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UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN
ILORIN, NIGERIA

THE USE OF ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Chapter Two

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE STUDY HABITS AND SKILLS

Binta Fatima IBRAHIM (Ph.D.)

What is a Habit?

A habit is something that is done on a schedule either regularly or planned. A habit indicates dedication to a particular event, activity, or process without reservations, excuses, or exceptions. Studying means educating oneself. To study is to devote time and attention to the acquisition of knowledge and competence on an academic subject. Studying is learning for a purpose.

Study habit is therefore simply the uninterrupted and regular activity dedicated to a learning task for the absorption of information. Study habits affect performance. Ogbe (2002) affirms that for an excellent performance, there is need for the student to form good study habits. The need to help the individual to build his or her full academic potential requires the development of student's study habit. Effective study habit can be enhanced when the student/learner deeply understands the motives behind reading and listening. Understanding, among other strategies, enhances positive attitudes towards learning and studying.

Types of Study Habits

- i. **Hobby Habits:** A hobby is an activity one does regularly as a result of the joy and satisfaction one derives from it. Some good learners have turned studying to one of their major hobbies. This hobby study habit type helps such learners' mental ability and reasoning to develop better.
- ii. **Recreational Habits:** This type of reading activity helps to improve interests in learning. Reading for recreation or relaxation brings about the desire for further reading and eventually effective acquisition of knowledge.
- iii. **Concentration Study Habit:** This provides the desired result for the learner. Success is easily achieved through concentration study which involves some other study strategies to be taken note of i.e. SQ3R Technique where:

S stands for surveying the content through the headlines

Q stands for the formulation of questions for effective comprehension; and

3R stands for reading, reciting and reviewing the material.

Insights for the Formation of Effective Study Habits

1. Personal level of preparedness, self-desire and willingness to improve and do well at school
2. Positive self-attitudinal motivation
3. Utilisation and management of time: Having a regular daily time and place schedule.
4. Use of conducive atmosphere that is devoid of distractions
5. Information storage
6. Retrieval of knowledge
7. Use of reading strategies, i.e. skimming, scanning and text attack skills, etc.

8. Active listening and concentration
9. Critical thinking
10. Use of question techniques
11. Retention of concepts and important ideas
12. Grouping and organising information so as to make learning easier
13. Applying inductive reasoning i.e. drawing clear generalised conclusions
14. Memorisation using a desired technique for remembrance
15. Having group discussions involving debates, quiz, etc. on collective effort
16. Prioritizing by putting the materials and contents in order of importance
17. Reviewing and revising the material regularly in order not to forget
18. Summarising what has been learnt in key parts: in words, phrases, sentences, outlines, concepts and categories
19. Restating or rewriting using your own words to rewrite your notes. This enhances your thinking ability.
20. Visualising your organised points in diagrams and labels. Diagrams though usually underrated as a tool, can be used to bring all the information together for easy grasp and practice.

Factors Affecting Effective Study Habits

Study habits have great influence on students' performance. Wrong study habits remain a hindrance to the effective use of the study strategies for academic achievements and the extent of students' learning may be determined by his/her study habits. The following items have been recognised as the factors affecting effective study habits: (See Adegbija, 1987)

1. Learners' negative attitude towards learning
2. Lack of self-determination and self-discipline
3. Lack of personal motivation
4. Inappropriate study venue
5. Ineffective time management
6. Lack of concentration in both reading and listening
7. Distractions through phone calls, watching movies, television, musical gadgets, etc.

Effective habits for effective study according to Covey (2006) involve the following:

1. Through personal habits, you can prepare yourself to succeed in your studies i.e., make studies your priority, your time schedule and the available resources. Time, in terms of morning, afternoon and evening.
2. Develop academic principles by not allowing friends to just dictate your principles and values.
3. Aim at your set goals without distractions achieving them one after the other.
4. The study arena must be a productive place; quiet and free from disturbances.
5. Consider yourself a win-win performer.
6. Understand other people's ideas, then make yourself understood.
7. Look for better solutions to lack of understanding. Lack of understanding for instance of a course material is a problem that requires more than just re-reading it. You need to consult your lecturer, an academic advisor, a classmate or a study group. (Hispanic Scholarship fund, 2008 941051-877-HSF-INFO)

The Meaning of Study Skills

A skill is learned or developed ability. Some people refer to it as technique for learning something; a strategy for acquiring knowledge in this instance. Study skills are therefore the methods that can be used by students and trainees in acquiring knowledge and competence in an easier way for a student. We study to learn; i.e. studying is for the purpose of learning. Studying and learning should therefore be viewed as two connected life-long processes. Learning requires study skills which are the tools needed for effective comprehension and practices. However, studying requires more effort than learning. A learner may not be necessarily studying, but listening to a story or watching a film or even practicing how to sew a piece of cloth. All these require studying the story, the film and the sewing, using certain developed abilities known as skills for practice and application. Skills are habits that instill discipline in the learner once well cultivated. It is these habits that lessen the learner's unnecessary frustration. For emphasis, either habit or skill applied helps to preserve time and aids the meaning of the material being learnt (Bakare, 1971).

With study skills therefore, more work can be done and learnt within a given period of time. Study skills are specific observed habits that can be used for effective study in any discipline. For more examples, following a schedule, a direction, taking notes with important details, and using relevant contents in an oral presentation will require specific skills of organisation. It is the application of study skills that enables the learner to be in charge of his/her own learning. Learners use the skills to direct and organise their learning process toward desired success, ease and comfort. The processes they adopt in their study skill to succeed are targeted towards the digestion of good and huge number of documents or materials for the purpose of gathering and organising the information therein. The focus of the skills or strategies therefore, is the assimilation and retention of the subject and the content that a learner needs to keep up-to-date in his/her field of study. Other study processes in learning involve a lot of activities such as thinking, reflecting, making topics, paying attention to outlines, organising facts, breaking lengthy and difficult segments into short parts, making notes, editing the note and developing them. These aid the study habit of the mind of the individual as serving as a study itself; i.e. a learner's willingness to improve his knowledge, planning how and what he/she intends studying enhances effectiveness. The learner is expected to read in preparation for studying, he/she also needs to clearly define his objectives. Facilities to be used could be gathered and prearranged within the working environment for a productive result.

Study skills or study strategies are specific approaches applied to learning. They are generally critical to success in school and are considered essential for acquiring good grades and useful for learning throughout one's life. They are an array of study skills which may tackle the process of organising and taking new information, retaining information or dealing with assessments, effective reading and concentration techniques as well as efficient note taking (Study Skills, 2013). This connotes the fact that effective study habits and skills go beyond just knowing them; they should be applied in the course of one's studies in order to aid thinking, improvement and achievement.

Types of Study Skills

There are a number of different methods through which effective study skills are acquired. Some of the more important ones are listed below:

1. Methods based on memorisation and rehearsal (rote learning)
2. Methods based on communication skills e.g. reading

3. Methods based on cue's (flashcard training)
4. Methods based on condensing information, summarising and use of key words
5. Methods based on visual imagery e.g. diagrams, charts, illustrations
6. Methods based on use of acronyms and synonyms
7. Methods based on time management, organisation and lifestyle changes
8. Thinking skills: everybody has thinking skills, but few use them effectively. Aim at positive thinking.
9. The SQ3R Method: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review. Another one is SQ5R (5r = Read, Recite, Reflect, Record, Review) (Knight, 1992:42).
10. Getting the Main Ideas: Main ideas are usually the important information or messages, that is, the main points.

Study Skills Strategies

Ellen (1986, pp. 472-474) has identified different types of study skills strategies for learners of English as a Second Language using a case study of comprehension passage thus:

- (1) *Content Anticipation*: Your ability to predict the next content in succeeding portions of a text ensures that you are concentrating on the material being studied. For understanding to take place, the basic foundation needed is concentration; which should be seen as a crucial strategy for studies.
- (2) *Recognition of Text Structure*: Another comprehension strategy is the ability of the learner to distinguish between the major points of the text and their supporting details. Let your mind be on the most important details.
- (3) *Information Integration*: Integration of information is another comprehension strategy. Try to learn to connect with new information. Pieces of information reinforce each other and ensure unity and coherence in a text. Try to question information in a text intelligently, that is question the important or truth of the content being read. Do not accept as the truth every piece of information you read about in the material – question it. In between, use comparisons and contrasts, draw generalised conclusion and induce reasons through external and internal inferences.
- (4) *The Nature of the Material under Study*: Good study strategy hinges critically on the kind of material the learner studies. Since knowledge constantly changes or advances, the learners have to be current. The material they are going to study may be outdated un-authoritative and consequently unreliable. They need to develop the habit of finding out the most current material on a particular subject in their field. Knowledge must include recent discoveries and present contributions.

If the content of the material before you is difficult to interpret, summarise the parts, make conclusions, formulate hypotheses and still try to draw inferences from what you read. Make use of general knowledge association, background information and experiment on explanation, verification, exemplification, clarification, validation. Always check to find out whether you actually understand what you have read. Your reaction to the text you have read, emotionally or otherwise is very important. You could indicate such impression in writing.

- (5) *Paraphrasing Strategy*: Another study skill strategy, is paraphrasing the segment of the text, which you find interesting using your own words. For instance a student, who reads only books written in 1970s might discover, to his/her annoyance that

signs and symbols. Research findings, to study them effectively and use both note taking and note making skills to recognise them. Students will also need to review and revise notes on regular practice basis. After which they should develop assertiveness based on personal and interpersonal experience.

- (6) *Personal Motivation Strategy*: The learner must be interested in learning before he/she can use study skills effectively. His/her willingness is of paramount importance. No amount of suggestion, skills, ideas, outline can help once the learner is uninterested in the study. The individual mind and level of preparedness is a device for effective study. The learner's motivation could be hindered by stress, boredom or emotional imbalance. He/she needs to create a balance between stress and his/her work.
- (7) *The PQRSST Strategy*: This method helps the learner to focus on areas of priority in his/her studies. This enables the learner practice how he/she will relate the important parts of the information gathering to his/her requirements using the following utilisation methods: Robinson, (1970) gives the details of the PQRSST Strategy as follows:
 - (a) *Previewing the Material (P)*: All the learner does here is to look at the topic, glance at the major points for the purpose of grasping the major theme or subject matter of the text. These involve organising the work in planning phases and keeping files.
 - (b) *Question Formula (Q)*: The learner formulates questions from the materials and these allow for flexibility of understanding. The question should either be specific or general.
 - (c) *Reading for Inferences (R)*: The learner should aim at picking out the information that best answers the question he/she has formulated.
 - (d) *Summarising the Processes (S)*: Information here is summarising according to the processes or parts enumerated in the reference materials. The actions to be taken include making written notes, mapping diagrams and attempting labels.
 - (e) *Testing and Assessment (T)*: This last step in PQRSST method is used to answer the questions you have formulated. The learner can manipulate the given information to suit whatever form of assessment that is needed.
- (8) *Time Management*: Managing time effectively is a crucial strategy for studying. Time management is an effective strategy for enhancing effective study. The learner should have a regular schedule of time for studying. Divide your study into smaller bits, review, summarise, and avoid distraction.
- (9) *Note-Making Strategy*: Every student must possess the skill of note making. Note making is a crucial aid to the retention of memory on information received in lecture, talks, books and other sources. Not only that, note making ensures the active participation of a learner in the process of learning since the desire to make notes often results in a corresponding desire to listen with attention, retrieve and recollect information. Note making saves time, for if you have taken good notes, you do not need to read the entire text or tape recorded lectures before knowing the major points it entails. It forces you to focus on the major points of a text, etc. Note making ranges from connotation, informal jottings, summary notes, to outlining. The purpose of note making dictates how they are to be taken.

We have two main kinds of notes;

- a. Notes made by students during lectures.

b. Notes made by students during private studies.

The first kind requires good listening and writing skills depending on the student's speed, good preparation, organisation and presentation on the part of the lecturer. A learner needs to be well equipped with abbreviations, acronyms, and other more economic devices that will aid accurate and organised writing of notes.

The note we take while studying on our own are usually based on written text. The pace of this write-up here depends on our personal reading and writing speed and these can be organised by following the plan and sequences used in the text one is reading or desired rearrangement in all notes. For these, we need all the salient points. Strangl-Taller (2009) adds that we must therefore use writing devices that help brevity. Use key words, phrases and concepts, restate them using your own words and review comments.

- (10) *Memorising Strategy*: People generally refer to the memorising techniques as a bottleneck. This is because it does not give room for any new information to be remembered. If you want to remember the number of items in your room for instance, you can think of using the alphabetical numbering order and go ahead to use the listing techniques, for instance.
- (11) *Outline Strategy*: This is also referred to as mind mapping. The outlining skill enables the learner to write down the core elements in the material being studied. These key elements help to minimise boredom and irrelevancies are avoided. The outline, be it phrase structure or sentence structure outline helps to make a material to be more organised and easy for understanding and recall. The components of the materials are better resources for evaluation of one's study ability.
- (12) *Summary Skill Strategy*: Every learner should have the summary methods. Some use paragraphs while some make use diagrams. However, learners are advised to hybridise all the available methods since each method is proven to improve study outcomes. Giving feedback is therefore an evidence of self-awareness and subsequent communication of one's effective knowledge.

Some of these skills, eg. Note taking/note making, summary, outlining are discussed in more details in chapter 3 of this book.

Factors Affecting Effective Study Skills

According to Cottrel (2003), the following factors affect effective study skills:

- a. *The Study Venue*: Differences exist in the choice of preferred places for study as a result of different qualities in different personalities. Most people study best in a quiet, serene and peaceful atmosphere rather than a turbulent, noisy and distracting one; while some others study better when there is a soothing, quiet, non-distractive music in the background. Such music could however, easily induce sleep. A noisy and turbulent environment, for example a market place, is definitely not an ideal place. It is always better to develop the habit of studying at a reading table and in a well-lit and well-ventilated room. Lying down on a bed to study could lure you to sleep. The library is certainly supposed to be a good place for studying, even though many people have not learned to respect the library as a place where absolute silence needs to be maintained.

- b. **The Study Time:** An effective key for studying is the judicious management of time. Time poorly spent frustrates, discourages and could even inhibit the prospect of success. So many people are failures or underachievers because they are unable to manage their time effectively. You must realise the fact that time flies and that it waits for no one.
- c. **Distractions during Study:** Inappropriate place of study could aid distraction. Thinking gives valuable insight and expected revelations into further knowledge. Lack of concentration and thinking leads to unnecessary distractions.
- d. **Underlining:** Underlining is not a productive way of emphasising useful materials; it is rather an effective way of highlighting all points in the material being read. Instead, one can circle words or ideas not well understood, and also put a bracket around explanations and exemplifications. Mark off things that you disagree with and put arrows on things you find remarkable interesting. Asterisk everything that is essential and use colours where emphases are made to enhance prominence accentuation.
- e. **Reading Aloud to Oneself:** Reading aloud does not allow one to study effectively. Moving of lips, as some people do, makes reading or studying ineffective and inefficient. It slows down one's reading speed. Faster reading promotes reading ability. The learner is expected to be able to read fast, faster and fastest. Good speed aids understanding.

Conclusion

The subtitles above are general factors which affect and enhance effective study habits and skills. The ability of every learner to develop his personality using these unique and effective tactics will ensure effective comprehension wherever time is well spent in studying. These productive study habits and strategies are bound to enhance academic harvests, leading to successful comprehension and achievement.

Having study partners or study groups could be of immense benefit to learners in addition to their developed study habits. Apart from the intellectual cross-fertilization that occurs as the learner interacts with study partners, most learners learn more easily through the interaction with study partners. Learners could access recent books, journals, ideas, bulletins, etc. in their areas and discussions could be held on them. Learners, therefore, need to form the habit of interacting with their colleagues, teachers and scholars frequently and also use online sources. Online sources provide an invaluable means of ensuring academic currency. The library, which is the reservoir for preserving all materials, is an inadequate resource centre in achieving our aims and objectives as learners. We therefore have to be judicious and selective with the kinds of materials we use in the library and gather from websites. Websites are effective resources for study skills toward academic competence. The basic skill for studying generally is therefore the more you read, listen, speak about it, use it and question it, the more you remember it. This is essentially learning in progress and with the application of certain learning habits and study strategies along with study habits and skills, students' studying becomes more successful and enjoyable.

Hence, in summary, the several factors that contribute to good study habits and skills are: knowing (recalling information from memory), comprehending (understanding concepts in your own words), applying (using concepts appropriately in new situations), synthesizing (bringing all the elements into a comprehensive whole), and evaluating (forming an opinion and justifying it through persuasive argument). (See *TransWorldNews*, 2009)

PRACTICE EXERCISES

Exercise 1

- (a) State the relationship between study habits and study skills.
(b) What is the difference between a habit and a skill?
- How can a learner's study habit be developed?
- Identify the types of study habits and differentiate between them.
- What are the techniques for the formation of effective study habits?
- In which ways can a learner enhance his/her study habits?
- Enumerate the importance of time schedule, organisation and management to study habits and skills.
- Discuss the SQ3R Method for developing the learner's study skill.
- Emphasise the function of the PQRSST study skill strategy.
- Of what relevance is listening and reading to the development of effective study habits and skills?
- When is the thinking skill put in use while using one of the study strategies?

Exercise 2

Instruction: One of the letters A-D in each of the following questions serves as the correct answer of the following multiple choice exercises. Choose the correct answer by placing a tick in the appropriate circle.

- 1) A Habit is an/a
(a) ☐ activity (c) ☐ strategy
(b) ☐ exercise (d) ☐ skill

- 3) One of the following is a type of habit
(a) ☐ learning (c) ☐ encouragement
(b) ☐ concentration (d) ☐ thinking

- 5) A Reading strategy that is good for studying is
(A) ☐ skimming (C) ☐ organising
(B) ☐ reciting (D) ☐ visualising

- 7) SQ3R concentration study habit means...
(A) ☐ See question 3 Read (C) ☐ Survey, question, read review, recite
(B) ☐ question survey, read, recite, review (D) ☐ None of the above

- 9) Time schedule needs one of the following
(A) ☐ Venue (C) ☐ Reading aloud
(B) ☐ Organisation (D) ☐ Discipline

- 2) A study can be defined as
(a) ☐ performance (c) ☐ knowledge
(b) ☐ task (d) ☐ achievement

- 4) Memorisation is a method of
(a) ☐ skills (c) ☐ habit skill
(b) ☐ study skill (d) ☐ study habit

- 6) Personal positive attitude aids
(A) ☐ questions (C) ☐ contents
(B) ☐ study habits (D) ☐ distractions

- 8) Inductive Reasoning is
(A) ☐ Explicit thinking (C) ☐ Implicit reasoning
(B) ☐ Making inferences (D) ☐ Drawing generalised conclusion

- 10) Academic success and knowledge can be achieved through
(A) ☐ only study skills (C) ☐ effective time schedule
(B) ☐ study habits and skills (D) ☐ listening and reading

Exercise 3

Instruction: Applying your study abilities/strategies, read the passage below and answer the questions that follow the passage.

COMPREHENSION PASSAGE

The beggars are in a flutter of disquiet; there is a rumble and grumble of suppressed anger. They have just returned from old Gorgui Diop's funeral. All they knew was that he had been picked up in a raid. A few days later they heard on the radio an announcement from the hospital superintendent, requesting the next-of-kin of Gorgui Diop, deceased, aged about fifty-two, native of Sandiara, to come and collect his body. No one had any idea in what circumstances he had been taken to hospital or what he had died of.

An oppressive silence hangs over Salla Niang's courtyard. It is the moment when the jinn are abroad, wallowing in the heat, when the sun that accompanies the rainy season pierces man's bruised flesh with its flaming darts. Stunned by apprehension and grief, the faces of this human flotsam wear an expression of terror. Tired of clobbered! Tired of being hunted! Tired of running! For some time now they haven't been going out in daylight any more. They get up before dawn, converge in small tight groups on the markets and the mosques, the only places where human activities are carried on before daybreak. When windows suddenly thrown open to the morning air and the uninterrupted rumble of the traffic announce the awakening of the City, they slip discreetly back to Salla's courtyard.

They have buried old Diop and here they are, back again, heavy-hearted, drenched in perspiration. The scorching air reeks of poverty and human desolation.

'If we don't look out we'll all end up like Gorgui Diop,' Nguirane Sarr cries. 'We'll all die like dogs!'

Today he is wearing a white caftan which has become the colour of ashes. He has bought a new pair of spectacle, this time with black frames. He wears a thin gold chain round his neck. The gash across his face has not yet healed; scabs have formed round the edges of the wound that is stained with mercurochrome.

'And, in any case, Gorgui Diop didn't do anyone any harm,' he resumes.

'Listen, my friends; since they want us to leave them in peace, let's leave them in peace. Let's stay here! Don't let's move from here!'

His friends expected anything but this. They are desperate, terrorised; they want a solution which will ensure that they are treated as citizens with full rights like everyone else. But Nguirane Sarr astonishes them. His suggestion seems devoid of sense.

'We don't go asking for charity anymore?'

'What shall we do? Must we be left without any resources? It's true that things aren't easy for us, but we still manage to take a bit of money here and there.'

'Nguirane, your suggestion just isn't feasible. Don't get carried away by anger. Life is full of pitfalls. We must be brave; one day they'll leave us alone. But if we don't go out looking for charity, where shall we go? If we stay at home sulking, we'll just be cutting off our own noses to spite our faces.'

'That's where you're wrong!' Nguirane thunders.

Backs that had stooped beneath the sun's heat are straightened. In Nguirane's voice are undercurrents of hostility, contempt, anger.

'That's where you are wrong! I've told you before: it's not because of our rags, nor our physical disabilities, nor for the pleasure of performing a disinterested good deed that

people deign to throw us the money we get as donations. First of all they have whispered their dearest and most secret desires to the alms they tender: "I make you this offering so that God may grant me long life, prosperity and happiness ..." "This donation is so that the Creator may remove all the difficulties I might encounter on my path ..." "In exchange for this contribution may the Master of heaven and earth help me to climb to the top of the ladder, make me the Head of my Department..." "Thanks to this offering, may the Almighty drive away all my cares as well as those of my family, protect me from Satan, from man-eating sorcerers and all the spells that might be cast upon me ..." That's what they say when they drop a coin or a little gift in the palm of your out-stretched hand. And when they are kind enough to invite you to share their steaming, odorous calabashes of millet porridge and curdled milk, do you imagine it's because they thought you might be hungry? No, my friends, that's the least of their worries! Our hunger doesn't worry them. They need to give in order to survive, and if we didn't exist, who would they give to? How could they ensure their own peace of mind? They don't give for our sake; they give for their own sake! They need us so that they can live in peace!

Salla Niang, who was cooking the midday meal at the other end of the courtyard, had been listening to everything Nguirane had been saying. She now moves deliberately forward, pushing her way through the dense throng till she stands in front of Nguirane. She is wearing a camisole that is pulled in at the waist and shows off the curves of her hips. Tiny beads of sweat stand out on her forehead and nose. Gorgui Diop's death has affected her deeply; she had known him in her native village, where everyone was unanimous in saying that he had been her father's best friend. As she had scarcely known her father, she had transferred all her affection to this man who was the friend of all the children in the village. Every evening they crowded round him and he used to tell them marvellous stories about the origin of the world. Later, when Salla saw him turn up in the City, she hastened to offer him her hospitality.

Her features became drawn with sorrow. She reached out to the assembled crowd a hand stained with henna arabesques.

'Now, my friends, the hour has come to make our choice: to live like dogs, pursued, hunted, tracked down, rough-handed, or to live like men. Gorgui Diop's reason for living was always to bring a little cheer to men's hearts. But these madmen have forgotten the meaning of cheer. Since Gorgui Diop has not been spare - Gorgui Diop who made people laugh - no one will be spared. So now, let's have no more of this stealing in and out on the sly; let's have no more of this running away like mad; let's have no more distress and fear. Let's all stay here! Do you hear, we'll stay here! In a very short time you'll see that we are as necessary to them as the air they breathe. Where will you find a man who's the boss and who doesn't give to charity so that he can stay the boss? Where will you find a man who's suffering from a real or imaginary illness and who doesn't believe that his troubles will disappear the moment a donation leaves his hands? Where will you find an ambitious man who doesn't think that the magic effects of charity can open all doors? Everyone gives for one reason or another. Even the parents of a man who's awaiting judgement, expecting to be condemned, have recourse to charity, to blur the judge's reasoning, in the hope of an acquittal.'

Everything that Salla Niang has said is based on what she saw during her experiences as a maid-of-all-work. She lived in houses where everyone stuffed themselves fit to burst; the left-overs that they threw in the dustbin could have fed ten paupers, but paupers were never invited to share the meal; paupers are dirty, a nuisance, they don't know how to behave. But, in these same houses, when the marabout recommended them to feed seven, ten or twelve

paupers on delicacies for three days, they went to seek out these same paupers, invited them to their homes, welcomed them, pressed dishes upon them that they would never have dreamed of: rice with fish, swimming in a rich, red sauce; white rice with plenty of tender meat; a delicious couscous with raisins, mixed vegetables, dates and prunes; and after every meal, fresh cola-nuts to aid the digestion.

What Salla Niang has just said is not the result of a sudden inspiration. It derives, among other experiences, from a painful scene which she witnessed at a time when she worked for some people who were not exactly rolling in money. As she made the beds, swept the rooms, scoured the saucepans, she kept her ears and eyes open and so was able to reconstitute the drama in which the family was involved. The husband, Galaye, was leader of the workers' union in a small metalworks, whose owner didn't look very favourably on the union's demands which, he said, were 'an obstacle to good working conditions and liable to have disastrous consequences for the financial situation of the firm'. The owner's motto was 'The output first, foremost and all the time' and this motto had become a sort of regular prayer recited at all times of the day, accompanying the showers of sparks given off from the welders' oxyacetylene lamps. To justify his obsession, he invoked the heavy taxes he had to meet, although all his employees knew that he enjoyed the enormous facilities and tax concessions granted to foreign investors. The workers' rights and the most elementary safety regulations no longer counted, and it became Galaye's duty to remind him that there were bye-laws relating to the employees' conditions of work. The owner did not appreciate Galayes' submissions and gave him to understand that under no circumstances was his firm - which had been set up to help the State and the workers - to be transformed into a political forum.

'You're here to get on with your work and not to create trouble! If you don't want to work, you can bugger off! There are hundreds waiting for your job!'

'If anyone here ought to bugger off, it's you! This is our country, and that's what you seem to forget! You just comply with the regulations laid down in the bye-laws; just pay us the overtime you owe us; and see that there's soap in the washrooms after work! And we must ask you again to install at least two fire-extinguishers. In a firm like this, it's conceivable that there isn't a single one!'

While these exchanges were being shouted above the shrill hiss of the oxyacetylene lamps in the workshop, most of the welders remained bent over their jobs.

'That's right, Mister Galaye, go on! And while you're at it, why don't you demand air-conditioners to diminish the effects of the heat!'

That had been the end of the argument that day. But Galaye had no idea how far his employer would go in double-dealing. The latter had got the impression that the factory ran the risk of being at the mercy of a wave of rebellion which would seriously impair his profits. To enable him to sack Galaye without paying him any compensation, he got some of the latter's compatriots to aid and abet him by dazzling them with wild promises of advancement. One day he pointed out to the storeman that the chit authorising the removal of ten wrought-iron gates from the workshop was a forgery. The storeman submitted that the chit had been given to him by Galaye. The owner brought a charge against Galaye who denied his guilt, but the storeman persisted in his accusation. Finally Galaye was condemned to three months' imprisonment, with suspended sentence, plus costs and the repayment of the value of the ten gates, estimated at sixty thousand francs each.

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