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**ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ICT IN PROMOTING READING AMONG STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ABAKALIKI EDUCATION ZONE OF EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study focused on the role of public library and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in promoting reading among senior secondary school students in English in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out the role of public library in promoting reading; the challenges of ICT in promoting reading and ways of enhancing reading through public libraries among senior secondary school students of Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. 300 students were sampled from fifteen public secondary schools selected by simple random sampling from a total population of 67 secondary schools that make up Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The method used for the study was survey while questionnaire was used for data collection. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions. Findings showed that respondents agreed that public libraries provide easy access to variety of books among others. Based on findings recommendations were made.*

**KEYWORDS:** Public Library, ICT, Reading, Senior Secondary School Students.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The place of the library in the educational programme of any society cannot be underrated. This is so because library provides unhindered access to information needed for academic, economic and social advancement of any nation. Library is a collection of books and other educative materials for private or public use for the purpose of enhancing learning. Ogayi and Chima (2012) see the library as an organized collection of books and other information materials for study, teaching, research and recreation. The Greek *Bibliotheca* and *Bibliothēkē* which carry the idea of bookcase and the Latin *liber*, all mean 'library' in many modern languages. Wikipedia (2015) posits that a library is a collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. Libraries provide physical or digital access to materials and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space or both. Wikipedia maintains that a library can include books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, maps, prints, documents, microform, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, Blue-ray Discs, e- books, audiobooks, databases, and other formats.

Libraries range in size from few shelves of books for private to several million items for either private or public. While private libraries are maintained by the individual persons or bodies that own them, public libraries are often maintained by government, a public body, an institution or a corporation. Students who are not able to meet up with the text demand of their academic work often consult public libraries. Ogayi and Chima (2012) identify six types of

library namely; national, public, academic, school, special and private libraries. Books and educative materials required in Libraries differ according to the type, interest and age of the readers for whom they are intended. There are therefore children and adult libraries as there are equally professional libraries. Mobile public libraries may provide quick and easy access to students and other readers who may be in rural areas where there may be no permanent library buildings.

Children libraries according to Wikipedia (2015) are special collections of books intended for juvenile readers and are usually kept in separate rooms of general public libraries. Public children libraries act as educational agency seeking to acquaint the youngones with the world's literature and to cultivate in them the love for reading. Children public libraries provide such services as storytelling sessions for infants, toddlers, pre- school and after – school programmes all geared towards developing early literacy skills and love for reading in the children. Generally speaking, public library should serve as a catalyst in reviving the reading pattern and interest of students especially in English. Because of its importance, Okoro (2004) posits that, it is essential that children be introduced to the art of reading very early in life, even before the child would step into the school. When this is done, the end result is that, children are linked early enough with the joys of reading as a means of enjoyment, self-development, love for literature and learning. This attitude when developed and sustained, continue to carry the beneficiaries into the secondary and tertiary education.

There is a general belief that students' reading culture is on a decline in Nigeria. Ozoegu (2012) does not consider it an overstatement to say that students' reading culture is dying every day. He maintains that since reading has become a burden to most students, their academic achievement have continued to remain poor. Ngwoke (2006) observes with dismay that most students today cannot express themselves in clear error-free English due to their total apathy to reading. Students with poor reading skills receive poor grades at school, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behavioural problems, seem to dislike school, and often fail to develop their potentials. According to Rosenberg (2000), children with poor reading habits have higher chances of anti-social behaviour. Delinquency, school violence, bullying, and examination malpractices all appear to have correlation with poor reading skills. This however, does not mean that all those with poor reading skills display such anti-social behaviours.

Reading is a powerful instrument of information and communication which is expected to begin from cradle. It can be seen as a knowledge acquiring process, involving the reader and the text, which is enhanced by the reader's prior knowledge and experience. Tracy and Akande (2008) see reading as a form of entertainment and an essential life skill. Reading can be silent or vocal. MacLeod (2014) has identified two basic types of silent reading as intensive and extensive reading, both of which enhance comprehension of text at various degrees. In reading, we perceive and comprehend communication, which involves, seeing and recognizing textual demands, such as letters and phrases, combined in sentences and, using the previous knowledge of the words and their context usage to interpret meaning. On the other hand, Ogayi and Chima (2012) say that, reading involves being able to obtain three types of information namely; the information which is clearly stated (factual or literal), the information which is not clearly stated, but implied (inferential or interpretive) and the information which involves making judgment (critical or evaluative reading). Ngwoke (2006) defines reading as the recognition and conscious reproduction of written or printed symbols, words, word groups and sentences by means of eye or finger contact. Every attempt made to

define reading has always revealed the need for comprehension. Wikipedia (2015) sees reading as a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning, and maintains that reading serves as a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. Robinson and Davidson (1999) see reading as, looking at, and having understanding of printed or written words; to speak words which are printed or written, to learn or gain knowledge of something by reading; to look at or be able to see something and get information from it. Public library appears to be an enhancer of effective students' effective reading habits since it offers readers the option of selecting from a wide variety of reading texts. It equally provides other educative aids.

The act of reading is expected to form part of an individual to the extent that, it becomes a habit difficult to break. Reading is a means of obtaining information; it is also a means of entertainment and relaxation. It follows logically that a good reading habit is a precursor to a good education, good information and communication. The act of reading could be an interesting practice for children and adolescents, if they are properly guided. This is because; a reading habit cultivated early in life, helps children to grow into independent adults with repertoire of knowledge. Reading is an essential tool for lifelong learning. Promoting a reading culture among students in Nigeria, is therefore one of the key tasks in the curriculum reform, whose aim is to strengthen the learning capabilities of students. Information through reading is the life blood of all human activities. Man's existence on earth is meaningless if it is devoid of reading.

The decline in reading among students appears to be an offshoot of technological advancements that have brought about overall changes in family, social and economic conditions. Poor reading habits occur in children and young people because reading is not considered a relevant leisure activity as it does not form part of children's social interaction like home video and internet interaction. Reading is somehow considered a solitary pursuit and so, not attractive when compared with the interactive activity on the internet. There is also an over-riding desire among young people to spend more time with their friends than to remain at home reading. Such attitude appears to be the brain behind the seeming abandonment of reading of print materials for internet browsing which appear to be drowning every reading appetite among secondary school students.

The internet is only an aspect of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). When computers and communication technologies are combined, it results to information technology. ICT defines the convergence of several arms of communicative media used to gather, store, process, analyze, retrieve and disseminate information. The computer which is a programmable multi-purpose machine accepts data, processes such into usable information and produces result as output. Communication technology consists of electromagnetic devices and systems for communication over a long distance. Communication technology devices include; telephones, radio, cable television and online among others. Gokhe (2015) agrees that ICT is a technology that supports activities involving information. Gokhe maintains that such activities include gathering, processing, storing, and presenting data. Increasingly, these activities also involve collaboration and communication; hence information technology (IT) has become ICT. Ideally, the advent of information communication technology should enhance acquisition of knowledge through reading. However, the reverse appears to be the case especially among secondary school students.

It appears the introduction of ICT into learning has become an antidote to reading and effective academic studies. Ndah- Isaiah (2012) laments that we have not been able to direct the minds

of the youth towards using the internet for academic purposes and learning; rather we have only succeeded in reconciling the internet with entertainment. If students misuse information and communication technological facilities, their academic achievement continue to be low due to poor reading attitude.

The reading culture of students may either build or destroy their academic excellence. Ozoegu (2012) observes that people hardly read these days unlike in times past when students read not only for academic purposes but also for the fun and entertainment side of the exercise. Njoku (2012) observes that reading has become burdensome to students such that most students graduate as half-baked, thus finding it difficult to practise in their areas of discipline. Abanobi (2012) laments that the internet is beginning to eat into students' reading values. Holt (1998) remarks that, a situation in which a large number of people rarely read, either because they lack the skill or simply because they do not care enough to take time to concentrate, will pose serious problems in the future. Reading is essential to full participation in modern society. Reading adds quality to life, provides access to culture and cultural heritage, empowers and emancipates citizens, and as well brings people together. In the words of Sisulu (2004), reading is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning. If Information and Communication Technology is taught and made to form part of students' reading arrangements, students' reading interests are likely to improve. Becoming a skilled and adaptable reader enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. Reading is not just for school, it is for life. Reading in its variety is vital to being better informed, and having a better understanding of others.

In Nigeria, there has been a general outcry, and a serious one for that matter, over the falling standard in education. This fall has been attributed to several factors, but hardly has the lack of public libraries and inappropriate use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) been mentioned. Provision of appropriate education on the use of Information and communication technology will likely enhance reading among students. For instance, students should be educated on the advantages in downloading reading materials from the internet. They are to be aware that they can browse and download from the internet the contents of books they use for studies in the class which they may not be financially capable of buying from the market.

The library and information and communication technology are expected to facilitate reading through the following ways: - i. by providing books for reading. ii. Providing other materials needed to enhance reading. iii. Providing the services of librarians who are experts at finding and organizing information and at interpreting information needs. Libraries provide quiet areas for studying; they offer common areas to facilitate group study and collaboration. Libraries provide public facilities for access to other electronic resources and the internet. Modern libraries are increasingly being redefined as places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources. Libraries extend services beyond the physical walls of a building, by providing materials accessible by electronic means, and by providing the assistance of librarians in navigating and analyzing very large amounts of information with a variety of digital tools. ICT is expected to provide quick and unhindered access to information- gathering, information- processing, information- storing, and data presentation. This study seeks to determine the roles of public library and information and communication technology in promoting reading among students of English language in Abakaliki Education Zone.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Both the library and Information Communication Technology (ICT) are expected to act as facilitators of reading among students. It however appears that both facilities are not having the expected impacts on students judging from the performance rate of students especially in English. Result obtained from Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board (EBSSEB)(2013) show that the percentage of senior secondary school students who scored up to five credit passes including English language in 2010, 2011, and 2012 stood at 20.6%, 17.3%, and 33.8% respectively. This reveals a poor achievement in English in Ebonyi state. It is feared that students' commitment to studies might have been lost due to certain intervening variables such as poor use of the library and the ICT. Also it is feared that the reckless use of ICT facilities especially among senior secondary school students has affected the letter-writing and general reading competence of the students of English language in the state. Library and ICT have great and significant roles which they should be made to play to ensure effective reading among students. It appears the corrupted version of English used for short message system (SMS) has interfered significantly with official English of writing. It equally appears there is dearth of public libraries. It is expected that public library and ICT should be enhancers of effective reading habits among students. If the current trend is allowed to persist unchecked, there is the likelihood that performance of students in public examinations in English language in Ebonyi State in particular and Nigeria as a whole will continue to be low. The problem of this study put in question form is, what are the roles of public libraries and ICT in promoting reading among students of English language in the Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the general role of public library and ICT in promoting reading among senior secondary school students of English language in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the roles of public library in promoting reading among the students of Abakaliki Education Zone in Ebonyi State.
2. Determine the challenges of ICT in promoting reading among the students of English language in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State.
3. Determine ways of enhancing reading among senior secondary school students in English language in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State through public library.

### **Significance of the Study**

Findings of this study will be significant to students, teachers, the people and government of Ebonyi State, and indeed other educational institutions in Nigeria. It will encourage students to patronize public libraries, and cultivate a good reading habit which in turn, will help to address students' poor achievement in English language in Ebonyi State, and the country at large.

Findings of this study will help the people and students to have a rethink and be more conscious on using information and communication technologies (ICT). Findings of this study will kindle a new zeal in the people towards promoting literacy through reading and information and communication technology (ICT).

### Scope of the Study

This study focused on the role of public library and ICT in promoting reading among senior secondary school students in English in Abakaliki Education Zone. It also focused on the role of the library in promoting reading among senior secondary school students and on the challenges of ICT in promoting reading among senior secondary school students in English in Abakaliki Education Zone, as well as on ways of enhancing reading among senior secondary school students in Abakaliki Education Zone.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the roles of public library in promoting reading among students of senior secondary school in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State?
2. What are the challenges of ICT in promoting reading among students of Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State?
3. What are the ways of enhancing reading through public libraries among secondary school students in English language in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State?

### METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire entitled *Role of Public Library and ICT in Reading (RPLICTIR)* was used to gather information from fifteen (15) public secondary schools selected by simple random sampling out of a total number of sixty seven (67) public secondary schools in Abakaliki Education Zone. A total number of 300 respondents responded to the questionnaire items. Abakaliki Education Zone is made up of four local government areas of Abakaliki, Ebonyi, Izzi and Ohaukwu. Abakaliki Education Zone has a dual composition of urban and rural since it houses the capital territory among other rural communities. Care was therefore taken to represent the urban-rural structure of the area of study in the schools' selection. Questionnaires were administered and collected using research assistants. Results of findings were analyzed using mean and standard deviation measures. The decision on the roles of public libraries and ICT were obtained using a 4- point scale of:

Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4

Agreed (A) = 3

Disagreed (D) = 2

Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1

Items with mean scores of 2.5 were accepted as agreeing, while items with mean score of less than 2.5 were rejected. The decision rule was arrived at by simple arithmetic mean calculation thus:

$$\underline{4+3+2+1=10} = 2.5$$

4 4

**Research Question 1**

What are the roles of the library in promoting reading among senior secondary school students of English language in Abakaliki Education Zone?

**Table 1: Mean Rating of Role of the public Library in Promoting Reading among Senior Secondary School Students of English Language in Abakaliki Education Zone.**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFX	X	STD
1	Public library provides easy access to variety of books for students	105	98	60	37	871	2.9	1.68
2	Public library provides easy access to other educational materials apart from books.	80	70	76	74	756	2.5	1.06
3	Public library does not provide enough reading comfort to users.	107	95	52	50	851	2.8	1.65
4	Public library does not offer readers the opportunity for team reading.	96	94	57	53	833	2.7	1.57
5	Public library does not favour the use of ICT in reading.	77	70	83	70	857	2.9	1.69
<b>Grand Mean=</b>		<b>2.76</b>						

The result showed that the grand mean on the role of public library in promoting reading among senior secondary school students is 2.76. This shows that respondents agree that the library provides easy access to variety of books and other educational materials for students; that the library provides enough reading comfort. That the library offers readers the opportunity for team reading and that the library favours the use of ICT in reading.

**Research Question 2**

What are the challenges of ICT in promoting reading among senior secondary school students of English language in Abakaliki Education Zone?

**Table 2: Mean Rating of Challenges of ICT in Promoting Reading among Senior Secondary School Students of English Language.**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFX	X	STD
6	ICT facilities are relatively new to students and so pose much difficulty to them.	115	95	59	31	894	2.9	1.69
7	The short message system (SMS) discourages good vocabulary building.	110	110	55	25	905	3.0	2.01
8	The internet encourages voracious reading among students.	98	122	55	25	893	2.9	1.69
9	Home video discourages reading of print among students.	112	104	30	34	920	3.06	2
10	ICT learning hinders print reading.	50	40	92	118	885	2.95	1.8
<b>Grand Mean = 2.96</b>								

By the general mean of 2.96, the result showed that respondents agree that ICT facilities are relatively new to students and so they pose great difficulty to them in managing them with conventional reading style (and so there is conflict of interest); that SMS discourages good vocabulary development; that internet encourages reading; that home video discourages reading of print among students but disagree that ICT learning constitutes print reading.

### Research Question 3

What are the ways of enhancing reading among senior secondary school students in English in Abakaliki Education Zone through public libraries?

**Table 3: Mean Rating of Ways of Enhancing Reading among Senior Secondary School Students through Public Libraries.**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFX	X	STD
11	Public libraries should be built wherever there are public institutions.	100	108	70	22	888	2.9	1.67
12	There should be public enlightenment on the importance of public library as a way of educating the uninformed students.	110	90	70	30	880	2.9	1.66
13	Librarians in public libraries should encourage cooperative learning as a way of cross breeding ideas	102	103	60	35	872	2.9	1.65
14	There is lack of qualified librarians in the public libraries.	115	95	65	25	900	3.0	2.00
<b>Grand Mean = 2.9</b>								

With a grand mean of 2.9, respondents agree that some of the ways of enhancing reading through public libraries include building public libraries wherever there are public institutions; organizing public enlightenment programmes on the importance of public libraries as a way of educating students. They equally agree that librarians in public libraries should enhance reading encouraging cooperative learning, but that this is hampered due to lack of qualified librarians.

With the grand mean of 3.0, respondents agree that among other ways, government should strive to promote reading by offering free text books to students; that adequate funds should be allocated to the education sector as a way of checkmating lack of libraries and that children should be introduced to reading early in life, so as to build in them the love of reading.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Results from findings showed that respondents agree that public library provides easy access to variety of books and other educational materials which are not books. They however regret that libraries do not provide enough comfort for users. With 202 out of 300 on item 3 of research question 1 (RQ1) agree that Public libraries do not provide sufficient comfort for users which represents 67.3%. It simply shows that 67% of respondents do not see the condition of our public libraries as adequate for reading. This shows that our libraries especially the public ones need improvement. If the public libraries are not conducive for reading, students will shun such places in preference to other more convenient but non-academically profiting exercises like entertainment. Orhuwhorun (2012) posits that since students are reading to know, understand and be able to answer any question that might come up; their reading environment cannot be the same with that of the newspaper reader. Respondents equally agree that a public library does not offer readers the opportunity for team reading. This may be expected since the library is supposed to be a noiseless place. On item 5 of RQ1, 153 respondents representing 51% disagree that public library does not favour the use of ICT in reading. In other words, they agree that public libraries favour the use of ICT, while 147 respondents or 49% say that public library does not favour the use of ICT in reading. Such situation might have arisen either because there are no ICT facilities in most public libraries or the respondents are ignorant of their availability. Librarians should therefore make library users aware of available library facilities by placing such information at conspicuous corners of the public library.

In RQ2, the grand mean of 2.96 shows that respondents agree that ICT facilities are relatively new to students and so they pose a lot of difficulty to their using them. This situation might generate a conflict of interest whereby students both settle down on the cheapest and entertaining aspects of viewing pictures and downloading music, or they may completely abandon the use of the internet. It is not uncommon these days to see students plug one or two ears with the ear piece of the phone plug while walking along the road or reading. The music plays on while real learning suffers.

The type of language and spelling used for the SMS leaves students in a dilemma of the acceptable spellings and expressions. This system of communication does not encourage good vocabulary building. Respondents also agree that the internet encourages voracious reading among students. This was shown on the table with 220 respondents representing 73.3% agreeing and 80 respondents or 28.6% disagreeing. It therefore means that if adequate education is given to students on the internet use, it will encourage them to read more voraciously. They equally agreed that Home video discourages reading of print among students. They disagreed that ICT learning contradicts print reading. It shows that ICT can improve reading among students. This however depends on the awareness created by teachers who teach ICT.

In RQ3 respondents agreed that reading among senior secondary school students through public libraries can be enhanced through:

- building public libraries wherever there are public institutions
- Carrying out public enlightenment on the importance of public library as a way of educating the uninformed students.
- Librarians encouraging co-operative learning among users of public library.

The possibility and extent this can be effectively controlled may remain an issue of debate since the library is expected to be a place of absolute quietness. However, respondents still observed that there may be a lack of qualified librarians to man public libraries. In item fourteen, 210 respondents out of 300 respondents or 70% agreed that there is lack of qualified librarians in the public libraries. This may equally account for the poor interest which most students show in going to read in the public library.

Where there are unqualified librarians, people consulting the library may not be given satisfactory attention, and that may discourage them from making further use of the library facilities.

Respondents agreed that librarians at public libraries should encourage cooperative learning as a way of crossbreeding ideas, but that there is lack of qualified librarians which might of course hinder effective guidance of public library users.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were made in view of the findings.

1. The condition of our public libraries should be improved to make them conducive for effective reading. Part of the improvement should include government equipping government-owned public libraries.
2. Efforts should be geared towards educating library users on how to operate ICT facilities. There should be ICT experts attached to every public library whose function will be teaching how to operate ICT facilities.
3. Public libraries should be located especially near academic institutions such as secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This will enable students to gain easy access to such libraries.
4. Government should consider giving free textbooks to schools to equip their libraries. This will enable many students to have easy access to reading texts.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, public library and ICT are important media of promoting reading among students especially at the senior secondary school level. When both facilities are properly utilized, they make reading not only interesting but result-oriented. Public libraries are

established to provide reading and educational materials that aid students to acquire reading techniques at a less costly price. With the introduction of ICT into education, studies of most concepts become modernized. Unfortunately, due to ignorance, some people especially, among the secondary school student populace have come to build some erroneous ideas about library and ICT. While some believe that public libraries do not offer enough reading comfort, others believe that the use of ICT hinders the conventional reading of print. The onus is now on teachers, education boards and government to join hands to chart sustaining education course that will reconcile the two. Equally, if ICT instructors are attached to public libraries, they will help to provide the much needed instruction that will enable students to be proficient in the use of ICT for effective reading.

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