STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING EXTENSIVE READING CULTURE
IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE IN THE PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract
Research findings point to the fact that Nigerians of all ages are averse to extensive reading culture. Scholars are of the view that the poor attitude of Nigerians of school age to extensive reading in the target language is partly responsible for the poor academic performance, which is currently the worse bane of education at all levels, and its attendant consequences such as youth unemployment, youth restlessness, armed robbery, kidnapping, drug abuse, rape, prostitution and other social misdemeanors. Against this background, this paper took an incisive look at the attitude of Nigerians of school age to extensive reading in the target language in contemporary times and highlighted some of the basic factors that have been found to have encouraged poor attitude to extensive reading. The paper argued that the campaign for development of effective extensive reading culture in the target language should be initiated at the primary and post-primary schools because there is the absolute need to “catch them young”. In addition, the paper opined that the task of promoting extensive reading culture should be a collective responsibility of the government, the school, the parents and of course, the learners. Finally, the paper highlighted the strategies for developing extensive reading culture in the primary and post-primary schools in Nigeria, among which is integrating extensive reading in the curricula of primary and post-primary schools.

Keywords: strategies, extensive reading, target language, primary and post-primary schools, and contemporary times.

Introduction
In the process of acquiring or learning a language, four basic language skills are indispensable. The skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. While listening and reading are described as receptive language skills, speaking and writing are considered productive language skills. Although these four basic language skills are critical in language study, our focus in this paper is reading. To throw more light on the concept of reading, it is expedient to review some definitions of reading.

The Concept of Reading
According to Wikipedia (the free encyclopedia), reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols with the intention of deriving meaning (reading comprehension) and/or constructing meaning. The source equally adds that in the process of reading, written information is received by the retina, processed by the primary visual cortex, and interpreted in Wernicke’s area. Wikipedia further states that reading is a means of language acquisition and a process of sharing information and ideas. For this reason, according to the source, readers use a variety of reading strategies to assist with the decoding and comprehension, and in doing so, readers may use morpheme, semantics, syntax and context clues to identify the meaning of unknown words. Readers integrate the words they have read into their existing framework of knowledge or schema. Based on these processes, Wikipedia concludes that reading is an important tool for people of many societies, allowing them to access information which otherwise might have been unavailable (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reading-(process)).

Uhoh (1986) posits that reading in itself is a process of communication between the writer and the reader. According to the source, while going through a text, the reader is constantly agreeing, questioning or rejecting the thoughts of the writer and in the end he/ the reader should be able to form his personal opinion about the content of the text he just read.

Obah (1981) sees reading as part of a complex information-processing system. According to the source, “reading involves a process whereby information is passed from the writer to the reader who, without the props of facial movements, gestures or tone of speech contexts, must learn to isolate concepts that are represented by black and white symbols – marks or words on the page” (p. 145).

Pang (2003) states that reading is all about understanding written texts: a complex activity that involves both perception and thought and consists of two related processes, that is, word recognition and comprehension. The source maintains that
word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. The author equally adds that readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written texts. Furthermore, the source sees learning to read as an important educational goal. According to the source, for both children and adults, the ability to read opens up new worlds and opportunities which enable one to gain new knowledge, enjoy literature and do everyday things that are part and parcel of modern life, such as reading the newspapers, job listings, instruction manuals, swaps and so on.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language and all the related aspects such as culture, civilization and history (Benettayea, 2010). It is also a life-long exercise that is not restricted only to a classroom setting, but can be embarked upon anywhere by any literate person irrespective of age.

Language is the medium through which reading is rendered. Since there are different forms of language such as first language (L₁), second language (L₂), foreign language, native language, language of immediate environment, and of course, target language, reading can be carried out in any one of these languages. For our purpose in this paper, our focus is on reading in the target language. The concept of target language in this context has to do with "a language other than one's own that one is learning". In the Nigerian context where the English language is the second language and by extension, the language for education and official transaction, it is the ambition of every literate person to be proficient in it so that they can perform effectively in educational and social environments. It is against this background that conscious efforts are made by Nigerians to learn the English language. For this reason, English is also described as a target language in the Nigerian context. Therefore, reading in the target language in the context of this paper implies reading in the English language.

Intensive versus Extensive Reading
Owing to the fact that reading is an exercise that is embarked upon for different purposes, two main types of reading can be distinguished, and they are intensive reading and extensive reading. Intensive reading refers to "the careful reading of shorter, more difficult texts with the goal of complete and detailed understanding. Intensive reading is also associated with the teaching of reading in terms of its component skills" (Barnford & Day, 1997, p. 6). The source further states that intensive reading focuses learner's attention on the features of the text which are important for comprehension and critical analysis. Such features include lexical elements, syntax, cohesive devices, discourse markers and other features especially important for academic reading such as discriminating and understanding the difference between the main idea and secondary ideas, grasping the relationship between ideas, separating fact from opinion, evaluating claims and detecting weaknesses, drawing inferences and conclusions, and deducing the meaning of unknown words (Van Wyk, 2003).

Intensive reading usually involves the explicit teaching of reading strategies such as activating background knowledge and monitoring understanding while reading as well as techniques such as skimming, scanning and summarising.

Paran (2003) posits that intensive reading practice can focus more intentionally on essential core vocabulary, patterns of text organisation and types of text processing needed to adequately comprehend any text. According to the source, intensive reading activities are needed for four main reasons: to help learners comprehend written texts, to become more aware of text organisation to better comprehend, to learn how to use and monitor effective reading strategies, and to develop general literacy skills necessary to generate productive expressions in L₁.

On the other hand, extensive reading simply refers to the kind of reading students do on their own with no help or guidance from the teacher. It is "an approach to the teaching and learning of second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence" (Barnford & Day, 1998, p. xiii). As an approach, teaching extensive reading "is based on the belief that when students read for general comprehension of large quantities of texts of their own choosing, their ability to read will consequently improve" (Aebersold & Field, 1997, p. 43).

According to Susser and Robb (1990), "extensive reading is reading (a) of large quantities of material or long text; (b) for global or general understanding; (c) with the intention of obtaining pleasure from text; (d) reading is individualised, with the students choosing the books they want to read, and (e) the books are not discussed in class" (p.157). Lituanas et al. (1999) state that extensive reading can be defined as the reading of large
quantities of material for information or pleasure. According to the source, many names have been given to extensive reading programmes, including Book Flood, Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Silent Uninterrupted Reading for Form (SURF), and Extensive Reading and Information Literacy (ERIL).

Day and Barmford (1998, pp. 7-8) list the following ten characteristics found in successful extensive programmes:

(i) Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of class.
(ii) A wide variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways.
(iii) Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them.
(iv) The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding. These purposes are determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the students.
(v) Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises to be completed after reading.
(vi) Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words makes fluent reading difficult.
(vii) Reading is individual and silent, at the students’ own pace, and, outside class, done when and where the student chooses.
(viii) Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower as students read books and other materials that they find easily understandable.
(ix) Teachers orient students to the goals of the programme, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the programme.
(x) The teacher is a role model of a reader for students – an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader and the rewards of being a reader.

Prowse (2003) lists the following benefits of extensive reading:

(i) Extensive reading builds automaticity of word recognition.
(ii) Automatic recognition of words allows lexical access – the automatic calling up from memory of a word’s meanings and its phonological representation.
(iii) Extensive reading builds vocabulary knowledge.
(iv) Comprehension and fluent reading depend on automatic word recognition and vocabulary knowledge, and thus are advanced through extensive reading.
(v) Fluent reading allows the reader to move from word-per-word decoding to the processing of ideas, which is essential to higher level reading and thinking skills.
(vi) Extensive reading builds awareness of grammatical and discourse structures and the ability to quickly and accurately process sentence structures.
(vii) Extensive reading enhances learners’ background knowledge.
(viii) Extensive reading promotes learners’ positive attitude toward reading. It fosters their confidence and motivation to read.
(ix) Extensive reading increases exposure to the target language.
(x) Extensive reading reinforces a grasp of language that is taught in class. It provides students with an excellent opportunity to consolidate what they have learned, which is an essential aspect of foreign language learning.

The specific benefits of extensive reading are manifold and wide-ranging. They have been cited by many scholars, researchers and teachers who have been deeply involved in this instructional approach for a very long time. From Nation (1997), Waring (1997), Day & Barmford (1998), Hill (2001) and others (p. 101).
Extensive reading is the same as reading for pleasure, recreational reading or leisure reading. On the other hand, intensive reading is the kind of reading embarked upon for the sole purpose of gathering information for a given task in one's area of specialisation. In fact, it is better described as study reading. It includes, for instance, reading for a test or examination, reading for a research activity, reading in order to gather information for a seminar, talk, debate, speech, etc.

The Reading Culture of Nigerian Students

Many research findings point to the fact that many Nigerians, including students at all levels of education, have a poor reading culture, especially reading for pleasure (extensive reading) (Emenyonyo, 1983; Unoh, 1983; Lawal, 1989; Ogbonna, 1999; Commeyras, 2001). The poor attitude of Nigerians to reading has always been aptly captured by the joke: "If you want to hide something from a black man, hide it inside a book and place it on the center table. He may never find it because he won't read the book". The joke is further amplified by Prof. D. Eka while commenting orally on the poor attitude of Nigerian students to reading, said that, "if you want to conceal a question paper meant for students, place it on a notice board. They may not see it because they hardly read, let alone things placed on notice boards". This is why an average Nigerian can afford to spend a huge amount of money to build estates, buy expensive cars and clothes, invest in several sectors of the economy, throw expensive parties but would hardly spend a dime to buy books unless it is for a particular task such as examination.

It is based on these foregoing views that Fagbemi (1997) posits that an average literate Nigerian reads what he/she is forced to read while many will not bother to touch anything outside the professional area. According to the source, students are the worst culprits in this direction. Though, they are supposed to read widely, regrettably a good number of them read only when the examination is close and when they read, textbook may be the beginning and end of reading. Anybody who has been privileged to relate with Nigerian students cannot but agree with Fagbemi's observation. It is obvious that the poor attitude of the students to extensive reading is partly responsible for their poor writing ability with its attendant poor performance in written examinations. Unoh (1983) observes that the students in Nigerian tertiary institutions manifest inefficient reading habits and behaviour that call for urgent action. Perhaps, it is as a result of the poor attitude to reading that the majority of the students could not read beyond the literal level of comprehension (Oladipe, 1991; Lawal, 1996). If the students have a poor attitude to reading, especially extensive reading, the implication is that they are most likely to be struggling writers.

Yankson (1985) believes that poor attitude to reading cuts across all cadres of students including secondary students. The author argues that many secondary school leavers in Nigeria do not develop an abiding interest in reading and the reading lethargy among them is the main cause of the deteriorating language performance. One cannot agree less with Yankson. In the contemporary times, experience has shown that students at all levels of education expend their valuable time in frivolities such as excessive watching of home video, computer games, unnecessary internet browsing, hard drugs, drunkenness and a host of other antisocial activities, which deny them valuable times they should have invested in reading and other related activities.

Oji (1980) attributes reading inertia in Nigeria to the fact that the teaching of reading in schools is inefficient and ineffective because we lack personnel trained in teaching of reading skills. In fact, Oji is very much right. Language curricula being implemented at all levels of education in Nigeria do not make adequate provisions for extensive reading. Above all, many language teachers, especially at the primary and the secondary school levels, do not have adequate training on reading skills. Experience has shown that some of the teachers have poor attitude to extensive reading. How can a blind lead the blind?

In all, it is obvious that many Nigerian students are averse to extensive reading. This is why Achebe (1975) in his answer to the question: "What do African intellectuals read?", says, "The temptation is indeed strong to answer the question in one word: Nothing".

Factors that are responsible for poor reading culture in the 21st century

Several factors can be adduced to be responsible for the decline in extensive reading culture in the target language in Nigeria in the contemporary time. First, there is the issue of explosion in the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The emergence of ICT has popularised the use of electronic devices such as GSM phone, television, home video etc. and also browsing the Internet by students. Although these devices have the potentialities of enhancing acquisition of knowledge, the contemporary students tend to misuse them to the extent that they help to distract
them from developing good reading culture. In the time past, students did not only discuss the English novels they had read but also exchanged them for wider reading. But today, what is in vogue among students is discussion and exchange of films they had watched either on the home video or the Internet.

Second, there is lack of functional libraries in schools and colleges. A visit to primary and secondary schools, especially those that are located in the rural areas, shows that most of the schools lack functional libraries. In such schools, what is designated as library could be just a room in one of the buildings in the school that is used by the students for private readings. Even when there are conventional libraries in such schools, there is usually nothing to write home about them as the stock of books is either scanty or they are outdated.

Another factor that has tremendously engendered poor extensive reading culture in the target language in Nigeria is poverty. From all indications, there is no doubt that over 70% of Nigerian populace live below poverty line. When people are poor, their main concern is seeking ways to solve their problems and under such a situation, reading and the craving for reading become a non-issue or even a luxury since it is usually said that “a hungry man is an angry man”.

Lack of bookshops and bookstalls is yet another factor that is hitherto threatening effective extensive reading culture. It is common knowledge that bookshops and bookstalls are fast disappearing from streets and markets, perhaps for lack of patronage. This is quite unlike before when people invested in setting up bookshops in cities and around educational institutions and people including students took delight in visiting the bookshops to purchase books of their choice or the ones recommended. But in the contemporary time, the situation has changed to such an extent that the bookshops and bookstalls have lost their places to provision stores, restaurants or the mushroom churches. Today, people who have, against all odds, sustained their reading culture are faced with the challenge of locating bookshops or bookstalls where they can purchase books of their choice.

Furthermore, the curricula that are being implemented at both the primary and secondary schools are inadequate in the sense that they do not make provision for the teaching and learning of extensive reading. As a result, much is not being done as far as extensive reading is concerned at both levels. The much the pupils and the students do at these levels is the reading of the scanty comprehension passages in their prescribed English textbooks (Reader) and the few novels, plays and poetry they read as recommended literature texts. But these are grossly inadequate as they are far below the quantum of materials the pupils and the students should read to meet up with the standard of extensive reading. Related to the factor of inadequate curricula is the fact that there are no trained teachers on reading in primary and secondary schools, even among the existing teachers, many of them are averse to extensive reading and as it is usually said, “one cannot give what one does not have”.

Consequences of Poor Extensive Reading Culture

The consequences of poor extensive reading culture are obvious. In the first instance, linguists have strongly supported the view that there is a correlation between reading and writing. That is, reading enhances effective writing (Eisterhold, 1990; Guth and Schuster, 1977; Omogwu, 1997; Faniran, 1997). It is in recognition of this fact that Achebe in 1992 in responding to the question: What is the secret of effective writing?, said: “Start writing now, and then read widely.” Therefore, people who are averse to extensive reading are most likely to be struggling writers, and will most likely end up being poor academic achievers. It, therefore, goes without saying that the poor academic performance at all levels of education in contemporary times in Nigeria has poor extensive reading culture as its root. According to Mrs. Ijeoma Rita Obo, Chief Executive Officer, Clement Ashley Consulting Nigeria quoted in Kayode (2011, p.11):

"Chances are that the average graduate we get today will not fit into any job because some of them cannot speak basic English, some cannot write a simple letter. The quality is so bad that you spend a fortune training them without getting any result, because some things that should have happened earlier in their lives did not happen."

Kayode (2011) also corroborated Obo by arguing that “poor reading culture and defective studies can never produce high-flying labour force with practical skills. Whatever is bred in the bone will definitely come out in the flesh” (p.11). When people are unemployed as a result of lack of skills resulting from poor academic performance, they would most likely indulge in social vices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, drug abuse, prostitution and the like.
Absence of reading creates room for illiteracy. It is against this backdrop that Bello (2008) opined that: “There is no doubt that a population that does not read may simply return to illiteracy” (p. 19). According to Francis Bacon, “knowledge is power”. And “what other better way of gaining knowledge if not through studying and reading expansively” (Ideke, 2011, p.3). Therefore, people who fail to read extensively are most likely to wallow in abject ignorance.

Strategies for developing extensive reading culture in primary and post-primary schools
The thrust of this paper is strategies for developing extensive reading culture in primary and post-primary schools in Nigeria. Having established the fact that Nigerians in general and Nigerian students in particular have poor attitude to extensive reading, having also highlighted the benefits of extensive reading and the consequences of poor extensive reading culture, we shall at this stage suggest strategies that would help to develop extensive reading culture in primary and post-primary schools.

Primary and post-primary schools as levels of foundation laying
The choice of primary and post-primary levels is very strategic because we feel that it is at those levels that an appreciable impact which would yield positive results later in life would be made because there is always the need to “catch them young” since it is impossible “to teach an old dog a new trick”. Above all, it is written in the Holy Bible: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Since the children of today will be the adults of tomorrow, it is most expedient to lay the foundation in them so that the problem of poor reading culture will not only be addressed now but also in the future.

Integrating extensive reading in the curricula of primary and post-primary schools
Based on the distinction between intensive and extensive reading, it should be pointed out at this juncture that Nigerian students at all levels of education are more inclined to intensive reading than extensive reading. This is why Ikonta (2004) observes that “students limit their reading and learning to prescribed texts for specific examinations but hardly indulge in recreational reading, which research has shown to be necessary for expanding intellectual horizons, sharing experiences, improving writing performance and developing more mature personalities” (p.10).

Corroborating Ikonta’s observation, Fagbemi (1977) opines that:
Even students who are supposed to widely read may read when examination is close and for many, the textbooks may be the beginning and end of reading. It is not out of place to find a university graduate confessing hardly reading novels for pleasure. Even newspapers are like a taboo to some (p.63).

Based on the foregoing, it could be deduced that Nigerian students are inclined to intensive reading or study reading, which could be best described as “compulsory reading” since the driving force behind it is the fear of failing examination, test or assignment. This is an indication that Nigerian students have no business with reading without any strings attached to it. In view of this understanding, it is strongly believed that if extensive reading is made a classroom subject to be taught and examined at both primary and post-primary levels, the learners will embrace it and take it more seriously as other school subjects. To be able to achieve this, the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education should put in place the machinery of training reading teachers (both NCE and degree) in colleges of education and universities for both primary and secondary schools, who will implement the programmes at the school level.

Introduction of mobile electronic reading
In this 21st Century, the emergence of ICT has created some devices that are youth friendly and capable of enhancing effective teaching. In this age, it is common knowledge that the youths through their earphone enjoy music and listen to recorded lectures even on transit. Given the fact that one of the reasons students give for not reading extensively is the issue of time, mobile electronic reading could be introduced so that students can read anywhere including when they are on transit just as they listen to their music and recorded lectures. To be able to achieve this, publishers should have re-orientation with regard to their mode of publication and make provisions for mobile electronic reading of their published works.

Establishment of functional libraries in schools, cities and village squares
The place of the library in promoting reading culture cannot be over emphasised. Without the library, especially at the level of academic institutions, reading whether intensive or extensive cannot be
meaningfully and effectively sustained. Therefore, the Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Education, should come up with a legislation that would make establishment of a functional library a prerequisite for the establishment of primary and post-primary schools, both public and private. In addition, funds should be made available to existing schools so that they can set up functional libraries. Furthermore, functional public libraries should be set up in cities for urban dwellers and village squares for rural dwellers. These libraries to be located at strategic places should be complemented by setting up mobile libraries.

Establishment of bookshops/ bookstalls
Establishment of bookshops and bookstalls should be revisited by academic institutions, corporate bodies and private individuals. Bookshops established in schools will be of immense help to the pupils and the students. For one thing, the books will be sold to the students at a control price while the students will be saved the pains of having to run about in search of places to buy their choice books and the recommended ones. To encourage book dealers and assist the pupils and students to buy the necessary books at affordable prices, the government should remove import duty on imported books.

Students’ price for dailies and periodicals
To encourage pupils and students to have access to published dailies and periodicals such as magazines, publishers should make provision for students’ prices on their published works.

Role of the parents
The parents have very important roles to play in developing extensive reading culture in primary and post-primary schools. First, the parents should create a conducive reading environment at home by creating a mini library in the home. Apart from creating a conducive reading environment, parents should serve as reading models to their children. A child who sees the parents read always would want to imitate them because learning is a process of imitation. They should not hesitate to make money available to their children on request for purchase of books.

For effective implementation of these strategies as enumerated above, the government, the school, the parents and the learners should work in concert as their roles are inter-related and complimentary.

Conclusion
There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigerians, both young and old, have poor extensive reading culture in the English language. This unhealthy development stems from some factors, among which are emergence of ICT, poverty, inadequate school curricula, lack of bookshops/bookstalls, lack of functional libraries, especially in schools, etc. Poor extensive reading culture has some adverse effects such as poor academic performance with its attendant consequences as unemployment, indulgence in social vices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, drug abuse, prostitution, etc. Against this background, it has become absolutely necessary to proffer a solution to the problem of poor extensive reading culture as a way of addressing the academic and social problems associated with poor extensive reading culture. It is believed that if the strategies as suggested here are effectively implemented it would effectively address the problem of poor extensive reading culture in Nigeria.
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