

# Promoting the Culture of Reading Among School Children in Selected Communities Around the University of Cape Coast through Reading Clinics

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## Abstract

To support the reading projects in Ghana, the University of Cape Coast Library, in celebrating the 3rd Library and Information Week under the auspices of the Ghana Library Association in October 2015, donated over 1000 reading materials to five schools around the University of Cape Coast. The library also organised a reading clinic to offer reading literacy knowledge and skills to school children. The reading clinic was organised to instill the culture of reading and writing into children, to enable them enjoy reading and writing throughout their school days and beyond. Also the exercise was intended to avoid the tendencies of struggling to read and write in the future years of the children. In this regard, 150 pupils with reading difficulties were selected from the five schools. Five professional librarians and ten paraprofessionals assisted in carrying out the reading clinic. The facilitators also organised reading and spelling competitions in the schools. To encourage and sustain the habit of reading, books were donated to the various schools to establish school libraries. After a period of six months, the programme was evaluated. It was realised that the programme have been generally helpful to pupils. Inadequate reading materials, and low teacher interest in pupils reading were realised. The study, recommends that, Ghana Education Service through the Ghana Library Authority should ensure that schools have libraries with qualified librarians and adequate reading materials.

**Keywords:** Reading Culture Promotion, Reading Clinics, School Children

## Introduction

Reading is the ability to interpret and make meaning out of words, be it in printed, handwritten, or an electronic form. Most people read for knowledge or to make decisions. Some also read for pleasure and entertainment. In teaching and learning, reading is fundamental. An individual cannot be educated without the ability to read. Reading is an essential aspect of education (Mokatsi, 2005), and it encompasses all aspects of learning.

Promoting the culture of reading among children will not only enhance their academic success but will also bring forth an enlightened society. Gbadamosi (2007) observed that the culture of reading is the habit or ability of a person to develop a positive affection towards reading. To become lifelong learners, children need to develop the habit and skill of reading, and it is the best habit someone can possess (Gupa, 2010). Reading is a fundamental skill needed to survive in school and after school (Yilben & Kitgkka, 2008). A child's success in school and throughout life depends on the ability to read. In this era of information age, it is important that people become proficient readers and writers in order to participate in society (Ontario Ministry of Education, Early Reading Strategy, 2003). To participate fully in social, civic and economic growth, reading is essential (Holden, 2004).

Within the context of the school, some school children have difficulties in reading. This implies that without any help such children will fall out of school. The Reading Clinic Tutoring ([www.readingclinicinc.org](http://www.readingclinicinc.org)) in the U.S

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reported that about ten million school-age children in the U.S. have reading difficulties and are considered poor readers. To save the situation, reading clinics are organised for children with such challenges. A reading clinic is a clinic organised for people with reading difficulties ([thefreedictionary.com](http://thefreedictionary.com))

To build up the interest of reading in school children in Ghana, both governmental and non-governmental bodies have setup reading projects to assist school children. Some of these organisations include the Ghana Library Association (reading clinic at La Nkwantanang Cluster of Schools, Madina, Accra), Ghana Library Authority (reading clinics for schools in Savelugu Nandom municipality, Tamale), Mmofra Foundation (reading clinics for schools in Greater Accra and Central Regions) to mention but a few. These organisations carry out various reading projects including reading clinics for school children in urban and rural communities to enhance the reading skills of children. Despite such programmes being organised, a preliminary investigation in some schools in the Cape Coast metropolis revealed that, most school children in primary schools have difficulties in reading. The preliminary investigation also indicated that school children in the metropolis were less engaged in reading activities. For this reason the University of Cape Coast Library organised a reading clinic for some schools around the University of Cape Coast. The project was intended to inculcate the culture and the joy of reading into children by guiding them to read one on one, and to help them to develop the skills of reading. To sustain the interest of reading, the Library donated relevant reading materials to the schools.

## Problem Statement

Reading enhances personal growth and national development. Most African countries have social and economic challenges due to poor reading habits (Mulindwa, 2001). In Ghana, various organisations carry out reading projects for school children both in urban and rural communities to boost and enhance their reading skills. Despite these numerous attempts by the various bodies to introduce the culture of reading into school children, its influence has not been greatly felt in some parts of the Cape Coast metropolis.

A preliminary investigation in some schools in the Cape Coast metropolis revealed that most schools do not have libraries at all, while the few that have libraries,

do not have adequate facilities and qualified librarians. Some parents especially those in rural and remote areas cannot provide reading materials for their children. Lack of reading materials implies that school children in the metropolis are less engaged in reading activities. This has resulted in reading difficulties among some children according to interaction with some school teachers, hence the need for some intervention such as reading clinics.

## Objectives

The study was to build the interest and encourage reading among children; thereby inculcating the culture and the joy of reading into them through reading clinics.

To donate relevant reading materials to the beneficiary schools to enable them establish libraries.

## Significance

The study will be a benchmark for the organisation and implementation of reading clinics by other institutions. It will serve as a guide for Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education in making policies for schools to intensify reading programmes for school children.

## Literature Review

Imbibing the culture of reading into children will help them to understand themselves and the society in which they live in better. Igwe (2011) stated that reading in totality enables people to be informed, obtain a proper understanding of themselves and others. A child who takes keen interest in reading will not only read to be a lifelong learner, but potentially has full opportunities to obtain leadership attributes which includes integrity, honesty, commitment, diligence, wisdom, justice, responsibility, and decisions making skills (Ilogho, 2015).

Through reading children will be better informed about national issues which will prepare them towards participatory citizenship. For this reason, it is better to introduce children to books at an early age so that they develop the love for books. According to Nalusiba(2006) the beginning of a good reading background is the accessibility of books as well as constant emulation of reading.

Douglas (2000) stated that it is necessary for all children to be proficient in reading in order to be successful in school and responsible individuals in an independent society. To

be proficient in reading, schools have a major part to play. Looking at the roles that schools play, Tella and Akande (2007) indicated that there are numerous issues that affect schools in achieving reading literacy directly and indirectly. The authors explained that school policies and curriculum determine the context within which children can acquire reading skills. They also added that school environment and resources also spell out the way learning is to be carried out; this they said is based on the safety of the schools' environment. The school policies, curriculum, and safety of the schools' environment (classrooms) and resources (reading materials) go a long way to affect the success of reading programmes organised for school children.

In developing the culture of reading among children, Ilogho (2015) indicated that it is appropriate to start reading picture books for children between the ages of 1-5 years. Gibson (2004) in a similar vein had stated that school children should be guided to read more picture books since these books tend to arouse their interest and in so doing encourage them to read.

However, from the perspective of Nigeria, Aina (2011) posits that due to poverty most children are out of school because parents are not in the position to buy books and pay children's school fees. Aina further states that, the reading language is initiated at later years of a child's life mostly at school; this in turn affects the reading interest and habits of the child as the child grows older.

Nalusiba (2006) cited Kerman(1984) who indicated that, for someone to build the culture of reading, the person must practice reading. Kerman said that not all children develop reading skills at the same time, such children he said need encouragement. Pressley (2000) also indicated that frequent reading brings fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge. Nalusiba (2006) further states that to start with, there is the need for schools to have libraries so that children will be exposed to a wide variety of reading materials.

### Africans and Reading

Developed countries have high literacy rate. Reading clinics such as "The Reading Clinic (<http://www.readingclinic.bm>), USA Reading Clinic (<http://www.usareadingclinic.com/>), VKC Reading Clinic ([vkc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/services/disabilityservices/reading\\_clinic/](http://www.vkc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/services/disabilityservices/reading_clinic/)), and The Reading Clinic Incorporated" and others are organised to assist and encourage children with reading difficulties. Schools in developed countries have well-endowed school libraries with information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, reading materials and books in various formats (e.g. talking books, electronic books, picture books, etc.). This indicates that much attention is given to children in developed countries to build up good reading habits.

On the contrary, this is not the case in Africa where there is high illiteracy rate and low reading habits. Africa has a substantial percentage of illiteracy rate (Henry, 2004). Tella & Akande, (2007) observed that the African continent is confronted with the challenge of illiteracy and limited educational resources which has narrowed people's chances of learning. The illiteracy rate in Africa has affected the priority given to education. For this reason, Africans regard oral tradition that is telling stories rather than reading books. The African society is said to be an "oral society" in other words "lacks the culture of reading" (Mulindwa, 2001). Due to this, the culture of reading has not been inculcated into school children. Consequently, children in Africa lack interest in reading (Busayo, 2011).

Due to the poor culture of reading in Africa, most school children exhibit poor reading abilities and therefore do not perform well in school. Factors such as poverty and lack of school libraries, inadequate reading materials impede the development of reading habits in Africa. School children therefore need special attention and assistance to be able to form good reading habits. Much needs to be done by parents, guardians, teachers and school librarians; since forming the habit of reading is a continuous process. The more children practice reading, the better they become.

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### Methodology

Five schools around the University of Cape Coast were purposely selected for the reading clinic. These included the Amamoma Presbyterian Model Basic School, Okyeso Catholic Basic School, Apewosika M/A Basic School, Kwaprow M/A Basic School, and Imam Khomeini Islamic Basic School at Amamoma. Thirty pupils with reading difficulties from primary one to six were randomly selected from each school.

In all, 150 pupils were used. Five professional librarians and ten para-professionals were also purposely selected to facilitate the project. In each school, 30 pupils selected were grouped into six groups with five pupils in each group according to their classes (e.g. primary one to six) with one professional librarian and two para-professionals to facilitate the exercise. Some teachers were involved in the exercise in every school; to establish familiarity between the facilitators and the pupils. Within a period of four days in each school, the three facilitators in each group helped the pupils to read story books (story telling for children) and picture books, learnt to spell and write new words. To attract student's interest to books, a number of books were exhibited and displayed at the schools premises.

## Observations and Discussions

The reading clinic programme was very successful with few challenges. The programme brought both pupils and teachers attention to the importance of cultivating a good reading habit.

The project was climaxed with reading competitions and spelling B's. Best readers and pupils who could spell from each school were awarded with story books to encourage other children to read more. As a step in the right direction, the University of Cape Coast library donated over 1000 books to the participating schools to set up school libraries since only one of the schools "Okyeso Catholic Basic School" had a well-established library with a teacher librarian in charge of the library. The donations were to ensure constant reading, which is in line with Nalusiba (2006); accessibility to books encourages good reading background.

Ten participants and five teachers who were involved in the exercise from each school were interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to establish the general impression and relevance of the reading clinic to the participating schools. The teachers interviewed indicated that the programme was relevant, timely and very captivating. They said that the programme has lifted the spirits of reading in the pupils. Concerning the views of the pupils, they all admitted that, this was their first time in participating in a reading clinic. They also said that they have been enlightened to read more, this they indicated will help them throughout their academic life.

To keep the fire burning in reading, the facilitators of the reading clinic collaborated with teachers in all the

schools to form "reading clubs" in the various schools so that the children can have maximum time for reading. The "reading clubs" in the various schools were monitored by the facilitators from time to time.

## Follow-Up Programme

After successfully organising the maiden edition of the reading clinic, a follow-up was made after a period of six months to schools where the programme was implemented. This was done in order to ascertain the impact of the reading clinic. The follow-up was carried in five-days with a-day visit to the five schools.

The teachers were first engaged to discuss diverse issues ranging from the reading habit of the pupils and the general impact of the reading clinic project. Thereafter, an evaluation exercise was carried out among the pupils. Four kids from each class were selected and assessed on their reading level. The selection was strategically made to include at least one person in the category of below average, average and above average as was mapped out earlier whereby one person should have participated in the general programme.

The Apewosisika M/A Basic School, was visited on the first day. The first day visit enabled the facilitators to fine-tune a strategy for the days which followed. On the second day, Kwaprow M/A Basic School was visited, followed by AmamomaPresby Basic School on the third day, Imam Khomeni Basic School on the fourth day, and Okyeso Catholic Basic School on the fifth day. The interaction with the teachers as well as that with the pupils led to some observations as discussed below:

## General Impact

The facilitators learnt with gratitude that the little gesture showed had really propelled the various stakeholders of the schools visited to really contribute in ways possible to inculcate reading habit in pupils. In some schools, our visit set the agenda for the Parent-Teacher Associations to commit to improving the reading culture of their children. It was therefore not surprising that schools which had no library periods on their time tables immediately sought to incorporate same.

## Book Usage

It emerged that in almost all the schools, there was a considerable effort on the part of the teachers to make

access to the book by the children as easy as possible. It was also interesting to note that in some schools, the reading materials donated by the University of Cape Coast library were lent out to pupils for a day or two. One of the schools, Okyeso Catholic Basic School, which had quite a substantial number of books in their library, had a motivating activity. Children in the school were allowed to borrow, read, and summarise the contents of materials before renewing the materials.

### Reading Levels

As pointed out earlier, pupils selected to participate in the reading clinic were of diverse reading abilities. In fact, priority was given to pupils of low reading ability. Our second visit to the schools revealed that pupils who were average and below average readers had significantly improved to become above average and average readers respectfully. One key strategy that helped was that, the facilitators in a concerted effort with the teachers, mapped out each class with respect to reading abilities. Later, parents, especially those whose children had low reading abilities, were asked to support the effort of teachers at home to enable the reading clinic 'heal' their wards' reading disability. It also came up that, "the reading clubs" established were of great impact, thus pupils met sometimes to discuss the skills of reading with the help of some teachers. The revelation of this progress really became a huge motivation to the facilitators to want to replicate this success story elsewhere.

### Challenges

Even though the Reading clinic could be said to have been generally impactful, there were however, some issues which needed attention.

To begin with, it was generally observed that the books were inadequate for the pupils of the schools. Even though the project was mainly to complement the efforts of the school, it will be well-appreciated if more books could be made available to stock the libraries of the schools engaged.

Secondly, it was observed in some schools that in their bid to prolong the lifespan of the books, access was seriously denied to students. While not undermining the effort to promote longevity of the materials, it is believed that a balance between increased access and usage on the one hand and increased shelf life of the materials.

It is also worthy of note that in some schools, the needed collaboration expected of parents to augment the efforts of teachers was missing. This negatively affected the efforts made at improving not only the reading skills of pupils but also, their general learning abilities.

Quite significantly, concerning the "reading clubs" that were established in the various schools, it was revealed that little efforts were made by teachers at engaging pupils to monitor their progress. It then looks like the pupils are left on their own without any keen interest on the part of teachers to help them improve.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The humble stride by the University of Cape Coast Library and Ghana Library Association at improving the reading skills of pupils in schools within the university's catchment area is yielding significant results. Thus an increased commitment to sustaining the reading clinic will go a long way to produce more scholars in the future and lead to national development since early reading has a direct positive effect on the children.

Early reading generates a kind of excitement in children which will make them read throughout life. Reading picture books with children enable them to develop intellectually, socially, psychologically, and emotionally. Also, early reading broadens their scope of knowledge for life. It is therefore the responsibility of parents, teachers and librarians to encourage and promote the habit of reading among children.

Based on the outcome of the study, the authors suggest that the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with the Ghana Library Authority should ensure that all schools in Ghana especially those at the basic levels have well-endowed libraries with adequate reading facilities and qualified school librarians, so that the school children can develop affection for books at an early age. By so doing, the children will adopt the fundamentals of reading and learning. Heads of schools should introduce "reading clubs" to enable school children engage in reading activities. This, the authors believe will enable them develop a healthy attitude towards reading.

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