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Pattern of biography usage by the students of Nigerian tertiary institutions

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The role of the library has been to develop and maintain collections of materials in all formats in order to serve the information needs of its users. Biographies reveal scintillating story of great men and women who by determination, rose to a pride of place in their various endeavours. Most biographical accounts disclose exemplary acts of boldness and bravery, scholastic endeavours, exhibit considerate leadership qualities, gives firm authentic history of one's birth, growth, career and so on. Descriptive research design using survey method was adopted for this study. Questionnaire was used as the survey instrument. The study sample comprised 500 randomly selected students from three universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study finds that the students preferred reading autobiographies to biographies. In case of biographies, they preferred biographies of the living to the dead. The study concludes that the biographies of notable personalities impact positively on younger generations.

Keywords: Biographies; Reading; Pattern of usage; Students; Higher institutions; Nigeria

Introduction

'Man comes into the world, and while he lives, he embarks upon a series of activities, absorbing experience which enables him to formulate a philosophy of life, and to chart his course of action; but then he dies. Nevertheless, his biography remains a guide to those of the living who may need guidance, either as a warning on the vanity of human wishes, or an encouragement, or both'. Nnamdi Azikwe

People in general are interested in the lives of great men and women and are impressed by their antecedents and credentials. They believe that their achievements are so resounding, unique and as such could be described as meteoric. Much attention is paid to such people so much that they see such achievers as role models for not just their contemporaries but also for the younger as well as unborn generations who may be looking for examples as guidance through life travails, extraordinary vision about future and penchant for excellence[1]. Biographies record the story of people who triumphed and have attained heights and others who are notable in some way in the society. The curiosity and instinct for survival in these upcoming generations can be satisfied through the reading of biographies and autobiographies[2].

Biographies reveal scintillating story of great men who by dint of determination, rose from a lowly estate to a pride of place in their various endeavours such as politics, entrepreneurship, academics, military, religion, education, etc. Biographies as records of landmark achievements disclose exemplary acts of boldness and bravery, scholastic endeavours, exhibit considerate leadership qualities, records a firm authentic history of one's birth, growth and career.

Biography is a form of non-fictional literature and sketches the story of a person's life written by someone else. The form is also considered to include autobiography in which the subject recounts his or her own history[3]. Useful information about important people on their birth, education and achievement are provided by biographies.

A biography helps to make the past more real and easier to understand because they tell about actual people and events. By reading biographies, people can satisfy their curiosity about well-known individuals

and can experience historical events as though they were actually present. A good biography is expected to present the fact about a person's life. Ideally, the biographical facts present by the writer include: education, ambition, conflict, work, relationship etc and what the person did and how the individual influenced the period in which he or she lived. Also, a biography should describe the subject's personality and provide an explanation for why he or she acted in certain ways. Biographers learn as much as possible about their subjects by making use of information sources such as diaries, personal letters and autobiographies of their subjects.

It is expected that users of academic library will take advantage of availability of these non-fictional materials to develop their mind by reading about the contributions of some people to the society. However, preliminary observations have proven otherwise. This study therefore intends to investigate the pattern of biography usage among the students of selected tertiary institutions in Ogun state, Nigeria.

Review of literature

It has been reported that reading is laborious and tasking[4]. A number of people do complain that they have no time to read. It is a known fact that many only read for the purpose of passing examinations which explains why we have quite a number of aliterates (those who are educated but do not read). Some of those who have access to transient reading materials like newspapers and magazines only flip through the pages, hardly reading. Arguably, reading is not popular in African culture. Yet, there are devoted readers – readers who are fascinated by anything in print[5].

In Africa, as a way of moulding, bringing up or creating a family or society with good and decent moral background, the art of story-telling as a custom has never been neglected or forgotten. These stories which are in form of folklores are meant to teach morals within the society[6]. In other parts of the world, children are told stories in order to lure them to sleep with bed time stories.

Africans are not inclined to reading; hence, learning is through informal process in the African culture[7]. The cultural habits of the Africans include listening and chatting. Many scholars have noted that, traditionally, animating and narrating written words from books to the illiterates through reading aloud, animated reading, dramatization or even demonstration were methods employed generally. These became necessary because of the difficulty in learning alphabets and acquiring reading skills. In some cases, the written animators were elder members of the family, members of religious institutions, professionals or even amateurs. In spite of the civilization and technological advancement, some societies still depend on indigenous information rather than written one[8]. However, the lure of electronic media, particularly, television's potential effect on reading performance has become an issue of growing concern among educationists and often cited as a cause for the decline in reading among both children and adults [9].

Reading entails mental recognition and processing of the printed symbols to derive meaning. The exercise goes beyond mere verbalization of the printed letter but rather consists in clear understanding of what is read, for reading does not take place until understanding is achieved. And for reading to be beneficial, the reader must be able to decode the intended meaning of a given piece. This calls for alertness of mind, the ability to read between the lines and competence in the language of communication. If reading is this involved, then, what compensations await the conscientious reader? Apparently, one of the appeals of reading is that it cultivates the mind. The various experiences, knowledge and wisdom gathered from reading good books go a long way to influencing and shaping the outlook of the reader[10]. Reading enables the mind to perceive things in a broader way, helps the reader to see things in a clearer perspective and affords him the opportunity to enter into the world of other persons (writers), taking him out of the limited confine of his own world. Good biographies, philosophy books, books on positive thinking and other well-written materials are suitable for this purpose.

Reading also serves a bibliotherapy purpose. Books can be used to modify undesirable character. Children who exhibit undesirable traits can be advised to read character-moulding books. Appropriate literature can be prescribed for this category of children to read and learn from. Didactic stories (adventure and school stories) and books on ethics come to mind here. Besides, reading is a form of recreation. Relaxation of the body and the mind can be achieved by reading for

pleasure after work or as a break from daily routine to relieve tension. Done for this purpose, reading becomes an enjoyable pastime rather than a task. Books which qualify for this purpose include comics, thrillers, well-written novels and magazines[11].

Moreover, reading leads to acquisition of information and knowledge. And knowledge is power. Acquisition of information on various fields of human endeavour makes a reader versatile as regards global affairs. This is important because one of the indices of sociability is the ability to discuss information and ideas among peers and colleagues. The ease with which one brings out facts, ideas and statistics in a discourse is a pointer to one's healthy reading habit.

Other benefits of reading include the enhancement of one's mastery of the nuances of the language of communication leading to competence in its use, arousal of the latent writing skill of reader, distraction of the mind from unworthy thoughts that can lead to regrettable actions, understanding of one's environment and learning about other people's culture among others. In essence, reading makes a total man.

Reading is recognized as an art capable of transforming man's life and his entire society. However, the World Children Report stated that nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or write their names[12]. The challenges posed by the emergence of Internet and other electronic gadgets such as iPod, multi-media, CD-ROM, among others should not also be forgotten. "At an age when browsing the net, playing with funky handsets and passing non-stop SMS seem to be the order of the day, reading a book in a peaceful corner of a library has become an archaic idea for most young people. While technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin atmosphere"[8]. In Sub-Saharan Africa particularly, the problems of illiteracy and the scarcity of learning resources gravely limit the opportunities people have to learn and to transmit their circumstances.

In another study conducted in the late 90s, the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) measured primary school students reading literacy against standard established by national reading experts and sixth grade teachers. It was reported that, in four out of seven countries, fewer than half of the six graders achieved minimum competence in reading. This study was also compared with another done by the same SACMEQ two years later, which saw literacy scores falling even further in five out of six countries[13].

Reading is important for everybody in order to cope with new knowledge in the changing world of the technological age. The importance and necessity will hopefully continue to increase in years to come. However, the number of aliterates, that is those who know how to read but do not read enough, is also increasing. There are still some people, young and old, who can read and get access to reading activities and reading programs, while there are some who can equally read but do not see the necessity for such activities and programs. They neither have much initial interest nor lasting interest in books and reading. Therefore, the reading habit has to be built up and promoted from the early age of an individual.

Reading is a very important issue which is not only about enjoyment but a necessity as it assumes the role of basic tool in education[14]. Reading makes way for a better understanding of one's own experiences and it can be an exciting voyage to self discovery[15,16]. It is the art of interpreting printed and written words, the most effective process of conscious learning which influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgment and action of readers[17].

There are some major factors that presently hinder the promotion of reading among the Africans. The background of learning through informal process is the African culture. The cultural habit of the Africans prefers listening and chatting to reading[18]. Man, money and management strategies are also responsible for poor reading habit. Insufficient libraries like public libraries, school libraries or special libraries are located in urban areas rather than rural areas are also reasons[19]. Further, shortage of books and reading materials, insufficient professional library manpower or workforce and limited library budget affect reading[20].

Television programmes, cable networks, internet services and global system of mobile telecommunication (GSM) amidst other modern sophisticated media resources have potential effect on reading performance and this has become a growing concern among educationists and often cited it as a

cause for the decline in reading among both children and adults. When people spent much of their time on programs which entertain rather than educate, ping, browse and play games on some of these electronic media, it has a direct effect on their reading habit.

There is a need to foster a love for reading, which will promote a reading culture in the African society. This can be achieved only if institutions, organizations such as NGOs, school libraries, etc. both in government and private work together to improve the reading culture of the Africans.

Parents who spend time reading to their children are giving them the best possible start on the road to literacy. Many research studies have pointed out that the children who do best in literacy skills at school are those who come from homes where there are books, where their parents spend time reading to their children and where children see their parents and older siblings engage in reading activities. Some creative suggestions for parents to foster reading habit on children include reading story books aloud; create a learning environment by setting up a corner with reading materials, visit to the library, book shops and giving books as gift.

Libraries are means to promote, stimulate and develop reading interests. The principal function of the librarian is to serve the cause of education formally or informally. Librarians have a responsibility and an opportunity to go out and tell the public what they have in their libraries and find out what people want to read and maintain the library that encourage readers to stay and browse.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the availability of biographies in academic libraries;
2. To examine whether biographies are been utilised or not;
3. To find out the frequency and the pattern of use of biographies in academic library;
4. To assess the current state of motivation being derived from the reading of biographies by library users; and
5. To determine the problems militating against the use of biographies and proffer solutions.

Methodology

Descriptive research design using survey method was adopted for this study. Questionnaire was designed and used as survey instrument. The questionnaire was divided into three sections namely: Section A: Demographic information, Section B: Availability and usage of biographies and Section C: Pattern of usage. The population for this study includes the students of three universities in Ogun State namely: Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode (TASUED) and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye (OOU). The respondents included 500 students randomly selected from the three institutions for this study. They were chosen based on their experience as registered users of the libraries in these institutions through purposive sampling technique. In this survey, simple percentage analysis was employed.

Analysis and results

Out of the 500 copies of the questionnaire, 200 were distributed among the students of FUNAAB and 150 each to the students of TASUED and OOU. Four hundred and eighty three questionnaires which represent 96.6% of the entire sample were returned. Out of these, 474 (94.8%) were found suitable for further analysis.

Table 1 on demographic information reveals that 100 level students were 35.7%, 200 level were 16.7%, 300 level were 9.6%, 400 level were 4.8% while 500 level students were 14.3%. The highest educational qualifications as revealed in the table indicate the certificates and diplomas the respondents had before the commencement of their degree programmes in their various universities. The respondents with Ordinary Level Certificate, West African Examinations Council Certificate and Senior Secondary School Certificate (O'L, WAEC, SSCE) as their highest qualification were 85%. Those who had Ordinary National Diploma and National Certificate in Education (OND, NCE) were 11.8%. Those with Higher National Diploma (HND) were 8% while others were 2.3%. 52.1% were male respondents for the study while the female respondents were 47.9%. The table further showed that 1.3% were 40-49 years old, 25.3% were 30-39 years while the largest number (73.4%) of the respondents were 16-29 years.

Table 1—Demographic information

Level of study	Frequency (%)	Highest educational qualification	Frequency (%)	Gender	Frequency (%)	Age	Frequency (%)
100	85 (35.7%)	O'L, WAEC, SSCE	403 (85%)	Male	247 (52.1%)	>60	0
200	113 (16.7%)	OND, NCE	56 (11.8%)	Female	227 (47.9%)	50-59	0
300	172 (9.6%)	HND	4 (0.8%)			40-49	6 (1.3%)
400	59 (4.8%)	Others	11 (2.3%)			30-39	120 (25.3%)
500	45 (14.3%)					16-29	348 (73.4%)
Total	474 (100%)	Total	474 (100%)	Total	474 (100%)	Total	474 (100%)

Table 2—Availability and usage of biographies

1	How often do you use the library?	Always	Rarely	Never
	Frequency	188 (39.7%)	197 (41.6%)	89
	Percentage			(18.8%)
2	Which of these retrieval devices for biography do you use most?	Catalogue	OPAC	Shelve browsing 207 (43.7%)
	Frequency	182 (38.4%)	85	
	Percentage		(17.9%)	
3	In what sections of the library are the biographies kept in your library?	Reading Rooms	Reference Section	Circulation Section
	Frequency	183	203	88
	Percentage	(38.6%)	(42.8%)	(18.6%)
			Yes	No
4	Are there biographies among your library collections?		342 (72.2%)	132 (27.8%)
5	Do you know how to use the biography and autobiography very well?		413 (87.1%)	61 (22.9%)
6	Is your reference unit conducive enough for the reading of biographies?		351 (74.1%)	123 (25.9%)
7	Are the biographies well organized at the Reference unit for easy retrieval?		307 (64.8%)	167 (35.2%)

Table 2 on availability and usage of biographies reveals that 188 (39.7%) respondents indicated that they were always using the library, 197 (41.6%) indicated they seldom use the library while 89 (18.8%) indicated that they rarely use the library. Also, 182 (38.4%) indicated that they use catalogue as retrieval device, 85 (17.9%) use OPAC as retrieval device while 207 (43.7%) engage in shelve browsing as retrieval device for biography. The table further shows that 183(38.6%) indicated that the biographies are kept in the reading rooms of their library, 203(42.8%) indicated that biographies are kept at the Reference Section of their library while 88(18.6%) indicated that biographies are kept at the Circulation Section of their library. Three hundred and forty two (72.2%) affirmed that there are biographies among their library collections while 132 (27.8%) responded negatively. Four hundred and thirteen (87.1%) respondents affirmed that they know how to use the biography and autobiography very well while 61 (22.9%) responded negatively. Three hundred and fifty one (74.1%) respondents affirmed that their reference unit is conducive enough for the reading of biographies while 123 (25.9%) responded negatively. Three hundred and seven (64.8%) respondents also affirmed that the biographies are well organized in

their libraries for easy retrieval while 167 (35.2%) responded negatively.

Table 3 shows that 80.6% respondents know the difference between the biography and autobiography, 11.8% were undecided while 7.6% did not. 62% respondents like reading biographies, 21.5% were undecided while 16.5% indicated that they did not like reading biographies. About sixty three percent respondents indicated that they prefer reading autobiographies, 15.4% were undecided while 22.1% responded negatively. Sixty percent respondents agreed that aautobiographies are better than commissioned biographies, 18.6% were undecided while 21.7% disagreed. 69.4% respondents preferred biographies of the living to the dead, 11.2% were undecided while 19.5% disagreed. 76.9% respondents agreed that they get enough motivation from reading biographies, 6.3% were undecided while 15.8% disagreed. 76% respondents also preferred print biographies to electronic biographies, 12.9% were undecided while 18.6% disagreed. Seventy five percent respondents indicated that they enjoy reading biographies only at their leisure, 5.7% were undecided while 22.6% disagreed.

The table further shows that 57.4% agreed that they pattern their life after some experiences from

Table 3—Pattern of usage

		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1.	I know the difference between biography and autobiography	206 (43.5%)	176 (37.1%)	56 (11.8%)	16 (3.4%)	20 (4.2%)
2.	I like reading biographies	185 (39%)	109 (23%)	102(21.5%)	26 (5.5%)	52 (11%)
3.	I prefer reading autobiographies	189 (39.9%)	107 (22.6%)	73 (15.4%)	66 (13.9%)	39 (8.2%)
4.	Autobiographies are better than commissioned biographies	136 (28.7%)	147 (31%)	88 (18.6%)	68 (14.3%)	35 (7.4%)
5.	I prefer biographies of the living to the dead	158 (33.3%)	171 (36.1%)	53 (11.2%)	69 (14.6%)	23 (4.9%)
6.	I get enough motivation from reading biographies	182 (38.4%)	187 (39.5%)	30 (6.3%)	59 (12.4%)	16 (3.4%)
7.	I prefer print biographies to electronic biographies	155 (32.7%)	170 (35.9%)	61 (12.9%)	70 (14.8%)	18 (3.8%)
8.	I enjoy reading biographies only at my leisure	167 (35.2%)	187 (39.5%)	27 (5.7%)	83 (17.5%)	24 (5.1%)
9.	I pattern my life after some experiences from biographies	97 (20.5%)	175 (36.9%)	48 (10.1%)	123 (25.9%)	34 (7.2%)
10.	I can perform better if I imbibe some good morals and attitudes I learnt from biographies	199 (42%)	189 (39.8%)	21 (4.4%)	58 (12.2%)	7 (1.5%)
11.	Biographies are good ingredients of academic libraries because of its impacts on the younger generations	235 (49.6%)	208 (43.9%)	28 (5.9%)	7 (1.5%)	9 (1.9%)
12.	My academic pursuit is strongly related to my experience from biographies	95 (20%)	65 (13.7%)	42 (8.9%)	137 (28.9%)	135 (28.5%)
13.	Reading biographies affects my academic performance positively	158 (33.3%)	187 (39.5%)	38 (8%)	64 (13.5%)	27 (5.7%)
14.	I develop leadership traits and training from reading biographies of notable personalities	161 (34%)	212 (44.7%)	24 (5.1%)	65 (13.7%)	12 (2.5%)
15.	I am selective and cautious in reading biographies because of some distorted facts	151 (31.9%)	185 (39%)	48 (10.1%)	68 (14.3%)	21 (4.4%)
16.	I prefer local biographies to foreign ones	135 (28.5%)	137 (28.9%)	72 (15.2%)	98 (20.7%)	32 (6.8%)
17	Biographies of notable Nigerians impacts positively on the younger generations	187 (39.5%)	178 (37.6%)	38 (8%)	31 (6.5%)	40 (8.4%)

biographies, 10.1% were undecided while 33.1% disagreed. 81.8% believed that they could perform better if they imbibe some good morals and attitudes they learnt from biographies, 4.4% were undecided while 13.7% disagreed. 93.5% of the respondents agreed that biographies are good ingredients of academic libraries because of its impacts on the younger generations, 5.9% were undecided and 3.4% disagreed. The table also shows that 33.7% indicated that their academic pursuit is strongly related to their experience from biographies, 8.9% were undecided about this while 57.4% disagreed. 72.5% agreed that reading biographies affects their academic performance positively, 8% were undecided while 19.2% responded negatively. Nearly 79% agreed that they develop leadership traits and training from reading biographies of notable personalities, 5.1% were undecided while 16.2%disagreed. Seventy percent of the respondents submitted that they were selective and cautious in reading biographies because of some distorted facts, 8% were undecided while 19.2% disagreed. 57.4% indicated their preference for local biographies to foreign ones, 15.2% were undecided while 27.5% disagreed. Lastly, 77.1% respondents affirmed that the biographies of notable Nigerians impact positively on the younger generations, 8% were undecided and 14.9% disagreed.

Conclusion

This study concludes that biographies are an important part of academic library collection because of its potential to impact younger generations and influence the students' academic pursuit. Therefore, more biographies should be acquired as it has been proven to be a good ingredient of academic libraries because it affects students' academic performance positively. Furthermore, reading should be encouraged among the students, especially outside their courses. More attention should also be paid to the use of biographies by the students in order to inculcate good morals and attitudes, especially during the teaching of mandatory use of library course in their respective citadels of learning.

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