

Appraisal of Tablet of Knowledge (Opon Imo) New Digital Concept of Reading: Issues and Perspectives

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Abstract

This study seeks to evaluate what the Education Managers termed “unusual transformation” of education in Osun State, Nigeria and looks at its practicality in view of the past and existing challenges confronting education in the State. A look was made into the reading habits and the reasons students are not reading as well as the need for the new concept of e-learning adopted by the State Government of Osun State (Nigeria) Secondary Schools. After appraising the new concept, probable challenges were highlighted and solutions were made. Recommendations as to how the new program could be handled better for general acceptability among the stakeholders were given.

Keywords: *Computers, e- learning, e- library, reading habit, digital concept.*

Introduction

It is a common knowledge that the standard of education and quest for reading and knowledge has gone down drastically in Nigeria going by the recent result of secondary school students both in WAEC and NECO. Osun State, in particular that could boast of notable figures in all fields of human endeavour did not perform better.

With 35th ranking in WAEC examination result in year 2009 and no significant improvement in the years after, the downward trend of the standard of education has brought a great concern to parents, students and government who are the major stake holders in education. Despite huge annual budgetary allocation to education, the trend becomes worrisome and the future of our teeming youth remains uncertain.

One vital reason adduced to this ugly situation is the dying interest in the reading habit of school children. Gone are the days of rigorous and painstaking reading.

To stem the tide of this ugly trend, the Government of the State of Osun, Nigeria conceived the idea of 'bringing back' the books to a format that is compatible with the interest of the students. Since the interest of the students has shifted to the use of computer and phones, books of different types on several subjects have been simplified.

The Concept of Tablet of Knowledge

The understanding that we live in the Information Age is the main reason for this project. The contents of Tablet of Knowledge and the expectation of the inventors is to revolutionize the education sector and reverse the situation where year in, year out students complain of lack of access to books, good learning and teaching environment and exposure. It is expected to put to an end to the dismal record of students' performance in public examinations

What is this "Tablet of Knowledge"? It is a stand-alone e-learning tablet that will provide the senior secondary students of Osun State, Nigeria with the contents required to prepare them for school leaving examinations. It contains 3 major content categories; Text Books, Tutorials and Practice Questions. A total of 150,000 of these tablets will be distributed to all senior secondary students across Osun State schools in a move that is expected to radically democratize access to learning, regardless of means, location or status. This means that in one fell swoop, the students will have literally at their fingertips access to all the books they need at all times in the most interactive and engaging way possible and they will also be learning to use tablets. Being solar compatible for at least eight hours the tablet saves its user undue dependence on the country's unstable power supply.

With an average weight of 1.1 kg and a mere 10 percent (the size of a standard textbook), each tablet, designed by Harvard University for the state's exclusive use resembles an iPad and is pre-loaded with more than 56 textbooks, lesson notes, virtual classroom and other learning resources for secondary school pupils. It also features a dictionary, the

Bible, books on the history of the Yoruba and Opon Ifa (divination corpuses). It is an ICT-based device patterned after iPad, the handy tool that the elite in the society wield for omnibus communication purposes.

The digital device also contains lesson notes for the 17 subjects taken in the WASSCE as well as JAMB exam questions for the past 10 years.

Appraising Tablet of Knowledge

1. The innovation is in tandem with the concept of digital revolution being canvassed globally. Africa and indeed Nigeria cannot afford to sit on the fence as the entire globe is edging towards a “paperless society”.
2. The innovation has readily brought before the students, reading materials in the format they could cherish and play with. Almost all of our present day students could play with almost all kinds of phones like iPhones and Blackberrys that have similar operations with computers.
3. The quality and main contents of the tablet remain highly valuable materials and resources for lifelong learning. Specifically, the inclusion of past questions, and other materials outside core academic curriculum is highly commendable.
4. It solves the problem of access to resources. It also affords the students the access to a large quantum of resources, a feat that could not have been achieved otherwise.
5. The tablet is a value-laden tablet that frees the student from the physical burden of a backpack of books.

Reading Habit among Students

Reading is the passion of the greatest personalities of all times since ages which helped to pass on knowledge through generations. (Shafy and Loan, 2010).

Reading habit is like a kind of custom or culture any student or individual must cultivate. It is that urge and willingness to read and study either as a student or for life. It makes comprehension and acquisition of knowledge easy. Reading habit refers to the behavior, which expresses

the likeness of reading and tastes of reading. It is the way the reader organizes his or her reading. Reading habits refers to how often, how much, and what the readers read. Researchers in the past have devoted efforts to examining learners' reading habits with their efforts, these researchers have discovered that reading habits correlate with gender, age, educational background, academic performance and professional growth.

Reading is defined as an “art of interpreting printed and written words”. Reading is viewed not only as a veritable vehicle for success in school, but also as a vehicle for development in ones life and career. Also considered as very complex, there is no other known way by which information and knowledge could be absorbed without reading. Reading is viewed in the word of (Thanuskodi S. 2001) as a precise process which involves exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and large language units. More simply stated, reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thoughts and language.

Reading is a very strong way of making meaning from printed or written materials. It is an undeniable fact that reading is important. Academic success at the all levels is likely a multidimensional phenomenon that includes languages proficiency, learning, study strategies and certain personal characteristics. (Fatimayi, 2012).

In the view of Okwilagwe, (1998) cited by Akabuike, (2012), it should be more of reasoning, involving the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases and sentences, requiring all types of thinking such as critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, evaluative, judgmental and problem-solving. It is evident from the above that the reading process involves one's acquisition of intended meanings of the writer as well as one's contributions in the form of interpretations, evaluations and reflections about these meanings. It therefore means that anyone who is reading should be thinking, predicting, questioning, evaluating, defining and redefining what is being read.

Yusuf in (Ejembi 2011) asserts that Access to information is crucial to individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Information is indispensable and according to him bridges the gap

between knowledge and ignorance. He further asserts that one of the major avenues for acquiring information is reading. Reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built. It offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary, word power, and language skills.

(Adetunji A. 2007) opines that extensive reading has been found to be the very best way of developing reading skills among youth in the sense that each reader will have a choice of what to read and they have more scope following their own interest; this will definitely reduce the teachers' control and allow and encourage learning to occur outside the class. In this sense, students are to engage in an all embracing reading so as to develop his skill. This is so because man as it were has a broad capacity for it. Learning outside the class should be encouraged because class does not take more than up to one third of the time of the students.

Reading, according to (Palani, K.K. 2012) is a neuro-muscular activity. During reading, man's active participation in coordinating his neuro-muscular components takes place. As a psychomotor skill, it influences the cognitive and affective domains of man's behavior. He suggested the following as some of the important components of reading skills:

1. Decoding the word and analyzing the concept.
2. Grasping the meaning of the concept.
3. Grasping the logic of sentence construction.
4. Anticipating the meaning of the next sentence.
5. Moving very easily to the next sentence with a clear understanding.

Reasons for not Reading

Nobody is born with natural aversion to reading. We know that. We see what happens when we introduce people to books. They fall in love. They carry their favorites around and admire the pictures over and over again.

Why, then, is reading such a problem for so many students? What turns so many little book lovers into adamant book haters? Instead of speculating, Gbadamosi, (2007) in Igwe, (2011) postulates the followings as possible reasons students don't read:

1. Change in Nigeria's value system: The quest for material wealth has eroded the interest for the search of knowledge. Many Nigerian people celebrate mediocrity at the expense of the quest for knowledge. This is manifest in our rush for material things. Some people abandon their educational careers for the pursuit of money.
2. Economic hardship that is prevalent in many homes: Most parents manage to pay their wards school fees and forget about buying book for them. In sub-Saharan Africa, the impact of poverty is deeply felt. Only a few people live above the poverty line. About 80% of Africans live under hazardous conditions. The per capita income of an average citizen in Nigeria, "the giant of Africa" with its abundant natural resources, is two dollars. (Aina 2011)
3. Astronomical prices of books and other information materials have put them out of the reach of the masses. Coupled with high cost of books is poor availability of indigenous books owing to the fact that local authors are not encouraged to write books.
4. Also cost of publishing books is very high. Indigenous writers are not motivated as they may not be able to finance the high cost of book publishing.
5. Advent of home videos, film houses and other electronic media.

He further identified another constraint to the development of reading culture as literary apartheid and slavery or literary neo-imperialism. According to him, most of the bookshops in the country prefer shelving foreign authors. Hardly do you see indigenous publications in their bookshops. Even when Nigerian authors approach them in order to sell their books, they (bookshop owners) will turn their request down.

Probable Challenges of the Initiative

However, the initiative is not without some feature that could cast fear and doubts on the minds of the teeming students for which it is intended. Some of the fears can be analyzed below:

1. Power supply is a major challenge. With the current state of electricity in the country, the effective use of the tablet is in doubt, the solar powered compatible feature notwithstanding.

2. One major issue about anything ICT or electronic library is that most of the developers do not give technical backup after delivery. Even if after delivery backup was initially promised, they always renege on such promise. To this end, an initiative of this magnitude in terms of quantity and financial resources without concrete technical backup could cast a great doubt in the heart of users and parents.
3. The obsession of phones and computers among our youth could also pose a serious threat to the perceived or anticipated success this initiative could bring. Some facilities in computers like music, pictures and internet could cause damaging distraction to students.
4. The opportunity and benefit of making reference to what one has read cannot be made possible through the use of this tablet. Its only paper related materials that one can make reference. This is a great disadvantage of the use of this tablet.
5. Because of the rich resources that have been imputed into it, the loss of one tablet means the loss of 56 textbook, 10 years past question papers and other invaluable resources. This means so much to the economy of the young state of Osun.
6. Continuity is and has been a major problem confronting development in our society. Politicizing issues that will directly benefit the populace should be the aspiration of all. The concern of the possibility of the next government pursuing the project further and even improving it is very high.
7. One Major concern of information stakeholders (librarians, publishers and authors) is the negative effect it will have on the development of libraries and library activities in the State. If N8.6b, as claimed by the state government has been judiciously spent on procurement of books and other library materials, it would have brought about a great revolution both in the development of library in particular and education in general in the state.
8. The inclusion of Ifa divinity alongside other resources of other religions like Christianity and Islam poses a kind of fear for the adherents of those two “foreign” religions. This probable fear may

cast doubt on the acceptability of the initiative by the large population of the adherents of these religions.

9. Finally, it will have a serious negative consequences on publishing, book trade and library development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In all sincerity, the replacement of books with this tablet is, to put it mildly, a turning point in the educational life of not only Osun but also the nation as an entity. The project is also unconsciously breeding a new generation of digitally literate young persons. This resulting digital competence will no doubt encourage in many, a closer affinity for computing and what computers can do. It may even lead to some of the students developing interest that will take them along the direction of creating simple computer applications and solutions.

The State Government should therefore begin to put in place a process and program that will cater for the few areas of concern raised above. Areas of concern like power, the possibility of replacement in the eventual case of loss and the deliberate effort of all concerned in Education sector in ensuring that the scheme does not affect the political will and financial commitment of Government.

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