in the successful realization of every educational programme especially the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme now on course in Nigeria. Books remain the primary sources of any instruction in the school; they are one of the media used in instructional communication. Okwu (1995) stressed that media should be selected based on their unique attributes relevant to the educational process.

Reading of books according to Omenyi (2000) increases as well as improves a child's speed and accuracy. One of the greatest and enduring values of books is to keep children usefully occupied.

### **Characteristics of a Good Book**

Roe (1984) explained that a good book is one which when evaluated by certain acceptable criteria, is deemed to be of good quality. To Carter (1980). the opposite of good book is rubbish". Aidan (2000) asserted that rubbish" usually mean literature which lacks any artistic, moral or educational value. Rubbish" are sub-standard books. Many of such substandard and unwholesome books abound in the market and our schools today, the child must not be fed with rubbish".

A literary work may be criticized for its triviality, linguistically impoverished style, anemia in plot and characterization as well as clinched stereotyped ideas. Books with these characteristics should be rejected. Ray (1979) stated that a book may be rejected if:

It has unsatisfactory physical format

- (i) It uses bad language and expresses or implies certain social attitudes.

The million Naira question is what then is a good book?" Roe (1984) drew up the criteria for determining a good book. He had children's books evaluated by ten experts who are librarians and teachers and posited the following attributes for selecting good books for children:

- It should be stimulating to the imagination and rich in ideas.
- It should be sound in ideas with the structure and expression entirely in harmony with the content and capable of stretching” the young reader - providing a satisfying experience.
- The title and printed works should all make an immediate impact on the eye, therefore colour, design, texture and shape of a work need proper attention.
- A good book should be produced with good quality paper to ensure its durability.
- Books meant for children should be free from pornography and obscenity.
- A good book should be appropriate to the child's age; nursery and kindergarten books should contain objects (especially those found in the environment) to be identified, coloured or traced.
- Books for children of primary school age are expected to contain plenty of practice in simple and understandable language, sentence structure as well as stories (Ray. 1979).

The school library from which the child benefits is where quality and wholesome books meant for the moral, psychological, philosophical and educational development of the child can be found. Uya (2004) lamented that there is lack of cheap reading materials while some available ones are expensive and beyond to reach of many parents. These hinder good reading habit among students especially at the lower level of education. In view of the fact that the average Nigerian family can hardly provide the prescribed texts for their wards, talkless of providing supplementary reading materials, concerted efforts should be made by governments at the local, state and federal levels as well Parent Teachers Association (P.T.A) to build and equip a functional school library in every school.

Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) advised that materials selected for children should aim at widening their horizons; deepening their understanding; giving them broader social insights; ministering to their merriment and enhancing their appreciation of beauty.

In tandem with the above, selection of good quality books and other library materials should be predicated on the objectives of the National Policy on Education (1998) for primary and secondary schools which stipulates:

- The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- The laying of a sound basis for a scientific and reflective thinking;
- Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity;
- Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

In view of the fact that the nursery and primary stages of education are the base of our educational system, unalloyed and painstaking efforts should be made to nurture them

appropriately. This can only be actualized by providing them with relevant, meaningful and effective books. We should provide children with books which contain a lot of activities involving manipulation, classification, construction and analysis of materials essential for the natural development of concrete reasoning. There should be opportunities for children to understand properties of texture, colour, shapes and also point out similarities, differences, opposites and relationships when it comes to dealing with objects.

Exercises in prescribed textbooks for children must have tasks which match cognitive skills with values, interest and needs of the child- The exercises should of necessity be motivating and less difficult to enhance academic motivation. When assignments are difficult, they create frustration and lack of interest.

### **Dearth of Books in our Schools**

Given the importance and role of books in educational development and transformation, one would have naturally thought that our schools would be flooded with enough books. It is pitiful that this is far from the truth. Inadequate provision of libraries in schools is a general disease plaguing education in Nigeria. From North to South and from East to West of the country schools are generally without libraries to support teaching, learning and the curriculum (Fadero.2001).

It is a show of shame that our school libraries (where they exist at all} have their shelves punctuated with few books here and there. As a result of this ugly state of affairs the nation's children are not fully exposed to reading. This is a serious minus for our educational system. There is also the problem of non-provision of recommended textbooks by majority of parents due to poverty. Further, majority of available books are pirated copies-poorly produced with blurred pages, It is only when wholesome books are produced and provided for the Nigerian child through the school library that his sound educational development can be guaranteed.

### **Conclusion**

The role of good books in the educational development of the child cannot be over-stressed. Every child should be groomed early in life to be competent in reading so as to enhance his or her capacity to succeed in life. Parents owe their children and wards the obligation of inspiring them to imbibe the culture of reading good books.

The Local, State and Federal Governments should build and equip school libraries with quality books to complement and back up teaching and learning. The Federal Government will be doing this nation a lot of good by removing all the obstacles that discourage publishing and the availability and provision of books for the development of the Nigerian child.

### **Recommendations**

Cognitive, moral, intellectual and general development of the child revolves around the provision of good books. Early availability of reading materials at home; parents interest in reading, early practice of reading to children and early pre-reading experience, such as parents discussing pictures and stories are some of the significant variables said to affect the pattern of learning to read and the reading ability of a child.

In view of the above realizations therefore, parents must take the lead in encouraging and inspiring their children to imbibe the culture of reading good books for their sustained development and growth.

The three tiers of government: the local, the state and the federal governments should no longer pay lip service to building and equipping school libraries with quality books to complement and backup teaching and learning.

Free and wholesome books should be provided by governments to schools so as to make the nine years of basic education an accomplished reality.

The Federal Government should help make the cost of books cheap and affordable by subsidizing the cost of publishing. It should also abolish custom duty on the importation of educational materials to encourage publishing and to make books cheap and affordable.

Copyright laws protecting intellectual properties from piracy should be vigorously and strictly enforced to discourage potential offenders. Apart from producing inferior quality books, piracy discourages authors and publishers who are deprived from reaping the benefits of their genuine efforts.

Librarians, authors and publishers should constantly promote awareness for books through seminars, readership promotion campaigns, book exhibitions, book fairs, library week and workshops. Non-governmental organizations and publishing companies should complement the efforts of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in the production of standard textbooks for schools.

To stem the tide of the production and circulation of unwholesome books which depict pornography, violence and obscenity, government constitution of a Censorship Board is imperative. Books used in schools should be reviewed to meet the accepted standard.

Writers of Children Literature in Nigeria should be encouraged to co-author with children.

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