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**INTERROGATING READING LITERACY IN NIGERIA**

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**GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY ENUGU – NIGERIA**

**13<sup>TH</sup> INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**TOPIC:**

**INTERROGATING READING LITERACY IN NIGERIA**

**TO BE DELIVERED BY:**

**PROF. FELICIA NNENNA ENE**

**OCTOBER, 2024**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SECTION TWO: PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Reading Literacy	4
2.2 The Nigerian Society	5
2.3 Purpose and Scope of the Lecture	6
2.5 Theoretical Review	7
<b>SECTION THREE: READING LITERACY LANDSCAPE IN NIGERIA</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Overview of Reading Literacy in Nigeria	10
3.1.1 Benefit of Reading Literacy and Reading culture	12
3.1.2 Key components of Reading Literacy	15
3.1.3 The 7 C's of Literacy	18
3.1.4 The 7 Levels of Literacy	19
3.2 Reading Literacy Rates in Nigeria	21
3.2.1 Literacy rates of women aged 15 – 24 across Nigerian States	23
3.2.2 Literacy rates in Nigeria, by zone and gender	24
3.2.3 Literacy rates by Ethnicity and gender	26
3.2.4 Literacy rates in Nigeria with HDI	27
3.2.5 The Literacy rates of African Countries and their HDI compared to Nigeria	28

<b>SECTION FOUR: INTEROGATING READING LITERACY IN NIGERIA</b>	<b>30</b>
4.1.1 Interrogating Educational Factors	35
4.1.2 Interrogating Technological Factors	37
4.2 Consequences of Poor Reading Literacy	38
4.3 Pedagogical Approach to Improve Reading Literacy in Nigeria	41
4.3.1 Teaching Training and Pedagogical Support	42
<b>SECTION FIVE: CASE STUDIES/SUCCESS STORIES</b>	<b>44</b>
5.1 Literacy Programmes and Initiatives	44
<b>SECTION SIX: <sup>23</sup>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>55</b>

## **LIST OF TABLE**

Table 1: African Countries Literacy rate and HDI

28

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. 7 C's of Literacy:	18
Fig. 2 Levels of Literacy	19
<sup>46</sup> Fig 3: Reading literacy rate in Nigeria	21
Fig. 4: Literacy level of women (15 – 24 years)	24
Fig. 5 Literacy Rates by Ethnicity and gender	25
Fig. 6: <sup>1</sup> Literacy rate in Nigeria by zone and gender	27
Fig. 7: Literacy Rate of Nigerian states and their HDI	28

## **SECTION ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today we are at a critical junction in our nation's history. While other nations of the world are prospecting space travels, robotics 5G technologies, Artificial intelligence and the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, which is already here with us, we in Nigeria, are confronted with hunger, banditry, multi-dimensional poverty, kidnapping, diseases and bad governance. Nigeria is supposedly the giant of Africa. Yet, what is our literacy level? What percentage of our citizens really meets the functional or advanced literacy mark? Does our literacy rate have anything to do with our level of development? What is the percentage of our out-of-school children? How many girls and boys of school age are in school? How many have been forced into early marriages? How many boys have abandoned school to chase after money? Probably because of what they see as hopelessness of those school graduates. How many of those who went to school actually learnt to read and apply the knowledge derived from reading literacy to their lives? How many of our people are functional readers who can use and apply reading to a critical and analytical level? Reading literacy holds the key to unlocking our potentials in the competitive world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We are here to interrogate reading literacy in Nigeria. Our journey in this interrogation begins with section one where we look at the concepts of reading and reading literacy and interrogations, a cursory look at the Nigerian society, then the purpose and scope will be spelt out. This will be followed by the theoretical frameworks upon which the interrogations hinge.

Section two will cover the 'Reading literacy landscape of Nigeria, starting with an overview of reading literacy, throw up the key components of reading and literacy in Nigeria and show the literacy rates of men and women across Nigeria, by zones, ethnicity and gender. It will also explore the literacy rates of Nigerians vis-à-vis Africa with their HDI.

Section Three: With the help of Functional critical Literacy theory and the Socio-Cultural theory, we shall interrogate reading literacy, in Nigeria. We shall interrogate the statusquo of reading literacy, discover the trends and patterns, expose the drivers, (the enablers and inhibitors of reading literacy)

Section 4: We shall examine the consequences of poor reading literacy while Section five will give us some Case studies to evaluate. Literacy is the foundation upon which all learning is built. Literacy and reading go hand in hand. While reading is more than merely decoding words on paper, literacy has become <sup>16</sup> more than merely the ability to read and write. Literacy which comes through education has transformed into a gigantic phenomenon that now rules the world. Literacy is now the gateway to empowerment (UNESCO 2020), critical thinking and to the boundless opportunities that education affords. It is the bridge that spans the divide between ignorance and understanding, between poverty and prosperity, between master and subordinates, between freedom and slavery, between development and under development.

As we move forward, my focus on ‘Reading and Reading Literacy’ will be unwavering. My interest in ‘Reading’ dates far back to my toddler years when I used to read every paper I came across including the wrappings of my mother’s shopping. Reading is the spark that ignites the flame of curiosity, fosters empathy and broadens our understanding of the world. It is the tool that equips us to navigate the complexity of our globalized world, to innovate and to solve the pressing challenges of our time.

Mandela (1994) stated that ‘literacy is the bridge that connects the individual to the world’ It is difficult to think of the contemporary world without reading and tragic to comprehend how people cope in today’s world without reading literacy(Ene, 2010). Reading and writing literacies have kept the world alive and young because they give relevance to history. As we



embark on this journey today, I am honoured to stand before you, committed to the transformative force of literacy to propel our society forward.

## SECTION TWO

### CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

This section will deal with conceptual review, establish the location of Nigeria, giving its characteristics, and state the purpose of this lecture and the theoretical frameworks, giving relevance to the lecture.

#### 2.1 Reading literacy

To understand and appreciate reading literacy, let us take a step back and explain the two key components. Webster (2003) defines reading as noun and verb, that is, as noun: “the act and activity of looking and understanding written or printed matter” and as verb: “to look at and understand written or printed matter; to interpret or explain something” or less importantly “to utter or recite aloud (such as in reading a speech)” Reading involves four critical functions named ‘decoding’ which means recognizing and translating written symbols into sounds and words; ‘comprehension’ which requires understanding the meaning and context of the text; ‘interpretation’ which requires the person to ‘make sense of the information, concepts, or ideas so presented and finally ‘analysis’ by which the person evaluates, critiquing and synthesizing the information. Literacy on the other hand is a more expanded concept, including not just reading but also writing. Webster (2003) refers to it as the ability to read and write in particular but even more broadly as ‘a person’s competence or skill in a particular area of life generally’. In this sense, literacy is closer to what we call ‘expertise’ or ‘social functionality’ rather than just ability to read and write.

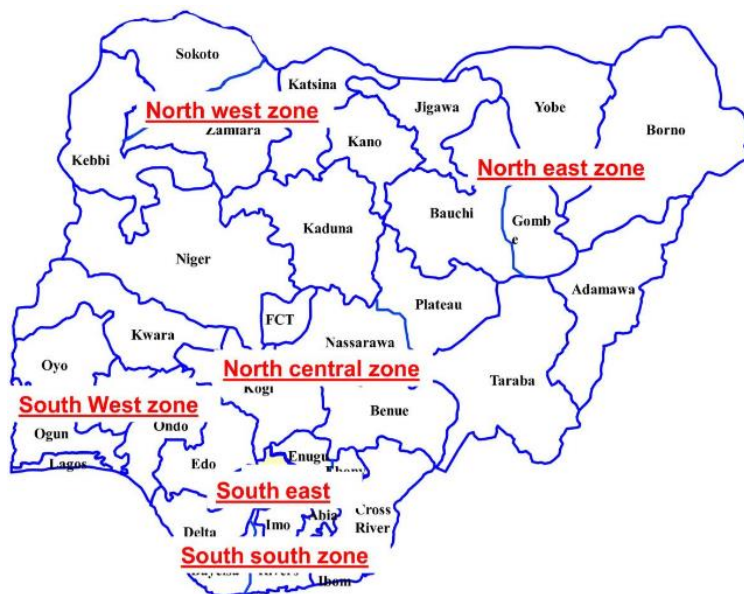
Reading literacy is therefore much richer in meaning. One good example of its rich meaning is the one given by the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) which the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2022) in its report cited as follows: Reading literacy is defined as the ability to understand, use, evaluate, reflect on and engage with written text to achieve one's goals, develop one's knowledge and potentials and participate in society' (OECD, 2020). As we progress, we shall see that reading literacy incorporates much of our daily tasks in life; that is, much of what we do daily to be able to live fully. (such as checking your time piece, counting your money, checking your balance, finding direction, reading notices. etc)

In its 1985 report on the US reading culture published as *Becoming a Nation of Readers: Report of the Commission on Reading*, the Anderson & Hiebert, (1985) identified five critical components of reading namely: reading is a constructive process, reading must be fluent, reading must be strategic, reading requires motivation, reading is a continuously developing skills. Although well received, later researchers have sought to revise the priority or gravity of one in terms of the other, that is, they subsume reading under literacy and in fact understand the former in terms of the later. In response to the report of the commission on reading, they propose the following components to achieve the transition from reading as a skill to the more embracing one of literacy: literacy is a constructive, integrative, critical process situated in social practices; fluent reading is shaped by language processes and contexts; literacy is strategic and disciplinary; literacy is a continuously developing set of practices (Frankel & Becker, 2017). As we go on, we will see indeed that literacy is such a concept that is loaded with meaning, which augments the ordinary meaning of 'reading'.

Interrogation is a critical thinking strategy that involves actively questioning and challenging the text, situation or observation to be able to construct meaning. Interrogation is an enquiry-based approach that involves questioning and exploring abstract concepts, ideas or themes, in

this case, related to reading literacy. An interrogation investigates, reflects, fosters deeper understanding. Literacy develops analytical and evaluative skills, example, “How does Reading literacy relate to power dynamics”? How does socio economic status impact Reading Literacy? What does Reading literacy mean in the digital age? Horning’s, (2012) perspective emphasizes the importance of open interrogation in developing expert readers by exploring complex concepts and ideas beyond the text, fostering critical thinking and analytical skills.

**2.2. The Nigerian Society.** This lecture focuses on Nigeria so we take a look at the country.



*Fig. 1: Map of Nigeria*

*Source:* Newweb creations (2024)

Nigeria is a nation in West African bordering the gulf of Guinea, with Cameroon by the right and Togo by the left. Niger and Chad are above Nigeria towards the Sahara desert. It has approximately 213 million as population (2024 census estimates). It has over 250 ethnic groups with up to 500 linguistic groups distributed as follows: Hausa/ Fulani 29%, Yoruba (21%), Igbos (18%), Ijaw (10%), Kanuri (4%) while others amount to 18%. The major religions include Islam 50%, Christianity 40% and Traditional African religion (10%). In

2020, Nigeria was the largest economy in Africa and the economic sectors include Agriculture, Oil and Gas, Manufacturing. It has challenges such as Corruption, Boko Haram insurgency, ethnic and religious tension, banditry and kidnapping, economic inequality, infrastructural deficits in electricity, roads, education and health care. Government is in three tiers; Federal, State and Local Government Areas. We are running a parliamentary system of government with 3 branches; the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary.

Nigeria boasts of ancient civilizations like <sup>14</sup>the Nok civilization and the Igbo-Ukwu civilization before the British colonization between 1914 and 1960. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 <sup>14</sup>followed by a civil war between 1967 to 1970, and a democratic transition from 1999 till date. Education was informal till the advent of the white man's incursion in the 1880s which brought Western Education and introduced English first as a contact language and gradually it became <sup>24</sup>the lingua franca and now the official language and language of instruction in our schools (FGN 2014). Besides English Language, there are three major indigenous languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and followed by nine other developing tribal languages which include; Ijaw (44.5m speakers), Kanuri (3-4m speakers), Ibibio (2-3m speakers), Edo, Nupe, Tiv, Urhobo, Idoma and Igala. In terms of landmass, Nigeria is approximately <sup>13</sup>923,768 square kilometers making it one of the largest countries in Africa and 32<sup>nd</sup> biggest in the world. The diverse landscape ranges from lush green forests in the South to arid expanses in the North with other notable features being River Niger and River Benue, the Adamawa, Mambilla, Jos and Obudu plateau. Nigeria has <sup>27</sup>36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The country's terrain varies with mountains, forests, savannahs, and mangrove swamps, supporting a wide range of flora and fauna. The ethnic groups come with different cultural ideologies and world views. Nigeria is a complex amalgamation of different ethnic groups with different ideologies.

### 2.3 Purpose and scope of the lecture

The main purpose of this lecture is to interrogate the state of reading literacy in Nigeria. The write up aims to identify current literacy situations, discover the **drivers, enablers** and **inhibitors** to reading literacy, critically assess current literacy initiatives, and propose pedagogical strategies for improving reading literacy across the country.

Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to national efforts to improve literacy outcomes, and above all, foster a culture of reading, and promote equitable access to literacy education for all Nigerians. Specifically this study seeks to:

1. Interrogate the role of government policies, funding, leadership and other factors affecting reading literacy in Nigeria.
2. Examine the socio-economic and socio-cultural factors affecting reading literacy in Nigeria.
3. Explore the role of technology and its effect on reading literacy.
4. Evaluate current literacy initiatives and interventions in Nigeria and identify best practices for improving reading literacy across diverse regions of Nigeria.

### 2.4 Theoretical Review

This lecture and the perspective of its author align majorly with the provisions of the UNESCO Functional Literacy Framework and draws inspiration from it. Much of the analysis you find in the later part of this work is based on the provisions of this framework. Therefore, it deserves to be explored here in some detail. By way of background, we should understand that after the World War II, the United Nation invested so much in the promotion of education, having recognized the right to education as a fundamental human right in article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of the Human Rights. With this, UNESCO arm of the

UN championed and promoted education and literacy as essential for economic development, social progress and the realization of human rights. In 1946 UNESCO launched the ‘**Global Literacy Programmes**’; in 1951, it launched the ‘**Fundamental Education** and 1965 the “**World Literacy Program**’ all targeting functional and universal literacy. While consolidating its work on education and literacy the UNESCO begins to develop its efforts as a framework, in the form of a universal guide to what functional education and literacy implies. In 197UNESCO published its groundbreaking work “**The Experimental World Literacy Programme**”: A Summary in which it propounded the famous **Functional Literacy Framework** to guide education /literacy programmes around the world. According to this theory “Functional literacy refers to the ability to use literacy skills to meet the demands of daily life, participating in community activities and access to information”. UNESCO has always believed that literacy is a human right, to be used for personal and societal development, is a lifelong process and that it is always contextual and culturally relevant.

There are three basic/ primary components of this framework namely:

1. Basic Literacy which subsists in the ability to read, write and calculate.
2. Functional Literacy which is realized when the candidate can apply literacy skills in everyday situations.
3. Critical Literacy means the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create information.

At the secondary level, there are four further categories:

- a. Instrumental Literacy consists of basic skills for daily functioning like reading signs and notices, filling forms and counting one’s money during trade transactions for instance.

- b. Document Literacy refers to the ability to understand and use documents like schedules, forms and so on.
- c. Quantitative Literacy refers to the ability to understand and use numerical information.
- d. Problem-Solving Literacy which is seen in the ability to apply literacy skills to solve problems.

Its key strengths are:

- i. It was designed as a comprehensive framework that addresses various literacy needs and gaps in societies.
- ii. It emphasizes practical applications and problem-solving mindsets/ skills.
- iii. Recognizes literacy as a form of human right.

**The Socio-cultural theory** was propounded by Lev Vygotsky in one of his books ‘Mind in Society’ in 1978. It was influenced by the social constructivist and social- linguistics theories. It has implications for collaborative learning, teacher guidance, language development and cultural relevance in instruction. Key concepts include understanding, integrating knowledge, scaffolding(support) and cultural mediation.

**Vygotsky’s theory** highlights the importance of social interaction and the availability of resources in learning. In Nigeria, socio-economic conditions play a critical role in determining literacy outcomes. Children from impoverished backgrounds, especially in rural areas, often lack access to essential learning materials such as books and qualified teachers. According to Vygotsky (1978), these children who are from poor background, miss out on social and educational connections that could enhance their literacy level (Adegoke & Salami, 2018). The theory emphasizes that literacy cannot be achieved in a vacuum. It requires engagement with others in environments rich with literacy-promoting resources. In

Nigeria, however, socio-economic disparities create uneven learning environments, where poverty severely limits students' opportunities to engage in meaningful literacy practices (Akinwumi & Ogunyemi, 2020). As a result, the gap in reading literacy between children from affluent and disadvantaged backgrounds continues to widen.



## SECTION THREE

### READING LITERACY LANDSCAPE IN NIGERIA

This section of the lecture will deal with conceptual definitions, establish the location of Nigeria, giving its characteristics, and state the purpose of this lecture and the theoretical framework, giving relevance to the lecture.

#### 3.1 Overview of the state of Reading Literacy in Nigeria.

In contemporary Nigeria, reading literacy is a critical component of personal development and national progress. Despite its importance, reading literacy levels remain alarmingly low, particularly among students/people from rural and marginalized communities.

The dominance of English as the primary language of instruction across all educational levels, from primary through to tertiary institutions, further complicates the issue. While English is widely seen as a vehicle for socio-economic mobility and academic success, its pervasive use in education raises concerns about accessibility and equity, especially for students who speak indigenous languages as their mother tongue (Ene, 2021). These disparities in literacy outcomes demand urgent attention, as they reflect broader socio-economic and infrastructural inequalities across the country.

The variation in English language proficiency among Nigerians highlights the disparities in educational quality and resources. Unlike urban areas, which generally provide good education systems, access to learning materials and high quality teaching, which strengthen the literacy achievement of students in these areas, rural areas suffer from inadequate schools, teachers inadequate training, (PTA and teachers and NYSC teachers). and lack of reading materials( Ene). , 1999. 2006). According to Omeze and Ugwu (2019), this divide is exacerbated by socio-economic constraints such as poverty, which limit the capacity of

families to support children's education and consequently students from rural areas, in particular those who do not have a first language English, are in a critical state of difficulty in acquiring reading skills

The issue of reading literacy in Nigeria is further complicated by the diversity of languages and culture in the country. With over 500 languages spoken across different states in Nigeria, English is the lingua franca and the main language of instruction in schools. While this language choice can promote national unity and facilitate communication in a multilingual society, it also marginalizes the national language and its speakers.

Native-speaking adult learners often struggle with English literacy, which hinders their overall academic achievement (Eneh, 2021). This language barrier can create a cycle of negative literacy, where students fall behind early in their education and fail to catch up, ultimately limiting their educational and employment opportunities

Apart from the challenges posed by languages, Nigeria's socio-economic status plays an important role in shaping literacy outcomes Poverty is a major barrier to literacy, as many families cannot afford the basic needs of education, such as textbooks, school fees and other learning materials There is generally a lack of access to libraries, reading materials and digital resources, which are essential for literacy development Furthermore, the income gap between urban and rural areas means students in more affluent areas benefit from more cost-effective schools and higher quality educational resources.

The social and cultural implications of low reading skills are profound. Literacy is essential not only for academic success but also for active participation in modern 21st century environment. Individuals with poor reading skills are often excluded from the full range of social, political, and economic opportunities available to those who are literate. (*A man eating*

*with his friend felt lost when the friend began to blow grammar with another and he said to him. My friend, all I know is that there are two pieces of meat, one for you and one for me. QED)*

3 They are less likely to engage in civic activities, such as voting or participating in community decision-making, and may struggle to find gainful employment. This exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality, as literacy is a key determinant of socio-economic mobility (Eneh, 2019). In this context, improving reading literacy is not just an educational issue but a social and economic imperative.

### **3.1.1 Benefit of Reading Literacy & Reading Culture**

Reading literacy and the cultivation of a reading culture are without doubt foundational to individual and societal development. Literacy in reading enables individuals to effectively comprehend, interpret, and analyze written materials, which opens up opportunities for educational success and personal growth. It equips individuals with critical thinking skills, facilitating better decision-making and problem-solving abilities. As Adigun (2016) argues, a society that promotes reading literacy empowers its citizens to engage meaningfully in democratic processes, fostering a more informed and active population.

A well-established reading culture nurtures a lifelong habit of learning, with individuals consistently seeking new knowledge and perspectives. According to Ilogu (2017), regular reading habits, especially those encouraged from a young age, contribute significantly to cognitive development. Reading stimulates mental faculties, improves memory retention, and enhances focus. As individuals continue to engage with diverse texts, they develop more profound analytical skills, enabling them to navigate complex subjects with ease.

The development of these skills has a ripple effect, impacting academic performance and career success. Ene, (2016a) found out that elite did not read much outside their professional materials. It is important that people read other materials like; inspirational books, biographies, business books and so on. A good book can change your life. It was through reading that late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe got the inspiration to fight for the liberation of the country “Nigeria” and eventually became the president. Refer also to the case of Miss Kamsiyochukwu Umeh of Deeper Life Secondary School Abuja, who scored the highest in 2023 WASSE, during her interview she said that she was an avid reader.

Moreover, reading literacy is closely linked to improved communication skills. People who read regularly are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures, and writing styles. This exposure translates into better writing and speaking abilities, allowing individuals to express themselves more clearly and persuasively (Oluwabunmi, 2018). Strong communication skills are essential for academic and professional success, whether writing reports, presenting proposals, or participating in discussions.

The social benefits of a strong reading culture are equally important. Reading exposes individuals to different cultures, ideas, and experiences, and fosters empathy and understanding. According to Nwankwo and Eze (2020), by participating in different worlds through literature, individuals can develop a broader worldview and learn to appreciate and respect differences. This high level of empathy is critical to building more cohesive communities and promoting inclusion in a diverse society like Nigeria.

Additionally, reading skills help develop creativity and imagination. As individuals engage in fiction and nonfiction, they are encouraged to think outside the box, consider new possibilities, and develop original ideas. Adesina and Omotayo (2021) emphasized that reading fosters new thinking, which is important for problem solving in personal and

professional contexts. The creativity fostered through reading is a valuable asset in a variety of industries, from art to engineering to business.

In a globalized world, reading skills contribute to new language acquisition and cross-cultural communication. As the world becomes more connected, individuals with strong literacy are better equipped to learn and understand new languages, opening the door to international opportunities. This is especially important in the context of globalization, where businesses and educational institutions are increasingly valuing multilingual capabilities and multicultural competencies (Kehinde, 2019).

Additionally, developing a reading culture can help mental health. Research shows that reading can reduce stress, improve emotional intelligence, and act as an escape route for relaxation and rejuvenation (Adewale & Olagunju, 2020). Engagement with books—fiction or nonfiction—can provide comfort, reduce anxiety, and help individuals process their experiences by talking about the characters and situations they encounter in the texts on the snow.

The benefits of reading skills and a strong reading culture are vast, from cognitive learning benefits to social, creative, and emotional well-being. According to Afolabi (2018), Ene, (2018), prioritizing reading initiatives in schools, homes, and communities can significantly elevate national development by producing citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of contributing to the growth and progress of their society.

### 3.1.2 Key Components of Reading Literacy

This section will expose all the components of reading literacy.

1. **Word Recognition:** This foundational skill involves the ability to quickly and accurately identify and decode words, allowing readers to focus on understanding the

text rather than struggling with individual words. Effective word recognition encompasses phonemic awareness (understanding sounds within words) and phonics (the relationship between letters and sounds) (Adams, 2018). In Nigerian primary schools, phonics programmes are frequently employed to teach young learners how to read, highlighting the importance of mastering sounds associated with letters (Ajayi, 2019).

2. **Comprehension:** Comprehension is the process of constructing meaning from text, requiring readers to integrate prior knowledge with new information. This involves cognitive skills like making inferences, predicting outcomes, and summarizing (Snow, 2018). In Nigeria's multilingual environment, comprehension is especially vital as students often need to translate concepts from their native languages to English. Effective reading instruction is expected to incorporate strategies from schema theory, emphasizing that gained experiences enhance comprehension through vocabulary development and image processing (Oluwabamide, 2020).
3. **Fluency:** Language refers to the ability to read text accurately, quickly, and articulate. It's the gap between word recognition and comprehension. Comprehensive readers are able to read clearly and clearly, allowing them to focus on the comprehension of the text rather than with reading devices (Rasinski, 2017). Fluency is generally developed through repetitive reading and oral guided reading, which helps students build confidence and improve their reading speed and accuracy (Okeke, 2021).
4. **Integration of Components:** The interaction between word recognition, comprehension, and slowness is important for effective reading. These things are connected; Improved word recognition increases fluency, which in turn aids comprehension. Comprehension can make it easier to recognize and understand new words (National Reading Council, 2020). Whole reading programs in Nigerian

schools that address all three components simultaneously are critical to the development of proficient readers.

5. **Educational Implications:** The adoption of multidimensional reading has important implications for educational practice. Teachers should take a balanced approach that includes instruction in vocabulary recognition, comprehension, and fluency. This comprehensive program ensures that students acquire all the skills needed to become competent readers. For example, incorporating phonics education, comprehension strategies, and materials into daily instruction can enhance the learning experience (Duke & Pearson, 2017). In resource-limited settings such as Nigeria, alternative strategies such as the use of local languages and culturally relevant materials can further enhance the effectiveness of reading instruction (Ezeokoli, 2018).
6. **Cultural Relevance:** To ensure effective student engagement, literacy programs should reflect Nigerian cultures and languages. Deep connections between the reading materials are created through the use of stories, texts, and examples that are appropriate to the students' context. This culturally sensitive approach not only supports engagement but also increases comprehension and retention, making reading more meaningful for students.
7. **Community Involvement:** Community involvement in literacy programs is critical to fostering a reading culture. Partnering with parents, community organizations and community leaders can provide additional resources and support for literacy programs. Community-based reading clubs and libraries can be important spaces for literacy development, encouraging collaborative learning and a sustained interest in reading.
8. **Technological Integration:** Embracing technology in literacy instruction can enhance learning experiences and accessibility. Digital platforms, e-books, and online

resources can complement traditional reading materials, providing students with multiple and interactive ways to engage with text. As technology increases, incorporating these tools into reading instruction can help fill resource gaps and support literacy development.

9. **Continuous Assessment:** why? Regular assessment of reading skills is essential to identify students' areas of strength and weakness. Ongoing research can inform instructional practices and help tailor interventions to meet students' specific needs. Progress monitoring allows teachers to adapt their instructional strategies so that all <sup>53</sup> students receive the support they need to succeed in reading.

10. **Policy Support:** Effective literacy programmes require strong policy support from government and authorities in education. Policymakers should prioritize literacy development by allocating resources, training teachers, and establishing programmes for effective reading instruction. Collaborative efforts between stakeholders <sup>34</sup> can create an environment that fosters the development of reading skills and encourages long-term educational success in Nigeria.



### 3.1.3 The 7 C's<sup>16</sup> of Literacy

The concept of literacy extends beyond the traditional abilities of literacy to encompass a broader set of skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. The 7 C's of literacy include; <sup>26</sup> collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, character, citizenship, and Computational thinking. They all play important roles in shaping well-rounded, potentially literate individuals who can fit in this modern society.



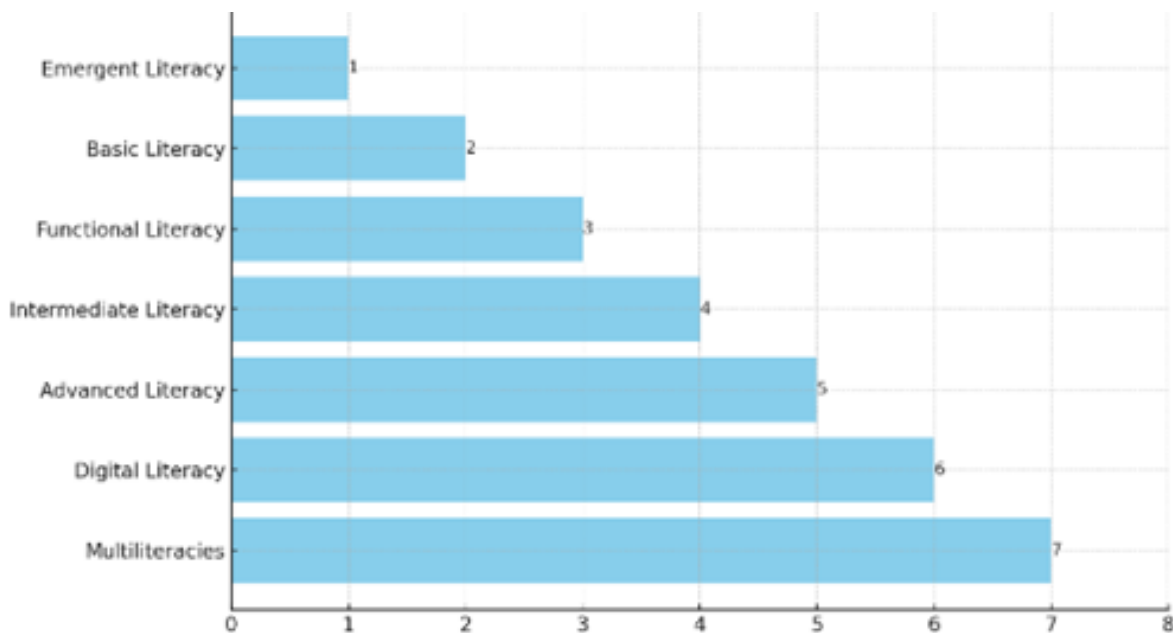
**Fig. 2: 7Cs of Literacy**  
**Source: Authors design (2024)**

Collaboration can be seen as working effectively and efficiently with others to achieve a common goal, especially in literacy where students collaborate on literacy projects, exchange ideas and give feedback. This develops ideas and increases understanding through activities such as students having group discussions. Communication <sup>50</sup> refers to the ability to express ideas clearly, both in writing and orally, which is essential for academic and professional success. Creativity encourages original thinking in reading and writing, enabling students to develop unique meanings and write persuasive texts. Critical thinking allows students to

analyze texts for accuracy and bias, deepening their understanding. Character develops qualities such as honesty and empathy through engagement with writing, while citizenship focuses on using literacy skills to participate actively in civic life. Lastly, computational thinking ensures solutions in reading literacy by using digital tools, which are very important especially in this technologically driven world and in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution.

### 3.1.4 The 7 Levels of Literacy

The 7 levels will present the various stages of development in reading literacy. According to UNESCO (2022), the seven types of literacy represent a continuum of skill development necessary for personal and social development. The 7 levels of literacy are as follow: emergent literacy, basic literacy, functional literacy, intermediate literacy, advanced literacy, digital literacy and multiliteracies.



**Fig. 3: Levels of Literacy**  
**Source: UNESCO (2020)**

The chart presents a visual representation of different levels of literacy, progressing from **Emergent Literacy** to **Multi literacies**. Here's a brief discussion of each literacy level based on the chart:

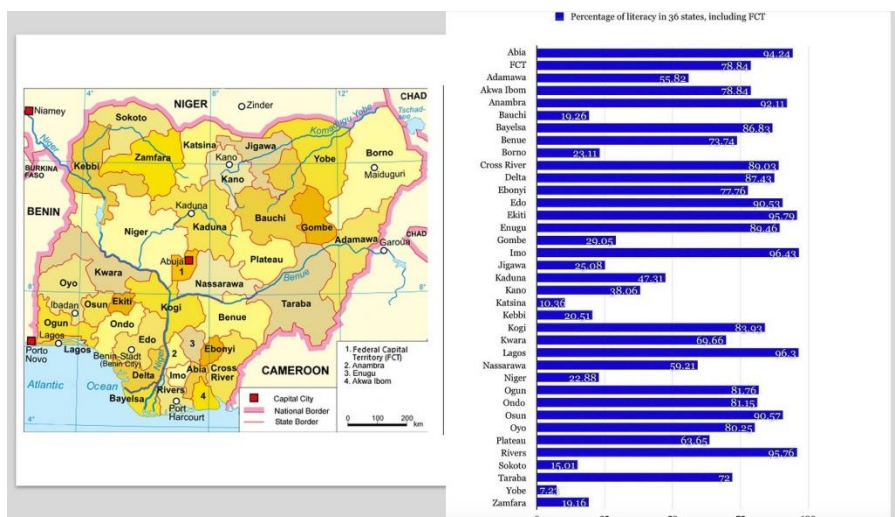
1. **Emergent Literacy:** This is simply the foundational level of literacy, where individuals are just beginning to learn how to read and write. It includes the understanding that symbols (like letters) represent sound and that words carry meaning. This stage is especially important in early childhood education, where children are exposed to books, letters, and stories. (About the man with the magazine).
2. **Basic Literacy:** At this point, individuals can identify and define simple words and phrases. They have basic literacy skills but can still struggle with more complex texts. Basic literacy is important for everyday activities such as reading signs, following simple directions, and filling out basic forms.
3. **Functional Literacy:** This level refers to the ability to read, write, and correct basic mathematical tasks to function effectively in everyday life. Functional literacy enables individuals to perform tasks such as managing money, understanding health information, or completing job applications.
4. **Intermediate Literacy:** Individuals with intermediate literacy levels may participate in more complex writing and writing tasks. They can read and analyze newspapers, read and appreciate books, understand detailed instructions, and write coherent paragraphs.
5. **Advanced Literacy:** Advanced literacy requires high levels of comprehension and expression. Individuals are able to analyze texts, engage in critical thinking, and write structured articles or reports. This level is important for higher education and professional situations that require complex communication.

6. **Digital Literacy:** <sup>15</sup> This refers to the ability to use technology effectively to access, evaluate, and create information. In the digital age, digital literacy is increasingly important for tasks such as navigating the internet, using software applications, and understanding digital communication tools.

7. **Multi literacies** (*Egwu eji- the heart of the matter*); At the highest level, multi literacies involve being literate across various modes of communication, including linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial forms. This concept reflects the reality of today’s diverse and multimedia-rich environments. (Know where you belong).

### 3.2 Reading Literacy Rates in Nigeria

A detailed breakdown of literacy rates in all states of the federation reveals the stark contrast across the federation. The following chart illustrates the literacy rates for all 37 states, highlighting the top and bottom performers: (Fig 4)



**Fig 4: Reading literacy rate in Nigeria.**  
Source: Statistica 2022

The chart on the right-hand side of the image presents the literacy levels across Nigeria's <sup>56</sup> states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), while the map on the left visually depicts the geographical layout of Nigeria and its states.

### Key Observations from the Chart:

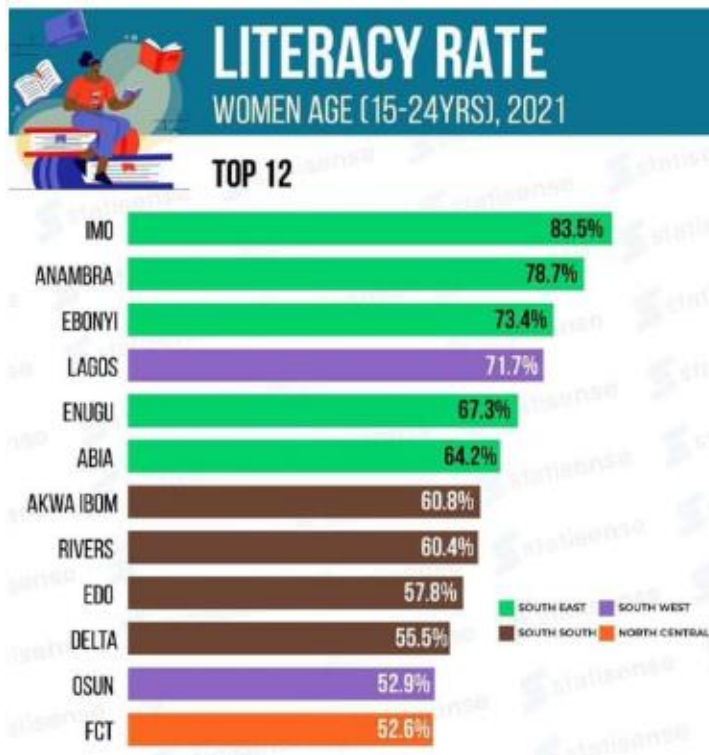
The key observations from the chart reveal significant disparities in literacy rates across different states in Nigeria. States like Lagos, Imo, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) exhibit the highest literacy rates, surpassing 75%. These states benefit from better infrastructure, access to quality education, and private investment in educational initiatives. Their urbanized nature provides students with better educational opportunities, contributing to their higher literacy levels.

Mid-range literacy states, including Ogun, Osun, and Kwara, fall between 60-70%. The mentioned states are located mainly in southern and central Nigeria; these states have mixed urban and rural settings. Although urban areas have better access to education, rural areas still struggle with resource allocation and access, leading to some literacy gaps. These areas have the potential for growth with targeted education programmes with special focus on rural development.

At the other end of the spectrum are the northern states of Borno, Yobe and Zamfara with severe literacy struggles, with rates below 25%. The reasons are multifaceted, with insurgencies, particularly Boko Haram (known to haunt western education), widespread poverty, and cultural factors preventing some groups, especially girls, from receiving an education and rarely entering formal educational environment.

The North-South reading literacy divide highlights historical and socioeconomic factors that affect educational inequality.

### 3.2.1 Literacy Rate of Women Aged 15 – 24 (Top 12 States in Nigeria)



*Fig. 5: Literacy level of women (15 – 24 years)*

*Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2021*

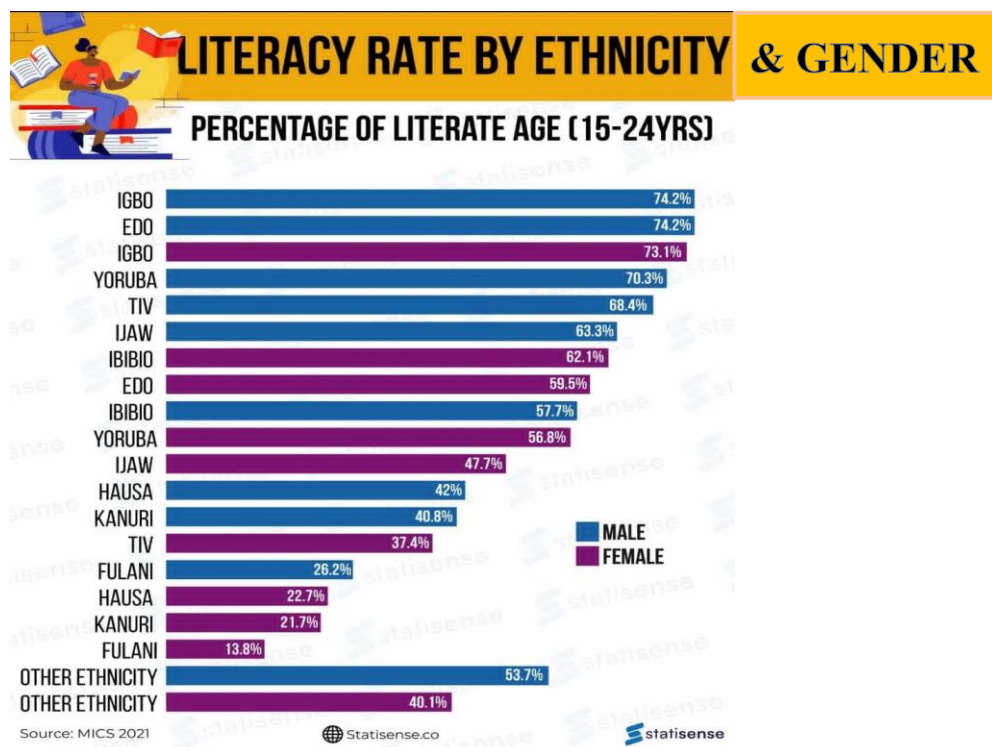
The chart in Figure 5 shows the literacy rates of women aged 15-24 in different states of Nigeria by 2021, providing insights into regional differences in female literacy. Imo State in the southeast tops the list with a literacy rate of 83.5%, followed by Anambra state (78.7%) and Ebonyi state with literacy rate of (73.4%) and also to the southeast. This high literacy rate in the Southeast reflects a significant investment in girl child education, as well as cultural factors that prioritize schooling for girls. Lagos, the economic hub of the Southwest, ranks fourth with a literacy rate of 71.7%, indicating high levels of urban literacy with good services and amenities.

In contrast, states like the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Osun in the South West show low female literacy rates of 52.6% and 52.9% respectively. This indicates that the FCT has

systemic challenges such as quality education and gender inequality despite its urban central status. Akwa Ibom state, Rivers state and Edo state in the South-South region show moderate literacy rates from 57.8% to 60.8% reflecting the successes of the education system and socio-economic and cultural factors in the Niger Delta area.

The chart shows the need for targeted interventions in those states where literacy trails, especially in states like Delta (55.5%) and Osun (52.9%). This disparity underscores the need for continued efforts by government and local communities to address educational gaps, provide access to better learning materials, and enforce gender equality in education. Understanding the regional differences in literacy rates can help inform more tailored and effective policies to uplift literacy levels, especially for young women in underserved areas.

### 3.2.2 Literacy Rates by Ethnicity and gender



**Fig. 6: Literacy Rates by Ethnicity and gender**  
**Source: MIC Statistense 2021**

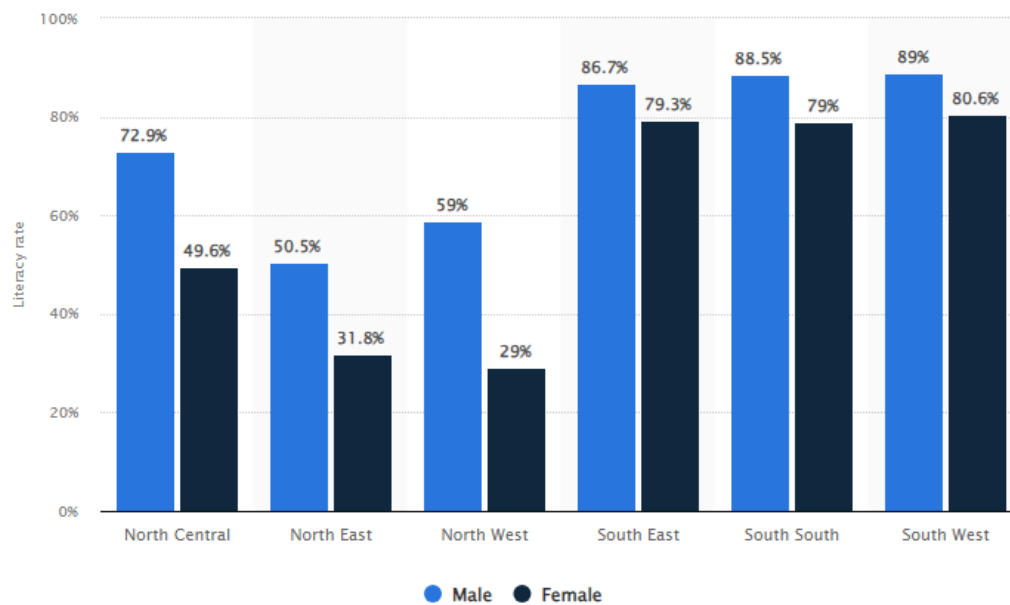
The chart on literacy rates by ethnicity and gender in Nigeria (Fig. 6) shows significant variations across different ethnic groups, highlighting both regional and gender disparities. Ethnic groups like the **Igbo** and **Edo** exhibit the highest literacy rates, with males and females recording literacy levels above 70%. The **Yoruba** also show relatively high literacy, with around **70.3%** literacy for males and **56.8%** for females. These groups are mainly located in southern Nigeria, where better access to education and infrastructural resources supports higher literacy levels. The gender gap is narrower in these southern ethnic groups, though males still generally outperform females.

In contrast, the **Tiv**, **Ijaw**, and **Ibibio** ethnic groups fall in the mid-range for literacy, with male literacy rates between **60-68%**, but more significant drops in female literacy. For example, among the Tiv, while male literacy is **68.4%**, female literacy stands at just **37.4%**, underscoring substantial gender inequality. These groups face challenges related to a mix of urban and rural environments, where resource allocation and access to education, especially for girls, remain problematic.

The **Hausa**, **Kanuri**, and **Fulani** ethnic groups, from northern Nigeria, show the lowest literacy rates, with males ranging from **26-42%** and females often below **25%**. The **Fulani** show the most concerning figures, with only **13.8%** literacy for females. Economic factors such as poverty, cultural restrictions on female education, general feudalism and insecurity, all contribute to low literacy rates especially for women. The chart depicts the need for change if aimed in education to address this gap. (Accounts, 2021).



### 3.2.3 <sup>1</sup> Literacy rate in Nigeria, by zone and gender



**Fig. 7:** <sup>1</sup> Literacy rate in Nigeria by zone and gender

*Source: Statista 2018*

The chart provides insightful comparisons of male and female literacy rates across geopolitical zones in Nigeria, highlighting the gender gap in educational attainment.

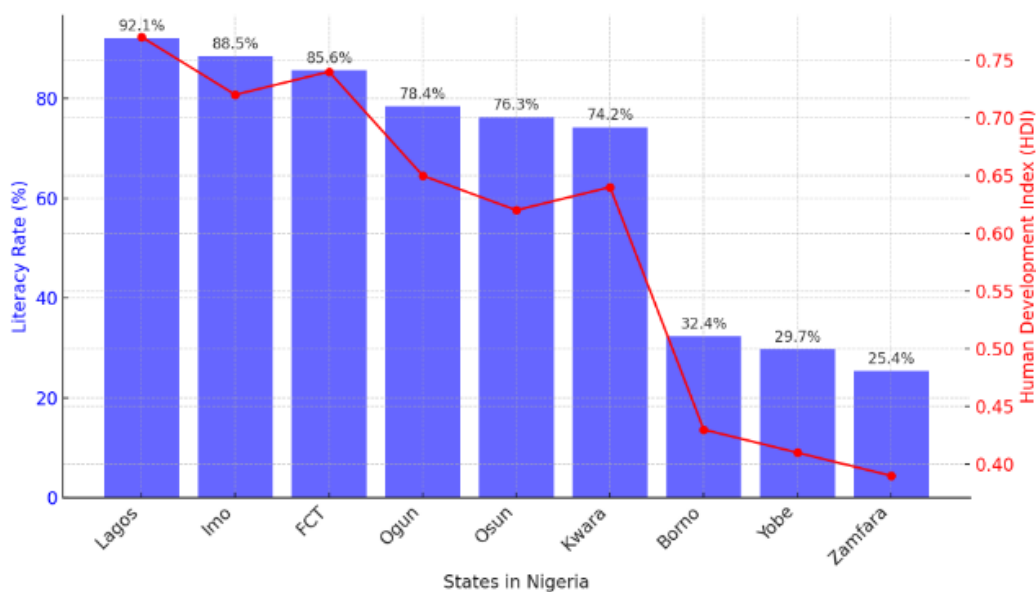
#### <sup>11</sup> 1. Northern Zones (North Central, North East, and North West):

Male literacy in the North Central Region is 72.9%, significantly higher than the female literacy rate of 49.6%. The disparity is even higher in the Northeast, with male illiteracy as low as 50.5% and female illiteracy as low as 31.8%. The North West region has the lowest overall literacy rate, with males lagging far behind at 59% and females at 59% and females lagging far behind at 29%, showing a clear gap between men and women in education in the northern region. Factors such as cultural norms, insecurity and early marriage may contribute to these differences.

2. <sup>11</sup> Southern Zones (South East, South South, and South West):

In contrast, southern regions show comparatively high levels of male and female literacy. Male literacy in the Southeast is 86.7% and female literacy is 79.3%, not far behind. Similar trends are seen in the South South region, where male literacy is 88.5% and female literacy is 79%. In the South West, males and females exhibit literacy rates of 89% and 80.6% respectively. This high rate indicates better access to education and stronger government policies in the southern regions. The chart reflects significant regional differences in literacy, with southern regions having significantly higher rates for both sexes, while northern regions, particularly the Northwest and Northeast, converge in education more severe challenges targeted interventions are needed

### 3.2.4 Literacy Rate of Nigerian states and their HDI



**Fig. 8: Literacy Rate of some Nigerian states and their HDI.**

**Source: UNDP (2021) and NBS (2019)**

The diagram above presents the literacy rates alongside the Human Development Index (HDI) for selected Nigerian states. States such as Lagos, Imo, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) exhibit high literacy rates, exceeding 85%, and also show correspondingly

high HDI values, indicating better educational resources, infrastructure, and overall human development. These states benefit from their urbanization and economic advantages.

States like Ogun, Osun, and Kwara show mid-range literacy rates between 74% and 78%, with moderate HDI values around 0.60 to 0.65. These states have a balance of urban and rural regions, which contributes to the disparity in access to educational resources, especially in remote areas.

On the lower end, states like Borno, Yobe, and Zamfara face severe challenges, with literacy rates below 35% and HDI values dipping as low as 0.39. These states are significantly affected by socio-political instability, poverty, and inadequate educational infrastructure, which hamper their overall development and literacy progress.

### 3.2.5 The Literacy rate of African Countries and their HDI

**Table 1: African Countries Literacy rate and HDI**

*Source: Statista 2023*

Country	Literacy Rate (%)	HDI (2023)
Nigeria	62.0	0.539
South Africa	94.0	0.713
Egypt	71.2	0.731
Ghana	79.0	0.632
Kenya	81.5	0.601
Ethiopia	51.8	0.485
Tanzania	77.9	0.529
Morocco	74.0	0.676
Algeria	81.4	0.745
Rwanda	73.2	0.543

The table illustrates a clear correlation between literacy rates and Human Development Index (HDI) scores in selected African countries. Countries with higher literacy rates, like South Africa with a literacy rate of 94% and an HDI of 0.713, demonstrate how educational

investments are directly linked to overall human development. These countries benefit from better socio-economic conditions, with literacy serving as a cornerstone of growth in sectors such as health, employment, and governance. This is supported by UNESCO functional literacy theory.

Regional disparities are evident in the data, with North African countries such as Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria exhibiting both higher literacy rates (around 70-80%) and higher HDI scores (above 0.67). These countries have relatively better access to education, infrastructure, and government services compared to sub-Saharan nations. Nigeria, despite being the continent's largest economy, has a relatively lower literacy rate of 62% and an HDI of 0.539, reflecting the persistent challenges in the country's education and social service sectors, which hinder overall development (see vygosky's, social-cultural and economic theory)

Countries like Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania, which have lower literacy rates (51.8%, 62%, and 77.9%, respectively) and lower HDI scores, face greater socio-economic barriers. These challenges include limited access to quality education, inadequate infrastructure, and high poverty rates, all of which contribute to slower human development progress. For Nigeria, addressing its educational shortcomings, particularly in literacy, is key to improving its overall HDI and achieving sustained national development.

## SECTION FOUR

### INTEROGATING READING LITERACY IN NIGERIA

In this section, we shall ask critical questions to find out why reading literacy is so low in Nigeria despite its being the giant of Africa. Interrogations are enquiries thrown at the issue on ground to find out the drivers, enablers and inhibitors as it were. Having seen the Nigerian reading literacy landscape and analyzing it by states, zones, by gender, by urban and rural locations and even with other countries in Africa and beyond, and it is unsatisfactory, we shall find out why it is like that.

Do political factors affect education and reading literacy in Nigeria? No doubt political factors significantly impact education and literacy by influencing policy decisions, funding and implementation. Political parties may focus on short term gains and compromise long-term educational goals. Corruption and embezzlement have in many cases led to diversion of funds. Transparency Internal, (2020), recognizes the role of international organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, WORLD BANK, OECD and how they help to shape educational goals. Does Nigerian government approve funds for the running of education? Like budgetary allocation? For example, Nigeria's budget for Education in 2022 was a mere 5.7% (NBS 2022) as against UNESCO standard of 15-20% of National budget? And it was not a one-off low allocation but a regular occurrence. Check out the following statistics: In budgetary allocation for education was:

2019-----7.05%

2020----- 6.7%

2021-----5.6%

2022-----5.7%

In the last 2 ½ decades it was only in 2011 under president Goodluck Jonathan that 11% was allocated to Education in Nigeria.

NBS (2022), in its report on '**Education spending**' as a percentage of GDP, stated that the average annual percentage allocation between 1999 to 2021 for Nigeria, was 7.81% while Ghana was 24.37% and South Africa was 19.49%. This goes to show the level of seriousness of our country over education funding. What are the implications for literacy education in such circumstances?

In the short term there is reduced access to quality education, increased drop out-rate, and in the long-term general depletion of human capita among others. (UNESCO 2020, World Bank 2019). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004 was to improve access to free, basic education (Ene, 2007). Since 2004, UBEC has been a law mandating all Nigerian children to attend school up to **JSS 3 free of charge**. A lot of money put together by government and different international agencies has been sunk into this project. According to UNICEF, an estimated N1.88 trillion (\$4.73billion) may have gone into saving the Basic education in Nigeria between 2004 and 2022. What do we have to show for it? Remember that this money just mentioned is in addition to yearly budgetary allocation? Unfortunately, it does appear, government has not been able to enforce it. Otherwise, why do we still have a staggering number of out-of-school children (over 15m children)? UNICEF puts the number as follows: Northern Nigeria 15.23m, Southern Nigeria has 2.58m. For the <sup>13</sup> six geo political zones North West-8.04m, North East 5.06m, North Central 2.12m, South West 1.15m, South South 769 m South East 664m. Why are school infrastructure & resources inadequate and in some cases, completely unavailable? Why are teachers not adequately remunerated and so unmotivated? Why are libraries not well stocked with books and other educational resources inadequate? Why is government not prosecuting defaulting parents and guardians, since the UBE is programed for free and compulsory education? It is because government is not faithful to education. In other climes, governments focus on education, to raise the level of literacy and compete favourably at the global level. In America, Obama made education his

top priority by dedicating a huge sum of \$4.45billion dollars to an education project dubbed ‘**Race for the top**’. It was meant to turn all schools round and gain massive innovation. In Nigeria, UBE fund is used to settle political jobbers. I say this because in Nigeria only the political heavy weights are made Chairmen of UBEC boards. They don’t have to know anything about education. No possession of degree in Education, except in Enugu state where the governor appointed a professor of education to be the commissioner and also he budgeted 33% to Education. for the current year 2024.

Why is there controversy over Christian & Islamic studies in schools or the study of History in schools? Or the age to enter school or enter for WAEC exams suddenly becomes very important than the quality education? When other counties in the world are prospecting space travels at the age of 16. (NERC 2019) states that there is shortage of qualified teachers especially in rural areas (World Bank). There are reports that government politicizes teacher recruitment, citing of schools, and even allocation of resources to schools (Daily Trust 2022). In the course of all these, quality is compromised, poverty is weaponized and illiteracy is weaponized. Are we surprised when admission cut off is unfairly skewed in favor of some places under one quota system or one policy statement or another? No doubt good leadership is crucial for the positive development of literacy and education in Nigeria.

Leadership at different levels, lack of continuity and selfishness in the education system, their vision and interest will certainly show in their attitude to education. Persistent inequalities hinder education progress.

Yet World Bank laments Nigeria’s low ranking in the World Banks Human Capital Development Index. <sup>7</sup> Nigeria was ranked 167th out of 174 countries in Human Capital Development. Again World Bank laments <sup>9</sup> that a child born in Nigeria today is expected to be only 36% as productive as they <sup>9</sup> could be if they had access to effective education and

health services. See fig 5: All states with low literacy rates are collaborated with high poverty index and low HDI.

This abysmal state of literacy does not meet the functional literacy framework by UNESCO, which stipulates that all children must enjoy equal access to education to be able to enjoy a full life and help develop self and society. Do you wonder why we have so many thugs, bandits and terrorist who have no values for human life, no shame, no meaningful livelihood,

<sup>45</sup> The socio-economic factors affecting reading literacy in Nigeria are deeply rooted in systemic inequalities that hinder educational access and opportunity. <sup>8</sup> Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and resource availability in learning.

However, in Nigeria, many children, particularly from low-income families and rural communities, lack access to basic educational tools like books, libraries, and qualified teachers. It prompts the question: how can children from impoverished backgrounds be expected to engage in meaningful literacy practices without adequate resources and environments conducive to learning? The lack of social and educational interactions, as Vygotsky suggests, limits the cognitive development of these children. If we recognize that literacy is a social process, what initiatives can be taken to ensure that every child, regardless of their socio-economic status, has the opportunity to thrive in such environments?

One of the most pressing issues is the disparity between affluent urban centers and rural or impoverished areas, where socio-economic conditions significantly impact literacy outcomes. Schools in wealthier regions often have well-stocked libraries, access to technology, and highly qualified teachers. In contrast, rural areas face overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers, and a severe shortage of reading materials (Adegoke & Salami, 2018). Should the government prioritize resource distribution based on socio-economic needs to close this gap? This rhetorical question highlights the necessity of redirecting funding and educational



support to areas most affected by poverty. By addressing the uneven distribution of resources, Nigeria could ensure more equitable literacy outcomes and reduce the socio-economic barriers to education.

Moreover, socio-economic challenges also perpetuate cycles of illiteracy. Children who grow up in impoverished households often lack exposure to reading culture at home (Ene, 2011). Parents, many of whom are illiterate or semi-literate, are unable to provide the foundational support needed for early literacy development (Akinwumi & Ogunyemi, 2020). Shouldn't there be government-supported initiatives that focus on both child and adult literacy, providing free or affordable reading materials and literacy programmes for entire families? Programmes like this, which engage both children and their parents would not only enhance family literacy but also create environments where reading is valued and practiced. Addressing these socio-economic factors holistically could pave the way for a more literate society in which socio-economic status no longer dictates educational success. Besides, it is high time we passed the stage of “If you want to hide something from a Nigerian, put it in a book”?

**Top 10 countries by reading frequency are:**

1. Finland (85% they read daily).
2. Sweden (77%).
3. Norway (75%).
4. Denmark (73%).
5. Canada (69%).
6. Australia (68%).
7. USA (67%).

### **Top countries by average reading time:**

1. India 6.5 hours/ week.
2. China 5.5 hours/ week.
3. USA 5.2 hours/ week.
4. Russia 4.8 hours/ week (UNESCO UIS Institute for Statistics, 2019) World Bank 2020.

Pew research Reading Habits in the Digital Age (2018), World Literacy Foundation, Literacy Rates around the world (World Literacy Foundation (2018)). Collaboratively, Finland with the highest reading rate in the world has highest literacy rate of 99.6% and She has a strong culture of reading. (UNESCO). Nigeria placed 80<sup>th</sup> out of 100 countries in the PEW programme

#### **4.1.1 Interrogating Educational Factors**

Educational systems in Nigeria significantly impact reading literacy in Nigeria, especially when considering the curriculum, teaching methods, and available resources. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights that learners can achieve higher levels of understanding with proper support and guidance. In Nigeria, this raises a critical question: 'How can students thrive when their teachers are undertrained and their classrooms overcrowded'? With teacher-student ratio sometimes exceeding 1:50 as against the official rate of 1:20? Individualized attention becomes impossible, and students are left without the scaffolding they need to develop literacy (Ogundele & Ojo, 2019). In this scenario, even motivated students fall behind, unable to access guidance within their ZPD. Adebayo (2018) notes that many Nigerian schools lack libraries and reading materials, further compounding the problem. How can a student read without books? The absence of resources fundamentally limits opportunities for literacy advancement.

The curriculum itself also poses challenges, often outdated and disconnected from students' real-world experiences. If literacy development depends on intervention and context, can a rigorous, one-size-fits-all curriculum really achieve effective reading skills? The answer is to revise the curriculum to reflect students' socio-cultural backgrounds, using interactive and student-centered teaching methods that encourage critical thinking and engaged writing. For example, the introduction of problem-based learning (PBL) and other contemporary teaching strategies can lead to a deeper understanding of reading content, as these strategies guide students in real-world problem-solving activity diversity in their respective ZPDs. What Nigerian curriculum reform efforts benefit from the inclusion of such strategies? Those who focus on the acquisition of essential literacy skills, such as in writing developing independent investigations and judgments?

Lack of trained teachers is a major obstacle to reading literacy, and Vygotsky's theory suggests the need for "trained teachers who are knowledgeable enough" to facilitate learning but Nigeria struggles with a shortage of well-trained teachers, especially in some villages. This leads to the question: Can teacher training programmes in Nigeria be reformed to equip educators with the skills necessary to guide students through their ZPD? Investing in continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, with a focus on literacy instruction, could bridge this gap?

Countries like Finland have seen remarkable success by prioritizing teacher education and development, ensuring that educators are not just subject experts but also skilled in literacy pedagogy. Finland has Masters Degree as the minimum qualification for teachers and a minimum of two teachers per class of 25 children. Is it a surprise that they have the best education system in the world? A system that is culturally driven and well organized. Could Nigeria not benefit from adopting similar practices? By keeping teachers motivated, schools

well equipped, teachers with modern literacy teaching techniques, more students would receive the individualized support they need, improving overall literacy rates across the country. Maybe Nigeria will borrow a leaf.

#### **4.1.2 Interrogating Technological Factors;**

Technological advancements have the potential to transform education, yet in Nigeria, they highlight glaring disparities in access to digital resources for literacy development. How can students develop literacy in a world increasingly shaped by digital tools, when they lack access to the very technology that facilitates learning?

Functional Literacy theory emphasized the role of tools in cognitive development, but in Nigeria, limited access to the internet, e-books, and online learning platforms prevents many from reaping these benefits (Ademola & Fatola, 2021). While students in urban areas may have access to digital literacy tools, rural schools face challenges such as poor electricity, inadequate internet coverage, and a lack of devices. How can Nigeria bridge this digital divide, particularly in rural and underserved areas? To close this gap, initiatives like government-sponsored digital literacy programmes, solar-powered learning centers, and public-private partnerships could be expanded to provide greater access to these critical tools, thereby ensuring equal and enhanced opportunities for literacy development.

The role of digital tools in promoting literacy is undeniable, yet Nigeria's infrastructure limits their widespread use. How can we expect teachers and students to integrate technology into learning when many schools lack even the basic infrastructure for it? Rural schools mainly lack internet connectivity required to access online resources or digital learning platforms (Ojo & Samuel, 2020). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, digital tools mediate literacy instruction. However, the lack of infrastructure perpetuates inequalities between

students from well-resourced urban schools and students in rural areas or poor villages (Amobi & Ekechi, 2019). The Nigerian government should prioritize the extension of internet access to rural schools and investment in digital infrastructure. Can Nigeria learn from countries like Kenya and India that have used mobile learning solutions and affordable devices to promote digital literacy in rural areas? Such programmes could be replicated and scaled up in Nigeria to ensure that students everywhere have access to technological tools.

The digital divide also widens socioeconomic disparities in literacy outcomes. Can literacy really improve if <sup>51</sup> only a small percentage of students have access to the tools they need to learn? This question highlights a key point: inequality in technological literacy directly contributes to the growing gap in reading competence between rich and poor students (Amobi & Ekechi, 2019). Technologically savvy urban students develop strong digital literacies, while rural and low-income students are left behind. What steps can be taken to ensure <sup>52</sup> equal access to digital resources for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status? Solutions could include subsidies for digital devices, digital literacy training for teachers, and the expansion of free Wi-Fi access in underserved areas. By leveling the playing field <sup>15</sup> and ensuring that all students have access to the tools necessary for modern literacy, Nigeria can make great strides in improving overall reading literacy across the nation.

## 4.2 Consequences of Poor Reading Literacy

Here we look at the potential consequences of poor reading skills in the country Nigeria.

The consequences of poor reading culture in Nigeria span many social dimensions, affecting individuals, society and the economy. According to functional literacy theory, literacy extends beyond just the ability to read. It involves the use of reading skills in daily activities, decision-making, and social interactions (UNESCO, 2006). However, Nigeria's low literacy rate poses significant barriers to achieving this ideal. If individuals cannot analyze data, solve

problems, or make informed decisions, how can they function effectively in society? Without strong literacy skills, individuals often find themselves excluded from opportunities for personal growth and civic participation. For example, an adult with poor reading literacy may struggle to understand a medical prescription or follow instructions on a job application. What does this mean for personal autonomy and the ability to lead a productive life? If individuals cannot engage with these everyday tasks, they become marginalized, which in turn affects broader societal dynamics.

For individuals, the impact of poor reading literacy is particularly detrimental in terms of education and career prospects. Literacy is the foundation of all learning, and without it, students struggle to grasp even basic educational content (Olukoya, 2017). How can one advance in school or at work without the ability to read proficiently? The cycle of poor literacy creates a barrier to higher education and career advancement, as individuals are often unable to meet academic or professional demands. For example, a student who cannot read well will likely perform poorly in examinations, reducing their chances of gaining admission into tertiary institutions. Moreover, this deficiency is not just academic but also psychological. Individuals with low literacy levels often suffer from low self-esteem and social isolation (Ojo, 2020). Can a person truly contribute to society if they feel alienated and incapable of fully participating in its functions? This social exclusion only deepens the emotional and psychological impact of poor literacy, leaving individuals trapped in a cycle of underachievement.

At the societal level, poor literacy hampers national productivity and weakens civic engagement. The functionalist theory emphasizes the role of literacy in cognitive development and critical thinking (UNESCO 2020). In a society where functional literacy is lacking, citizens are less informed which diminishes their ability to participate in public

discourse or make decisions that benefit the community. How can citizens be expected to make informed political decisions or understand public health information if they cannot effectively process the material presented to them? Are poverty and illiteracy being weaponized? The inability to engage with written content stunts the potential for civic participation, leading to poor decision-making on both individual and collective levels (Akinwumi & Ogunyemi, 2020). This not only affects democratic processes but also weakens societal cohesion. For instance, public health campaigns requiring written instructions, like those on disease prevention or vaccination, become less effective in populations with low literacy.

Yes, economically, poor reading literacy translates into loss of human capital, decreased economic productivity, and increased poverty rates. How can a nation thrive economically when a significant portion of its population cannot fully engage in productive activities? According to the World Bank (2020), countries with low literacy rates often experience slower economic growth because their citizens are not equipped to contribute meaningfully to various industries. In Nigeria, individuals with poor literacy skills are often confined to low-paying, informal jobs, unable to break out of the poverty cycle (Ademola, 2021). How can entrepreneurship and innovation flourish in an environment where basic literacy skills are lacking? Without these skills, individuals cannot manage their personal finances, engage in entrepreneurial activities, or pursue more advanced economic opportunities, which in turn drags down the national economy.

Poor reading literacy exacerbates social inequality and limits upward mobility. How can social equality be achieved if access to literacy is unevenly distributed across different socio-economic groups? Functionalist literacy theory suggests that individuals from privileged backgrounds have <sup>37</sup> access to a wide range of educational and cultural resources, making

reading literacy easier to acquire. In contrast, those from disadvantaged areas especially in rural Nigeria have limited opportunities to acquire these skills (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2018). For example, children in rural areas often attend under resourced schools with limited access to textbooks and trained teachers. How can these children be expected to compete with their urban counterparts in terms of education or employment? This disparity perpetuates a cycle of poverty, as illiteracy leads to fewer opportunities, deepening the socio-economic divide. If Nigeria is to address these entrenched inequalities, greater efforts must be made to ensure equal access to literacy resources for all citizens.

### **4.3 Pedagogical Approach to Improve Reading Literacy in Nigeria**

The teaching/learning of reading literacy in Nigeria has traditionally been dominated by teacher-centered approaches, according to Adeosun (2017), it focuses primarily on memorization and repetition of words. These strategies often emphasize phonology and word recognition but do not always provide depth of understanding and critical thinking, which is important for literacy development. Although these strategies have been relatively successful in helping students develop basic reading skills, they have failed to improve their comprehension of texts or their engagement with complex reading materials.

More student-centered approaches such as a “balanced literacy approach” are emphasized. This approach incorporates a variety of instructional strategies including guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading to build grounded and high-concept reading skills. According to Duke and Pearson (2017), a balanced literacy approach to programming literacy and literacy development, as it recognizes the importance of engaging students at various levels of literacy - core Rigorous analysis and understanding from ghost vocabulary in which they are found.



The sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky, (1978) provides a useful lens for understanding the teaching of reading literacy in Nigeria. Vygotsky emphasized the role of social interaction and cultural context in learning as literacy development through interaction with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, parents, or peers. In Nigeria this theory emphasizes the importance of learning culturally, where educators use local languages and local materials to make students understand and engage with texts. The diversity of the linguistic and cultural landscape of Nigeria calls for such an approach, as it adapts the curriculum to the social realities of the students, thereby moving improving the outcome of the reading skills.

However, despite the merits of this theory, there are significant challenges in implementing culturally sensitive teaching in Nigerian schools. Current language policies that prioritize English as a medium of instruction often create barriers for native-speaking children at home.

This raises several questions:

- How can the curriculum incorporate indigenous languages without undermining the role of English as a unifying language?
- What strategies can be employed to ensure that children in rural areas, where the literacy rates are lower, benefit from culturally responsive teaching?

These questions point to broader systemic issues within Nigeria's educational framework, which must be addressed to improve literacy outcomes.

#### **4.3.1 Teacher Training and Pedagogical Support**

Another critical factor in the pedagogical approach to reading literacy is the quality of teacher training. According to Ajayi (2019), many teachers in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, lack the necessary training to teach reading effectively. Ene (2010) stated that about 75% of rural

secondary schools in Enugu State had less than 4 teachers or only 2 or 3 teachers and more than 50% of such schools had no English language teachers. Most teacher training programmes are outdated and fail to equip educators with the skills to implement more modern, interactive, and student-centered teaching methods. This situation has been exacerbated by high teacher-to-student ratios in many public schools, limiting teachers' ability to support individualized instruction.

In view of this, the question arises:

- How can teacher training programs in Nigeria be improved and incorporate more effective teaching strategies for literacy?

One potential solution is to integrate digital literacy into teacher training, allowing teachers to use technology to improve reading instruction. This will not only meet the immediate needs created by the digital divide but will also prepare teachers to integrate digital literacy with traditional literacy in their classrooms.

Teaching approaches to literacy in Nigeria need to be interrogated through a multi-dimensional lens that includes sociocultural, economic and technological considerations. Traditional methods of rote learning and memorization have proven inadequate in providing students with the broad literacy skills needed for the 21st century. Functionalist thinking though a useful framework for understanding how culturally relevant learning can improve literacy outcomes but challenges remain as a language strategy.

In terms of current challenges, including the impact of the pandemic and ongoing insecurity in the North, it is important that stakeholders in education continue to ask tough questions about how to deliver literacy education system has improved on Nigeria. There is hope to close the literacy gap and empower the next generation of Nigerian students through innovative educational programmes, digital tools and community-based services.

## SECTION FIVE

### CASE STUDIES/SUCCESS STORIES

A few case studies will be highlighted to show what has worked in other countries and whether it can be tried in Nigeria. Literacy in Nigeria has faced persistent challenges, but recent efforts in literacy programs and projects offer some positive progress and opportunities for improvement. These initiatives aim to address systemic socio-economic factors that impede literacy development, and many are beginning to yield significant results. Furthermore, lessons from other countries with literacy programs that date in the 19th century provides valuable insights into the Nigerian literacy system.

#### **5.1 Literacy Programmes and Initiatives: Evaluation**

In Nigeria, an effective literacy program has emerged as an important tool to address the country's literacy crisis. One successful program is the Reading and Numeracy Program (RANA) program, a USAID-supported project focused on improving first grade literacy and numeracy in Northern Nigeria. The program approach involves rural local languages and of marginalized communities. Increase understanding among students (USAID, 2019). This program demonstrates how literacy development can be better enhanced by using mother tongue instruction in the early years rather than relying solely on English. Adapting to the realities of the Nigerian language, Rana has seen tremendous success in improving early childhood reading, an important step in addressing literacy challenges in Nigeria as a whole.

Another notable project is the Reading for All project, FHI 360 in partnership with the Department of Education, which provides reading materials to children in underserved communities. It was the Literacy and Numeracy Program for Katsina and the Numeracy Program was launched by the Nigerian government in collaboration with international

partners,(UNICEF) This program focuses on creating a culture of reading by establishing libraries and distributing books to schools with rural areas (Uwe, 2020) . The strength of the project lies in the approach, which includes not only government agencies but also civil society organizations and the private sector Despite Nigeria’s ongoing economic struggles, this sector contributes to they bridge the gap between literacy aspirations and actual use.

Recently, the Lagos State Literacy Intervention (Programme LIP) successfully addressed the literacy gap in urban areas. The goal of this program is to provide remedial reading lessons to children who are lagging behind in their reading skills. Another feature of this program is the integration of digital literacy, giving students access to e-books and online reading materials. Since its launch in 2018, it has reportedly improved the reading skills of over 10,000 students in Lagos State (Olawale, 2021). The success of this program highlights the importance of blending traditional literacy practices with modern technology in addressing literacy challenges.

Looking beyond Nigeria, best practices from other countries can provide valuable insights for improving reading skills. One such example is South Africa's <sup>19</sup> Read to Lead campaign, which was launched by the Department of Basic Education in 2015. This initiative involves teachers, parents, and... enough community members to get students' reading skills flying effectiveness throughout the country. The campaign provides free reading materials and facilitates teacher training programmes, which have helped to strengthen reading instruction in South African schools (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). For Nigeria, the adoption of a similar national campaign that mobilizes the entire population could be a revolutionary way to improve literacy skills.

In another success story, Finland consistently ranks first in global literacy surveys. The country’s success can be attributed to its holistic and inclusive approach to education. Finnish

schools emphasize in the development of children from an early age by using the children and the teachers are well trained in the direction of financial literacy. 15). Nigeria can learn from Finnish teacher development strategies by investing more in teacher training programs focused on literacy instruction.

In Kenya, first grade reading activities in Tusome have produced impressive results in improving early childhood literacy. Funded by USAID and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Tusome provides reading lists in English and Kiswahili along with teacher training and coaching. The success of the program lies in its clear objectives, policy analysis and accountability. By implementing a similar structured literacy strategy, Nigeria can replicate Kenya's achievements in improving literacy.

In recent years, Ethiopia has also made strides in literacy development through its Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed (READ) program. This program focuses on producing high quality reading materials in local languages, training teachers, and developing community reading programs. The success of READ in increasing literacy rates, especially in rural areas, demonstrates the importance of culturally relevant literacy resources and community engagement (Rose et al., 2006). Nigeria can follow Ethiopia's path of using local languages to improve reading comprehension and literacy through different languages.

The adoption of these international best practices in Nigeria can help address the challenge of literacy. For example, the use of local languages in early reading instruction, as seen in programs such as RANA, is consistent with successful models in Ethiopia and Kenya. Furthermore, Finland's focus on teacher autonomy and training coincides with the urgent need to improve teacher quality in Nigeria, where many teachers still lack the necessary skills to effectively teach reading . . . .

These case studies and success stories show that improvements are possible with the right policies, resources and community involvement. Nigeria needs concerted efforts to integrate lessons learned from these programs to expand its literacy programs and achieve greater success. In addition, ongoing government commitment, adequate funding and accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that the literacy program can achieve its full potential.

## SECTION SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the state of literacy in Nigeria poses significant challenges and opportunities for national development. Chronic socioeconomic inequalities, lack of education, and resource gaps that hinder literacy require urgent attention. Efforts to improve reading skills in Nigeria should be multi-pronged, including government policy, community-based programs and technological innovation. Government policies to fund education, teachers training and literacy programs earlier is an important step forward. In addition, community-run initiatives, such as reading clubs and libraries, provide grassroots support that can stimulate a reading culture. Integrating technology, through e-learning platforms and digital resources, provides new options for improving access to learning materials, particularly in underserved settings. However, these strategies must be tailored to the unique linguistic and cultural context of Nigeria, promoting literacy in the vernacular alongside English.

The importance of teacher training and continuous professional development cannot be overstated. Teachers play a key role in promoting literacy, and providing them with the necessary skills and resources is critical to the success of any literacy development initiative. Collaborative efforts by government, educators, parents, and communities are essential to sustainable growth and long-term success in literacy.

After all, improving reading skills in Nigeria is not just an educational goal but a national need. Literacy is a foundation for economic development, social cohesion, and civic engagement. By addressing the root causes of poor literacy, implementing targeted strategies and harnessing the richness of Nigerian culture and languages, the country can build a future for all can achieve literacy, empowering individuals to make collective progress.

## **Recommendations**

To address the challenges of reading literacy in Nigeria, we propose a multi-pronged approach that addresses structural, socioeconomic and language policy factors.

1. Our recommendations include strengthening the policy framework and funding for education and literacy programmes.
2. Addressing socioeconomic disparities through community-based projects.
3. Utilization of Nigerian languages through mother tongue based education.
4. Enhancing existing literacy programmes through teacher training, technology integration, and partnerships.



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