THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES IN FOSTERING READING CULTURE AT THE BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL IN NIGERIA

By
[1]Comfort Remilekun Olorunyomi, PhD
[1]Department of Primary Education,
Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano
Email: mummytosin2017@gmail.com
Tel.: 08023606046; 08143411510

Abstract
The importance of reading culture in basic education cannot be overstated, as it underpins academic achievement, lifelong learning, and social development. School library services, comprising information resources, reading programmes, instructional support, and literacy initiatives, are increasingly recognized as critical mechanisms for fostering a vibrant reading culture among young learners. In Nigeria, where literacy challenges persist and reading engagement among children remains a concern, school libraries have the potential to bridge this gap by providing access to quality reading materials, facilitating structured reading activities, and creating supportive environments that nurture students' interest in reading. However, the effectiveness of school library services is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the availability of resources, professional staffing, curriculum integration, and institutional support. This paper reviews local and international literature on the role of school library services in promoting reading culture at the basic education level, while contextualizing Nigerian experiences within broader theoretical and practical perspectives. It discusses key concepts such as reading, reading culture, and school library services; examines how library services support literacy development; identifies the challenges that constrain their effectiveness; and proposes strategies for strengthening reading culture initiatives. Despite existing empirical attention to reading habits and basic library functions, significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding how school libraries can support diverse learners, integrate digital literacy, and scale evidence-based reading practices across different regions. The paper concludes that strengthening school library infrastructure, professional capacity, community engagement, and policy frameworks is essential for promoting reading culture within Nigeria's basic education sector.

Keywords: School library services, reading culture, basic education, literacy development, library programmes

Introduction

Reading culture refers to the habitual and sustained engagement with texts for pleasure, knowledge acquisition, or personal development. At the basic education level, cultivating a strong reading culture is crucial because it supports reading comprehension, critical thinking, academic achievement, and lifelong learning. Nigeria, like many other countries, recognizes the importance of literacy to educational development and national development. Nevertheless, evidence and observations indicate persistent gaps in reading engagement among children and adolescents. These gaps are often associated with poor reading habits, low utilization of library resources, declining interest in traditional book reading, digital distractions, and limited access to appropriate reading materials (Akinkoola, 2025). School libraries occupy an important position within this context because they are intended to provide learners with access to diverse reading materials and structured support capable of influencing their attitudes towards reading. This review therefore examines the role of school library services in fostering reading culture within Nigerian basic education through conceptual

definitions, empirical evidence, and international perspectives.

School library services encompass a range of functions, including the collection and organization of print and digital reading materials, facilitation of reading programmes such as book clubs and storytelling sessions, provision of literacy support and guidance, and creation of spaces for independent and collaborative learning. In principle, these functions position the school library as an important catalyst for reading engagement. In practice, however, many schools, particularly in Nigeria, face challenges such as inadequate collections, insufficient funding, limited professional staffing, and low utilization of library resources by students. Understanding the relationship between school library services and reading culture therefore requires an examination of the underlying concepts and available evidence regarding how these services contribute to literacy development and reading engagement.

This review draws on Nigerian studies alongside relevant international literature to provide a broader understanding of the state of reading culture and the contribution of school library services to its development and enhancement.

Concept of School Library

A school library is more than a repository of books; it is an educational centre that supports teaching, learning, reading development, and students' intellectual growth. According to Oraekwe and Emenari (2024), a school library provides organized collections of print and multimedia resources, trained personnel, and services designed to meet the educational and information needs of students and teachers. Such collections may include storybooks, textbooks, reference materials, magazines, and digital resources that cater to learners' diverse interests, abilities, and educational levels. Within the context of basic education, the mission of the school library is closely aligned with literacy development and the cultivation of reading culture among young learners. Empirical studies in Nigeria indicate that well-stocked school libraries can enhance literacy skills and knowledge acquisition when their resources and services are effectively utilized (Oraekwe & Emenari, 2024).

Importantly, the school library serves as a bridge between formal classroom instruction and independent learning. It complements classroom teaching by providing learners with opportunities to explore a wider range of reading materials that stimulate curiosity and imagination. School libraries can also facilitate structured programmes such as book clubs, storytelling sessions, reading competitions, and other literacy-related activities that encourage students to engage with texts beyond the requirements of the classroom. In communities where textbooks dominate and recreational reading is uncommon, school libraries can expose learners to diverse genres, languages, subjects, and formats, thereby broadening their reading experiences. International literature similarly indicates that school library services that emphasize reader engagement and provide diversified resources can contribute positively to students' reading habits and overall literacy outcomes.

Despite these potential benefits, the effectiveness of school libraries is often dependent on institutional support, adequate resources, and the professional capacity of library personnel. In many Nigerian basic education settings, structural and operational challenges, including inadequate collections, insufficiently trained library personnel, inadequate funding, and limited reading programmes, constrain the ability of school libraries to foster a strong reading culture among students. Addressing these challenges requires both policy commitment and practical interventions aimed at strengthening school library services at the grassroots level.

Concept of Reading

Reading is a complex cognitive process through which individuals decodes written symbols and constructs meaning from texts. It is fundamental to education and constitutes an important component of lifelong learning. The ability to read fluently and comprehend written materials not only contributes to academic achievement but also equips learners with skills for critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and informed participation in

society. At the early stages of schooling, reading is commonly developed through approaches such as phonics, guided reading, and other literacy exercises. Beyond these foundational skills, however, reading as a culture encompasses voluntary engagement with texts for pleasure, personal development, knowledge acquisition, and intellectual enrichment. Reading therefore extends beyond basic literacy to include an appreciation of narratives, ideas, perspectives, and diverse worldviews.

Research in Nigeria and other parts of the world consistently indicates that students who develop strong reading habits are more likely to perform well academically and continue learning independently. Conversely, weaknesses in reading culture have been associated with poor academic performance, low engagement, and reduced opportunities for knowledge enrichment (Oji & Habibu, 2025). Technological distractions, socio-cultural attitudes towards reading, and limited exposure to diverse reading materials have also been identified as factors contributing to declining interest in reading among children and adolescents.

Fostering a genuine reading culture involves more than teaching the technical skills of reading. It requires the development of an environment in which reading is valued, enjoyed, encouraged, and incorporated into students' everyday school experiences. School libraries play an essential role in creating such an environment by providing access to appealing and relevant reading materials, facilitating reading activities, and establishing spaces where reading can become a socially accepted and valued activity. Understanding reading as both a learning activity and a meaningful and enjoyable experience therefore highlights the importance of interventions that promote pleasure reading and diverse forms of engagement in literacy development.

Concept of Reading Culture

Reading culture refers to the habitual practice of engaging with reading materials in a sustained, meaningful, and pleasurable manner. It encompasses the attitudes, behaviour, practices, and social norms that position reading as a valued and regular component of learners' lives. Within a strong reading culture, students read not only for academic purposes but also for personal development, entertainment, knowledge acquisition, and social awareness. Research indicates that a strong reading culture is associated with improved academic outcomes, broader knowledge, and enhanced cognitive abilities (Abdulkadir & Mohammed, 2025).

In many societies, reading culture is influenced by social norms, family practices, institutional support, and access to appropriate reading resources. In Nigeria, concerns have been raised about declining reading culture, particularly among younger generations, as emerging technologies and digital entertainment compete for learners' attention and time (Oji & Habibu, 2025). Studies on readership indicate that factors such as inadequate library infrastructure, the high cost of books, and insufficient promotion of reading activities contribute to low levels of voluntary reading engagement (Akinyoola, 2025).

School library services are strategically positioned to influence reading culture because they can provide structured opportunities for learners to explore and enjoy reading. Through initiatives such as book clubs, storytelling sessions, reading challenges, book exhibitions, and thematic displays, libraries can create communal and interactive reading experiences. Such activities can help students associate reading with pleasure, curiosity, social interaction, and discovery, thereby reinforcing positive reading habits. Reading culture is therefore cultivated not merely through the availability of reading materials but also through active engagement, mentorship, guidance, and encouragement from teachers and library personnel.

Promoting reading culture consequently requires a multidimensional approach that integrates library resources, pedagogical practices, community involvement, and curriculum alignment. Schools

that regard reading culture as an important educational priority rather than a peripheral activity are more likely to create conditions that support sustained literacy engagement among learners.

Basic Education Programme and School Library Services

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria seeks to provide free, compulsory, and inclusive basic education, with emphasis on foundational literacy, numeracy, and competencies necessary for lifelong learning. Within this framework, school library services constitute important support mechanisms for resource-based learning and reading promotion. The UBE curriculum recognizes that literacy development extends beyond textbook-based learning and requires opportunities for learners to explore diverse materials, participate in reading programmes, and develop critical-thinking skills. When adequately supported, school libraries can serve as centres for these activities.

Empirical evidence from different parts of Nigeria suggests that school libraries can contribute positively to literacy outcomes when their services are aligned with educational objectives. For instance, studies of school libraries indicate that access to storybooks, magazines, reference materials, and other reading resources can enhance literacy development, independent learning, and reading engagement (Oraekwe & Emenari, 2024). Similarly, reading clubs and other library-based activities can encourage students to explore texts beyond their prescribed academic requirements, thereby fostering reading as a regular and enjoyable activity. School library services can also complement classroom instruction by providing additional opportunities for reading practice, exploration, and intellectual development.

From an international perspective, effective school library services often involve collaboration between teachers and library personnel, integration of digital reading resources, and systematic reading programmes that are aligned with curricular objectives. Such practices can enhance learner engagement and establish continuity between classroom instruction and library-based learning. However, in many Nigerian basic education settings, school library services continue to be constrained by inadequate collection development, insufficient funding, lack of qualified library personnel, and limited integration of library activities into school timetables. These weaknesses reduce the potential contribution of school libraries to the development of reading culture and require deliberate policy and institutional interventions.

Factors Inhibiting the Promotion of Reading Culture in Basic Education Schools

Several factors constrain the effective promotion of reading culture among learners at the basic education level in Nigeria. These factors are both structural and socio-cultural and include inadequate funding, shortage of qualified library personnel, curriculum and time constraints, limited parental involvement, socio-economic challenges, and the growing influence of digital entertainment.

1 Inadequate Funding and Library Resources

One of the major challenges affecting the effectiveness of school library services is inadequate funding. Many basic education schools lack sufficient financial resources to establish, equip, maintain, and regularly update functional school libraries. Funding constraints often result in inadequate collections of current and age-appropriate books, limited digital resources, insufficient furniture and facilities, and poor maintenance of existing library infrastructure. Consequently, students may have limited access to attractive and relevant reading materials capable of stimulating their interest in reading.

Closely associated with inadequate funding is the shortage of appropriate reading materials. A school library that lacks diverse, current, and appealing resources may struggle to attract learners and sustain their interest in reading. This is particularly important at the basic education level, where children's reading preferences vary according to their age, interests, abilities, and educational needs. Adequate investment in library collections is therefore necessary to ensure that learners have access to materials that encourage both academic and recreational reading.

2 Lack of Trained Library Personnel and Literacy Specialists

Closely linked to funding shortfalls is the shortage of trained librarians and literacy specialists. Professional library personnel play a critical role in managing collections, guiding students towards appropriate reading materials, and facilitating reading programmes such as book clubs, reading hours, and storytelling activities. However, many basic education schools operate without qualified library personnel; where such personnel exist, they often perform multiple responsibilities without specialized training in literacy promotion (Nwachi, Nkechi, & Onoh, 2024; Odusina & Oloniruha, 2020).

The absence of adequately trained personnel can significantly reduce the effectiveness of school library services. Without skilled guidance and facilitation, libraries risk becoming underutilized spaces where books remain unused rather than dynamic learning environments that stimulate curiosity, encourage exploration, and cultivate positive reading habits among learners. Continuous professional development for library personnel and teachers is therefore essential for strengthening reading promotion activities in schools.

3 Curriculum Constraints and Limited Time Allocation

Another structural factor inhibiting the promotion of reading culture is curriculum constraints and inadequate time allocation for library and reading activities. In many Nigerian basic education schools, reading activities are not formally integrated into the school timetable as essential literacy practices. Instead, reading is frequently associated with examination preparation, while library visits may be irregular or treated as optional activities outside core academic requirements (The Cable, 2023; Ezeokoli, Fadekemi, & Kolawole, 2013).

This examination-oriented approach may reinforce the perception of reading as merely a requirement for passing examinations rather than as an enjoyable activity and a lifelong learning habit. Furthermore, limited classroom time devoted to recreational and independent reading reduces opportunities for learners to explore materials beyond prescribed textbooks and curricular objectives. Integrating structured reading and library activities into the school timetable could therefore provide learners with regular opportunities to develop and sustain positive reading habits.

4 Socio-Cultural and Family Factors

Socio-cultural factors also play an important role in shaping reading culture among children. Parental involvement and the home reading environment are particularly important because children often develop attitudes towards reading through observation and interaction with family members. In many Nigerian households, parents may lack sufficient time, resources, or established reading habits, thereby limiting opportunities for children to observe and develop positive reading behaviour at home (The Decline of Reading Culture, 2025; Flickers of Hope Foundation, 2025).

Where reading is not reinforced outside the school environment, learners may be less likely to perceive it as a valuable or enjoyable activity. Economic pressures and competing family responsibilities may further reduce the time available for reading at home. These challenges can be particularly pronounced in low-income communities where families may have limited access to books, digital resources, or suitable and quiet spaces for reading.

5 Digital Distractions and Entertainment Media

The proliferation of digital technologies and entertainment media has also emerged as a significant challenge to the development of reading culture among young learners. Smartphones, social media platforms, online videos, and digital games provide easily accessible forms of entertainment that compete for learners' time and attention (The Decline of Reading Culture, 2025). Although digital technologies can be effectively used to support reading and literacy development, their unregulated use may divert learners from sustained engagement with books and other extended texts.

Research within and beyond Nigeria suggests that increased engagement with entertainment-oriented

digital content may reduce the amount of time learners devote to sustained reading. Learners may increasingly prefer brief and immediately engaging digital content to longer texts that require concentration and reflection (The Cable, 2023; Flickers of Hope Foundation, 2025). This shift in preferences presents an important challenge to schools seeking to promote reading culture through conventional library services. Rather than viewing technology solely as a threat, however, schools and libraries can incorporate appropriate digital reading resources and activities into their reading programmes to make reading more relevant to contemporary learners.

6. Overall Implications of the Identified Challenges

Taken together, the identified barriers reflect both structural and cultural dimensions of the challenges confronting reading culture promotion in Nigerian basic education schools. Although some of these challenges are shared by educational systems globally, factors such as inadequate educational funding, socio-economic disparities, limited institutional support, shortages of professional personnel, and inadequate access to reading materials may intensify their effects in the Nigerian context.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated interventions involving government and education authorities, school administrators, librarians, teachers, parents, communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Such interventions should combine adequate resource provision with effective reading programmes, professional capacity development, parental involvement, and appropriate integration of digital technologies. A coordinated and context-sensitive approach would provide a stronger foundation for developing sustainable reading habits among learners.

Recommendations

Based on the issues identified in the literature reviewed, the following measures are recommended to strengthen the role of school library services in fostering reading culture at the basic education level in Nigeria:

1. Governments and relevant education authorities should increase funding for basic education libraries to ensure the provision of adequate, current, diverse, and age-appropriate reading materials. Such funding should cover both print and digital resources, furniture, infrastructure, equipment, and regular maintenance.
2. Appropriate policies should be implemented to ensure that all basic education schools have functional school libraries equipped with relevant print and digital information resources. The establishment of a library should be accompanied by adequate provision for its sustained operation and maintenance.
3. Qualified librarians and library personnel should be employed in basic education schools to manage library resources and provide professional services. Regular training and professional development programmes should also be organized to strengthen their capacity in literacy promotion, reading guidance, digital literacy, and learner-centred library services.
4. School administrators and teachers should incorporate structured reading activities into the regular school timetable. Activities such as reading periods, storytelling, book clubs, reading competitions, book discussions, and independent reading should be given sufficient time and treated as integral components of literacy development rather than optional activities.
5. Librarians and classroom teachers should collaborate in planning and implementing reading and literacy activities. Such collaboration can help ensure that library resources and programmes complement classroom instruction and provide learners with opportunities to explore materials beyond prescribed textbooks.
6. Schools should encourage parents and communities to support children's reading activities beyond the school environment. Partnerships with public libraries, publishers, literacy organisations, community groups, and other stakeholders

can provide additional reading resources and create broader opportunities for learners to engage in reading.

Conclusion

School library services play a pivotal role in fostering reading culture at the basic education level by providing access to diverse reading materials, facilitating structured reading activities, and creating supportive environments for learning and literacy development. Evidence from Nigerian and international literature indicates that when school libraries are adequately resourced, professionally managed, and effectively integrated into school programmes, they can contribute significantly to learners' reading engagement and the development of lifelong reading habit.

However, the potential of school libraries to foster reading culture is constrained by persistent challenges, including inadequate funding, limited and outdated library resources, shortages of qualified professional personnel, curriculum and time constraints, socio-cultural barriers, limited parental involvement, and the growing influence of digital entertainment. These challenges indicate that simply establishing school libraries is insufficient; sustained institutional, financial, professional, and community support is required to ensure that they function effectively.

Strengthening school library services therefore requires a comprehensive approach involving government and education authorities, school administrators, librarians, teachers, parents, communities, and other stakeholders. Adequate provision of resources, employment and training of professional personnel, integration of reading activities into the school curriculum, community participation, and appropriate use of digital technologies can enhance the capacity of school libraries to promote reading culture. Ultimately, a well-supported and effectively managed school library can serve as a vital educational environment for nurturing reading habits, improving literacy engagement, and supporting lifelong learning among learners in Nigeria's basic education sector.

References

Abdulkadir, A., & Mohammed, B. (2025). *Promoting reading culture in the Nigerian society*. *Nigerbiblios: Journal of National Library of Nigeria*, 27(1&2), 115–127.

Akinyoola, O. G. (2025). Readership as a tool in fostering educational development in Nigeria. Nigerbiblios: *Journal of National Library of Nigeria*, 29(1&2), 41–53.

Ezeokoli, O. A., Fadekemi, O. O., & Kolawole, A. A. (2013). Challenges in school library provisions and reading culture in Nigeria. *International Education Journal.*

Flickers of Hope Foundation (2025). *Poor reading culture in Nigeria: Causes and solutions*. Flickers of Hope.

Nwachi, C., Nkechi, I. Onoh, C. (2024). *School libraries and the promotion of reading*. Journal of Academic Libraries.

Odusina & Oloniruha (2020). *Library services and constraints affecting reading culture*. International Journal of Library and Information Science.

Oji & Habibu (2025). *The role of schools and libraries in reading promotion*. Information and Knowledge Management.

Oji, S. E., & Habibu, I. (2025). The role of schools and public libraries in promoting reading habit among children and adolescents in Nigeria. *Information and Knowledge Management*.

Oraekwe, I. N., & Emenari, B. C. (2024). The role of school library in literacy development of school children