



THE READER'S JOURNEY: NAVIGATING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF LITERACY

by

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PUBLIC LECTURE TO COMMEMORATE

The UNESCO

International World Book and Copyright Day

In celebration of Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library Week,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 22-24 April, 2025.

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The Reader's Journey: Navigating National Development through the Lens of Literacy

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Guest Lecture to Commemorate

The UNESCO
International World Book and Copyright Day

on the 23rd of April, 2025

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ABSTRACT

There are some 13 countries in the world where the adult literacy rate is 100%. In Africa, the three leading countries in terms of the adult literacy rates are Seychelles (95.9%), Equatorial Guinea (95.3%) and South Africa (95%), respectively. On the other hand, Nigeria is ranked 36th out of the 54 countries of Africa with a low adult literacy rate of 62%, comprising 71.3% for Male and 52.7% for Female in 2018. Moreover, about 18.3 million children in Nigeria are out of school, with 10.2 million of primary school age and another 8.1 million of junior secondary school age. This number represents one in every five of the world's out-of-school children, making the country home to the largest number of out-of-school children globally. The literacy index in Nigeria is poor in spite of the fact that the National Policy on Education (2013) clearly stipulates that Basic Education, the education given to children aged 0 to 15 years, shall be compulsory, tuition-free, universal and qualitative. The low literacy rate in Nigeria has adversely affected the Gross Domestic Product per capita and the Human Development Index. By prioritizing literacy, which can be acquired through formal education, informal education and self-directed learning, including personal reading and exploration, and addressing the challenges that limit access to education, the full potential of individuals can be unlocked, and thereby promote sustainable development and growth. The ways University Libraries can promote Information Seeking Behaviour are outlined in this paper.

Keywords: reading, literacy, out-of-school children, national development, national policy on education

INTRODUCTION

I wish to thank the University Librarian at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Dr. Olukemi A. Fadehan, CLN, for the invitation extended to me as a Guest Speaker at this public lecture as part of the activities to commemorate the UNESCO International World Book and Copyright Day within the activities marking the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library Week celebrations. I acknowledge the Management of the University for this opportunity. I have always been highly impressed by the great works done at this citadel of learning, whose motto is '*For Learning and Culture*'. It is gratifying that the leaders of your University, both past and present, have more than justified the vision of the founding fathers over the past six and a half decades. I must also add that I feel doubly proud that your University Library System has been deservedly named after Professor Hezekiah Adedunmola Oluwasanmi (1919 to 1983), your second Vice-Chancellor who was in the saddle here from 1966 till 1975. He was reputed to be the first Nigerian Professor of Agricultural Economics and one of the most famous old students to have been produced by my alma mater, the famous Ilesa Grammar School, Ilesa. We pray for the continued success of Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library System and the repose of the soul of the eminent scholar-administrator Professor Oluwasanmi.

The topic of this lecture is '*The Reader's Journey: Navigating National Development through the Lens of Literacy*'. The topic has been conceived to create a national awareness that reading engagement and intentional positive information-seeking behavior as correlates of the national development process, which could be exemplified in all spheres of life (personal, educational, social, economic, local, and international).

Attempt would be made to cover all types of literacies that are essential for all areas of human, national, and international advancement. For instance, aside from reading for educational purposes or for the development of human capital, what is the importance of reading/studying culture/information access and use

on the economy, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), political health, foreign policy, etc.?

To this end, the perspectives/testimonials of a non-information manager/provider (e.g., not a librarian but an information user), the group to which I belong in this case, are considered as potent enough to motivate the audience and society and engender a positive reading culture, information consciousness and awareness, a vibrant information-seeking behavior, data generation, conservation and integration, and information utilization with desirable value chains. I am a Geoscientist and to be asked to talk on a topic that is largely within the domain of librarians and information scientists would imply that I have to leave my comfort zone. In a manner of speaking, then I have to interact with you from the position of a ‘bare foot expert’.

The University Librarian has asked me to address among others the challenges we face as a nation in these spheres, including our policy choices. What should be our takeaways (for the academic community, Nigerians, and the world) on this auspicious day, World Book and Copyright Day? Even as the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library of Obafemi Awolowo University Library System celebrates Library Week, what is the role of librarians in this sphere? What should be the right attitude of university management to librarians and library services? What are the suggestions on the way forward?

In preparing this lecture, I have identified the following keywords: reading, literacy, out of school children, and national development. These issues shall be addressed within the context of the detailed terms of reference given by the University Librarian.

Understanding the Literacy Malalignment

It is desirable at this juncture to attempt a general overview of some noticeable mismatch or malalignment in the way the developing nations conceive some concepts such as reading, literacy and education. Oftentimes, reading is conceived as a major

element or component of literacy. Again, mostly to achieve vertical education, it is usually meant to facilitate education from the cradle and probably to tertiary level at its best. This concept has left our environment and economies bereft of development and excellence. The mismatch here is exemplified by the fact that we see reading only as an act needed for examination purposes. Once this concept is skewed, there is a limit to the amount/level of literacy individuals and the nation can attain at any point in time.

By and large, education is perceived as a pursuit to put bread on the table essentially. Societal structural development is thereby thrown to the winds. Students struggle to read and pass while teachers also only read to pass on formal education as well as earn a living. Again, libraries are currently barely consulted, mainly for bookish exercises, while other types of literacies remain untapped.

It is obvious that most students in our public primary and secondary schools leave without any library engagement as there are no libraries in existence. The current alibi has been the prevalence of the information and Communication Technology (ICT). Even at that, the electronic devices are under-utilised for positive development. It only requires a profound reading exercise to be able to effectively and efficiently reap the fruits of the Internet. A good reader will always be a fruitful Internet user and a reading nation is a prosperous nation.

The art of reading has been eroded and is getting more unpopular by the day. The fire brigade attitude has taken over the learning process. The irony is that despite the information overload globally, the poorer nations are those who have not been able to explore reading and integrate same effectively into the development processes.

To this end, I will proceed to examine what the literacies entail. May I add at this juncture that as UNESCO has rightly conceptualised that the past and present of development is hidden in books, primarily in traditional books and secondarily, as facilitated by the ICT (which is mainly a medium but not an end in itself). As we proceed, we will discover all the elements of the

literacies that are desirable for survival and the required information seeking attitude required to pursue them.

Meaning of literacy

Literacy refers to the ability to read, write, and communicate effectively, as well as to understand and interpret various forms of information. It involves a range of skills, as defined by UNESCO (2025a):

Acquiring literacy is not a one-off act. Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world. Literacy is a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills. Literacy skills themselves are expanding and evolving as people engage more and more with information and learning through digital technology.

UNESCO has been working to realise the vision of literacy for all since 1946 in the belief that acquiring and improving literacy skills throughout life is an intrinsic part of the right to education and brings with it huge empowerment and benefits. However, despite progress globally, 754 million adults still cannot read and write. Literacy drives sustainable development, enables greater participation in the labour market, improves child and family health and nutrition, reduces poverty and expands life opportunities (UNESCO, 2025b). Literacy is a lifelong process (Zua, 2021).

The following literacies can be considered essential in all areas of human, national and international advancement:

(a). Reading and Writing

Traditional definitions of literacy usually refer to the ability to read and write. Reading is the ability to understand and interpret written text, including words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Writing is the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and opinions in written form, using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

These are skills that can be developed over time, and they should be practiced regularly. More than just knowing how to read and write basic letters and sentences (although this is a great start), this literacy means that you can understand and communicate what you have read and that you can express yourself through writing (Gaspesie Literacy Council, 2025). Literacy in reading and writing is more about the capacity of people to read and write in the official language of instruction of the country in which they live, and not in English language (Onwuka, 2024).

While reading offers benefits for development of literacy and other academic skills, it may also offer well-being benefits for readers. Research with a primarily adult sample found that reading can be a pleasurable escape with associated benefits for well-being (Merga, 2017), and readers often choose a book for pleasure and then find in it insights related to themselves, their lives, and their problems (Howard, 2011). More recent research has found that recreational reading is associated with reduced psychological distress and can be beneficial for mental health (Levine et al., 2020).

(b). Numerical Literacy

Numerical literacy is the ability to use basic mathematical skills in everyday life and the ability to use numbers to solve problems or manage finances. Going hand-in-hand with financial literacy, numerical literacy means: understanding charts, diagrams, and data; solve problems; check answers; explain solutions; use logic (Gaspesie Literacy Council, 2025).

(c). Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to use digital technologies, such as computers, smartphones, and the internet, to access, evaluate, and create information. Digital literacy means being able to critically use technology to navigate through various online forums and devices, understanding how technology works, and being able to creatively and inventively manipulate technology to solve problems. It goes hand in hand with media literacy. Basically, being digitally literate means being able to use technology to solve problems and to express yourself. Contrary to popular belief, young people are not necessarily digitally literate just because they are competent in using technology - it depends on what they use it for (Gaspésie Literacy Council, 2025).

(d). Health Literacy

This is the type of literacy that allows you to understand the health care system, such as: medications; Communicating with doctors and specialists; Getting the necessary help. Having poor health literacy skills is dangerous and can result in taking incorrect medications, trouble following instructions from your doctor about lifestyle, food, and referrals, missing appointments, and so on (Gaspésie Literacy Council, 2025).

(e). Financial Literacy

Going hand in hand with having good numeracy is the ability to understand and manage your finances. Financial literacy is having the knowledge, skills and confidence to make responsible financial decisions, including:

- Understanding how finances work and applying them to your life
-
- Planning for your financial future and managing your personal funds
- Being confident to make important decisions
- Navigating financial systems and institutions
- Making the best use of the resources you have

(Gaspésie Literacy Council, 2025)

(f). Information literacy

Information literacy empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. Information-literate people are able to access information about their health, their environment, their education and work, and to make critical decisions about their lives. In a digital world, information literacy requires users to have the skills to use information and communication technologies and their applications to access and create information (UNESCO, 2023).

(g). Media Literacy

Media Literacy refers to the ability to understand the messages you are being told on television, radio, video games, movies, news programmes, social media, and more. Essentially, media literacy means understanding:

- Media is constructed with a specific purpose in mind – it is designed to make you think in some way.
 - People will see the same thing but understand it differently
 - Constructing media is a business
 - It reflects political and cultural ideas
 - The type of story changes depending on the type of media
- (Gaspesie Literacy Council, 2025).

(h). Cultural Literacy

Cultural Literacy is the ability to understand all of the subtle nuances that come along with living or working in a particular society. It consists of understanding the language, methods, assumptions, and unstated ideas that make up a way to behave and communicate. It is specific to each culture, even the particular cultures that develop in a workplace or school, and most people are only literate in their own culture. The benefit of having a good understanding of cultural literacy is knowing how to avoid misunderstandings and communicate well with people of other cultures. Knowing your own cultural literacy makes you more empathetic and aware of others (Gaspesie Literacy Council, 2025).

(i). Emotional/Physical Literacy

Emotional literacy involves identifying, validating, and expressing your feelings, as well as recognizing and responding to the feelings of others.

Physical literacy is the development and repeated use of fine motor skills, balance, confident movement, and the enjoyment of being able to move with skill. Developing this literacy at an early age allows children to learn and think more easily. However, improving physical literacy is important at every age.

Having competent physical literacy is a fundamental tool for the development and expression of emotional literacy. In other words, the more comfortable you are in your own body, the more in tune you will be with your own feelings, and the more in tune you will be with the world (Gaspesie Literacy Council, 2025).

(j). Civic Literacy

According to the Connecticut State Library (2023), civic literacy is the knowledge of how to actively participate and initiate change in your community and the greater society. It is the foundation by which a democratic society functions. Puspaningtyas et al. (2024) noted that civic literacy is an essential ability that every citizen needs to have in the information age. Lack of civic knowledge and skills can result in actions such as easily provoked behaviour or disinformation from fake political information spread online.

While all the above literacies and other types of literacies not discussed in this lecture are important, focus is on the construct of literacy concerned with functional reading, writing, listening and speaking skills to meet communicative competence requirements needed for academic, vocational and social participation (Merga, 2021).

(k). Communication is the ability to convey and receive information effectively, using verbal and non-verbal means.

(I). Critical thinking is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information, making informed decisions and solving problems.

Literacy is essential for individuals to participate fully in society, make informed decisions, and achieve their goals. It is also critical for economic development, social mobility, and civic engagement. Literacy can be acquired through various means, including the following:

- (a). Formal education: Schools, universities, and other educational institutions.
- (b). Informal education: Community programmes, workshops, and online resources.
- (c). Self-directed learning: Personal reading, research, and exploration.

Who is an illiterate?

A pertinent question one may wish to ask is ‘Who is an illiterate?’. An illiterate person is someone who lacks the ability to read and write, or has very limited literacy skills. Illiteracy can be defined in different ways, but it generally refers to a person's inability to:

1. Read: Understand and interpret written text, including words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.
2. Write: Express thoughts, ideas, and opinions in written form, using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Illiteracy can be categorized into different levels, including:

1. Functional illiteracy: The inability to perform everyday tasks that require reading and writing, such as filling out forms or reading instructions.
2. Absolute illiteracy: The complete inability to read and write, often due to a lack of education or opportunities.
3. Relative illiteracy: The ability to read and write, but only at a very basic level, often due to limited education or practice.

Illiteracy can be caused by various factors, including:

1. **Lack of formal education:** Insufficient access to quality education, particularly in childhood and adolescence.
2. **Poverty:** Limited resources and opportunities, making it difficult to access education and literacy s.
3. **Learning disabilities:** Conditions such as dyslexia, which can make it challenging to learn to read and write.
4. **Language barriers:** Limited proficiency in the dominant language of a region or country, making it difficult to access education and literacy resources.

It's essential to note that illiteracy is not a reflection of a person's intelligence or potential. Rather it can be attributed to a lack of opportunities to someone to be educated. Many people who are illiterate are highly skilled and knowledgeable in other areas, and with the right support and resources, they can acquire literacy skills and improve their overall quality of life.

Role of literacy in Economic Growth and Development

Literacy plays a vital role in national development, and its importance cannot be overstated. Some of the reasons why literacy is crucial for national development are outlined below:

Economic Growth and Development

1. **Increased Productivity:** Literate individuals are more productive, as they can read instructions, understand policies, and adapt to new technologies.
2. **Improved Economic Opportunities:** Literacy opens up better job opportunities, enabling individuals to participate in the formal economy and contribute to the country's GDP.
3. **Reduced Poverty:** Literacy is a key factor in reducing poverty, as educated individuals are more likely to secure better-paying jobs and improve their socio-economic status.

Social Development

1. **Empowerment and Autonomy:** Literacy empowers individuals, especially women and marginalized groups, to

make informed decisions about their lives, health, and well-being.

2. **Improved Health Outcomes:** Literate individuals are more likely to understand health information, follow medical instructions, and adopt healthy behaviors.
3. **Social Mobility:** Literacy enables individuals to move up the social ladder, improving their social status and contributing to a more equitable society.

Political Development

1. **Informed Citizenship:** Literate individuals are more informed about their rights, duties, and civic responsibilities, enabling them to participate actively in the democratic process.
2. **Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills:** Literacy promotes critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling citizens to evaluate information, make informed decisions, and hold leaders accountable.
3. **Good Governance:** Literacy is essential for good governance, as it enables citizens to understand policies, participate in decision-making processes, and demand transparency and accountability.

Cultural Development

1. **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Literacy helps preserve cultural heritage by enabling individuals to read, write, and appreciate their cultural traditions.
2. **Promotion of Cultural Exchange:** Literacy facilitates cultural exchange, enabling individuals to understand and appreciate different cultures, and promoting global understanding and cooperation.

Challenges and Solutions

Despite the importance of literacy, many countries, including Nigeria, face significant challenges in promoting literacy. Some of these challenges include:

1. **Limited Access to Education:** Many individuals, especially in rural areas, lack access to quality education.
2. **Poor Quality of Education:** Even when education is available, the quality may be poor, leading to low literacy rates.
3. **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Socio-cultural barriers, such as gender inequality and cultural norms, can limit access to education and literacy.

To address these challenges, governments, civil society organizations, and individuals must work together to:

1. **Increase Access to Education:** Invest in education infrastructure, recruit and train more teachers, and promote inclusive education policies.
2. **Improve Quality of Education:** Implement rigorous teacher training programmes, develop relevant curricula, and provide adequate resources for learning.
3. **Address Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Promote gender equality, challenge cultural norms that limit access to education, and support community-based literacy programmes.

By prioritizing literacy and addressing the challenges that limit access to education, we can unlock the full potential of individuals, communities, and nations, and promote sustainable development and growth.

How do we measure National Development

National development is typically measured using a combination of economic, social, and environmental indicators. Here are some common ways to measure national development:

Economic Indicators

1. **Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** The total value of goods and services produced within a country's borders.
2. **GDP per capita:** GDP divided by the population, providing a measure of average income.

Figure 1 shows the 2024 GDP per capita for 20 countries in Africa with the highest GDP. Nigeria ranks 18th at USD890, compared to USD6,553 for South Africa, 6,139 for Libya and 5,579 for Algeria.

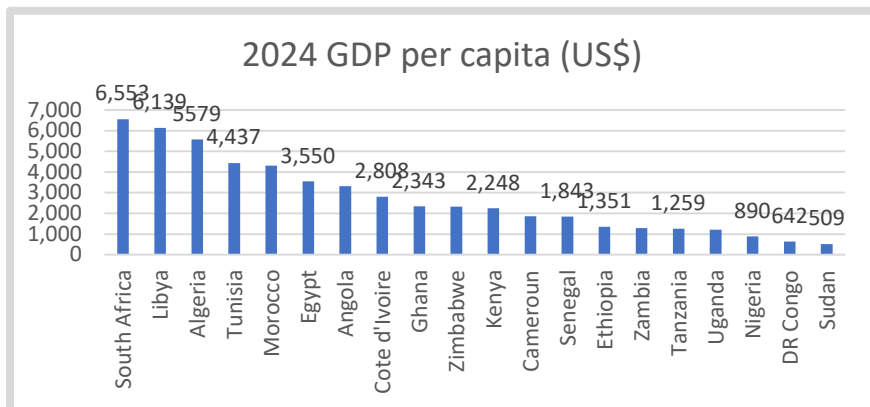


Figure 1: 2024 GDP per capita for 20 countries in Africa with the highest GDP

The Top African Countries by GDP per capita include Seychelles: \$22,001 (2025 est.) and Mauritius: \$13,099 (2025 est.). The two countries have very low population hence the total GDP in each case was too low to enter the top 20 countries.

The lowest GDP per capita in Africa include countries such as Burundi: \$157 (2025 est.), South Sudan: \$334 (2025 est.), Malawi: \$448 (2025 est.), and Central African Republic*: \$549 (2025 est.).

It should be pointed out that the GDP per capita figures can vary depending on the source and methodology used. These figures are based on estimates from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and may have changed since the last update. There is a general tendency for skilled workers to seek greener pastures in higher income countries, in the process of brain drain, or what is referred to locally as ‘Japa’ in Nigeria.

3. Inflation rate: The rate of change in prices of goods and services.
4. Unemployment rate: The percentage of the labour force that is unemployed.
5. Poverty rate: The percentage of the population living below the poverty line.

Social Indicators

1. Life expectancy: The average number of years a person is expected to live.
2. Literacy rate: The percentage of the population that can read and write.
3. Education enrolment rates: The percentage of children enrolled in school.
4. Health outcomes: Measures such as infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, and disease prevalence.
5. Human Development Index (HDI): A composite measure of life expectancy, education, and income.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a statistical composite index of life expectancy, education (mean years of schooling completed and expected years of schooling upon entering the education system) and per capita income indicators which is used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. A country scores a higher level of HDI when the lifespan is higher, the education level is higher, and the gross national income GNI (PPP) per capita is higher.

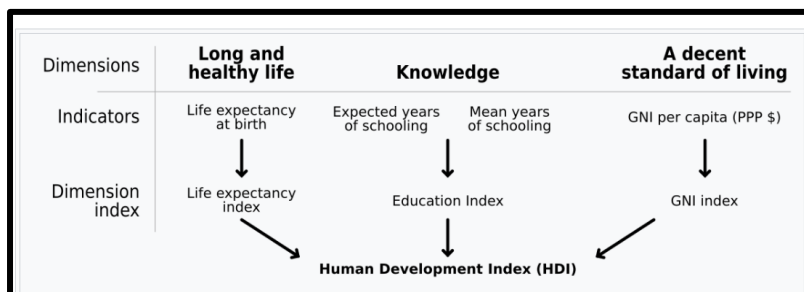


Figure 2. Framework for Human Development Index
(Accessed from Wikipedia.org)

Table 1 is a list of African countries by Human Development Index. It can be seen that Nigeria is grouped along with Low Human Development Index.

Table 1: List of African Countries by Human Development Index (2022 data; 2024 report)

Rank		Country	HDI 2022 Data (2024 Report)
Africa	World		
Very High Human Development			
1	67	Seychelles	0.802
High Human Development			
2	72	Mauritius	0.796
3	92	Libya	0.746
4	93	Algeria	0.745
5	101	Tunisia	0.732
6	105	Egypt	0.728
7	110	South Africa	0.717
8	114	Botswana	0.708
Medium Human Development			
9	120	Morocco	0.698
10	123	Gabon	0.693
11	131	Cape Verde	0.661
12	133	Equatorial Guinea	0.650
13	141	Sao Tome and Principe	0.613
14	142	Eswatini	0.610
		Namibia	
16	145	Ghana	0.602
17	146	Kenya	0.601
18	149	Republic of the Congo	0.593
19	150	Angola	0.591
20	151	Cameroun	0.587
21	152	Comoros	0.586
22	153	Zambia	0.569
23	159	Uganda	0.550
		Zimbabwe	
Low Human Development			
25	161	Nigeria	0.548
		Rwanda	
27	163	Togo	0.547
28	164	Mauritania	0.534
29	166	Cote d'Ivoire	0.534

30	167	Tanzania	0.532
31	168	Lesotho	0.521
32	169	Senegal	0.517
33	170	Sudan	0.516
34	171	Djibouti	0.515
35	172	Malawi	0.508
36	173	Benin	0.504
37	174	Gambia	0.495
38	175	Eritrea	0.493
39	176	Ethiopia	0.492
40	177	Liberia	0.487
		Madagascar	
42	179	Guinea-Bissau	0.483
43	180	Democratic Republic of the Congo	0.481
44	181	Guinea	0.472
45	183	Mozambique	0.461
46	184	Sierra Leone	0.458
47	185	Burkina Faso	0.438
48	187	Burundi	0.420
49	188	Mali	0.410
50	189	Chad	0.394
		Niger	
52	191	Central African Republic	0.387
53	192	South Sudan	0.381
54	193	Somalia	0.380

Environmental Indicators

1. Carbon emissions: The amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced by a country.
2. Renewable energy share: The percentage of energy generated from renewable sources.
3. Water quality: Measures of water pollution and access to clean water.
4. Deforestation rate: The rate of forest loss and degradation.
5. Environmental sustainability index: A composite measure of environmental performance.

Other Indicators

1. Corruption perception index: A measure of perceived corruption within a country.
2. Ease of doing business index: A measure of the business environment and regulatory framework.
3. Global peace index: A measure of peacefulness and stability.
4. Human rights index: A measure of human rights performance.
5. Innovation index: A measure of innovation capacity and performance.

These indicators provide a comprehensive picture of a country's development progress and help policymakers identify areas for improvement.

Encouraging a reading culture requires a multi-faceted approach that involves individuals, families, schools, communities, and governments. Here are some strategies to promote a reading culture:

Individual Level

1. Lead by example: Parents, caregivers, and educators should model reading behavior themselves.
2. Create a reading-friendly environment: Establish a dedicated reading space with comfortable seating, good lighting, and a diverse collection of books.
3. Set aside dedicated reading time: Allocate time each day for reading, free from distractions like TV, phones, and computers.
4. Make reading a habit: Incorporate reading into daily routines, such as before bedtime or during breakfast.

Family and Community Level

1. Establish family reading traditions: Engage in regular family reading activities, such as reading aloud or discussing books together.

2. Organize community reading events: Host book clubs, author readings, or literacy festivals to promote reading and bring people together.
3. Create neighbourhood libraries: Establish community libraries or book-sharing programmes to increase access to books.
4. Partner with local schools: Collaborate with schools to promote reading and provide resources for students.

School Level

1. Integrate reading into the curriculum: Make reading a central part of the school curriculum, incorporating diverse texts and reading strategies.
2. Provide access to diverse reading materials: Offer a wide range of books, including fiction, non-fiction, and graphic novels, to cater to different interests and reading levels.
3. Encourage reading for pleasure: Allow students to choose books for independent reading and provide time for reading during the school day.
4. Support struggling readers: Offer targeted support and interventions for students who struggle with reading.

Government and Institutional Level

1. Develop and implement literacy policies: Establish national or regional literacy policies that promote reading and provide resources for literacy programmes.
2. Increase funding for literacy programmes: Allocate sufficient funds to support literacy initiatives, including reading programmes, libraries, and teacher training.
3. Promote reading through public awareness campaigns: Launch public awareness campaigns to promote the importance of reading and encourage people to develop a reading habit.
4. Support research and development in literacy: Fund research on literacy and reading instruction to inform evidence-based practices.

Digital Level

1. Utilize digital platforms and tools: Leverage digital technologies, such as e-books, audiobooks, and reading apps, to increase access to reading materials and promote reading.
2. Create online reading communities: Establish online forums, social media groups, or blogs to connect readers, share book recommendations, and discuss reading experiences.
3. Offer digital literacy resources: Provide online resources, such as reading guides, book reviews, and literacy games, to support readers and promote literacy.
4. Develop digital reading programmes: Design and implement digital reading programmes that incorporate interactive elements, such as quizzes, games, and discussions, to engage readers.

Nigeria National Policy on Education

The Nigerian education system is structured into the following:

(a). Basic Education

- Early Child Care Development and Education
- Pre-Primary Education (1 year)
- Primary Education (6 years)
- Junior Secondary Education (3 years)

(b). Post-Basic Education and Career Development

- Senior Secondary Education
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

(c). Mass and Nomadic Education

- Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education
- Nomadic Education

(d). Tertiary Education

- University Education
- Teacher Education
- Technology Education
- Innovation Enterprise Institutions

The assumption in this Lecture is that those who have successfully gone through Basic education, which comprises in the main, Primary and Junior Secondary School Systems should be formally literate.

Basic Education

According to the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), <https://www.facebook.com/NERDC/posts/734776969881272>) the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) was developed in response to Nigeria's need for relevant, dynamic and globally competitive education that would ensure socio-economic and national development. Specifically, BEC was developed to ensure that learners at the basic Education level receive well-rounded education capable to compete favourably anywhere in the world in terms of knowledge, skills, techniques and values and aptitude. Thus BEC addresses amongst other things, the issues of value re-orientation, poverty eradication, critical thinking, entrepreneurship and life skills.

The goals of Basic Education are to:

- Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement
- Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and in the performance of their civic responsibilities;
- Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour;
- Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background; and
- Provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability.

According to Section 2 of the National Policy on Education (2013), Basic Education is the education given to children aged 0 to 15 years. It shall be **compulsory, tuition-free, universal and qualitative**. It shall also include adult and non-formal education at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out-of-school youths.

The goals of primary education are to:

- (a). inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;
- (b). lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking;
- (c). promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity;
- (d). instil social, moral norms and values in the child;
- (e). Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
- (f). give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;
- (g). provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The curriculum for primary education is to include:

- (a). Languages
- (b). Mathematics
- (c). Science
- (d). Physical and Health Education
- (e). Religious Knowledge
- (f). Agriculture/Home Economics
- (g). Social Studies and Citizenship Education
- (h). Cultural and Creative Arts (Drawing, Handicraft, Music and Cultural Activities)
- (i). Computer Education

Teaching is expected to be by practical, exploratory and experimental methods.

For effective teaching and learning, **the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:35.**

Since the rest of the educational system is built upon primary education, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the entire educational system.

Structure of Basic Education

Primary Classes 1-3

1. English Studies
2. Nigerian Languages (One Nigerian Language) •
3. Mathematics
4. Basic Science and Technology (BST)
 - Basic Science
 - Basic Technology
 - Information Technology (IT)
 - Physical and Health Education
5. Religion and National Values (RNV)
 - Christian Religious Studies
 - Islamic Studies
 - Social Studies
 - Civic Education
 - Security Education
6. Cultural & Creative Arts
7. Arabic (Optional)

Primary Classes 4-6

1. English Studies
2. One Nigerian Language
3. Mathematics
4. Basic Science and Technology (BST)
 - Basic Science
 - Basic Technology
 - Information Technology (IT)
 - Physical and Health Education

5. Pre-Vocational Studies (PVS)

- Home Economics
 - Agriculture
- Entrepreneurship** • Each of the listed component will serve as theme for the Pre-Vocational Studies
- Consumer Education to be infused into Pre-Vocational Studies
 - Create enabling environment for the teaching of pre-vocational studies in schools

6. Religion and National Values (RNV)

- Christian Religious Studies
- Islamic Studies
- Social Studies
- Civic Education
- Security Education

7. Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) • Important for preservation of our cultural Heritage and Creativity.

8. French Language

Nigeria is surrounded by Francophone countries, namely Cameroun, Niger, Chad and Benin. The study of French language will make our children more competitive at the global level.

9. Arabic (Optional)

Junior Secondary School

The objectives of Junior Secondary Education are to:

- Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship and educational advancement;
- Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and the performance of their civic responsibilities
- Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour; and

- Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background

JSS 1-3

1. English Studies
2. One Nigerian Language
3. Mathematics
4. Basic Science and Technology (BST)
 - Basic Science
 - Basic Technology
 - Information Technology
 - Physical and Health Education
5. Religion and National Values (RNV)
 - Christian Religious Studies
 - Islamic Studies
 - Social Studies
 - Civic Education
 - Security Education
6. Pre-Vocational Studies (PVS)
 - Home Economics
 - Agriculture
7. French Language
8. Cultural and Creative Arts
9. Business Studies
10. Arabic Language (Optional)

The magnitude of out-of-school children in Nigeria is staggering. According to UNICEF, about 18.3 million children in Nigeria are out of school, with 10.2 million of primary school age and another 8.1 million of junior secondary school age. This number represents one in every five of the world's out-of-school children, making Nigeria home to the largest number of out-of-school children globally.

The situation is particularly dire in the northern regions, where 67.6% of children in Kebbi State, 66.4% in Sokoto State, and 62.9% in Yobe State are out of school. Poverty, insecurity, and socio-cultural norms are significant factors contributing to this crisis.

Furthermore, the lack of access to quality education has severe consequences, including increased poverty, inequality, and insecurity. It's estimated that 74% of children aged 7-14 lack basic reading and math skills, highlighting the urgent need for improved education outcomes. Insecurity, particularly in the northern regions, has displaced families and closed schools, thus impacting education and literacy rates.

To address this crisis, it's essential to implement policies and programmes that promote inclusive and equitable education, improve teacher training and infrastructure, and address the root causes of poverty and insecurity.

The challenges faced by out-of-school children in Nigeria are numerous and interconnected. Poverty and Economic Barriers are significant factors, as many families cannot afford to send their children to school due to financial constraints. This is exacerbated by Socio-Cultural Norms and Practices, particularly in northern Nigeria, where girls are often married off at a young age and boys are sent to Qur'anic schools with no formal education.

Lack of access to quality Education is another major challenge, with many schools lacking basic infrastructure, qualified teachers, and resources. Insurgency and Conflict have also contributed to the high number of out-of-school children, particularly in the northeast region, where schools have been destroyed and children are often kidnapped.

Reducing the menace of out-of-school children in Nigeria requires a multi-faceted approach that involves government, civil society, communities, and individuals. Here are some strategies to address this issue:

Government Initiatives

1. Increase funding for education: Allocate more resources to education, particularly for infrastructure development, teacher training, and scholarships.
2. Implement inclusive education policies: Develop and enforce policies that promote equal access to education for all, regardless of socio-economic status, location, or disability.
3. Establish conditional cash transfer programmes: Provide financial incentives to families who keep their children in school.

Community and Civil Society Efforts

1. Raise awareness about the importance of education: Organize community campaigns, workshops, and events to sensitize parents and caregivers about the benefits of education.
2. Support community-based education initiatives: Partner with local organizations to establish community schools, literacy programmes, and vocational training centres.
3. Mobilize community resources: Engage local leaders, traditional rulers, and religious leaders to support education initiatives.

Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers

1. Challenge harmful socio-cultural norms: Engage with communities to change attitudes and practices that prevent children from attending school.
2. Promote girls' education: Implement programmes that specifically target girls' education, such as scholarships, mentorship, and safe spaces.
3. Support children with disabilities: Provide inclusive education opportunities and resources for children with disabilities.

Improving Quality of Education

1. Train and support teachers: Provide regular training, mentorship, and resources for teachers to improve their pedagogical skills.

2. Develop relevant curricula: Review and update curricula to ensure they are relevant, inclusive, and aligned with national development goals.
3. Improve infrastructure and resources: Invest in school infrastructure, textbooks, and technology to create conducive learning environments.

Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Establish a national database: Create a centralized database to track out-of-school children and monitor progress.
2. Conduct regular assessments: Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and programmes to identify areas for improvement.
3. Support research and innovation: Encourage research on out-of-school children and innovative solutions to address this issue.

By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can reduce the number of out-of-school children and ensure that all children have access to quality education.

Furthermore, Poor Governance and Corruption have hindered efforts to address the issue, with funds allocated for education often being mismanaged or diverted ³. Stigma and Misconceptions about education also play a role, with some communities viewing education as "evil" or unnecessary ².

To address these challenges, it is essential to implement a multi-faceted approach that involves Increasing Funding for Education, Improving Access to Quality Education, Addressing Socio-Cultural Norms and Practices, and Enhancing Governance and Accountability.

The Nigerian Literacy Landscape and impact on the economy and human development

The importance of literacy to the personal development of an individual and existence of any nation cannot be overemphasized. Literacy is the foundation for meaningful development of any

nation. It is not a single entity but an interconnection of several fields' education, health, agriculture, and more. For example, a literate individual can have access to information relating to her career or business. However, not every individual in the society is literate enough to contribute to national development. Thus, strong literacy skills are necessary to function in today's contemporary society (Zua, 2021). Literacy plays an indispensable role in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning". This goal is targeted at ensuring literacy and numeracy for youths and adults (men and women) by the year 2030.

Data Pandalas (2024) published the 2024 literacy rate involving 207 countries and Nigeria has a literacy rate of 59.57% and ranked 187th in the world and 35th in Africa. This shows that a significant portion of the Nigerian population still lacks basic literacy skills, limiting their opportunities for personal growth and socio-economic advancements (Olusola, 2023). Literacy level usually determines individuals' ability to secure employment (Onwuka, 2024) and ultimately their socioeconomic status (Blanchard, 2023). Hence, literacy rate to a significant extent correlates with human development (Onwuka, 2024).

The United Nations Development (UNDP) has been publishing reports on the Human Development Index (HDI) since 1990. The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone (UNDP, 2024). HDI is a summary composite measure of a country's average achievements in three basic aspects of human development: health, knowledge and standard of living. The HDI measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development:

- A long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth.
- Knowledge, as measured by the adult literacy rate (with two-thirds weight) and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (with one-third weight).

- A decent standard of living, as measured by the log of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP) in USD.

The higher a country's human development, the higher its HDI value (WHO, 2024). It is interesting to note that the majority of countries with high literacy level as shown in Data Pandas (2024) also have high HDI in the UNDP (2024) report, while majority of the countries with low literacy levels, including Nigeria, also have low HDI.

The higher a country's human development, the higher its HDI value (WHO, 2024). It is interesting to note that the majority of countries with high literacy level as shown in Data Pandas (2024) also have high HDI in the UNDP (2024) report, while majority of the countries with low literacy levels also have low HDI, including Nigeria. Policy analysts consider literacy as a population's absolute key to socio-economic development (Prettyman, 2019).

Literacy is also one of the factors used in measuring education and the effectiveness of an educational system. A high literacy rate implies that the educational system can provide the population with opportunities to acquire sound literacy skills. Educational achievement enhances social and economic development (Zua, 2021).

Literacy is associated with life expectancy through several socioeconomic factors such as income, education, and employment (Gilbert et al. (2018)). This means that people with poor literacy skills and the less educated are more likely to be unemployed. Gilbert et al (2018) further stated that unemployed people are more likely to have low incomes and poor health behaviors. These socioeconomic factors can be linked to lower life expectancy. Thus, literacy can be used to eradicate poverty and broaden participation in the society. Literate individuals are more likely to be employed and earn good wages, thereby reducing poverty. Adequate wages can move individuals from one social stratum to

another and improve quality of life. Thus, low literacy is connected to higher unemployment (Gilbert et al, 2018). This is because government and private agencies would employ literate individuals that will enable them to achieve the organizational goals. Illiterate individuals may be classified as unqualified, thereby leading to unemployment.

There is also a literacy gap between the poorest and wealthiest households. Impoverished households and neighborhoods are reported to experience illiteracy. Literacy drives sustainable development. It can be used to predict the quality of the future labor force as well as ensure policies for life skills for men and women (Zua, 2021).

Literate individuals can easily access information to improve education, health, and safety. Although a literacy gap exists between men and women, literate women are more economically self-reliant. Literacy empowers women to play a meaningful role in the society (Zua, 2021).

Literacy is a fundamental human and democratic right (Lind, 2011). Literate individuals are more likely to know their rights and can effectively use their rights to defend themselves. Conversely, the rights of illiterate individuals are likely to be violated. Their inability to read and write can prevent them from seeing for themselves that which they are entitled to and demand it. Illiteracy is a means of control. Literacy is a step away from ignorance and therefore a tool and a threat (Zua, 2021).

Literacy is a springboard for achieving Education for All (EFA). Literacy is a channel to the achievement of the SDGs. The poor are empowered when they become literate. As a component of basic education and a foundation for lifelong learning, literacy is the key to enhancing human capabilities and achieving many other rights (Zua, 2021).

Promoting financial literacy has also been reported as a means of achieving the socio-economic goals of poverty reduction, equality and lowering unemployment levels in lower-middle income countries (Abdelghaffar et al., 2023), like Nigeria. Financial literacy is the ability to understand financial concepts and utilise financial resources properly and efficiently; it goes beyond knowing how to make and spend your money. It is much deeper than that. Many people do not understand how money works beyond the basics of receiving it and spending it. One of the primary reasons why people struggle with money is their lack of financial literacy or the inadequacy of their financial knowledge. Regardless of social status, everyone needs financial literacy. The more financially literate Nigerians we have, the more economically secure our country will become. This will also impact the standard of living as more money comes in and circulates within the economy. Increased financial literacy will also make Nigerians more strategic and innovative, providing a platform for generating more income through the people's financial power (Mabawonku, 2021). According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, It is only when the vast majority of the Nigerian population is financially literate that they can participate in the formal financial system, by becoming aware of and taking advantage of its opportunities, get financially included and thereby contribute to the financial and economic development of Nigeria.

Challenges to literacy in Nigeria

Despite the importance of literacy to any nation, adult literacy is still a challenge in many African countries. Although, progress has been made over the years to overcome illiteracy, adult literacy is still elusive. According to an UNESCO report, sub-Saharan Africa has one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world with a 61 percent average literacy rate (UNESCO, 2024). The challenges facing literacy in Africa can be traceable to multilingualism, colonization, and population explosion (Alexander et al, 2007).

Majority of the challenges in the UNESCO (2010) country paper on literacy in Nigeria are still valid today. Literacy is an integral

part of basic education and the benefit of quality basic education to individuals and the society is immense. A good basic education strengthened by the acquisition of literacy and numeracy is the minimum educational foundation upon which an individual can build lifelong learning attitudes. Literacy education will help equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Adult literacy will help the people to ease challenges they encounter in their daily lives such as challenges of poverty, income generation, health issues, shelter, food, security etc. However, some challenges to literacy in Nigeria include the following:

(a). Majority of illiterates in Nigeria live in remote rural communities, far from the purview of the government. They remain marginalized and unreachable. The challenge for Nigeria is to get education to the unreached in the rural areas where the majority of the population lives.

(b). The challenge of children out-of-school. According to UNICEF (2022a), at least 10.5 million children are out of school in Nigeria, the highest rate in the world. A full one-third of Nigerian children are not in school, and one in five out-of-school children in the world is Nigerian. This is despite the fact that primary education is officially free and compulsory.

(c). It is also very urgent that the challenges posed by the girl-child education in some States in Nigeria be tackled. The Sustainable Human Development approach places a strong emphasis on the involvement of all sections of society, contending that eliminating the gender gap in culture, education, the economy, is a prerequisite for achieving long-term and sustainable development (Azeez et al., 2024). According to UNICEF (2022b), states in the north-east and north-west have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7 percent and 47.3 percent, respectively, meaning that more than half of the girls are not in school. The education deprivation in northern Nigeria is driven by various factors, including economic barriers

and socio-cultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for girls.

(d). Key challenge in budgetary allocation to education. According to UNESCO (2016), global education monitoring report, the Education 2030 Framework for Action proposed two benchmarks as ‘crucial reference points’: allocate at least 4% to 6% of GDP to education, and/or allocate at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education. Globally, countries spend 4.7% of GDP on education and allocate 14.2% of public expenditure to education; 35 countries spend less than 4% of GDP and allocate less than 15% of public expenditure to education. Nigeria also has been allocating less than the recommended 15–20% of budget to education, as the budgetary allocation for 2025 is just above 7% (NISER, 2025).

(e). Another critical challenge and a much over-looked factor that closely explains the poor learning achievement of basic, post-basic and secondary education learners is the medium of communication, the language of literacy. Since the landmark research known as the Six Year Ife project led by Professor Babatunde Aliu Fafunwa in the 1960s (Fafunwa, 1989), it has been empirically established in various countries around the world that learning in the mother tongue is the key to success in basic education, as first language instruction results in increased access and equity, improved learning outcomes, reduced repetition and drop-out rates, socio-cultural benefits and lower over costs (Alidou et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2010). However, many countries, including Nigeria, pay lip service to the active use of mother tongue in the delivery of education at the basic level.

How University Libraries can promote Information Seeking Behaviour⁷

University libraries play a crucial role in promoting information-seeking behavior among students, faculty, and researchers. Here are some strategies to promote information-seeking behaviour:

Library Instruction and Orientation

1. **Information Literacy programmes:** Develop and offer information literacy programmes that teach students how to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.
2. **Library Tours and Orientation:** Provide library tours and orientation sessions to familiarize users with the library's resources and services.
3. **Workshops and Training Sessions:** Offer workshops and training sessions on specific topics, such as database searching, citation management, and research methods.

Access to Relevant Resources

1. **Collection Development:** Develop a diverse collection of print and electronic resources that support the university's curriculum and research needs.
2. **Database Subscriptions:** Provide access to relevant databases, journals, and e-books that support research and learning.
3. **Open Access Resources:** Promote open access resources, such as open access journals and repositories, to support research and learning.

Support Services

1. **Reference Services:** Offer reference services, such as research consultations and email support, to assist users with their information needs.
2. **Research Support:** Provide research support services, such as literature searching and systematic review support, to assist researchers with their research projects.
3. **Technology Support:** Offer technology support services, such as computer and software support, to assist users with their technology needs.

Collaborations and Partnerships

1. **Faculty-Librarian Collaboration:** Collaborate with faculty members to integrate information literacy into the curriculum and to support research projects.

2. Interlibrary Loan Services: Participate in interlibrary loan services to provide users with access to resources not available in the library's collection.
3. Community Partnerships: Partner with community organizations and institutions to provide access to resources and services that support research and learning.

Marketing and Promotion

1. Library Website and Social Media: Develop a user-friendly library website and social media presence to promote the library's resources and services.
2. Library Events and Exhibits: Host library events and exhibits to promote the library's resources and services and to support research and learning.
3. Library Newsletters and Blogs: Publish library newsletters and blogs to keep users informed about the library's resources and services.

Assessment and Evaluation

1. User Surveys and Feedback: Conduct user surveys and gather feedback to assess the library's resources and services and to identify areas for improvement.
2. Library Assessment and Evaluation: Conduct regular assessment and evaluation of the library's resources and services to ensure that they meet the needs of users.
3. Continuous Improvement: Use the results of assessment and evaluation to make continuous improvements to the library's resources and services.

Research suggests that school librarians can play an important role in supporting student literacy, particularly in relation to reading engagement. Reading engagement is a 'multidimensional construct that includes behavioural, cognitive, and affective attributes associated with being deeply involved in an activity such as reading' (Guthrie et al., 2012). Simply conceptualised, engaged readers find reading enjoyable which stimulates them to read more (Merga, 2019); pleasure in reading is a strong predictor of reading

frequency (Merga and Mat Roni, 2018), which leads to growth in literacy skills (Guthrie et al., 2012; OECD, 2011). The following are thus suggested roles of librarians in promoting literacy in their respective environments:

(a). School librarians may be natural reading models as a love of literature and reading often guides their entry into the profession. Many school librarians are drawn to their profession because of their passion for literature and reading (Walker and Calvert, 2016). Their enthusiasm for books and storytelling often inspires them to pursue a career where they can share that love with others, particularly students. As a result, they naturally serve as role models for reading, encouraging a love of books and literacy by their example and the resources they provide. Essentially, their personal connection to reading makes them well-suited to foster a reading culture in schools.

(b). If people are to stay literate, they must have access to a variety of written documents and continue the habit of reading in their adult lives. In line with this, libraries are a vital tool to provide access to information sources, and ensure that users are in frequent contact with them. They achieve this through planning –exterior of the library should be inviting and the interior made attractive. Serene environment should be maintained, lighting fitting, and good furniture properly fixed (Chidiebere et al., 2013).

(c). Literacy is an integral part of societal life; it is needed at home, in the classroom, in the workplace, for development and preservation of the cultural heritage and that of history. Literacy programmes should be designed to functions within a framework of relevance, in other to inculcate value and achieve desired goal via dissemination of information. Here libraries play a vital role in provision of information (reading) materials for all (Chidiebere et al., 2013).

(d). Development of basic reading materials that build literacy based on local knowledge and are attractive to neo-literate individuals. Such materials help learners transition from an oral culture to a transformed literate culture. At this point, libraries,

through the acquisition of reading materials, can integrate written words with oral norms in such societies (Chidiebere et al., 2013).

(e). Parents have to be good readers themselves. Children who grow-up in a literate home are at an advantage in schools and are more likely to be successful throughout formal schooling than their peers from non or semi-literate homes.

Literacy Rates in Different Parts of the World

According to data published by the World Population Review, there are 13 countries with 100% Literacy Rate, indicate that everyone in those countries can read and write. (Table 2).

Table 2: List of Countries with 100% Literacy rates

(Source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com>); Accessed 29th March 2025

List	Country	Total Population Literacy Rate (%)	Literacy Rate (Male)	Literacy Rate (Female)	Data Year
1	Ukraine	100	100	100	2021
2	Uzbekistan	100	100	100	2022
3	North Korea	100	100	100	2015
4	Kazakhstan	100	99.8	99.7	2020
5	Azberbaijan	100	99.9	99.7	2023
6	Finland	100			
7	Norway	100			
8	Georgia	100	99.6	99.7	2022
9	Luxembourg	100			
10	Guam	100	99.8	99.7	2000
11	Andorra	100	100	100	2016
12	Greenland	100	100	100	2015
13	Liechtenstein	100			

Similarly, the Literacy Rate is very high at about 99% in the G-8 countries of United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and United Kingdom, which implies that approximately 1%

of the population is deemed unable to read or write in the official language.

The ranking of African countries on the Literacy Rate league is presented in Table 3; it shows that the best performers are Seychelles (95.9%), Equatorial Guinea (95.3%) and South Africa (95%), respectively. Nigeria occupies a lowly position of 36th among all the 54 African countries (62%).

Table 3: Ranking of African Countries on basis of Literacy Rates
 (Source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com>); Accessed 29th
 March 2025

Ranking	Country	Total Population Literacy Rate (%)	Literacy Rate (Male)	Literacy Rate (Female)	Data Year
1	Seychelles	95.9	95.4	96.4	2020
2	Equatorial Guinea	95.3	97.4	93	2015
3	South Africa	95	95.5	94.5	2021
4	Sao Tome and Principe	94.8	96.5	91.1	2022
5	Namibia	92.3	90.6	92.3	2021
6	Mauritius	92.2	93.5	90.5	2021
7	Libya	91	96.7	85.6	2015
8	Cape Verde	90.8	94.2	87.4	2022
9	Cote d'Ivoire	89.9	93.1	86.7	2019
10	Zimbabwe	89.7	88.3	89.7	2021
11	Eswatini	89	88.3	88.5	2020
12	Botswana	88.5	88	88.9	2015
13	Zambia	86.7	90.6	83.1	2020
14	Gabon	86	86.2	84.7	2022
15	Kenya	83	85.5	79.8	2022
16	Tunisia	82.7	89.1	82.7	2021
17	Tanzania	82	85.5	78.2	2022
18	Lesotho	82	81	72.9	2022
19	Algeria	81.4	87.4	75.3	2018
20	Democratic Republic of Congo	81	89.5	70.8	2022
21	Republic of the Congo	80.6	85.9	75.4	2021
22	Ghana	80	83.5	74.5	2020
23	Uganda	79	84	74.3	2021
24	Cameroun	78			2020
25	Madagascar	77.3	78.8	75.8	2022
26	Morocco	77	84.8	67.4	2022
27	Eritrea	76.6	84.4	68.9	2018

28	Burundi	76	81.3	68.4	2022
29	Rwanda	75.9	78.7	73.3	2021
30	Egypt	73.1	78.8	67.4	2022
31	Angola	72			2022
32	Malawi	68	71.2	63.7	2022
33	Mauritania	67	71.8	62.2	2021
34	Togo	66.5	80	55.1	2019
35	Mozambique	63.4	74.1	53.8	2021
36	Nigeria	62	71.3	52.7	2018
37	Comoros	62	67	56.9	2022
38	Sudan	60.7	65.4	56.1	2018
39	Gambia	59	65.2	51.2	2022
40	Senegal	58	68.4	45.4	2022
41	Guinea Bissau	52.9	67	39.9	2022
42	Djibouti	52	63	44	2022*
43	Ethiopia	51.8	57.2	44.4	2017
44	Sierra Leone	48.6	56.3	41.3	2022
45	Liberia	48.3	62.7	34.1	2017
46	Benin	47	56.9	35	2022
47	Burkina Faso	46	54.5	37.8	2021
48	Guinea	45.3	61.2	31.3	2021
49	Somalia	41			2022
50	Niger	38	45.8	29	2022
51	Central African Republic	37.5	49.2	26.2	2022
52	South Sudan	34.5	40.3	28.9	2018
53	Mali	31	46.2	25.7	2020
54	Chad	27	35.4	18.2	2022

**World Bank Data (<https://data.worldbank.org>); Accessed 29th March 2025*

Table 4 shows the breakdown of the adult literacy rate in Nigeria by states as of 2018, the percentage of people aged 15 and above who can read and write with understanding.

Table 4: 2018 Literacy Rate Ranking of States in Nigeria
<https://usi.org.ng> (Accessed 27th March 2025)

State and % Literacy Rate			
1. Imo 96%	10. Enugu 89%	19. Ebonyi 78%	28. Gombe 29%
2. Lagos 96%	11. Cross River 89%	20. Benue 74%	29. Jigawa 25%
3. Ekiti 96%	12. Delta 87%	21. Taraba. 72%	30. Borno 23%
4. Rivers 96%	13. Bayelsa 87%	22. Kwara 70%	31. Niger 23%
5. Abia 94%	14. Kogi 84%	23. Plateau 64%	32. Kebbi 21%
6. Akwa Ibom 93%	15. Ogun 82%	24. Nassarawa 59%	33. Bauchi 19%
7. Anambra 92%	16. Ondo 81%	25. Adamawa 56%	34. Zamfara 19%
8. Osun 91%	17. Oyo 80%	26. Kaduna 47%	35. Sokoto 15%
9. Edo 91%	18. FCT Abuja 79%	27. Kano 38%	36. Katsina 10%
			37. Yobe 7%

©Data by National Bureau of Statistics

Imo State has the highest literacy rate at 96.43%, followed by Lagos State at 96.3% and Ekiti State and Rivers State at 96%. The South-South region comprising Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Cross River, Delta and Bayelsa States, had the highest literacy rate at 84.1%. The worst performing States are Yobe (7%), Katsina (10%), Sokoto (15%), Zamfara (19%), Bauchi (19%) and Kebbi (21%).

In 2021, the adult literacy rate in Nigeria was 63.16%. Despite improvements, Nigeria still faces challenges in literacy, with a significant number of children out of school and low basic reading and math skills. A 2024 UNICEF report revealed that only 26% of Nigerian children and adolescents aged 7-14 possess basic reading and mathematics skills.

Challenges of Library in Reading and Literacy Promotion in Nigeria

According to Chidiebere et al. (2013), in the Nigerian context, the life circle of libraries is unfavorable and bleak, from policies establishing them to poor funding and design, inadequate

manpower, and myopic vision. Some libraries may exist, but by mere shadow of nomenclature. The following challenges were identified and persist more than a decade after the authors presented these findings.

(a). Poor Funding: Nigeria does not have direct budgetary allocation for library development and services (but for Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund)). In a situation where the parent institution allocates fund to the libraries (as a subsidiary) is grossly unpalatable, hardly any of the states in Nigeria can boast of running public library efficiently. In some states, the presence of public library has completely disappeared, or operating in a mere image of nomenclature. Inadequate funds account for lack of hiring of ICT professionals, inadequate acquisition of reading resources books, periodicals, and other ICT resources, lack of intensive training and re-training of staff, infrastructural deterioration and poor maintenance. It also stunts design and disrupt the implementation of programmes which reading and literacy are part of.

(b). African Factors: Lack of maintenance culture, lack of innovative spirit, absence of information technological environment, droning reading and learning habit, negligent of ICT application, over dependence on foreign inventions/materials (technology), absence of indigenous commercial library services, deficiency of staff skill in information/knowledge management, incessant corruption among the leaders and deficiency in programme design, militate against library and its literacy promotion in Nigeria.

(c). Economic Factors: In a country where the majority are living in poverty, it means that reading cannot be their problem. “Empty stomach comprehends nothing”. Nigerian citizens are battling with hunger, until food is presented on the table of common man, reading will still be a pending agenda for people. Again, Nigeria economy has failed to curtail inflation, if prices of essential commodities like wares, food items, shelter, transportation and

services are high; Library may not have enough fund to purchase good and adequate books needed for promotion of literacy.

(d). Lack of Professional Staff: The curriculum of librarianship needs to be restructured to suit the present-day information services. Inadequate hiring of experienced librarians in some Nigerian libraries has directly, hampered the core function of library and invariably queers the needed reading and literacy campaign.

(e). Irrelevant Materials: Most libraries are at the mercy of archaic materials. The books are not current, not repaired (when damaged) and not relevant for the target readers. Inadequate publishing of local books, over-reliance on foreign books (donations), and librarians' limited knowledge on collection development has contributed to an acute shortage of books/information sources, thereby leading to irrelevant library stocks.

(f). Lack of Needs Analysis: Most libraries in Africa are established without a professional needs analysis of the host community, resulting in information services based upon assumptions and not on actual needs. Libraries have virtually limited their services to the majority of the general public; often, their content is relevant only to the urban-based class who are relatively educated. Just as need analysis is necessary before establishing a service library, continuing monitoring, and evaluation with active community participation is also crucial to ensure that library services remain relevant.

(g). Lack of Functional Information Policy: Lack of working paper (policy) on information is a weak point on development of information and literate society. Where there is no functional information policy, released fund will not have a directional impact. Also, there will be inadequate circulation, regulation, quantity and qualitative information materials. According to Mostert (2001), a written information policy should be made prerequisite for every country involved in information provision. Where this is lacking, the country may lose vision on acquisition,

organization and dissemination of information, especially as it relates to national literacy achievements.

(h). Frequent power failure, mismanagement of library fund, poor existence of archives institutions, corruption and government negligence of educational sector all combine to adversely affect reading habit in Nigeria.

Reading, Literacy and Life-Long Education: My Personal Introspection as a Library and Information User

In this section, I will give an overview of my experience as a Library and Information User as a student from primary to postgraduate levels as well as my modest involvement at the policy level in later life.

I attended Saint Bartholomew's Anglican Primary School, Odo Ijesa which had no library at the time I was there from 1964 to 1969. To that extent I was not even aware of the meaning of the word 'Library' then. In terms of literacy, it is apt to mention that my mother was literate in Yoruba language but she could neither write nor speak the English Language. This was because she only had about three years of primary education at the time she was a little kid. On the other hand, father only attended a few evening lessons organised by the Saint Bartholomew's Anglican Church so he was barely literate. However, he could recognise and read numerals and he was reputed to have a knack for remembering historical dates and events, including the date of birth of all 12 of us his biological children. I have mentioned these points just to underscore the fact that literacy, or a lack of it, as alluded to earlier is not necessarily a measure of intelligence.

I entered Ilesa Grammar School in January 1970; one was luckier with the library in the sense that the school already had in existence a functional library. We were encouraged to make use of the facility to do our private reading and consult the available books. I cannot now remember whether I ever attempted to borrow any book from our school's library during my five-year stay in the school.

The situation was a lot better by the time I enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan in October 1977. I registered at the Central Library, named after the first Vice-Chancellor, the notable historian, the late Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike in 1988. I was a regular user of the library facilities, both for my personal reading and also for consultation of textbooks and journals in my areas of specialisation. My typical days from Monday till Saturday, were hardly ever complete without a visit to the Central Library which is just a stone throw from my Hall of Residence (Sultan Bello Hall). One habit I cultivated then was never to be satisfied with the notes I took from attending my lectures. I always endeavoured to visit both the Departmental and the Central Libraries to look for some of the recommended books in order to complement my lecture notes. The Department of Geology Library then was very useful when I was undertaking my Final Year Project. There are copies of Bachelor projects and postgraduate dissertations and theses that students were free to consult. One of my lecturers, Professor Sunday Williams Petters (1944 to 2021), lately the Pioneer Vice-Chancellor of Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, advised us that some journal articles might be very difficult for us to understand in-depth as undergraduates, but we should at least read the Abstract, Introduction and Conclusion sections in order to gain insight as to what those research papers were talking about. I found this particularly helpful.

By the time, I enrolled at Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, University of London, for my Master of Science degree in Geophysics in the Department of Geology during the 1983/1984 Session, I continued with the habit of making effective use of the College's central library facilities for consultation and private reading. I still remember borrowing some books from both the Central Library as well at the Department of Physics library which was adjacent to my Department.

The same scenario repeated itself when I proceeded to the University of Birmingham for my PhD. As a research student I had 24-hour access to the Departmental Library following a request I

made through my Supervisor, Dr Ronald Donaldson Barker to the Head of Department, Professor Graham Westbrook. The major experience I took from the provision of library services in Birmingham as a research student was that any reference material, especially journal articles, that I could not locate at the main Library was always sourced from other libraries and made available to me, without fail, within a few days through the Inter-Library Loan Scheme. I used to visit the main University Library regularly to read newspapers as well. There were no internet facilities those days.

In my Vision Document as a candidate for Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan in 2015 I pointed out that:

The challenges confronting the University of Ibadan Library System in providing a 21st century library facilities including inadequate electronic and print resources; inadequate reading spaces and inadequate internet bandwidth, shall be tackled head-on.

In 2017, Kenneth Dike Library provided a 24/7 Reading Room that could sit 285 readers. And, the following year the reading room was extended to accommodate additional 295 seats. The 24/7 reading rooms thus had a combined seating capacity of 580 during my stint as the Vice-Chancellor. This innovation allows students to come into the library at will, throughout the year (the day and night) irrespective of public holidays. We put in place measures to ensure uninterrupted power supply through a dedicated alternate source of power and a solar-powered inverter; there were also surveillance cameras and a security officer that managed the space at night. Similarly, the Campus Security Service was instructed to strengthen security within the precincts of Kenneth Dike Library. The reading room was to be opened every time and be made available for use by all categories of students of this university.

I had said in a speech at Kenneth Dike Library on 5th July 2018 as follows:

Within the limit of available resources the Management of the University will always give utmost priority to the Library system of the University, which comprises the Kenneth Dike Library, the Latunde Odeku Medical Library in the College of Medicine, and all the Faculty libraries.

In consonance with best practices in academic librarianship in contemporary times, it was realized, that it is almost impossible to keep young adults in a library for several hours without talking to one another. Besides, the emergence of technology and its application to information delivery and services have not helped in retaining users in a library building. In the last two decades, academic libraries have evolved means of courting the friendship of library users anew. These include demarcating library spaces into the *Quiet and Noisy Zones*. The quiet zone(s) is meant for serious academic/research work with very minimal interactions amongst readers, while the noisy zones are spaces dedicated to group or collaborative work, socializing and relaxation. With a deep conviction that zoning library into Noiseless and ‘Noisy’ spaces, a Chat Room (Noisy space) was commissioned at the Kenneth Dike Library, on 31 January 2019. It is an acoustic room which could seat 38 students at a time and fixed with two packaged air-conditioning units and a 42 inch television set. The room had uninterrupted supply of electricity, because it was connected to a solar powered inverter. It was the first of its kind in a Nigerian tertiary institution library. The initiative was widely celebrated on social media and many university Librarians visited so as to borrow the idea from us. Credit for this initiative is due to Dr. Helen Kofoworola Komolafe- Opadeji, the University Librarian at the University of Ibadan from 2016 to 2022.

The Departmental of Geology Library has since been modernised with a new extension in the Mosobalaje Oyawoye electronic library with generous funding support from the Alumni body, the

Association of Ibadan University Geologists (also known as *Ibadan Geologists*) and ND Western Ltd, an oil exploration and production company. This was opened in 2021. I recollect also that a new Ultra-Modern Faculty of Pharmacy e-Library was opened in 2018, an initiative of the then Dean of Pharmacy, Professor Oluwatoyin A. Odeku.

Over the last few years, I regularly contact the University Librarian to kindly assist me in digitalising my personal academic contributions, including public lectures and monographs in order to form part of the institutional repository. I have also had to contact the University Librarian to help me locate past issues of the University Calendar and Order of Proceedings at Convocation ceremonies, for my personal research.

It is worth pointing out that the Library is one of the four core components scored during the routine Accreditation of undergraduate programmes by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The main elements in the evaluation of library resources include books, journals and digital resources. A maximum score of 12 percentage points is allotted to the Library and to gain full NUC Accreditation a programme must score at least 70% of the maximum. It is gratifying to note that all the Undergraduate programmes at the University of Ibadan were rated far above the required threshold under Library.

Professor Emeritus Oladipo Akinkugbe (1933 to 2020) donated his library to the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, in February 2020. This today stands as the *Akinkugbe Corner* in the Postgraduate Reference Section of the library. The Corner is the first in the history of the University of Ibadan Library System that would be set aside for donated collections of one of the living legends of the University in his time. The corner houses the generous print donations of Prof. Akinkugbe. Some of the collections which are not related to Medicine donated by Prof. Akinkugbe are biographies, Elliot, Asquith and Ashby Commission Reports on Higher Education in Nigeria, Ibadan University Calendars from 1948, Philosophy, Economics, Political Science

and Sociology. Others include Religions, Travel, Gardening, Essential Fiction and Contemporary Titles as well as Reference Works. He also donated a bronze statue of Hippocrates (469-399BC).

The collection which Prof. Akinkugbe donated is what professional Librarians will tag **rare or prized books** consisting of a potpourri of ancient and modern, medical and non-medical books which he had acquired over several decades. Speaking at that event, Prof. Akinkugbe recalled that his association with the UI dated back to 1951 when he was admitted as first-year undergraduate of the University College, then in special relationship with the University of London, stressing that the only way to appreciate the university was to give back to the university that made him. He disclosed that he was under immense pressure from other universities to donate the collection to them, saying ‘this ceremony is a consummation of my preference for the University of Ibadan’. Professor Akinkugbe, NNOM, MD, was the pioneer Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin and a former Vice-Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Discussion and Conclusion

Literacy is an indicator of the level of development and the quality of life in a country. Countries with 100% literacy rates invariably prioritise universal education and robust government support for schooling. While some countries have achieved universal literacy, many others, including Nigeria, are still struggling. The slow response has been affected by population growth and the limited priority by government at the various levels, which affect the access to education. The bane of our society is poor reading culture. The problems faced in countries with low literacy rates include poverty, conflict, and lack of educational infrastructure. The low literacy rate has contributed significantly to the low Gross Domestic Product per capital and the low Human Development Index.

A tacit assumption in this paper is to the effect that any child who has successfully completed Basic Education should be literate enough to face the challenges of life and acquire skills relevant to a

world that is increasingly becoming competitive with recent advances in a digital world that is already in the Fifth Industrial Revolution with Robotics and Artificial Intelligence taking the centre stage. A major bane of our society is poor reading culture at all levels. We should find the library back. Some other measures required to improve the literacy rate in Nigeria include building more schools to keep pace with the growth in population, training teachers, addressing insecurity in various parts of the country and implementing policies that promote gender equality in education. International partnerships and funding can also play a crucial role in helping to overcome barriers to literacy. Albeit, my I end this discourse on an interrogative note potent enough to evoke varying degrees of self – introspection and causing each and every one to genuinely inwardly ask the question irrespective of our levels of education – How literate am I? and to what extent are my sphere of literacies impacting on national development?

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Literacy Rate by Country 2025

