CREATING AND PROMOTING A READING CULTURE IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN THE ICT ERA

Felesia Mulauzi
The University of Zambia, School of Education, Department of Library and Information Studies, P.O. Box 32379, Lusaka, Zambia
fmulauzi@gmail.com, mzulu@unza.zm

Velenasi Mwale Munsanje
Evelyn Hone College, Lusaka, Zambia
velenasi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the paper: The paper examined the activities that school librarians and teachers undertake to create and promote a reading culture among learners in secondary schools.

Background of the study: The decline in the reading culture among learners in Zambia is a worrisome situation for educational success and the country's development at large. The role of the school library in education is seen from the basic level of inculcating the reading culture among learners.

Methods used for the study: The study was conducted in some secondary schools in Lusaka Province and it employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. 46 secondary schools participated in the study. The researchers used a questionnaire and an interview guide to gather primary data.

Main findings of the study: The study reports interesting revelation of the activities school librarians and teachers undertake to create and promote a reading culture among learners in the era of ICT. These include the following: recorded lessons, Internet searches, book fare sensitisation campaigns, award giving to regular patrons, reading programs, school debate sessions, press clubs, reference services, book reviews after reading, deliberate policy to keep learners in the library, reading clubs, reading lessons. Based on the above, a major recommendation is made that a reading environment should be provided for all learners in schools for them to develop good reading culture.

Importance of the study: The study will help policy makers including librarians and school administrators to design appropriate reading programs for learners in secondary schools in Zambia.

KEYWORDS: Reading culture, Literacy, Information and Communication Technologies, Zambia, Libraries, learning, Zambian Secondary Schools.

1.0   INTRODUCTION
We are now living in the ICT era which by implication refers to information and knowledge era. This era does not only offer abundant information and knowledge but also a wealth of reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help the learners learn how to read for

lifelong learning. This era also requires that individuals develop the ability to access, evaluate, retrieve and use information and knowledge for personal and national development. Reading is one of the fundamental skills needed to function effectively in today's society. Thus, the importance of developing a reading culture in any nation cannot be over-emphasized. Culture is defined by Miti (2013) as shared beliefs, values as well as attitudes that characterize a group of people or a nation. Consequently, individuals in a particular nation tend to portray certain attitude towards reading. According to Elisam (2005), reading culture is a culture where reading is guarded as highly valued and appreciated in society. It is a culture where individuals read extensively and it is part of their regular habit. Reading is not only regarded as something you practise at school or for studying but it is also something practised at home during leisure as a means of pleasure (Elisam, 2005). By and large, reading culture entails a society with people who are able to read newspapers, stories, and poems etc for entertainment and pleasure (Lungwangwa, 2007). It is a learned practice of seeking knowledge or information through the written word.

The benefits of a reading culture cannot be over emphasised. Reading enables people to acquire knowledge, information, skills, values and attitudes necessary for personal, family, community and national awareness and development. It is difficult for any nation to achieve economic development with high levels of illiteracy among its citizens. A reading culture allows individuals to critically analyse and understand issues in the nation. Thus, a good reading culture unlocks the key to economic prosperity since knowledge is power. Reading enables people to learn how to survive, develop their full capacities, live and work in dignity, participate fully in development, builds an informed citizenry, makes a person more resourceful, improve the quality of life, make informed decisions, develop critical, innovative and independent thinking, and to continue learning (Ruterana, 2012). The absence of reading culture not only results in social inequalities (Street, 2011) but also threatens national development because no country can develop if its citizens lack information. Reading culture widens learners' vocabulary and also helps them acquire lifelong skills suitable for participation and survival in present day changing environment. Additionally, a person's bargaining power or capacity is enhanced through reading (Lungwangwa, 2007).

A library is the foundation for promoting and creating a good reading culture especially among learners. It makes available and accessible the reading materials to learners. In addition, it provides free and equitable access to information. However, limited, outdated and irrelevant materials in these libraries in most cases contribute to poor reading culture among learners. High illiteracy levels in Zambia also make it difficult for people to read. Further, Sokotwe (2008) asserts that the poor reading culture in Zambia has to do with the education system that emphasises on quantity other than quality. This Sokotwe affirms has resulted in large classes in most schools making it difficult for teachers to appropriately teach reading. Moreover, the teachers who are supposed to create and promoted a reading culture among learners have lost the culture of reading. To mark matters worse, Sokotwe argues that no conventional libraries are accessible to learners to provide non-text reading materials. If a library exists in school, there are no qualified librarians to run it (Sokotwe, 2008).

1.1 The state of reading culture in Zambia
According to Zambia Central Statistical Office (2011), Zambia has a population of 13,046,508 million with 51 percent (6, 652, 053 million) being females and 49 percent (6, 394, 455 million) males. The enrolment at primary school level stood at 93.7 percent in 2010 (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). Zambia's literacy status for the population

aged 15 years and above as of 2010 was 70.88 percent with the female literacy of 61.34% and the male literacy of 80.6% (World Bank, 2010).

One of the worrisome challenges in the Zambian education system is the poor reading culture in most schools particularly at primary and secondary school levels. Generally, Lungwangwa (2007) contend that most of our people read very little. Yet, reading culture is at the heart of learning in any education system. The only time some people make an attempt to read is only when they have an examination to write or their job requires them to read certain material. Even learner's reading culture has deteriorated drastically. Learners are only reading in preparation for an examination. The reading involved according to Lungwangwa (2007) is specific, focused and short term- to achieve something in the foreseeable future. Learners' performance in class written and oral presentations including home assignments demonstrate little reading experience. In fact, it has been observed that Zambia's reading culture is not only among the poorest in Southern Africa but also inhibit the country's economic development. Thus, the majority of Zambians are poor because they do not have information. They do not have information because they do not read.

According to Lungwangwa (2007), a society which reads is usually socially stable. This was proven by the colonial authorities in the 1930s when there were the 1935 broken hill riots. A solution to these riots was creation of improved social amenities by promoting reading through a supported strong book industry, libraries, more newspapers, film industry and performing arts.

In the present era it is sad to note that the reading culture is degenerating. According to Lungwangwa, travelling provides excellent opportunity for reading and writing. However, Lungwangwa asserts that most travellers in Zambia are either sleeping, site- seeing or peering through the windows of buses, trains, or aeroplanes instead of reading novels newspapers and magazines provided on planes or buses. Important health information is ignored because people do not want to read or have not created time for reading. People have become so lazy that they cannot even read what is written on the packets of soaps, creams, soups, medicines, which they buy. Secondly, there is so much literature on HIV/AIDS pandemic produced at very high cost which very few people make an effort to read. It is difficult to effectively fight HIV/AIDS if we cannot read the literature that is churned out every day. Lungwangwa therefore, argues that we should not subscribe to the adage from some quarters which states *"if you want to hide information from an African, put it in a book"* (Lungwangwa, 2007).

Cultivation of a reading culture among learners in secondary schools is particularly important for it boosts their academic excellence and the nation's growth prospects. It enables learners to proficiently interpret and draw conclusions from their reading. It also allows them to read, write and think more critically. This was the motivation for undertaking this study.

1.2   Objectives
The study set out to achieve the following objectives:
1. To determine if secondary schools have school libraries and position of Library Officer in the school establishment
2. To assess the learners' access to library materials in secondary school libraries
3. The find out the activities librarians and teachers conduct to create and promote a reading culture among learners in Zambian Secondary schools
4. To ascertain the challenges in creating and promoting a reading culture in secondary school libraries

5. To suggest ways of improving the poor reading culture among learners in Zambia

2.0 METHODOLOGY

A field survey was employed in conducting the study. The main data collection instruments employed for primary data was a questionnaire and an interview guide. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. 46 secondary schools participated in the study and these included: Parklands, Libala, Mwembeshi, Chitende, Likasa boys, Naboye, Highland, Lilayi, Tum, Katondwe girls, Chirundu, Nyumba Yanga, Luangwa, Matero boys, Roma girls, Chinika, Kafue boys, Munali girls, Chilenje, Chongwe, Northmead, Arakan boys, Arakan girls, Kapululira, Lusitu, Mwavi, Kasisi girls, Olympia Park, Munali boys, Twin Palm, St Marys, Chelstone, Matipula, Chunga, Save Our Souls (SOS), Kamwala, Felma Trust, Jatamo, David Kaunda, Matero girls, Kabulonga girls, Mukamambo II girls, City of Hope, Kamulanga, Mikango and Kabulonga boys. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Existence of school libraries and position of Library Officer in the school establishment

Table 1 shows the results on existence of school libraries and position of Library Officer in the school establishment. 67.4% indicated that they have libraries in their schools while 32.6% reported having no libraries at school. Although the majority indicated that they have libraries, a large number of schools affirmed that they do not have the position of Library Officer (40%) in their establishment. Only 13% have the position of Library Officer in their school establishment. These results clearly show that libraries in most secondary schools are not only understaffed but also being staffed by unqualified personnel. This implies that many schools are missing or ignoring the value-added asset that a teacher librarian can be in any school.

Table 1: Existence of school libraries and position of Library Officer in the school establishment

Response	Existence of library	Percentage		Library Officer position in the school establishment
Yes	31	67.4	13	6
No	15	32.6	87	40

The results above raise a very serious concern of the need to create positions of Library Officer in secondary schools. A qualified teacher librarian can contribute to the school community immensely, particularly with ongoing curricular changes and ICT impact on teacher workload. According to Spence (2002), teacher librarians ease that workload, not by re-shelving books but by using their expertise to collaborate with teachers; not by covering books but by providing valuable professional development in the use of ICT; not by checking books in and out but by joining committees to develop policies and practices that enhance student learning; not by chasing overdues but by working directly with students to develop their reading and information literacy skills.

With the right support from school communities, teacher librarians' extra skills can be of great benefit to both staff and students. Research supports the view that school libraries play a

significant role in inculcating a culture of reading and a quest for knowledge necessary for one to open up to new ideas particularly at the primary and early secondary level. Where an impact on reading culture and literacy has been demonstrated, it is employing qualified school library staff. Hence, the school library and its staff are significant school assets, and need to be considered as an educational investment rather than a cost (Spence, 2002).

3.2 Access to reading materials

The researchers were interested to find out the nature of materials learners access in schools under this theme. The findings of the study reveal that secondary school libraries are not equipped with sufficient materials. Additionally, most of the school libraries are stocked with irrelevant and outdated materials as narrated by one of the respondents:

> We do not have sufficient books in the library... In most cases, three to four pupils are meant to share a book during reading times...most of the materials do not interest pupils ...they are either irrelevant to pupils or too old to relate to their current experiences... when I start reading such books to them, they either sleep or dose off...

Lack of access to reading materials has been observed by a number of scholars as one of the contributing factors to the poor reading culture and poor performance and the current national priority of expanding access to secondary school education has meant that there are more learners in dire need of books. According to Rosenberg (2003), the availability and accessibility of relevant and appropriate books and materials are the preconditions and base of all reader development activities. Hence, she points out that it is impossible to inspire interest, involvement and confidence in reading without the availability of the right kind of materials.

The study further revealed that most school libraries depend on donated books. One of the respondents had the following to say:

> Our main source of library materials is donations...We receive materials mainly from Zambia Library Service, Book World, Project educate and World Vision. We are yet to contact other organisations which we heard also donate books such as Society for Family Health, Oxford and McMillan Press.

There are problems associated with donated books. Book donations are often unsuitable for the Zambian learner's interest since they most of them are not relevant to the learners and lack local content. According to Ruterana (2012), books with contents related to one's culture, history and lifestyles constitute relevant and appropriate literature likely to stir a thirst for reading. Ruterana further argues that there is a correlation between language in which literature is written and promotion of reading culture. Few learners are conversant with foreign languages such as English in which many of the written materials to be read are produced. Foreign languages like English are rarely used outside the classroom by learners. Thus, Ruterana asserts that reading in one's mother tongue about a familiar context are key elements in teaching children to love reading.

It is in this context that school libraries should provide educational material that stimulate research and broaden learners' knowledge base, foster a culture of reading, including recreational reading and provide teachers with extra teaching and reference materials to

improve the quality of teaching and ultimately improve the school leaving examination results.

The study revealed little or no usage of Internet to access current materials. This was explained by a respondent as follows:

> *We do not have computers...no Internet...so how do learners access current materials?... we have Internet only for members of staff in the computer laboratory...the library has not computers at all...*

3.3 Activities librarians and teachers conduct to create and promote a reading culture among learners in Zambian Secondary schools

The study revealed that there are several activities librarians and teachers conduct in an effort to create and promote a reading culture among learners in Zambian secondary schools. Among other activities, some respondents reported giving assignments to learners that require them to conduct searches on the Internet. According to the respondents, *"such assignments are meant to impart information search skills in learners on the Internet..."* Additionally, respondents reported that they show recorded lessons to learners for them to have a different feeling from that of the usual classroom learning environment.

Respondents also reported that they do conduct book fare sensitisation campaigns and reading competitions. One of the respondents explained that *"this is usually a great event that attracts readers, writers, illustrators, storytellers, poets, policy makers, publishers and other stakeholders"*. This activity provides an opportunity for schools to exhibit and promote a culture of reading among learners.

The study further revealed that school librarians and teachers organise reading programs, awards for regular library users, school debates, press clubs, conduct book reviews after reading, lend out materials for learners to read during their own free time and have a deliberate policy to keep learners in the library to read.

3.4 Challenges faced by school librarians and teachers to create and promote a reading culture among learners in Zambian Secondary schools

The study revealed a number of challenges that impede the creation and promotion of a reading culture among learners in secondary schools. One of the major obstacles faced by librarians is the negative perception of Library Officers in schools. Teachers including school administrators undervalue the library profession and services. This is evident from the following responses from school librarians:

> *I am undervalued at school...I can't even see the Head Teacher to discuss issues to do with the library...I remember at one time being told "you are too junior to talk to me directly"... I am told to go through the Deputy Head Teacher...*

> *I taught at this school some time back before I studied Library and Information Studies. Since I came back here as a Library Officer after obtaining qualifications in Library and Information Studies I have been reduced to ashes...I look too junior among teachers..I have become a laughing stone...the library is underutilised especially by teachers...*

It is sad to learn that despite the significant role of library services in creating and promoting a reading culture among learners, Library Officers and library systems remain undervalued by learners, teachers and school administrators.

The study further revealed that the emergent of ICTs have made it difficult to create and promote a reading culture among learners. This is so because some school libraries do not have computers and Internet connectivity for providing access to information on the Internet. Not only that, respondents also felt that ICTs have distracted learners from reading. Thus, most learners lose concentration in reading once disturbed by these ICTs. This is evident from what some respondents had to say:

> *The onset of technology especially mobile phones have made it difficult for us to promote a culture of reading books among learners...they do not concentrate on reading and studying...they are busy on mobile phones playing games, writing messages, watching videos and playing music (headsets) and so on....*

> *Once a learner receives a message on phone say about the funeral of beloved one, concentration is lost...or if he/she receives a message to meet someone somewhere urgently, he/she will have no choice but to stop whatever is being read to meet that person.*

> *Internet which can be accessed either on phone or Computer is used by learners as a social networking tool for chatting for instance on face book, whats up, Twitter, Tell a Friend, etc.*

Respondents further cited exam leakages as a challenge when it comes to creation and promotion of a reading culture. According to one respondent, *"leakages make learners not to concentrate on reading because learners are confident of passing the examinations even when they do not read..."*

Respondents also alluded to the fact that learners demonstrate little or no interest to read especially non academic materials. They regard reading as boring and non-purposeful. *The only time I see learners read is when they have examinations, tests or assignments. Other than that, learners focus on outdoor activities such as games*. One respondent explained.

In schools with libraries, the study revealed that lack of qualified librarians to run libraries affect the reading culture of children. Teachers who are in most cases given the task of running these libraries according to respondents *tend to be too busy with other teaching responsibilities...the library is opened once or twice only in a week...unfortunately, there is no provisions in the establishment for the position of Library Officer.*

Among other challenges include limited reading time outside the classroom environment, limited or lack of reading materials, lack of infrastructure to house reading materials, poor funding towards library services, outdated and irrelevant books.

3.5   *Ways of improving the reading culture in Zambia*

i.   Recognising the central role of a school library in promoting a reading culture among learners, school administrators in schools with no libraries should ensure that they establish one.

ii.   It should be a Government policy to ensure that all schools establish a library.

iii. ICTs should be used to promote reading in schools by allowing learners to access a wide range of electronic information resources and databases including stories and novels, talking books, audio-visuals, etc.

iv.   Considering the fact that the richness and quality of the library provision depend upon qualified personnel available within and beyond the school library, school administrators should advocate for the position of librarian to be included in their school establishment

v.   School administrators in various schools should provide financial support as well as other material resources for school libraries to be well equipped for both teachers and students to rely upon it as a support facility for creating and promoting a reading culture.

vi.   Teachers including school administrators should treat a school librarian as a partner in teaching so that just like any subject in the school, reading books can be part of the curriculum for the librarian not to only read materials with learners but also help them reason on materials they find in the library and teach them how to exploit resources to become independent learners.

vii. There is also need to redesign the literacy education curriculum so that it stipulates reading books in classrooms as compulsory.

viii. there is need to seriously promote reading culture in the country, policy decision makers in the country should consider building more libraries especially in residential areas including hospitals and clinics where patients who are able to walk can read. Offices and working places should have also libraries for their workers. Parents should be sensitised on the importance of their children to read even in a home environment. In fact, they should be encouraged to make it a habit of buying books as birthday gifts for the children as a way of encouraging children to start reading from a very tender age.

ix.   There is need for teachers including school administrators for change of mind set to start valuing information and indeed libraries in schools.

x.   School librarians should ensure that they acquire sufficient and quality reading materials so that learners have access to a wide variety of quality books to foster a reading culture among Zambian learners.

xi.   It is also imperative for school librarians to equip their libraries with suitable reading materials for every reading type, need and interest for all learners so as to inspire interest, involvement and confidence in reading.

xii. It is recommended that schools should also engage with private public sector partnerships.

xiii. Teachers and librarians should teach learners to associate reading not only with tests, examinations and assignments but also with pleasure, enjoyment, relaxation, self development and advancement.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Libraries play a fundamental role in creating and promoting a reading culture among learners. It makes available and accessible the reading materials to learners. Librarians encourage learners to develop the love for not only books but also literature at large. They also encourage learners to want to read and practice the reading skills. It is therefore, imperative for librarians and teachers together with their school administrators to create approaches which challenge learners to read. The availability and accessibility of relevant reading materials can also inspire learners' interest, involvement and confidence in reading. Books in local languages can help sustain a reading culture among learners. Thus, books of all categories such as fiction, general non-fiction, specialist non-fiction and general education must be acquired and made accessible through libraries. Furthermore, a variety of literature will enlarge learners' choices as they visit the libraries.

REFERENCES

Central Statistical Office (2011). 2010 census of population and housing: preliminary report. Lusaka: Government Printer

Chidiebere, I.G.C., Nosike, O.O., Nkechi, I. and Magnus, A.C.
 (2013). Bring back the book: the role of Libraries and librarians in promotion of reading and Literacy in Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).* Paper 876. Available at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/876 (Accessed 14/05/2013).

Igwesi, U., Chimah, J.N. and Nwachukwu, V. N. (2012). The Use of ICTs and Audiovisual Resources in Developing Children's Reading Habits in Nigeria. Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). Paper 825. Available at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/825 (Accessed 14/05/2013).

Krolak, Lisa. (2006). The role of libraries in the creation of literate environments. "Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life*". Available at: http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/literacy-and-reading/publications/role-of-libraries-in-creation-of-literate-environments.pdf (Accessed 14/05/2013).

Lungwangwa, G. (2007). Speech delivered at the official opening of the stakeholders' workshop to discuss the reading culture in Zambia at ZAMCOM Educational Trust , Lusaka, 16th – 17th march, 2007 http://www.moe.gov.zm/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=22&Itemid=194

Magara, E. (2005). Building family literacy skills among parents and children in developing countries: a case for Uganda. In: World Library and Information Congress: 71th IFLA General Conference and Council, August 14th - 18th, 2005, Oslo, Norway. Available at: http://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/papers/117e-Magara.pdf (Accessed 20/06/2013).

Ministry of Education (1996). Educating our future. Lusaka: Zambia Education House.

Ronnås, M. (2009). Reading Promotion in Zambia: Lessons from Three Projects. Available at: http://bada.hb.se/bitstream/2320/5062/1/09-21.pdf (Accessed 19/06/2013).

Rosenberg, D. (ed). (2003). Reader Development and Reading Promotion: Recent Experiences from Seven Countries in Africa. Oxford: International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). Available at: http://fieldmarshamfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/tumblr/References/Rosenberg%20-%20Reader%20Development%202003.pdf (Accessed 28/06/2013)

Ruterana, P.C. (2012). Enhancing the culture of reading in Rwanda: reflections by students in tertiary institutions. *Journal of Pan African Studies, (5)1, 36-54*

Sokotwe, S. (2008). Reading culture. Available at:
http://maravi.blogspot.com/2008/02/letters-corruption-literacy.html (Accessed 19/06/2013)
Spence, S. (2002). Survey highlights major problems with library staffing. Available at:
Available at: http://www.slasa.asn.au/Advocacy/docs/aeusurveyarticle.pdf (Accessed 27/06/2013)

Street, B.V. (2011). Literacy inequalities in theory and practice: the power to name and define. *International Journal of Educational Development, 31, 580-586*

United Nations Development Programme (2013). Millennium Development Goals Progress Report/ Zambia. Available at: http://www.undp.org/content/zambia/en/home/library/mdg/zambia-mdgs-progress-report-2013/ (Accessed 25/06/2013)

World Bank (2010). World Bank indicators - Zambia – Outcomes. Available at: http://www.tradingeconomics.com/zambia/literacy-rate-adult-total-percent-of-people-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html (Accessed 25/06/2013)