The culture of reading for acquisition and learning of content knowledge for English language and literature in English in higher education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the culture of reading literary texts in higher education and the strategies that can enhance the acquisition and learning of the content knowledge for both English Language and Literature in English. The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative research design. The study is qualitative in nature. Language in/for/with content and schema theories form the basis for the study. The former holds that language cannot be acquired outside content whilst schemata are stored mental structures that determine the acquisition of new knowledge; thus, literary content knowledge may not be acquired/learned outside linguistic and communicative competencies and vice versa. Data were collected from the relevant literature from the past six years. It was interpreted and analysed thematically. The results showed that students' habit of reading is poor which affects their academic performance. In addition, new technological devices make learning easier and more accessible, but it negatively affects students' ability to read authentic texts for information and entertainment. The study therefore concludes that university students do not read literary texts because of the bad use of information and communication technology. However, the use of digital libraries could improve the situation. The findings suggest that institutions of higher learning should have strategies to engage linguists and literary scholars in the habit of reading literary texts. University libraries should be equipped with relevant and updated digital reading materials.

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Introduction

The concept of reading literary texts for the acquisition of proficiency and content knowledge for English Language and Literature in English has been discussed for years. For instance, Oyewole (2017) states that students in Higher Education seem to have a low and poor reading culture. Consistent with the idea is the observation that reading culture at universities declines and changes due to Information and Communication Technology (Mustafa et al., 2021; Nguyen, Nguyen, and Tran, 2023). Furthermore, studies carried out in this field by Baron (2021), Mangen et al., (2021), Twenge et al., (2019), Jackson, (2018), Wolf (2018), Syvertsen (2017) show that the reading of authentic texts is at risk and vulnerable due to the introduction of new technological devices. The assertions above imply that the culture of reading literary texts generally and even in institutions of higher learning is low. As a consequence of that, it leads to poor academic performance and proven knowledge in that students fail to conceptualise concepts as they should for effective communication and expression.

Furthermore, Mustafa et al. (2021) opine that poor reading culture affects not only a person's academic and social life but also one's career. The researchers also state that factors that affect students' poor reading interests in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Kurdistan for instance, are that reading had not been a habit among university students in Kurdistan and such a challenge was seen in students' performance and proven knowledge to such an extent that when students graduate, they do not have sufficient knowledge...
they should have. Moreover, in a study carried out by Oyewole (2017) in Orido State in Nigeria concerning the reading culture, the findings demonstrate that students do not read as much as they should due to lack of well-equipped libraries to aid effective reading performance. The study also confirmed that reading habit influences students’ academic performance and there is a relationship between reading culture and academic performance. It can therefore be understood from the assertions above that successful academic performance from Basic Education to Higher Education level is dependent on students’ ability to effectively read because good learners are good proficient readers.

In addition, effective reading of literary texts enables students to learn requisite skills, linguistic and literary content knowledge, and new vocabulary and structures, thereby improving academic performance. The statement above is in line with Wema (2018) and Bulgurcuoglu's (2016) assertion that reading culture promotes individuals’ lifelong learning skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving competencies; this means that students’ requisite skills are enhanced. They also get exposed to the use of English language in different contexts. Moreover, they do not only acquire language but content knowledge of the two disciplines as well, hence the inseparability of language and content.

Acquisition of linguistic and communicative competencies from reading literary texts is requisite for developing English proficiency. The reason is, one has to know the rules of grammar, such as subject-verb agreement, tense, spelling, the use of articles and prepositions for effective communication. Effective communication and content knowledge will be challenging if students do not read regularly. Furthermore, learners who read effectively by applying different reading strategies are more proficient and achieve better results (Eutsler and Trotter, 2020; Bećirović, Brdarević-Čejlo and Dubravac, 2018). In addition, studies carried out in this space reveal that reading literary texts written in English benefits students who study the English Language as a discipline (Lalić and Dubravac, 2021). The assertions above imply that to understand a discipline's content; one should have appropriate reading skills, failing which comprehension and effective learning of such a discipline are challenged.

Taking the discussion further, in the research conducted by Cochrane, Oztürk, Khataee, Alhababi, Almaiki and Nourim (2022) in Qatar on Qatar Read suggests that children participating in the Qatar National Vision of 2030 significantly improve their attitude toward reading (Cochrane, Oztürk, Khataee, Alhababi, Almaiki and Nourim, 2022). The programme was meant to change the reading culture in that country. The findings demonstrate that students participating in the programme spend more time reading, and parents spend more time reading with/for their children. It can therefore be deduced that students could improve the culture of reading for purposes of acquisition of proficiency in English Language if clear structures are put in place and parents also take part in it as it the case in Qatar.

The studies above have concentrated on the culture of reading and its importance from elementary to high school level; very few studies focused on the culture of reading literary texts for the acquisition of proficiency in English and content knowledge for both English Language and Literature in English in higher education. The aim of this study therefore, is to explore the culture of reading literary texts by higher-education students in order to acquire proficiency in English and content knowledge for the two disciplines. It also investigates the strategies that could be employed to improve the poor reading culture in higher education.

The study is organised as follows: following the introduction, is the review of literature, then the research methodology. Thereafter, data presentation and analysis as well as conclusions and suggestions/recommendations and future research.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is supported by the constructivism paradigm which claims that reality is subjective and socially constructed. That is, truth is a social construction that is dependent on the meanings people ascribe to and their own experiences and interactions with others (Cilliers et al., 2014; Mertens, 2005). The paradigm also aims to generate knowledge through individual viewpoints and the significance ascribed to those viewpoints (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Constructivists also view knowledge as constructed by the processes individuals undertake (interpret) to make sense of their lived experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The scholars imply that knowledge/understanding about the reading culture in higher education was constructed after critically examining and interpreting the relevant literature. The constructivist paradigm grew from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German philosophers' study on interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Eichellberger, 1989). Hermeneutics studies the interpretive understanding or meaning of something from a particular standpoint or situation (Marree, 2012).

Language in/for/with content learning theory also formed the basis for this study. The theory holds that language should be taught using stimulating content (Lazars, 1993). The reading of literary texts therefore encourages language acquisition, expands students’ language awareness and interpretation abilities (Short, 1996; Cook, 1994). The implication of the above statements is that literature is the best tool for language teaching. It helps and motivates students to acquire and learn language because the content is familiar therefore fascinating. It is actually the practical use of language.

Schema theory is also used in this paper because of its relevance to the constructivist theory about knowledge construction. According to Axelrod (1973) schema theory is about how a single person observes and makes sense out of a complex environment. Axelrod indicates that schema describes the perceptual and cognitive process of a single person. In totality, the above-mentioned scholar’s postulation on schema theory is that schemata are experiences and knowledge that one has acquired over a period of time.
Consistent with the understanding of effective reading which is applicable to the teaching of the two disciplines is Short’s (1989) observation that the reader’s understanding of a text is determined by what he/she already knows which will be useful during the reading process. This postulation is in line with Zhao’s & Lei’s (2012) assertion that schema theory clarifies that in order to comprehend a text, one has to combine own background knowledge with the information in a text. Sharing the same idea is Sun’s (2014) understanding that the background knowledge is applied in learning new concepts. The understanding about the value/role of already acquired knowledge and even skills is consistent with Pankin’s (2013) position that that schema is based on past experience and is accessed to guide the current understanding or action.

Definition of Reading and Reading Culture

There are various definitions scholars attach to reading and reading culture. Dukper et al. (2018) define reading as a process of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning and problem-solving; it also transfers knowledge, while the culture of reading is an academic activity that increases skills in reading strategies. The scholars further state that reading is a systematic and deliberate task of gaining precise knowledge geared towards a criterion. The assertions above imply that reading is a process of acquiring/learning new information/knowledge and different generic skills from interacting with the written material. Therefore, it is a crucial skill for lifetime learning for students to flourish in their academic endeavors, so students must cultivate a strong reading culture (Ogunbode and Sawyerr-George, 2023). Reading could also refer to a person’s capacity to recognize letters and symbols and derive meaning from them.

Furthermore, reading culture is defined as the tradition of making reading a regular activity and the growth of a mindset and skills that make reading enjoyable. (Nyam, 2015). It can be considered a habit or regular interaction with written material for different purposes, such as knowledge/information acquisition or enjoyment. It is also a long-term method of developing a favorable reading attitude, not merely for scholastic purposes (Nkordeh, Oni, Olowononi and Bob-Manuel, 2017). Taking the discussion further is Ogunbode and Sawyerr-George’s (2023) statement that developing a consistent reading habit outside the classroom is a reading culture in which a student with a strong reading habit reads frequently. The scholars further argue that a person is said to have a reading culture if they routinely read books and other resources like periodicals that are not strictly necessary to grow in their field or career. Reading culture, thus, play a vital role in enabling an individual to achieve practical efficiency (Dukper et al., 2018). It can be inferred that it improves an individual's linguistic and communicative competencies, of which, if not mastered, effective communication by students in higher education will be hampered.

Reading Culture in Higher Education

Students in higher education should develop a reading culture to acquire new information and proficiency in English for effective communication. If one develops a culture of reading regularly, good reading culture will be formed because a habit is formed unconsciously when an individual does something. However, the problem most tertiary students have especially in Ghana which contributes to their poor academic performance, is the use of social media that affects their reading culture (Dukper et al., 2018). Due to social media’s influence, tertiary students read much less of their books. Even examination malpractices may be traceable to social media, which becomes a regular part of their life (Dukper et al., 2018). The scholars further state that tertiary students are expected to read and keep abreast of what is happening around them. However, that does not occur because they spend quality time surfing the internet on gossip and other immaterial issues (Dukper et al., 2018). In the study carried out to explore the effects of social media on the reading culture of tertiary students in Ghana, the study revealed that students' excessive use of social media has a statistically significant impact on the reading culture and their academic performance. The statements imply that the culture of reading in universities is poor because of the advent of social media that occupies students' ample time consciously and subconsciously. Also, there is evidence that students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) lag in reading compared to their international counterparts (Marquez, Lambert, Ridge, and Walker, 2022; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Arab Emirates, 2019), which is often attributed to the assertions that many households in the region do not have books at home and that parental involvement in children's education is infrequent (Demirci, 2019). The lack of reading material and low parental contribution at home contribute immensely to the challenge. A recent survey conducted by the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge showed that only 23% of parents read to their young children (Kumar, 2022); this is primarily because most parents are either unaware of the advantages of reading or are uneducated (Marquez, Lambert, Ridge and Walker, 2022). The scholars' observation signifies that the poor reading culture from basic education, elementary education and high school level affects students' culture of reading even at the university level, thus, poor academic performance.

According to Ha Le (2021), many university students in Vietnam, especially those who study in English medium schools, read because of the number of course books in English. That is, they read because of the availability of English written texts related to their courses. The assertion also implies that scarcity of textbooks related to their area of specialization promotes a poor reading culture. The study further revealed that students face many challenges reading English textbooks when they lack the necessary vocabulary and background knowledge. It can be inferred that students in higher education do not have enough requisite knowledge and skills, including the vocabulary related to their level of education and the field of study. As a result, they fail to read English written textbooks effectively.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Şahenk-Erkan and Dağal (2018) in Nigeria, which investigated the opinions of university students about digital reading, digital writing, and digital presentation, the study revealed that students had some negative thoughts
as well as positive thoughts about understanding, interpreting, expressing, and presenting examples of what they read in digital environments. Digital reading, also known as screen reading or e-reading, is defined as loading new meanings into the information reflected on the displays of various tools and absorbing this knowledge through mental processes (Akkaya and Çivğın, 2020). The findings also established that most university students used digital readings (DRs) daily, and the internet resources were used mainly by students who positively perceived the impacts of DR usage on their reading habits. As a result of technological advancement and the explosive rise of digital resources (DRs), undergraduate students’ reading preferences are shifting from print to digital sources (Yusof, 2021).

The statements imply that students had challenges using digital devices such as digital presentations and reading in their academic work. The study also revealed a significant relationship between DRs and the reading habits of university students in Nigeria (Ogunbodede and Sawyerr-George, 2023). The assertion implies that DRs can enhance the reading culture of university students in Nigeria since it enables easy accessibility of reading materials; this is consistent with the understanding that the use of digital texts is unavoidable in today's academic environment and has had a significant impact on students' attitudes and reading habits (Pardede, 2017). Similarly, Arslan (2023) states that today technology is used in almost every lesson in educational environments, such as in different courses, for various purposes and techniques. It contributes to students’ studies and positively affects their success. The scholar further argues that the students who acquire information by reading from different written sources formerly (books, magazines and newspapers) should have digital reading skills by transferring this information to digital media because the benefit and functionality of digital reading are high, as it provides instant access to the needed information (Arslan, 2023). Students can also have the convenience of learning at their own pace because of digital tools. They can use their preferred devices to access and read library content in various digital formats (eBooks, audiobooks, and films on demand) whenever they want and anywhere they are (Pearson, 2021).

Using libraries in universities could also promote the reading culture among university students. According to Ogunbodede and Sawyerr-George (2023), the library is a vital resource centre at any university with the primary goal of meeting users' information needs. The scholars further state that it also plays a crucial role in students’ learning process and cultivating reading habits by offering relevant and up-to-date resources for their study, research, and general interests and a welcoming environment. A library is a storehouse of knowledge that can support the younger generation in learning (Mariantia, 2023; Purnama, 2018). Also, it cannot be denied that students need new enthusiasm to visit the library (Zakirman and Rahayu, 2018).

Taking the discussion further is Nguyen et al.’s (2019) aversion that university libraries play a variety of essential responsibilities in encouraging reading habits, such as fostering literacy, providing depth and range of resources, organizing readership campaigns, offering library orientation programs, hosting book fairs and exhibitions, and more. The statements above show that libraries are the catalysts of the reading culture. However, statistics on university library users show that students use the library more only when studying for examinations (Ogunbodede and Sawyerr-George, 2023).

Taking the discussion further is Nguyen et al.’s (2023) statement that learners also experience unpleasant emotions and inherent threats to the literacy skill of reading. Sharing the same viewpoint is Pabro-Maquidato (2021) in her recent study which investigated anxious feelings in speaking among second language learners. The study revealed that learners often suffer from emotional tensions, physiological symptoms, and mental difficulties when orally expressing ideas in English. It can be deduced that learners experience some difficulty expressing themselves in English and reading English written literary texts because they are not used to the culture of reading regularly for information or enjoyment. Due to poor reading culture, students who self-disclose being anxious about reading in a foreign language receive lower scores on their reading tests (Mardianti, Wijayati and Murtadho, 2021). It is implied that students who do not read regularly have challenges with relevant content knowledge and linguistic and communicative competencies.

In addition, most students reported that their reading background knowledge and reading ability, namely the top-down factors, accounted for their negative emotions while performing the task (Nguyen et al., 2023). This means that students' low confidence in their ability to read automatically develops negative attitudes towards reading as a whole. This state of affairs affects students' academic performance. Nguyen et al. (2023), further define top-down Reading Anxiety (TRA) as that which consists of readers’ background and cultural knowledge, while Bottom-up Reading Anxiety (BRA) is that which involves the levels and complexity of vocabulary and grammar of the texts. Classroom Reading Anxiety (CRA) concerns mainly the teaching methods employed by the teachers in the reading classes. In essence, the assertions imply that students’ cultural background, their level of reading competence, and the teaching methods they are exposed to in a classroom affect their academic performance.

Importance of Reading

Fostering the habit of frequently reading for knowledge and entertainment has numerous benefits, including academic and non-academic (Renandya, Krashen, and Jacobs, 2018). Akkaya and Çivğın, (2020) opine that for a person to adapt quickly to the developing and changing world, it is necessary to constantly improve the reading skill that one has throughout one's education life. In general, reading aids in developing the mind, personality and individual intellectual capabilities (Duşker et al., 2018). The assertions mean that even students in higher education should adopt a culture of reading for academic success and personal development. Though most research on extensive reading has been conducted in English language settings, extensive reading can be a valuable approach to reading development in all languages, mainly through exposure to reading (Aghar, Demirci, Houjej, McMin, and Ali Saif Alzaabi, 2023). Furthermore, reading graded readers (GR) as part of an extensive reading program has also been proven
beneficial in improving vocabulary, reading skills, and understanding of different cultures, as reported by both university faculty and students (Xie and Yeung, 2022; Kim, 2019). It can be deduced that extensive reading also can improve students' culture of reading.

Taking the discussion further is the understanding that the culture of regular reading does not only apply in languages but also in all courses/modules. In the study that investigated Arabic teachers' perceptions of the effects of the practice of extensive reading (ER) on reading comprehension (RC) and vocabulary acquisition in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Suk (2016) employed 30 minutes of ER instruction in his classes with Korean University students of English as a foreign language (L2), the results showed that (ER) positively impacted on L2 students' reading abilities and increased their vocabulary acquisition significantly. The study further revealed that a growing number of language teachers have begun to implement (ER) in their teaching to help their students improve their overall language proficiency (Aghar, Demirci, Houjeir, McMinn, and Ali Saif Alzaabi, 2023). It can be denoted that reading culture is a prerequisite to extensive reading because students cannot extensively read unless they have a strong reading cultural background. Furthermore, Marianita (2023) opines that reading culture helps students develop analytical thinking successfully; for example, consistently reading fiction helps kids build their moral character, worldview, intelligence, and cognitive function. The scholar further argues that teachers should gradually extend reading time, collaborate closely with parents on this matter, and suggest literary works for reading in a way appropriate for the student's age. The assertions point to the understanding that reading habit develops and moulds students' personality; therefore, the working relationship between parents and teachers concerning the improvement of the reading culture for students should start at an early stage of their education so that they proceed to a tertiary level having already developed a culture of reading.

Strategies to Curb the Poor Reading Culture in Higher Education

Institutions of higher learning should have strategies to help students improve the reading culture; for example, with the exponential expansion of digital reading in Nigeria, Nigerian students' declining reading habits could be transformed, enhanced and resuscitated if the academic curricular could be mixed with digital reading availability (Liasu and Bakrin, 2022). The excerpt implies that universities should develop and review their curriculum so that students can easily access reading material digitally because accessing information using different electronic devices is easier and quicker. Students can access materials easily if they have the internet. Consistent with the understanding that moving texts and visual components add vitality to reading, making it more enjoyable to students of all ages to read without getting bored (Ogunbode and Sawyerr-George, 2023; Akkaya and Çivğın, 2020; Ogunbode and Sawyerr-George, 2023; Akkaya and Çivğın, 2020). Digital reading, therefore, can improve the poor reading culture at institutions of higher learning.

Nonetheless, numerous studies have consistently shown that consumers prefer to use print resources over digital ones because they think they can focus and remember information more effectively (Greene, 2018). Sharing the same viewpoint is Ogunbode et al.’s (2020) statement that the primary reason users want a print textbook is that they believe printed materials are more accessible, less distracting, well-known, straightforward to use, and do not need internet access. In the study by Kumara and Kumar (2018), the effect of ICT on students at Tumkur University’s reading habits was examined; the study revealed that students regularly access the internet and use digital readings to help them with their academic work. However, most students argue that print books cost more than online resources. It can be inferred, therefore, that the combination of digital/online reading accessibility and reading of print textbooks could help improve the reading culture in institutions of higher learning; it is up to individuals' preferences. The internet may not be accessible in some areas; similarly, hard copies of print texts might also not be easily accessible or even be expensive in some instances. Students could therefore use what is at their disposal.

English-major students are quite familiar and well-equipped with different strategies for reading texts, but teachers are still considered the key factors in lessening their reading anxiety (Nguyen et al., 2023). It can be understood that although students in higher education have already acquired different reading skills, lecturers are still expected to guide students to enhance students’ reading competence. The scholars further argue that teachers should first provide students with needed strategies and techniques before introducing the reading of texts and assignments to minimize their reading anxiety, which could hinder their ability to read texts with understanding effectively. Lecturers' guidance is essential because many students appreciate reading major books suggested by their lecturers (Nguyen, 2022).

Research and Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature because it allows the researcher to interpret data subjectively. It also adopts constructivist paradigm and a qualitative research design that seek to delve deeply into the social constructs that underlie this phenomenon. According to Merriam (2009) qualitative research has been derived philosophically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction. The scholar further states that it is used by researchers who are interested in “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). What is more, the purpose of educational qualitative research is to improve our practice and the basic qualitative research design is particularly well suited to obtain an in-depth understanding of effective educational processes (S. B. Merriam, personal communication, September 5, 2013). She further argues that for example, a basic qualitative study can be used to uncover strategies, techniques, and practices of highly effective teachers and administrators. In furtherance to that, the qualitative research approach corresponds with the constructivism paradigm in that the two do not seek to generalize but rather attempt to thoroughly understand the phenomenon from the researcher's
point of view (Creswell, and Poth 2018; Rajasekar, Philominathan, and Chinnathanamthi 2013. It is for the above reasons this study adopted qualitative research design that would enable the researcher to dwell deeper into the poor culture of reading in higher education and strategies that could improve it. In addition, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them (Aspers, and Corte, 2019). It lets the reader know something new and probably find viable solutions to a problem (Islam and Faraj, 2022). In this study, the researcher explored the existing literature on the reading culture in higher education to find the trend, gaps, challenges, and solutions, thus constructing new knowledge in the field. This critical review of the global literature on the phenomenon is for the past six years from the studies by Ogunbodede and Sawyer-George, (2023), Marianita (2023), Kumar (2022), Marquez, Lambert, Ridge, and Walker (2022), Yusof (2021), Pabro-Maquidato (2021), Akkaya and Akkaya and Çivğın, (2020), Çivğın (2020), Widiyawati (2020), Kim (2019), Demirci, (2019), Dukper et al., (2018) and Greene, 2018).

Data analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative analysis can be referred to as a method of analyzing a particular subject using non-numeric plus non-quantifiable indicators, behavior, and characteristics to determine its overall situation, quality, value, or any other parameter (Wallstreetmojo Team, and Vaidya, 2023). It includes interpreting, identifying, and examining patterns and themes in textual data and determining how they help understand the phenomena more profoundly for answering questions (Islam and Faraj, 2022). This study therefore adopted Thematic Analysis which refers to a process of segmentation, categorisation and relinking of aspects of the data prior to the final interpretation (Matthew & Liz, 2010). Furthermore, according to Castleberry & Amanda (2018), TA can also be defined as a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning across a dataset, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. Identifying unique and idiosyncratic meanings and experiences found only within a single data item is not the focus of TA. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is discussed or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities. The researcher critically compiled the literature on the phenomenon, then disassembled/separated the data to create meaningful groupings, identified patterns, categorized them into themes that go together or have connections, interpreted them and made analytic conclusions; thus, constructed new knowledge.

Findings and discussions

This study explores the reading culture of literary texts and its implications for the acquisition of proficiency in English in Higher Education and the strategies that could be employed to solve the problem. The researcher analyzed the literature on the phenomenon. Significant themes that emerged from the literature are; the state of the reading culture in higher education, reasons for the poor reading culture in higher education and the strategies that could be used to curb the situation.

The State and Reasons for the Poor Reading Culture in Higher Education

The literature-related findings related to the reading culture in higher education revealed that students' habit of reading is poor, and as a result, it affects their academic performance (Dukper et al., 2018; Marquez, Lambert, Ridge, and Walker, 2022; Demirci, 2019). The observation implies that students' acquisition of proficiency in English and content knowledge for Literature in English and English Language as interdependent disciplines are negatively affected. On the contrary, students' ability to read regularly and extensively for content knowledge and entertainment enhances their linguistic and communicative competencies and content knowledge for the two disciplines (Dukper et al., 2018; Xie and Yeung 2022; Kim 2019). The literature further showed that the poor reading culture in higher education is attributed to the influence of social media (Dukper et al., 2018). Students spend most of their time on social media chatting instead of studying. In some situations, it is discovered that many households do not have books at home because parental involvement in children's education is infrequent (Demirci, 2019). That is, there are not enough books and newspapers for students to read at home because most parents do not read regularly, so students grow up in an environment with a poor reading culture (Kumar, 2022). The same poor habit of reading is transferred to students' academic work, even up to the university level. This is consistent with Nguyen et al.'s (2023) top-down reading anxiety, which is about readers' background knowledge and bottom-up reading anxiety, which consists of the levels and complexity of vocabulary and grammar of the texts students read. By implication, the scholars mean that students' reading background and content knowledge/experience (schemas) determine their level of comprehension and linguistic and communicative competencies. The same attributes are prerequisites for habitual reading in higher education.

Furthermore, another literature-related finding is that the majority of the students in Nigerian universities, for example, use and prefer digital reading as opposed to print (Akkaya and Çivğın, 2020; Yusof, 2021). Digital readings positively impact on students' reading habits globally; therefore, there is a significant relationship between DRs and the reading habits of university students (Ogunbodede, and Sawyer-George, 2023). The study also revealed that digital reading is unavoidable in today's academic environment as it is used in every lesson in educational settings and has had a significant positive impact on students' attitudes and reading habits (Pardede, 2017; Arslan, 2023). The assertion points to the understanding that in the 21st Century (technological world), teaching and learning are surrounded by technological devices, so, ideally, even the culture of reading should be digital.

Another finding is the use of libraries in universities. The statistics on university library users show that it is only during examination times that students' use of the library rises dramatically (Ogunbodede, and Sawyer-George, 2023). It can therefore be inferred that
students only read more in the library when they study for examinations; otherwise, they do not use it frequently as they should throughout the academic year.

**Strategies to Improve the Poor Reading Reading Culture in Higher Education**

The literature-related findings suggest that the consistent use of the library could improve the poor reading culture in higher education because it is a vital resource centre at any university in the world of education today with the primary goal of meeting users' information needs (Marianita, 2023; Putri Dewa Yani, 2022). It could also improve the reading habit by fostering literacy, hosting book fairs and exhibitions, organising readership campaigns, as well as offering pertinent and up to date resources for students’ study, research and general interests (Maree, 2012; Ogumbode and Sawyer-George, 2023; Marianita, 2023; Alex Nnecha and Hersfall, 2019). The assertions point to the understanding that structured library usage could improve students’ reading habits because of the availability of different materials; in fact, it serves as a reference source. Marianita (2023) further argues that the library as a reference source of various kinds is vital in higher education because it can support campus activities, so it must be prioritized. Lecturers could invite students to visit the library at least several times in one semester to study and increase their insight and literacy, both for support materials and research, so that students in learning do not complain about the reference sources needed (Marianita, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings indicate expanding and flavoring academic curricula with digital reading (Liausu and Bakrin, 2022). Digital reading enables students to access material easily and quickly at any time, regardless of location, as long as they have internet access. Students, therefore, would not get bored (Ogunbode and Sawyer-George, 2023; Akkaya and Çiğın, 2020). The findings also revealed that digital books are cheaper, user-friendly and accessed easily compared to expensive heavy printed texts (Kumara and Kumar, 2018). The availability of digital books could improve students’ culture of reading. The finding is, therefore, suggestive of the digital library. The reason is that the digital library itself is not only easily accessible to the educated but to the general public from various backgrounds (Marianita, 2023). It can be reached even from different remote areas (Marianita, 2023). The era of globalization has indeed provided convenience and unlimited access to finding references in digital libraries, which are very indulgent for visitors today. For instance, the Indonesian nation is developing a digital library to overcome the level of decline in literacy among the younger generation of Indonesian nation (Widiyawati, 2020).

The findings also revealed that teachers and parents should continue encouraging students to read even if they can read a particular book or tale on their own; for example, they could read their favorite novels because they primarily influence their area of interest and support their efficient growth, so to do this, parents and educators should set a good example for kids by displaying a favorable attitude about the book (Marianita, 2023); this implies that parents should be exemplary concerning habitual reading of novels at home to influence the children to copy the good reading habit even though it should be developed following their interests since the educational process involves developing pupils’ motivation for reading artistic works of literature, which is regarded as a crucial component of contemporary education.

Taking the discussion further is the discovery that teachers and lecturers should teach and guide students on different reading strategies for other purposes as that would reduce students reading anxiety (Nguyen, Nguyen, and Tran, 2023). Students’ competence in different reading strategies would improve their habit of reading. Researchers have also suggested that the difficulties reported around students’ lack of interest in reading may be reduced if teachers hold their students accountable for reading by writing book reports or taking post-reading quizzes (Chang and Renandya, 2017; Van Amelsvoort, 2016). Monitoring and evaluation on students’ reading habits could positively influence their reading habits.

**Conclusions**

The study concludes that the reading culture in higher education is poor, and as a result, students’ personal development and academic performance are negatively affected. Students’ content knowledge and linguistic and communicative competencies for Literature in English and English Language as academic disciplines are also affected. The study also concludes that factors such as poor students’ home reading background caused by parents who do not read and the absence of adequate reading materials at home contribute to students’ low level of reading culture in higher education. The challenge escalates to the high school level, where most schools do not have well-equipped libraries with interesting recent books, so students do not use libraries as they should. The study also concludes that students in higher education spend more time in the library only during examination time. Furthermore, it is concluded that digital libraries could improve the reading culture because of easy accessibility regardless of students’ location. The use of social media as a vital component of student’s daily life at the tertiary level is another leading source of poor reading culture.

The study makes a theoretical contribution to the institutions of higher learning and the world of academia in general. It adds value to the already existing research on the culture of reading and it is hoped that it would be used as a resource for future studies. It also promotes the use of Information Communication and Technology as it will enhance accessibility of reading materials.

The study however has limitations in that data were generated from the literature from the past six years only, perhaps more years backwards could bring a different dimension altogether because the poor culture of reading has been discussed for years. Also it is limited to higher education only, yet poor reading culture does not start at higher education. It starts from the elementary level.

This study focused on the culture of reading literary texts in higher education in order to enhance learning and acquisition of proficiency in English and content knowledge for both English Language and Literature in English as well as the strategies that could be employed.
to improve it. Future studies are expected to fill the short comings of this study, for example, they could focus on the reading culture at primary and high school levels in order to enhance the learning and acquisition of the content knowledge for both English Language and Literature. They could also explore the strategies that could be employed to improve the situation at those levels. In addition they could focus on policies institutions of higher learning could put in place to instill and enhance the culture of reading in all faculties because it affects not only Literature in English and English Language majors but the overall performance of students across all disciplines.

The study recommends that to improve the students' reading culture in higher education; students should start reading from the elementary level and at home under the guidance of parents as role models. Parents should buy books and newspapers for students to have something to read at home. Similarly, schools should equip their libraries with engaging, relevant and latest textbooks for students to read. There should also be corner libraries in the class where every student is forced to borrow a book to read regularly at the classroom level. The study recommends that teachers should teach and train students on appropriate reading skills for different purposes because that would enhance effective reading and learning. The same reading culture and skills should be transferred to the tertiary level. The study recommends that university libraries should be equipped with relevant and updated reading materials. Students should be encouraged to read regularly, and lecturers should have strategies to assess students’ reading habits because that would improve not only students' proficiency in English but also the content knowledge of language-related disciplines and others. In addition, the study recommends that lecturers should regulate students’ visiting hours on their timetable. Easily accessible digital books for students should be available whenever they feel like it; this implies that the university management should continue to provide internet services and computer systems so that students can continue to enjoy more access to DRs to enhance their learning (Ogunbodede and Sawyerr-George, 2023). Access to the internet could be regulated because it should be available only at certain working hours to limit students' free access to social media; this is in line with Dukper et al.'s (2018) recommendation that relative orientation on when and how to manage social media by students in tertiary institutions should be done and since most of the students access social media with a wireless network, authorities in tertiary institutions should establish rules and regulations that will curtail or restrict students’ use of social networking sites during lectures and library sessions. Social media should be used prudently, not only to stay in touch with family and friends but must be used reasonably as a vital information source and conducting academic activities (Dukper et al., 2018). Again, students must endeavor to spend more time reading their books than surfing social media.

Finally, they could use wikis (a type of social media) like Wikipedia that promotes learning and academic research.

This research has contributed to the scholarship of reading culture in higher education. It has revealed that the culture of reading in higher education is poor so students’ academic performance is negatively affected. It has also unveiled that Literature provides the content and context for teaching and learning of English Language. The culture of reading should be digital as that will enable students to easily access reading material at any time, anywhere as long as they have access to the internet. The research has also made a significant contribution to the theories surrounding the area of study. It has expanded Language in/for/with content theory that acquisition of language and content are simultaneous and inseparable. The study has also enhanced the schema theory in that students are able to study Literature in English and English Language because of the already stored literary and linguistic schemata. It has gone beyond the known principles and added that acquisition of new knowledge is dependent on the old schemata.

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