



**GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY ENUGU – NIGERIA**  
**13<sup>TH</sup> INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**TOPIC:**  
**INTERROGATING READING LITERACY IN NIGERIA**

**TO BE DELIVERED BY:**  
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## 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: 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
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: 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 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.



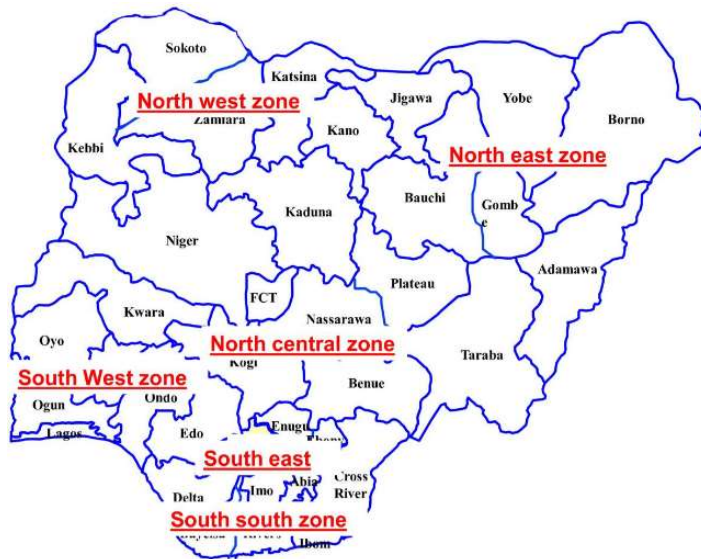
Reading literacy is therefore much richer in meaning. One good example of its rich meaning is the one given by the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) which the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2022) in its report cited as follows: ‘Reading literacy is defined 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 the Nok civilization and the Igbo-Ukwu civilization before the British colonization between 1914 and 1960. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 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 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 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 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 197 UNESCO 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 miss out on valuable social and educational interactions that foster literacy development (Adegoke & Salami, 2018). The theory underscores that literacy cannot be achieved in isolation. 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. Urban areas typically offer better educational infrastructure, access to learning materials, and higher-quality instruction, leading to stronger literacy outcomes for students in these regions. In contrast, rural areas suffer from inadequate schools, poorly trained teachers, (PTA and teachers and NYSC teachers) and a lack of reading materials, resulting in lower levels of literacy( Ene, 2006). According to Omeje and Ugwu (2019), this divide is exacerbated by socio-economic challenges such as poverty, which limits the ability of families to support their children's education. Consequently, students from rural areas, particularly those whose first language is not English, are at a significant disadvantage in terms of achieving reading literacy.

The issue of reading literacy in Nigeria is further complicated by the linguistic diversity of the country. With over 500 languages spoken across Nigeria, English serves as the lingua franca and the primary language of instruction in schools. While this linguistic choice may promote national unity and facilitate communication in a multilingual society, it also marginalizes indigenous languages and their speakers.

Students who grow up speaking indigenous languages often struggle with literacy in English, which hinders their overall academic performance (Eneh, 2021). This language barrier can create a cycle of poor literacy, where students fall behind early in their education and are unable to catch up, ultimately limiting their educational and professional opportunities.

In addition to the challenges posed by linguistic diversity, the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria plays a significant role in shaping literacy outcomes. Poverty remains a significant barrier to reading literacy, as many families cannot afford the basic necessities for education, such as textbooks, school fees, and supplementary learning materials. Rural and underserved communities are disproportionately affected, with students often lacking access to libraries,



reading materials, and digital resources that are essential for literacy development. Furthermore, economic disparities between urban and rural areas mean that students in more affluent regions benefit from better-funded schools and higher-quality educational resources, while those in poorer areas are left behind (Eneh, 2019).

The socio-cultural implications of low reading literacy are profound. Literacy is not only essential for academic success but also for active participation in modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century society. 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)*

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). In academic and professional settings, strong communication skills are crucial for success, whether through writing reports, presenting ideas, or engaging in discussions.

The social benefits of a strong reading culture are equally significant. Reading exposes individuals to diverse cultures, viewpoints, and experiences, promoting empathy and understanding. According to Nwankwo and Eze (2020), by immersing themselves in different worlds through literature, individuals can develop a broader worldview, learning to

appreciate and respect differences. This increased empathy is vital for building more harmonious communities and promoting inclusivity in diverse societies like Nigeria.

Additionally, reading literacy contributes to the development of creativity and imagination. As individuals engage with fictional and non-fictional texts, they are encouraged to think outside the box, envision new possibilities, and create original ideas. Adesina and Omotayo (2021) highlight that reading fosters innovative thinking, which is essential for problem-solving in both personal and professional contexts. Creativity, nurtured through reading, is a valuable asset in various fields, from the arts to technology and business.

In a globalized world, reading literacy also supports the acquisition of new languages and cross-cultural communication. As the world becomes more interconnected, individuals with strong reading literacy are better equipped to learn and understand new languages, opening doors to international opportunities. This is especially important in the context of globalization, where businesses and educational institutions increasingly value multilingual abilities and cross-cultural competencies (Kehinde, 2019).

Furthermore, cultivating a reading culture can have mental health benefits. Studies show that reading can reduce stress, improve emotional intelligence, and serve as a form of escapism that allows individuals to relax and recharge (Adewale & Olagunju, 2020). Engaging with books—whether fiction or non-fiction—can provide a sense of comfort, reduce anxiety, and even help individuals process their own experiences by relating to the characters and situations they encounter in texts.

The benefits of reading literacy and a strong reading culture are vast, ranging from cognitive and academic advantages to social, creative, and emotional well-being. As we continue to emphasize the importance of reading in educational systems and communities, it becomes

clear that fostering a culture of literacy is not just a personal gain but a societal necessity. 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 should incorporate strategies from schema theory, which emphasizes that prior experiences enhance comprehension through vocabulary development and graphic organizers (Oluwabamide, 2020).
3. **Fluency:** Fluency refers to the ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with appropriate expression. It serves as a bridge between word recognition and

comprehension. Fluent readers can read smoothly and expressively, enabling them to concentrate on the meaning of the text rather than on the mechanics of reading (Rasinski, 2017). Fluency is often developed through repeated reading and guided oral reading sessions, helping students build confidence and improve their reading speed and accuracy (Okeke, 2021).

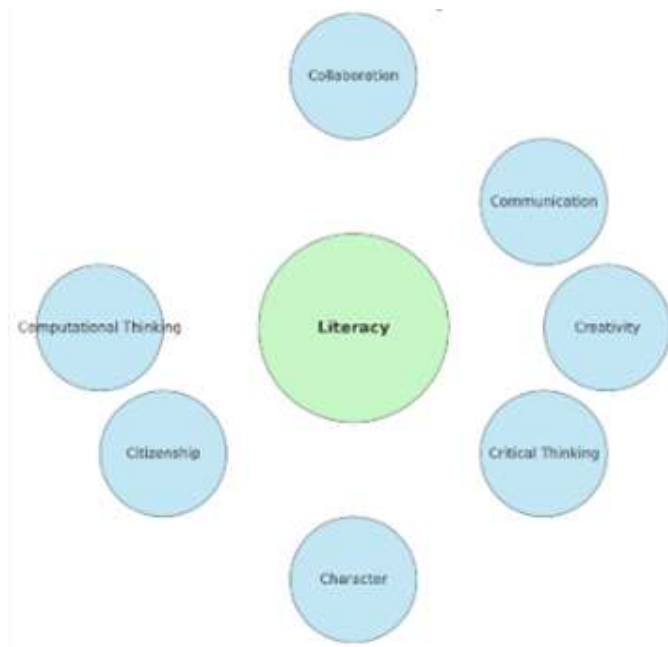
4. **Integration of Components:** The interplay between word recognition, comprehension, and fluency is essential for effective reading. These components are interconnected; improved word recognition enhances fluency, which in turn supports comprehension. Strong comprehension skills can also facilitate the recognition and understanding of new words (National Reading Panel, 2020). Holistic reading programmes in Nigerian schools that address all three components simultaneously are vital for developing proficient readers.
5. **Educational Implications:** Recognizing the multifaceted nature of reading has significant implications for educational practices. Teachers should adopt a balanced approach that incorporates instruction in word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. This comprehensive strategy ensures students develop all the necessary skills to become proficient readers. For example, integrating phonics lessons, comprehension strategies, and fluency-building activities into daily instruction can enhance the learning experience (Duke & Pearson, 2017). In resource-limited settings like Nigeria, innovative methods, such as using local languages and culturally relevant materials, can further enrich reading instruction (Ezeokoli, 2018).
6. **Cultural Relevance:** To effectively engage students, literacy programmes should reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Nigeria. Utilizing stories, texts, and examples that resonate with students' backgrounds fosters a deeper connection to reading materials. This culturally responsive approach not only promotes engagement

but also enhances comprehension and retention, making reading more meaningful for students.

7. **Community Involvement:** Engaging communities in literacy initiatives is crucial for fostering a culture of reading. Collaborating with parents, local organizations, and community leaders can provide additional resources and support for literacy programmes. Community-based reading clubs and libraries can serve as vital hubs for literacy development, encouraging collaborative learning and sustained interest in reading.
8. **Technological Integration:** Embracing technology in literacy education can enhance learning experiences and accessibility. Digital platforms, e-books, and online resources can supplement traditional reading materials, offering diverse and interactive ways for students to engage with texts. As technology becomes more prevalent, incorporating these tools into reading instruction can help bridge gaps in resources and support literacy development.
9. **Continuous Assessment:** Why? Regular assessment of reading skills is essential to identify areas of strength and weakness among students. Ongoing evaluations can inform instructional practices and help tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of learners. By monitoring progress, educators can adapt their teaching strategies to ensure all students receive the support they need to succeed in reading.
10. **Policy Support:** Effective reading literacy programmes require strong policy support from government and educational authorities. Policymakers must prioritize literacy development by allocating resources, providing training for educators, and establishing frameworks for effective reading instruction. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders can create an environment that nurtures reading literacy and promotes long-term educational success in Nigeria.

### 3.1.3 The 7 C's of Literacy

The concept of literacy has expanded beyond the traditional ability to read and write, encompassing a broader set of skills essential for success in the 21st century. These skills, often referred to as the 7 C's of Literacy, include Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Character, Citizenship, and Computational Thinking. Each of these components plays a critical role in shaping well-rounded, literate individuals who can navigate the complexities of modern society.



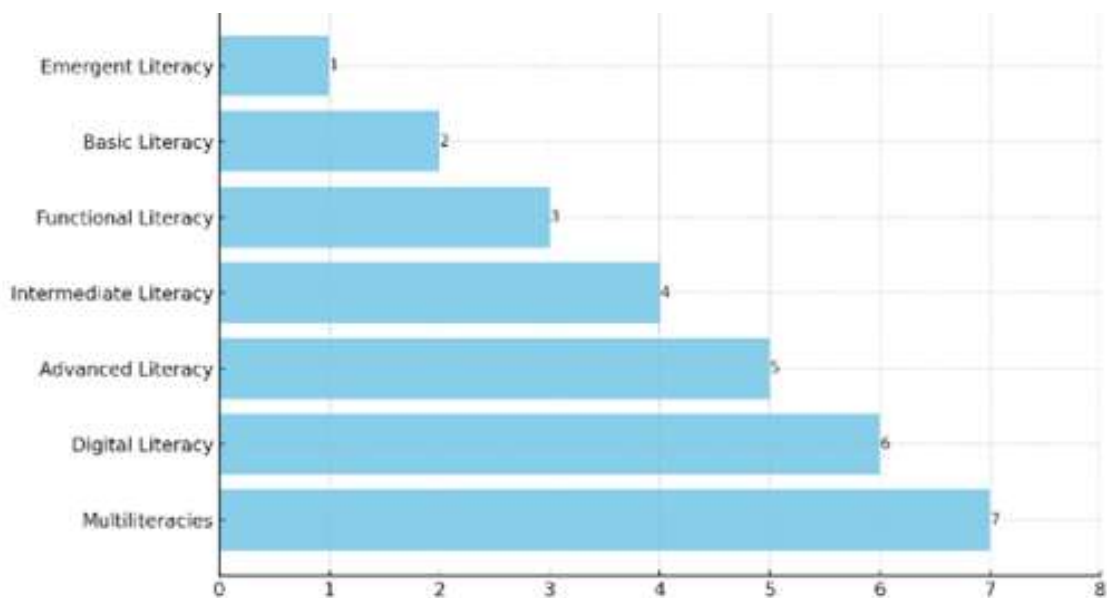
**Fig. 2: 7Cs of Literacy**  
**Source: Authors design (2024)**

Collaboration involves working effectively with others to achieve a common goal, particularly in literacy where students engage in reading and writing projects together, exchanging ideas, and offering feedback. This fosters diverse perspectives and enhances comprehension through activities like group discussions. Communication refers to the ability to express ideas clearly in both written and spoken forms, crucial for academic and professional success. Creativity encourages original thinking in literacy, allowing students to

generate unique interpretations and write compelling stories. Critical thinking enables students to analyze texts for validity and bias, deepening their understanding. Character involves developing traits like integrity and empathy through engagement with texts, while citizenship focuses on using literacy skills to participate actively in civic life. Lastly, computational thinking enhances problem-solving in literacy by utilizing digital tools, which are increasingly important in a tech-driven world and in the 4th Industrial Revolution.

### 3.1.4 The 7 Levels of Literacy

The 7 levels will expose the different levels of attainment in reading literacy. According to UNESCO (2022), the seven levels of literacy represents a continuum of skill development essential for individual and societal progress, beginning with emergent literacy, basic literacy, functional literacy, intermediate literacy, advanced literacy, digital literacy and multi literacies.



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



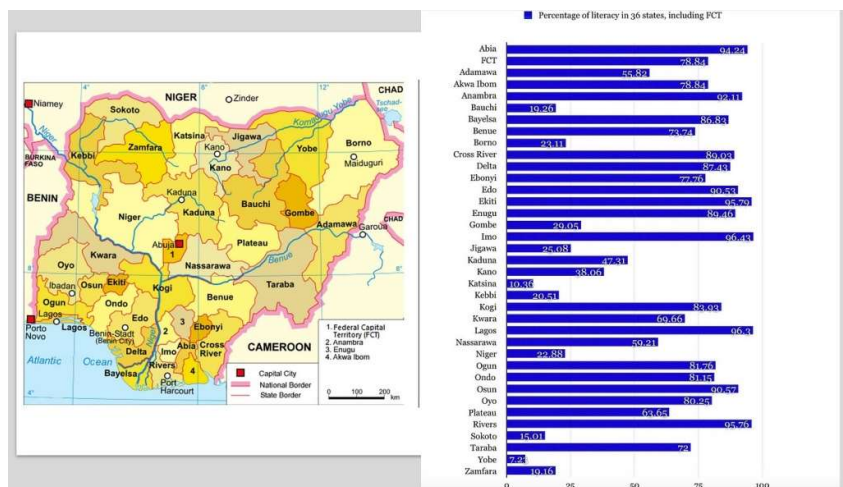
The chart presents a visual representation of different levels of literacy, progressing from **Emergent Literacy** to **Multi literacies**. Here's a brief discussion of each literacy level based on the chart:

1. **Emergent Literacy:** This is the foundational level, where individuals are just beginning to develop an awareness of reading and writing. It includes the understanding that symbols (such as letters) represent sounds and that words carry meaning. This stage is critical in early childhood education, where children are introduced to books, letters, and storytelling. (Story of Man clutching a magazine).
2. **Basic Literacy:** At this level, individuals can recognize and decode simple words and phrases. They possess the fundamental skills of reading and writing but may still struggle with more complex texts. Basic literacy is essential for everyday activities such as reading signs, following simple instructions, or filling out basic forms.
3. **Functional Literacy:** This level refers to the ability to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic tasks well enough to function effectively in everyday life. Functional literacy enables individuals to handle tasks such as managing money, understanding health information, or filling out job applications.
4. **Intermediate Literacy:** Individuals with intermediate literacy can engage with more complex texts and writing tasks. They can read newspapers and analyze them, read books and appreciate them, understand detailed instructions, and write coherent paragraphs.
5. **Advanced Literacy:** Advanced literacy involves a higher level of comprehension and expression. Individuals can analyze texts, engage in critical thinking, and write well-structured essays or reports. This level is necessary for higher education and professional environments where complex communication is required.

6. **Digital Literacy:** 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 36 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:

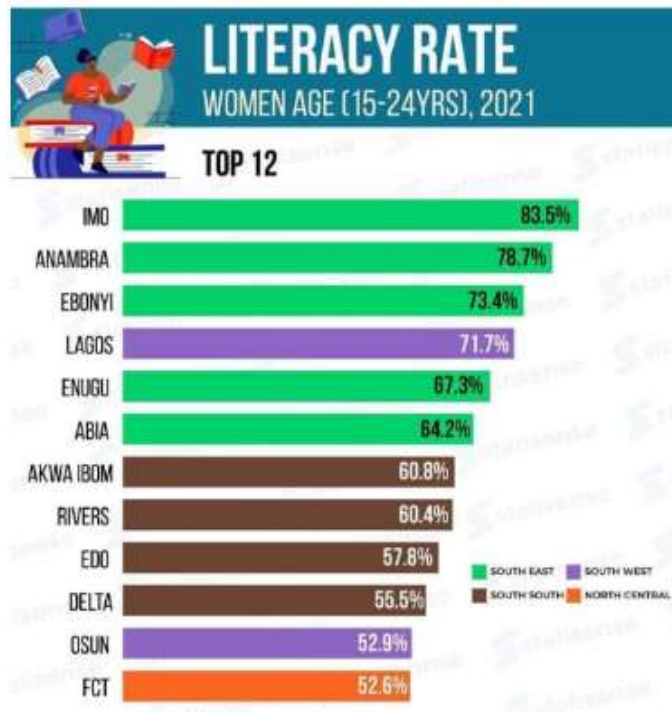
The key observations from the chart reveal significant disparities in literacy rates across different states in Nigeria. States like Lagos, Imo, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) exhibit the highest literacy rates, surpassing 75%. These states benefit from better infrastructure, access to quality 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%. These states, located mainly in southern and central Nigeria, experience a blend of urban and rural conditions. While urban centers tend to have better access to education, rural areas still struggle with resource allocation and accessibility, leading to some gaps in literacy levels. There is potential for growth in these areas, especially with targeted educational policies focusing on rural development.

At the lower end of the spectrum, northern states like Borno, Yobe, and Zamfara face severe literacy challenges, with rates below 25%. The reasons are multifaceted, including insecurity caused by insurgencies, particularly Boko Haram (they have been known for inhibiting western education), widespread poverty, and cultural factors that limit access to education for certain groups, especially girls. The regional divide is also evident, as northern Nigeria struggles with vast rural areas and less access to educational infrastructure compared to the urbanized and industrialized southern states.

This north-south literacy divide highlights the historical and socio-economic factors influencing educational disparities.

### 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**

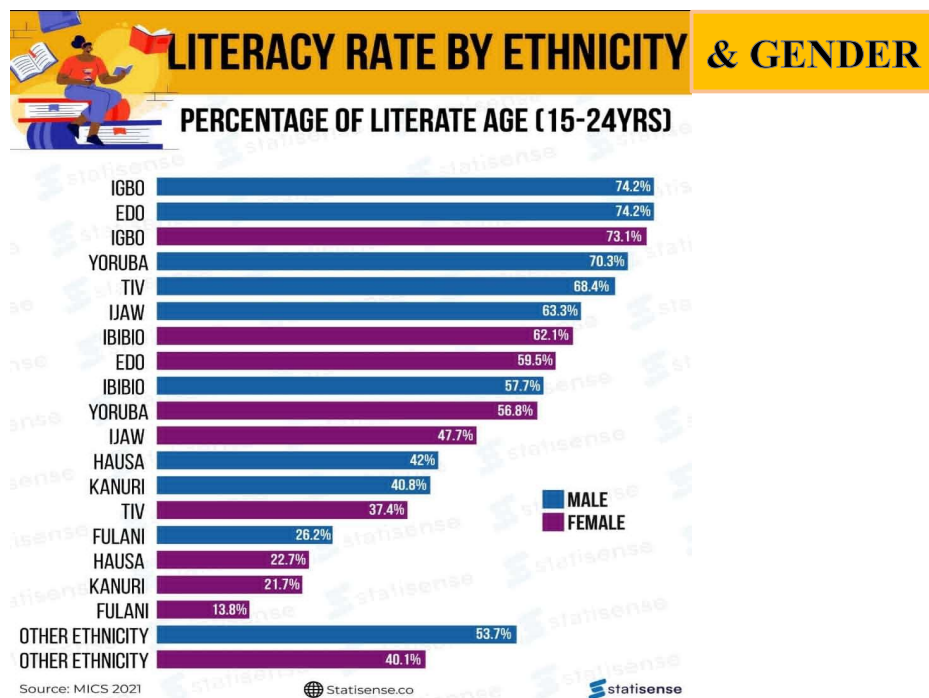
The chart in Fig. 5 illustrates the literacy rate of women aged 15-24 across various Nigerian states in 2021, providing insight into regional disparities in female literacy. Imo State, located in the Southeast, leads with a literacy rate of 83.5%, followed by Anambra (78.7%) and Ebonyi (73.4%), also in the Southeast. These high literacy rates in the Southeast reflect significant investments in female education, as well as cultural factors that prioritize schooling for women. Lagos, the economic hub in the Southwest, ranks fourth with a 71.7% literacy rate, indicating that urban areas with better infrastructure and more resources tend to yield higher literacy levels.

Conversely, states like the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Osun, both in the Southwest, show lower literacy rates for women at 52.6% and 52.9%, respectively. This suggests that

despite the urban and central positioning of the FCT, systemic challenges such as access to quality education and gender disparities may still impact literacy rates. Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Edo, from the South-South region, show moderate literacy rates ranging from 57.8%, to 60.8% reflecting the varied success of educational policies and socio-economic factors in the Niger Delta region.

The chart highlights the need for targeted interventions in the areas where literacy is lagging, particularly in states like Delta (55.5%) and Osun (52.9%). This gap underscores the necessity for continued government and community-based efforts to address educational inequalities, provide better access to learning resources, and promote gender equity 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



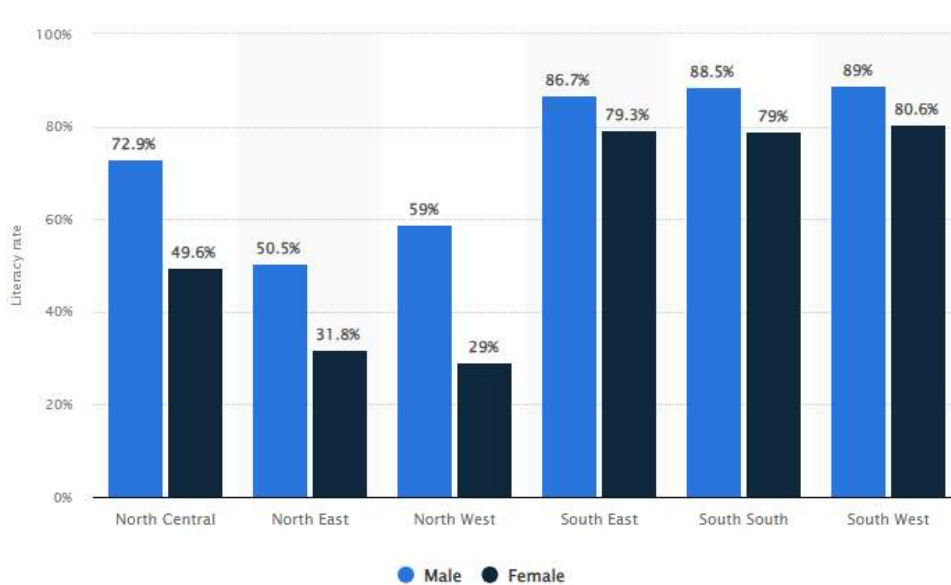
**Fig. 6: Literacy Rates by Ethnicity and gender**  
**Source: MIC Statistense 2021**

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. These northern regions are affected by economic issues like poverty, cultural restrictions on female education, general feudal system and insecurity, all of which contribute to low literacy rates, especially for women. The chart reflects the need for targeted educational reforms to address these disparities, particularly in the north and among women in these communities. (Statisence, 2021).

### 3.2.3 Literacy rate in Nigeria, by zone and gender



**Fig. 7: Literacy rate in Nigeria by zone and gender**

**Source: Statista 2018**

The chart provides an insightful comparison of literacy rates between males and females across different geopolitical zones in Nigeria, underscoring gender disparities in education.

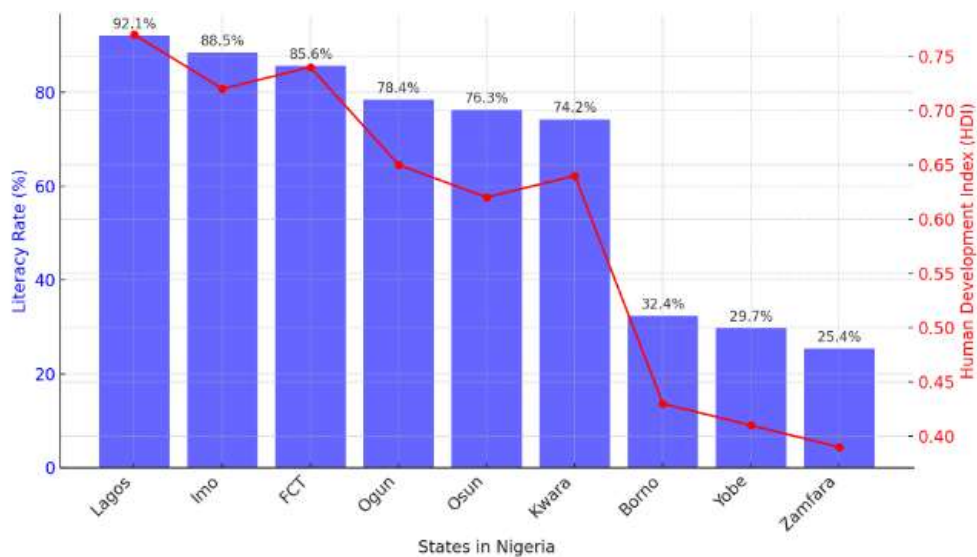
#### 1. Northern Zones (North Central, North East, and North West):

In the North Central zone, male literacy stands at 72.9%, significantly higher than the female rate of 49.6%. The North East exhibits an even greater disparity, with male literacy at 50.5%, while female literacy is as low as 31.8%. The North West zone records the lowest overall literacy rates, with males at 59% and females trailing far behind at 29%, reflecting a pronounced gender gap in education in the northern regions. Factors such as cultural norms, insecurity, and early marriage are likely contributing to these gaps.

## 2. Southern Zones (South East, South South, and South West):

In contrast, the southern zones show comparatively higher literacy rates for both genders. In the South East, male literacy is 86.7%, with female literacy not far behind at 79.3%. The South South zone demonstrates similar trends, with male literacy at 88.5% and female literacy at 79%. In the South West, both males and females exhibit high literacy rates, at 89% and 80.6%, respectively. These higher rates are indicative of better access to education and stronger government initiatives in the southern zones. The chart highlights the stark regional disparities in literacy, with southern zones achieving significantly higher rates for both genders, while the northern zones, particularly the North West and North East, face more severe educational challenges. Addressing these gaps requires targeted interventions to improve access to education for females, especially in the northern regions, by promoting girl-child education, reducing early marriages, and improving infrastructure.

### 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 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 \$4.45 billion 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 countries 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 Bank’s Human Capital Development Index. Nigeria was ranked 167th out of 174 countries in Human Capital Development. Again World Bank laments that a child born in **Nigeria today is expected to be only 36%** as productive as they 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,

The socio-economic factors affecting reading literacy in Nigeria are deeply rooted in systemic inequalities that hinder educational access and opportunity. 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 being outdated and disconnected from students' real-world experiences. If literacy development hinges on engagement and relevance, can a rigid, one-size-fits-all curriculum truly cultivate effective reading skills? The answer lies in revising the curriculum to reflect students' sociocultural contexts, incorporating interactive and student-centered teaching methods that encourage critical thinking and engagement with texts. For instance, introducing problem-based learning (PBL) and other modern pedagogical methods can foster a deeper understanding of reading materials, as these approaches guide students within their ZPD through real-world problem-solving activities. Could Nigeria's curriculum reform efforts benefit from incorporating strategies that focus on developing critical literacy skills, such as analyzing texts and forming independent judgments?

The lack of trained teachers is a major barrier to literacy, and Vygotsky's theory points to the need for "more knowledgeable teachers" to facilitate learning. However, Nigeria struggles with a shortage of well-trained teachers, especially in rural areas. 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, in particular, lack the internet connectivity needed to access online resources or digital learning platforms (Ojo & Samuel, 2020). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, digital tools act as mediators in literacy learning. However, the lack of infrastructure perpetuates inequality between students from well-resourced urban schools and those in rural or

impoverished communities (Amobi & Ekechi, 2019). The Nigerian government must prioritize expanding internet access and investing in digital infrastructure for rural schools. Can Nigeria learn from countries like Kenya and India, which have implemented mobile learning solutions and low-cost devices in rural areas to promote digital literacy? Such initiatives can be replicated and scaled up in Nigeria to ensure that students everywhere can benefit from technological tools.

The digital divide also exacerbates the socio-economic gap in literacy outcomes. Can literacy truly improve if only a fraction of students can access the tools required to learn? This question underscores a core issue: inequality in access to technology directly contributes to the growing disparity in reading literacy between wealthier and poorer students (Amobi & Ekechi, 2019). Urban students with access to technology develop stronger digital literacy skills, while rural and economically disadvantaged students are left behind. What steps can be taken to provide equitable access to digital resources for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background? Solutions could include subsidies for digital devices, teacher training in digital literacy, and expanding free **Wi-Fi** zones in underserved areas. By leveling the playing field and ensuring that all students have access to the tools necessary for modern literacy, Nigeria can take significant strides in improving overall reading literacy across the country.

## **4.2 Consequences of Poor Reading Literacy**

Here we look at possible consequences of poor reading literacy in Nigeria

The consequences of poor reading literacy in Nigeria ripple across multiple facets of life, affecting individuals, society, and the economy. According to Functional Literacy Theory, literacy extends beyond the mere ability to read. It involves applying reading skills to everyday tasks, decision-making, and social engagement (UNESCO, 2006). However,

Nigeria's low reading literacy rates present significant obstacles to achieving this ideal. How can individuals function effectively in society if they cannot navigate written information, solve problems, or make informed decisions? 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 more access to educational and cultural resources, which facilitates the development of literacy skills. In contrast, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in rural Nigeria, have fewer opportunities to acquire these skills (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2018). For instance, children in rural areas often attend under-resourced schools where access to books and trained teachers is limited. How can these children be expected to compete with their urban counterparts in academic or career pursuits? This disparity perpetuates a cycle of poverty, as illiteracy leads to fewer opportunities, further entrenching socio-economic divides. If Nigeria is to address these deep-rooted inequalities, a concerted effort must be made to provide equitable access to literacy resources for all citizens.

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

The teaching and learning of reading literacy in Nigeria has traditionally been dominated by teacher-centered methods, which are primarily focused on rote memorization and repetition (Adeosun, 2017). These approaches often emphasize phonics and word recognition but do not always foster deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills, which are crucial for literacy development. While these methods have had some success in helping students acquire basic reading skills, they fall short in fostering a comprehensive understanding of texts or promoting engagement with complex reading materials.

There has been a growing emphasis on more student-centered approaches, such as “**the balanced literacy approach**”. This method integrates various instructional strategies, including guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading, to build both foundational reading skills and higher-order thinking skills. According to **Duke and Pearson (2017)**, the balanced literacy approach offers a more holistic framework for developing reading literacy, as it recognizes the need to engage students at multiple levels of literacy- from basic word recognition to critical analysis and comprehension.

The **Sociocultural theory**, advanced by **Vygotsky**,(1978) provides a useful lens for understanding reading literacy pedagogy in Nigeria. Vygotsky emphasized the role of social interaction and cultural context in learning, positing that literacy development occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, parents, or peers. In Nigeria, this theory highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching, where educators use local languages and culturally relevant materials to enhance students' understanding and engagement with texts. The diversity of Nigeria's linguistic and cultural landscape necessitates such an approach, as it aligns the curriculum with the students' social realities, thereby improving literacy outcomes.

However, despite the merits of this theory, the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in Nigerian schools faces significant challenges. The current language policy, which prioritizes English as the medium of instruction, often creates barriers for children who speak indigenous languages 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 further aggravated by the high teacher-pupil ratios in many public schools, which limit teachers' ability to provide individualized instruction and support.

In light of this, the question arises:

- How can Nigeria's teacher training programmes be reformed to incorporate more effective pedagogical approaches to reading literacy?

One potential solution is to integrate digital literacy into teacher training, enabling educators to use technology to enhance reading instruction. This would not only address the immediate needs posed by the digital divide but also prepare teachers to foster digital literacy alongside traditional literacy in their classrooms.

The pedagogical approaches to reading literacy in Nigeria must be interrogated through a multifaceted lens that includes sociocultural, economic, and technological considerations. The traditional methods of rote learning and memorization have proven insufficient in equipping students with the comprehensive literacy skills needed for the 21st century. The **Functionalist theory** offers a useful framework for understanding how culturally responsive teaching can improve literacy outcomes but challenges remain in the form of language policy. Talking about the current challenges, including the impact of the pandemic and ongoing insecurity in the North, it is crucial that educational stakeholders continue to ask difficult questions about how to reform the literacy education system in Nigeria. By leveraging innovative pedagogical strategies, digital tools, and community-based initiatives, there is hope for bridging the literacy gap and empowering the next generation of Nigerian students.



## SECTION FIVE

### CASE STUDIES/SUCCESS STORIES

A few case studies will be high-lighted to show what has worked in other countries and whether they can be tried in Nigeria. Reading literacy in Nigeria has faced persistent challenges, but recent efforts through various literacy programmes and initiatives offer some positive developments and opportunities for improvement. These programmes aim to address the structural and socio-economic factors that hinder literacy development, and many are beginning to yield significant results. Additionally, lessons from other countries with successful literacy programmes provide valuable insights for Nigeria's literacy agenda.

#### 5.1 Literacy Programmes and Initiatives: Evaluation

**Effective reading literacy programmes in Nigeria** have emerged as crucial tools in combating the nation's literacy crisis. One successful initiative is the *Reading and Numeracy Activity* (RANA) programme, a USAID-supported project that focuses on improving early-grade reading and numeracy in Northern Nigeria. The programme's approach incorporates local languages, which enhances comprehension among students in rural and marginalized communities (USAID, 2019). This initiative demonstrates how using mother-tongue instruction in the early years can promote literacy development more effectively than exclusive reliance on English. By adapting to the linguistic realities of Nigeria, RANA has seen considerable success in improving reading outcomes among young children, a critical step in addressing Nigeria's overall literacy challenges.

Another notable initiative is the *Reading for All* project, FHI 360 in collaboration with Ministry of Education which provides access to reading materials for children in underserved communities. It was Reading and Numeracy Activity for Katsina and Zamfara States

Launched by the Nigerian government in collaboration with international partners,(UNICEF) this programme focuses on creating a reading culture by establishing libraries and distributing books to schools in both rural and urban areas (Uwe, 2020). The project's strength lies in its multi-stakeholder approach, involving not only government agencies but also civil society organizations and private-sector actors. Despite Nigeria's ongoing economic struggles, these collaborations are helping to bridge the gap between literacy aspirations and actual implementation.

More recently, the *Lagos State Literacy Intervention (Programme LIP)* has been successful in addressing reading literacy gaps in urban areas. This programme aims to provide remedial reading classes for children who are behind in their reading skills. One of the innovative elements of this programme is its integration of digital literacy, allowing students to use e-books and online reading resources. The programme has reportedly improved the reading levels of over 10,000 students in Lagos State since its inception in 2018 (Olawale, 2021). The success of this programme highlights the importance of blending traditional literacy practices with modern technology in addressing literacy challenges.

Looking beyond Nigeria, **best practices from other countries** can offer valuable insights into improving reading literacy. One such example is South Africa's *Read to Lead Campaign*, launched by the Department of Basic Education in 2015. This initiative was designed to improve the reading skills of learners across the country and encourage a culture of reading through the involvement of teachers, parents, and the broader community. The campaign provides free reading materials and offers teacher training programmes, which have helped strengthen reading instruction in South African schools (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). For Nigeria, adopting a similar national campaign, which mobilizes all levels of society, could be a transformative approach to improving reading literacy.

In another successful case, Finland has consistently ranked at the top in global literacy assessments. The country's success can be attributed to its holistic and inclusive approach to education. Finnish schools emphasize the development of reading literacy from an early age, using child-centered methods that focus on individual learning needs and promote a love for reading. Furthermore, teachers in Finland are well-trained in literacy instruction and are provided with substantial autonomy to implement teaching strategies that best suit their students (Sahlberg, 2015). Nigeria can learn from Finland's teacher development strategies by investing more in teacher training programmes that focus on literacy instruction.

In Kenya, the *Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity* has achieved remarkable results in improving literacy among young children. Tusome, funded by USAID and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), provides structured reading materials in both English and Kiswahili, along with teacher training and coaching. The programme's success lies in its clear goals, systematic assessments, and accountability mechanisms, which ensure that reading interventions are effectively implemented in schools (Piper et al., 2018). By employing similar structured literacy programmes, Nigeria can replicate Kenya's achievements in literacy improvement.

In recent years, Ethiopia has also made strides in literacy development through its *Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed* (READ) programme. This initiative focuses on producing high-quality reading materials in local languages, training teachers, and developing community reading programmes. The success of READ in increasing literacy levels, particularly in rural areas, showcases the importance of culturally relevant literacy materials and community involvement (Rose et al., 2017). Nigeria, with its linguistic diversity, can adopt Ethiopia's approach of leveraging local languages to improve reading comprehension and literacy.

The adoption of these international best practices in Nigeria could be instrumental in tackling literacy challenges. For instance, the use of local languages in early reading instruction, as seen in programmes like RANA, aligns with the successful models from Ethiopia and Kenya. Furthermore, Finland's focus on teacher autonomy and training resonates with the urgent need for improving teacher quality in Nigeria, where many teachers still lack the necessary skills to teach reading effectively.

These case studies and success stories demonstrate that progress is possible with the right policies, resources, and community engagement. For Nigeria to scale up its literacy programmes and achieve widespread success there needs to be a coordinated effort that integrates lessons from these initiatives. Moreover, sustained government commitment, adequate funding, and accountability mechanisms are essential to ensure that literacy programmes reach their full potential.

## SECTION SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the state of reading literacy in Nigeria presents both significant challenges and critical opportunities for national development. The persistent socio-economic disparities, educational inadequacies, and infrastructural gaps that hinder reading literacy need urgent attention. Efforts to improve reading literacy in Nigeria must be multifaceted, incorporating government initiatives, community-based programmes, and technological innovations. Government policies that prioritize education funding, teacher training, and literacy programmes are critical steps forward. Additionally, community-driven initiatives, such as reading clubs and libraries, provide grassroots support that can ignite a culture of reading. The integration of technology, through e-learning platforms and digital resources, offers new avenues for improving access to learning materials, especially in underserved areas. However, these strategies must be tailored to Nigeria's unique linguistic and cultural landscape, promoting literacy in indigenous languages alongside English.

The importance of teacher training and continuous professional development cannot be overstated. Teachers play a central role in fostering literacy, and equipping them with the necessary skills and resources is vital for the success of any literacy improvement strategy. The use of relevant theories, such as the sociocultural theory, reinforces the need for literacy practices to be contextually grounded, taking into account the diverse languages, cultures, and experiences of Nigerian students. Collaborative efforts between the government, educators, parents, and communities are essential for sustaining progress and achieving long-term success in reading literacy.

Ultimately, improving reading literacy in Nigeria is not just an educational goal but a national imperative. Literacy is foundational for economic development, social cohesion, and civic engagement. By tackling the root causes of poor literacy, implementing targeted strategies, and leveraging Nigeria's rich cultural and linguistic diversity, the nation can create a future where literacy is accessible to all, empowering individuals and driving collective progress.

## **Recommendations**

To address the complex challenges of reading literacy in Nigeria, we propose a multifaceted approach that tackles policy, socio-economic, linguistic, and initiative-related factors.

1. Our recommendations include strengthening the policy framework and funding for education and literacy programmes.
2. Addressing socio-economic disparities through community-based initiatives.
3. Leveraging Nigeria's linguistic diversity through mother-tongue-based education.
4. Enhancing existing literacy initiatives through teacher training, technology integration, and partnerships.

By implementing these strategic measures, Nigeria can significantly improve reading literacy rates, bridge the educational divide, and foster a culture of reading that benefits individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole.

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