The scale **Journal Website:** https://thescalejournal.com.ng/
An Interdisciplinary Journal of
The ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF POLYTECHNICS - ZONE D
ISSN: 2992-3727 Published 30th November, 2025

LOW READING CULTURE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Low reading culture characterized by students' minimal engagement with text beyond compulsory academic assignments has emerged as a significant challenge in tertiary education. This trend undermines deep learning, critical thinking, and independent inquiry, all of which are essential for academic success. Evidence from empirical studies demonstrates that low reading habits negatively affect students' academic performance by encouraging superficial learning and reducing long-term knowledge retention. Factors such as sorting (inducement for marks) among lecturers, corruption in the educational system, growing distractions of social media, and low academic library patronage further reinforce this culture of limited reading. These systemic and behavioral barriers not only hinder students' academic outcomes but also diminish the overall quality of graduates produced by tertiary institutions. This paper also identified practical strategies for improvement, including institutional reforms to promote accountability and academic integrity, modernization of library services and e-resources, department driven reading incentives, and student time-management interventions.

Keywords: Low Reading Culture, Academic Performance, Students

Introduction

Reading culture has long been acknowledge as the bedrock of academic success and intellectual development. It is not only a tool for acquiring knowledge but also a medium for stimulating critical thinking, enhancing comprehension, fostering creativity, as well as their general wellbeing. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), reading is a constructive and interactive process that supports lifelong learning. Within tertiary education, where independent learning is emphasized, a strong reading culture becomes indispensable for students' academic achievement and professional growth. Students tend to develop their broad view only through reading. Unfortunately, in many developing countries, particularly Nigeria, the reading culture among students is in decline. Studies have shown that a significant proportion of students engage in reading primarily for the purpose of passing examinations rather than for knowledge acquisition or personal development (Oriogu et al, 2017). Similarly, Otache (2020) stresses that Nigerian students' low reading attitudes are rooted in systemic issues such as underfunded libraries, over-reliance on lecture notes, and poor motivation to read beyond mandatory coursework. According to Ayankojo, (2017), reading involves series of systems like eye-to-eye movement, tracing, moving along with hands while reading. A low reading habit, therefore, does not only affect proficiency in the English language and other subjects, it possibly affects the coordination of some body parts. For students to improve academically, they must embrace a reading culture to excel.

Academic performance is the extent to which a student has attained their short or long-term educational goals. Completion of educational benchmarks such as secondary school, diplomas and bachelor's degrees represent academic performance. It also demonstrates a strong work ethic and

consistently puts forth their best effort. Schunk (2012) defines academic performance as the level of attainment of learning outcomes, typically measured by standardized tests, grades, and teacher evaluations. Similarly, York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) describe academic performance as the demonstrated ability of students to meet short-term or long-term academic goals, evidenced through grades, persistence, retention, and graduation rates. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, academic performance is most often assessed through semester examinations, continuous assessment scores, and final CGPAs (Atolagbe et al, 2024). The success of students in tertiary institutions depends to a large extent on their ability to read and comprehend which in turn increases their academic performance. The role of the academic libraries in preparing students for success in academics is very crucial and cannot be undermined. Librarians in other hand should be in the forefront championing innovative techniques and advocacy for reading promotion, as reading is an essential tool for academic performance and knowledge transfer.

Low-reading culture refers to the tendency of students to avoid or neglect regular reading beyond what is strictly necessary for examinations or assignments. It is a condition where reading is not embraced as a habit, lifestyle, or means of continuous learning. In higher education, this culture has been linked to poor academic performance, limited critical thinking, and declining intellectual engagement. Studies have shown that students with low reading habit perform poorly in their academic. Nssien (2007) claims that low reading skills which has been identified as the problem of Nigerian students was as a result of the following: Slow comprehension rate, slow reading rate, difficulty in distinguishing main ideas from irrelevant details, inadequate vocabulary or word power, inadequate reading interest and habits, distractions from television and film viewing and lack of relevant reading materials. The persistence of non-reading culture threatens the quality of graduates produced in Nigerian institutions and elsewhere. As Obadare (2018) notes, when academic effort is undermined by corruption and lack of reading, higher education loses its role in producing skilled, ethical, and competent professionals. According to Ayankojo, (2017), failure to read will make students to become more and more lost academically and affects vocabulary and skills. Hence, they cannot perform well in any academic discipline without a good reading culture since reading is a searchlight for knowledge.

Therefore, examining the nexus between low-reading culture and academic performance is critical to understanding the educational challenges facing higher institutions in Nigeria and beyond. This paper seeks to contribute to the discourse by reviewing empirical studies that highlight how low reading habits influence students' academic performance, while also proposing strategies for fostering a sustainable reading culture in tertiary institutions.

Causes of Low Reading Culture in Nigerian Tertiary Institution

A low reading culture is caused by a multiplicity of factors. In that regard, the following factors have been identified to be responsible for the low reading culture among students in tertiary institutions.

Sorting Lecturers

Sorting is a widespread practice in Nigeria tertiary institutions, referring to situations where students offer bribes through cash, gifts, or sexual methods to lecturers in exchange for good grades. This practice undermines academic integrity and discourages students from cultivating strong reading habits. Instead of investing time in studying and reading, students may resort to unethical shortcuts to achieve academic success. Sorting reduces the incentive to study, as grades can be obtained without effort. Eboh and Nwogu (2017) explain that sorting contributes significantly to academic laziness, as students perceive success as attainable without serious study or commitment to learning. Similarly, Oko and Adie (2016) observe that sorting creates a culture where academic achievement is monetized, eroding students'

motivation to read, conduct research, or engage critically with course materials. Over time, this breeds graduates who lack both depth of knowledge and confidence in their fields.

Corruption in the Educational System

Closely related to sorting is the broader issue of corruption in Nigerian higher education system. Corruption manifests in different ways such as examination malpractice, nepotism in admission processes, favoritism in grading, and mismanagement of resources meant for academic development. Obadare (2018) stresses that corruption in Nigerian Universities normalizes academic shortcuts, leading students to prioritize who they know or what they can pay over genuine academic effort. As a result, students are less motivated to read extensively, knowing that academic success can sometimes be secured without it. Adebanjo (2019) further notes that institutional corruption demoralizes students who would otherwise be motivated to study, as they observe peers achieving higher grades through dishonest means. This creates an environment where reading is devalued and academic performance is decoupled from hard work.

Social Media Distractions

The proliferation of social media has dramatically reshaped students' reading habits. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram dominant students' free time, often replacing academic reading with digital interaction. While social media has educational potential, its dominant use among Nigerian students is for entertainment, gossip, and social networking, thereby limiting time and focus devoted to reading. Oriogu et al (2017) observed that students at Afe Babalola University often prefer scrolling through social media to engaging in serious reading. They concluded that excessive use of these platforms contributes significantly to declining reading habits and ultimately poor academic performance. Lukose and Agbeyangi (2025) similarly argue that the heavy presence of social media in students' daily lives reduces attention span and discourages the development of a consistent reading culture. Beyond time wastage, social media has been linked to shorter attention spans and reduced cognitive stamina. Junco (2012), in a broader study, found that high frequency Facebook use among students correlated negatively with their overall academic performance, as over use of social media often diverts students from meaningful reading. This supports findings in Nigeria that social media often replaces academic reading with less productive digital activity.

Poor Foundation in Early Education

A significant factor that sustains low reading culture among students in higher institutions is the weak foundation laid during early and secondary education. According to Abid et al., (2023), many students arrive tertiary institutions without having developed strong reading habits, comprehension skills, or exposure to diverse texts. As a result, academic reading, especially of complex scholarly materials becomes burdensome and often avoided. According to Otache, 2020), teaching methods in early education are often exam-oriented and teacher-dominated, focusing on rote memorization rather than critical engagement with texts. This approach prevents students from developing independent reading strategies, skimming and scanning skills, or critical thinking abilities. By the time these learners reach tertiary institutions, they struggle with academic journals, research reports, and course textbooks, which require higher order reading competencies.

Low Patronage of Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are central to the mission of higher education as they provide access to textbooks, journals, electronic resources, and study spaces that enhancing reading and learning. However, in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria, students underutilize these resources. The low patronage of

academic libraries has become a recurring concern, with direct implications for students' reading culture and academic success. Many students perceive academic libraries as outdated or irrelevant in the digital age. According to Ezeani and Igwe, (2021), some students are unaware of the full range of services libraries offer, while others experience library anxiety feeling intimidated by cataloguing systems or staff, hence, discourages frequent visits and active use of library resources. Aderiran and Akinola (2022) found that a large proportion of Nigerian university students prefer using the internet and social media for information rather than consulting library collections. This preference for quick, easily accessible information often discourages sustained engagement with library resources, which are perceived as time consuming to access, making the students to have low reading culture. Students who seldom use academic libraries are more likely to rely on shallow reading materials, affecting both their grades and long-term intellectual growth Atolagbe et al (2024).

Strategies for Reducing Low Reading Culture amongst Students in Tertiary Institutions

The following strategies are proffer in reducing low reading culture in tertiary institutions:

Reducing Sorting Practices: Sorting thrives in environments were assessment lacks transparency and accountability. To reduce it, strict enforcement of academic integrity policies must be implemented. Tertiary institutions must adopt and enforce zero tolerance policies on bribery, sexual harassment, and grade manipulation. According to Eboh and Nwogu (2017), creating clear disciplinary frameworks, where both students and lecturers face sanctions can deter sorting. Oko and Adie (2016) recommend that online examination and digital grading systems can limit opportunities for undue influence, which minimizes direct lecturer and student grade manipulation. Also, establishing anonymous reporting channels for students to report sorting attempts can enhance transparency, as Adebanjo (2019) notes that anti-corruption bodies within universities, when given autonomy, encourage ethical accountability and reduce sorting culture.

Combating Corruption in the Educational System: Corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions extends beyond sorting to cover nepotism, favoritism, mismanagement of funds, and examination malpractice. To address this, Obadare (2018) argues that strengthening university governance structures and granting financial autonomy reduces bureaucratic bottlenecks that foster corruption. According to Eboh and Nwogu (2017), external quality assurance discourages corrupt practices and ensures academic standards. Adebanjo (2019) stresses the importance of merit-based admission, scholarship, and promotion systems to restore student confidence that academic excellence is rewarded fairly. Embedding ethics and civic education in tertiary institutions curriculum can instill integrity in students and lecturers. When students internalize integrity early, they resist participating in corrupt practices Okebukola, (2015).

Minimizing Social Media Distractions: Although social media is a global trend, it often reduces time available for academic reading. Instead of banning it outright, institutions can minimize distractions through digital literacy campaigns, where students need guidance on balancing social media use with academic reading. Oriogu et al. (2017) recommend sensitization workshops to help students manage screen time and prioritize academic tasks. Tertiary institutions can harness platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram for academic discussions, group reading, and collaborative projects. Junco (2012) found that social media, when directed towards academic purposes, increases engagement and motivation.

Academic Libraries Modernization and E-resources: Most students do not go to the libraries to these days to read or do their assignments. Some students go to the library, but for the wrong reasons. Providing attractive, digital-friendly libraries and e-reading resources can redirect students' online time towards academic materials. Lukose and Agbeyangi (2025) suggest that combining social media technologies with

learning management systems such as Moodle, Google Classroom, encourages more productive digital reading.

Reducing sorting, corruption, social media distractions and, low academic patronage in tertiary institutions requires a holistic approach such as stricter academic integrity enforcement, governance reforms, digital assessment technologies, digitalization of academic libraries and digital literacy initiatives. If effectively implemented, these strategies can foster a culture of accountability, discipline, and balanced digital engagement, which in turn enhances students' reading habits and academic performance.

Conclusion

The persistent challenges of sorting, corruption, social media distractions and low patronage of academic libraries pose significant threats to the development of a sustainable reading culture and, by extension, to the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions. These issues are deeply interconnected and reflect broader systemic weaknesses in the educational sector. However, while these problems are entrenched, they are not insurmountable. Effective eradication requires a multi-pronged approach. Government must enact and enforce stronger educational policies, institutions must uphold accountability and transparency, lecturers must model integrity, and students must embrace discipline and self-regulation. If these reforms are pursued consistently, Nigerian tertiary education system can gradually shift from one dominated by shortcuts and distractions to one where reading, hard work, and integrity define academic success. This transformation is essential not only for improving students' academic performance but also for producing graduates who are competent, ethical, and globally competitive.

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