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BRIDGING GAPS AND BUILDING FUTURES: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S LIBRARY SERVICES IN EASTERN UGANDA

BY

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Abstract

Purpose: This research explored the prospects and difficulties in practicing literacy with children at the Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre in Jinja District – Uganda.

Methods: The study incorporated a qualitative research concept. Interviews were conducted with some of the selected parents and with the librarians, and focus group discussions whereby 80 children aged between 6 and 13 years.

Findings: The study established that there are multiple programs for children in the library including; training reading sessions, story-telling and formation of reading clubs. At the same time, a number of problems were revealed, such as insufficient financing, the lack of staff, the problem of security, and poverty affecting children's books' availability. The study also noted that reading is mostly initiated by parents when the child joins formal school making it hard for their early reading. Furthermore, because the education system puts much emphasis on examination performance, children are discouraged from reading for recreation. In the course of the research, the following possibilities were found useful for enhancing children's reading: Some teaching strategies which could help facilitate literacy are establishing a print-rich environment, offering multiple text choices, modeling appropriate readers, maintaining interest in reading, reading to children, sharing a good relation with teachers, promoting choral reading and last but not least, should encourage children.

Practical implications: We need to learn strategies for addressing issues public libraries experience while effectively managing existing opportunities for promoting reading culture among children. Community libraries can benefit children's future literacy by funding reading programmes.

Key words: Community libraries, Reading culture, Early literacy, Literacy development.

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Introduction

The general public depends on community libraries in order to meet their information requirements. These forms of libraries can be popularly stated as being interwoven with the communities they are serving that makes them key sources of enhancing people's reading habits of not only the children but the adults as well (Asif & Yang, 2021). Some community libraries contribute to literacy and education needs within regions where resources are limited. These libraries provide their clients with social, political, economic, health and cultural materials/books and other information resources available (Abdulsalam, 2022). They

encourage participation of the public and respond to concerns of the society positively, therefore promote culture of reading and learning throughout one's life. They also provide safe environments for learning as well as for community to enrich intergenerational episodes and culture (Krolak, 2019). These libraries do not only offer books to read and borrow, but they also extend literacy and relate the literacy exercises to real life income generating issues (Krolak, 2019). They are therefore involved in the promotion of reading among children from an early age. The research of Celik (2019) indicated that the children's first-time exposure to community libraries influences their reading culture in



the preschool going age. These libraries can create a strong reading environment that can enhance the literacy achievement of children when compared with the children who do not enjoy such resources (Nmecha & Horsfall, 2019).

However, Uganda faces some major challenges in trying to foster a reading culture in the country even with the presence of the community libraries that are empowered by NGO's mostly for purpose of promoting literacy. Many households cannot even buy books or indeed have access to book shops at all (Rugyema, 2023). The educational supporting structures are also poorly developed; there is a lack of qualified teachers and insufficient quantities of school libraries to promote literacy. In addition, the effects for digital media sources exist side by side with traditional reading patterns. Smartphones and social media, particularly those that are now widely used, undermine books and reading (Rugyema, 2023). Previous studies have postulated that one of the most roundtable approach that parents can use for their children to learn to read is by working through reading with them (Uwezo National Learning Assessment Report, 2021; Støle et al., 2021). This practice not only solves typical problems linked with the violation of reading skills, but also contributes to language development, and prepares children for future school education. Nevertheless, some parents fails to dedicate enough time to involve with children through reading, caused by the overloaded schedule. This limited communication hampers the learning achievement of critical literacy skills (Brown et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2019). To awake to such challenges, community libraries have played a central role of offering support to children /students during extra hours of learning. They provide ideal backgrounds for providing homework help and have included relevant activities like spelling bees and setting up of positive attitude to reading. Through engaging in most community libraries' storytelling hours and children's day camps, the children benefit through being empowered through reading and gaining self-confidence (Ahmad, 2020; Rwotolonya, 2023). Besides, the community libraries act more as host organisation for various literacy campaigns targeting enhanced reading practices among children. Programmes utilizing the local content materials and/or storytelling styles have emerged dramatically influencing positive changes of the students, regarding treatment and understanding (Rugyema, 2023). More importantly, these interventions do not only make reading accessible but appropriate in terms of the culture of the children.

For example in Kenya, the camel mobile library service takes over 7,000 books to children in North East Province conveyed through camels. The initiative has been successful in building reading habits among children who experience learning peculiarities because of their moving behavior (Ahmad, 2020; Rwotolonya, 2023). Such creative approaches call for the need to consider libraries as an important social institution whose services have to be suitable for different communities. According to the Uwezo National Learning Assessment Report 2021, it was recorded that eight out of every ten children in Uganda cannot read. The National Development Plan III also include recommending a national book and reading policy to enhance the ability of reading;

however, the progress is still sluggish (Buruga & Osamai, 2019). Many a time Uganda has been depicted as an oral culture community where there is telling, telling instead of reading. Such a cultural background plays a part in children's challenges in reading for they are used to hearing rather than reading at their own (Adewale, 2021; Mustafa et al., 2021). In order to close this gap, therefore, it is necessary to identify how community library can adopt concrete measures and programmes that can help to promote the reading culture among children in Uganda. This study was anchored under the ecological system theory (EST). EST insists on recognition of individuals in the setting in which they are found. It acknowledges that child development is in a network of systems, the family, school, and community, and how they interconnect.

Literature review

Public libraries have come up with different approaches to promote literacy that are actual means to promote reading habits among young people. They have well-designed facilities that children could engage in these sessions (Kawalya, 2018). In read-aloud sessions, librarians explain to children how to read and indeed the children were allowed to interact with the books by questioning and sharing their feelings about those stories they have been read. This kind of reading makes it enjoyable for the children and at the same time enhances their listening and understanding as well. Another component of the learning process that community libraries use for children is known as storytelling. It is very agreeable also enjoyable to tell stories and it remains very effective in enhancing the children's imaginative and imaginative skills (Wani & Ismail, 2024). Children that are often exposed to stories improve their reading culture because such stories spark their thinking process and familiarizes them with real life situations. Also, if stories are narrated in local languages these also assist in improving the linguistic of kids and also increased cultural humility. Book clubs are also used by community libraries as a means of improving on reading skills among children. Arranging children into classes based on their ages and choice peruses, the children's librarian does the best to ensure that every kid will understand and appreciate the reading materials (Adewale, 2021).

Group sessions enable children to express what they wanted to about the books they had read, give opinions as well as be part of good discussions on the books. This social element of reading aids in the nurturing a common word and at the same time makes learners appreciate literature in their lives. Another fun event into which most community libraries seek to enhance the children's spelling and their confidence in the language is the spelling bees. Librarians help create word lists from easy ones to the most challenging ones with rules guiding the game (Mojapelo, 2018). Every child gets to spell out words as they engage their peers in spell bees to encourage the spelling activities amongst them. This makes the children to be encouraged towards reading by enhancing their language skills. Spelling bees motivate children towards reading by having encouraging reasons for them to participate in spelling bee. Besides reading practices, community libraries offer educative games that can enable children learn alongside playing. These are board games such as "Ludo", Snakes and Ladders,

Building challenge with blocks as suggested by Mojapelo (2018). In choosing games appropriate for one age or another, or preferred topics, the librarians help to build an environment that is accessible for all children. Not only does such games make learning a fun process but also sharpens the critical and analytical thinking of the young students as they sort out the games and materials they have been given.

Silent reading sessions are another good practice in reading habits. Schools form an environment that can be conducive for learning by the preparation of serene reading areas for kids to read at their convenience. According to Mojapelo (2018), librarians choose appropriate timings for silent reading and display several books such as, fiction, text, and picture books. It enables child to sample different genre but at the same time they improve on their concentration span. In read-aloud sessions, storytelling, and book clubs, amongst others such as spelling bees, educative games and silent reading, community libraries fostering habits of reading amongst children develop. These initiatives do not only help develop better literacy but also create value for continuous learning for a lifetime.

It goes without saying that such community libraries play a crucial role in shaping children literacy development. They are anticipatory spaces that directly respond to the literacy concerns of children as well as meet the social identity of inhabitants of the community (Krolak, 2019). These concerns have not only shown that community libraries which allow children to access to materials and information they can read or follow, interact with through play or interest can play a role in supporting the literacy skills of children. Krolak (2019) discovered that community libraries are familiar with the requirements of communities because they are actual members who do the organizing. For instance Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association URLCODA initiated several community libraries that turned out to be important focal point of societal interaction and education within country tracts (Krolak, 2019). It meant that through these libraries people of different age groups were coming together to learn from each other. With regard to competitive strategy, community libraries have also been found to be useful in deploying innovative solutions focused toward meeting needs of particular communities. For instance some offer membership to present story telling sessions or workshops that involved children and parents (Krolak, 2019). These activities not only make children to develop love for reading but also parents and their children come together to share literary materials.

Still, community library systems debited some constraints such as inadequate funding and resource equipments. Some do it without any funding from the state, and most of them depend on donations or volunteers for maintaining the services (Krolak, 2019). Most community libraries are manned and funded poorly, meaning that they are unable to procure new books and other resource as and when it is desired. These financial constraints, for instance, impact on issues to do with opening hours and what is offered in these libraries. Limited access can make it inconvenient for users and also rendered timely preservation/upgrade of library assets

unrealistic (Okafor, 2020; Bushman et al., 2021). Thus, building a reading culture is, to a certain extent more complex and did not involve only purchasing books but keeping a variety of collections. Thus, of necessity, monetary needs are incurred. This situation demonstrate the importance of continued efforts by the governments, NGOs and communities to sustain those libraries to be in a position to promote literacy resources in future. Cronholm also identifies a similar downtrend of reading culture among children in his global analysis (2021). This has been brought by the improvements in trends due to change in family pattern, social responsibility and general welfare. This is the case because many children fail to read for leisure and find it very boring instead, since they can explore more interactive content online. Another problem is shortage of employees. Most community libraries face a challenge of a lack of enough trained staff or volunteers that can adequately assist children during reading (Hernandez-Carrion & Chutia, 2022). This shortage can sharply decrease the quality of the services delivered by librarians and also reduce the outreach with schools or any other interested party. Thus, outcome means that during patrons' visits to the library, there will be less staff to attend to each companion directly.

Even these basic ways of supporting readers are problematic due to space constraints in community libraries that strive to provide enough book stock for all the readers who come in with diverse purposes of reading. If there are no adequate silent zones where the patrons can effectively focus on what they want to learn or read comfort then it becomes very hard for the patrons to achieve their or their learning objectives during library visits (Boonaree et al., 2018; Cox, 2023). Lack of proper structures for sitting lead to many disruptions because many people end up sitting side by side within confined areas. Finally, based on its location dominant by community libraries presents a strong challenge in terms of accessibility for many families who live a distance from these facilities (Buruga & Osamai, 2019). The poor road networks and relatively long distances which are also be disruptive to the user – especially if it is a child – to frequently commute. Transport costs make it worse as most of the families cannot afford multiple trips and timetables that prevent parents from accompanying children to the library. By overcoming these challenges, the community libraries will be in a better position to help enhance literacy performance among the diverse populace all over the world.

Methods

The study was conducted at the Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre in Jinja District Uganda. The centre serves Igombe village in Buwenge sub-county and other neighbouring areas. The research study adopted a case study research strategy that belonged to the interpretivist research philosophy. The study targets developed consisted of chosen parents, one librarian and eighty children aged between 6 and 13 years. Self-generated data was obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with the librarian and FGDs made with 80 children, divided into 8 focus groups of 10 students each. These approaches enabled understanding of children's reading requirements, reading practices, and community library offerings in detail. This design



was preferred because it allowed for a focused exploration of the particulars of context of the Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre and its effects on early reading in the children enrolled in the centre. With this population type specifically selected, the study sought to inform ways in which community libraries can enhance reading by children. Responses obtained from the interviews represented the nature of resources offered at the library, the services being offered and more to that offered to the children and the various challenges faced in the promotion of reading habit among the young Ones. Attributable to the FGDs with children, more details of their experience, event preferences, and tendencies towards particular contexts of reading activities in the library were obtained.

Findings

Findings on children's reading activities and challenges faced at Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre were obtained. These are presented below using derived themes:

Children's reading activities

Read aloud

Read aloud involved reading books together and taking turns and making a discussion of the stories in the books that have been read. The community librarian engaged in this reading activity with the children. During the interview, he asserted that,

"As a community librarian, I try to engage with children and get to know their reading interests through involving them in several reading activities."

This helped the librarian make recommendations and guide them towards books that they will enjoy and find meaningful. Libraries serve as community spaces where children's reading activities are performed. A wide range of reading materials are stocked in the library, and these include story books, dictionaries, text books, newspapers, historical books among others. The inclusion of a variety of information materials, such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and atlases, in a community library's collection is essential for supporting the educational and intellectual development of children. Reference materials not only provide a wealth of information on a variety of subjects but also help to promote critical thinking and research skills. Encouraging children to use these resources can help them expand their knowledge and understanding of the world and foster a lifelong love of learning.

Storytelling

Telling stories to children is fun and very powerful. Stories help children to develop their imaginative and creativity skills. A child mentioned that:

"I like how the librarians use storytelling to help us learn. They always have interesting stories that teach us new things and make the learning experience more enjoyable".

Children have a wide range of interests and preferences when it comes to reading materials. Some may prefer storybooks, while others may be more interested in non-fiction books, magazines, or

graphic novels. In addition to books, children may also have other reading-related interests, such as communication, pronunciation, debates, drawing, and painting. Understanding and catering for children's reading interests can help motivate them to read more, improve their literacy skills, and cultivate a lifelong love for reading.

Book clubs

Another great activity to encourage a love for reading among children is introducing book clubs. Community libraries perform this activity by grouping children according to their different age so that every child in that particular group can understand what they read at that level. Meetings are regularly contacted say on a weekly basis so that the community librarians can discuss with the children what has been read. By so doing, children are compelled to read and also participate in the discussions which will develop their love for reading. The librarian mentioned that:

"As a librarian, we strive to provide a wide range of reading materials to support the learning and development of children. Our library has an extensive collection of storybooks, including picture books and chapter books, as well as fiction and non-fiction books that cater to different interests and reading levels"

This response highlights the importance of incorporating a variety of teaching methods to cater to the diverse learning styles of children. The idea of adjusting teaching methods to suit individual learning styles is consistent with the principles of differentiated instruction, a teaching approach that recognizes the unique needs and abilities of each child.

Spelling Bee

A spelling bee is also a reading activity that can improve the children's spelling skills and instills confidence in the children's language capabilities. Children were gathered and each of them given a chance to spell a word. If a child wrongly spelt a word, they were dropped from the activity until when the last child is declared a winner. One child stated:

"The library has been my best place whenever I need to do my assignments. It helps us to learn how to spell and read different words".

Children always work hard so that they win and are recognized as winners. This is a sure way of developing a love for reading among children so that they can properly spell the words given to them in the spelling bee competitions.

Educative games

Community libraries provide educative games for children to engage children in learning. They normally select particular games for children in particular age groups and also with interest in such games. This is aimed at involving all children and also provide games that can be accessible by all children. If community libraries host such educative games, there is ample space for children's learning and general development. A child remarked:

"I think the librarians use a combination of different teaching methods to help us learn. They adjust their methods to suit different learning styles, which makes it easier for us to learn and retain information"

All the 80 children agreed that the library met their information needs. They also commended the library for providing them with services such as games and sports which have helped them to improve their talents and physical fitness. The provision of ICT services has also helped them to improve their computer skills. The handcraft skills acquired from the library such as weaving baskets, mats, making soap and baking have also helped the children and other library users to earn a living.

Silent reading

Through the above activity, the community library provided a conducive environment where children learn to love reading and develop lifelong appreciation to learning and reading a variety of information materials. The librarian affirmed that:

"We strive to provide a wide range of reading materials to support the learning and development of children. Our library has an extensive collection of storybooks, including picture books and chapter books, as well as fiction and non-fiction books that cater to different interests and reading levels"

The library has always been considered as an essential resource for learning and gathering information. It provides access to a wide range of materials, including books, magazines, newspapers, and online resources that are crucial for educational and personal development.

Modelling

At the library, the children acted out favourite stories or characters from the books that they read. This was important because it helped to develop the children's creativity and imagination. The children always looked forward to participating in this activity because of the different characters they would choose to act. They had to be conversant with the characters they were going to act and the only way they could achieve this was by reading about them in the books where the plays were got. During the discussions, the children mentioned that:

"The library allows us to act in plays as different characters from the books. It is a good activity for us children and we learn a lot from this activity".

The participants' response highlights the critical role that libraries play in supporting learning and academic achievement. They identify the library as an essential resource for completing their homework and assignments. The library serves as a central location where children can access a vast collection of materials, including books, magazines, and online resources, to aid in their academic work. This response underscores the library's crucial role in providing access to information and resources necessary for learning and academic success. Additionally, the participants' comments reflect the importance of community libraries as a community resource, providing a space where children can learn

and grow, further emphasizing the library's vital role in supporting education and youth development.

Reading competitions

Children also participated in reading competitions where the best readers were rewarded with gifts. This would encourage other children to read and participate in such competitions so that they could also emerge winners. Reading is a fundamental skill that forms the foundation of children's education and personal growth. One of the primary functions of libraries is to provide access to a diverse range of reading materials that meet the varying needs and interests of children. In line with this, libraries stock a wide variety of reading materials, including storybooks, dictionaries, textbooks, newspapers, historical books, and many others. The librarian shared that:

"I try to engage with children and get to know their reading interests."

This helps me make recommendations and guide them towards books that they will enjoy and find meaningful. The statement made by the librarian highlights the importance of the librarian's role in supporting children's reading interests. By engaging with children and understanding their reading interests, the librarian can provide personalized recommendations and guidance, which can help cultivate a love of reading in children. Therefore, the librarian's efforts to engage with children and understand their reading interests can have a significant impact on their reading development and overall academic success.

Reading among children below three years at the resource centre

The study findings revealed an interesting finding of children below three years who visited the community resource centre. During data collection, it was discovered that some pregnant mothers visited the resource centre while some mothers went to the centre with babies and toddlers between 0 – 5 years. The researcher discovered that these babies had interest in looking at and touching colourful picture books. Some were seen opening such books. These children would handle books and recognize the pictures in such books. These children would also imitate the reading behaviors of other children and their mothers by holding books in the same way that other readers held them, pretending to read and babbling. This can lay a firm foundation for their reading in future. By coming into contact with books and the library environment, children below three years can develop essential pre-reading skills and a lifelong love for books and reading.

Challenges faced at Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre

Poor staff remuneration

The library is managed on a voluntary basis with no proper remuneration for the staff members. This demotivates the staff members and also lowers their level of commitment towards the services they offer at the community library. This also dictates on the number of staff members who serve at the library. According to the librarian:



"I have been a volunteer in this library for over five years. I devote most of my time serving the community, yet I also have a family that I need to take care of. At times I have to make ends meet elsewhere so that I can take care of my family as the head"

This lack of staff remuneration has been a major hindrance to the development of the reading culture among children in this community. Sometimes the library remains closed because the librarian has to make ends meet elsewhere and this affects the children's reading. In addition, many librarians shun working at this library when they discover that the services they offer are on a voluntary basis and they opt to look for paying jobs elsewhere. The presence of professional, paraprofessional and support staff members in libraries is vital and such staff must be well motivated.

Power and internet fluctuations

The unstable electricity supply affects the activities done in the library. The machines that depend on electricity like computers and printers are not operational when power goes off. This affects the information search and retrieval activities at the library, and this alters the reading of the children. Like libraries in most countries in Africa, this library faces a challenge of limited internet access. This coupled with the challenge of limited computers cannot match the demand for the same. It was disclosed that:

"Irregular electricity affects the activities of the library. There are times we go for a number of days when we don't have power. The children cannot use the computers and internet and the lighting in the building will also be poor. Just like the library staff, the users will also face a hard time"

Library users especially the children and youths prefer to use computers during information search and also to play computer games. They get disappointed when they don't get a chance to use the computers. In addition, some computers are old and slow in their functioning. All this affects the way in which children utilize the library.

Limited funding

The library was started by an individual and is managed by individuals without any government support. A few well-wishers occasionally support the library in executing its activities. There is no clear source of income for running this library. This affects the quality of the collection in the library and staff remuneration which affect the quality of service offered to the community. The librarian noted that:

"We do not get any funding from Jinja Municipal Council or from the central government. There are times when the going gets really tough. We need to meet daily bills for maintaining the library and this burden rests on the founder and a few other people"

Operating with a limited budget hinders the smooth operation of activities at the library.

Under staffing

The library has few staff members who serve such a big community. Due to this, the opening and closing hours are affected. The library remains closed sometimes over the entire weekend and is opened sometimes on Saturday in case of any special activities. This affects the quality of services offered to the different library users. A child echoed that:

"I get demotivated when the librarian is sick. That day, the library will remain closed unless there is another member of staff to open for us. That means I will miss reading and using the computer. Sometimes, I am reluctant to visit the library at the thought of finding it closed"

Insecurity

The library has faced the challenge of theft of information materials and other library equipment in the past. Over 30 computers were stolen in addition to printers, scanners and other valuables. This hinders the provision of effective and efficient services to the library users since replacement of such stolen equipment translates into incurring heavy expenses, yet the library is struggling financially. The librarian narrated that:

"In 2019, thieves broke into the library and stole many things. 30 computers were stolen, the printer and scanner were also stolen and many books were destroyed. This has been a major setback in our work. We now have very few computers that cannot match the demand by the library users"

Uganda's education system

Uganda's education system was mentioned as a contributing factor to the poor culture of reading in Uganda. In most schools, children read mainly to pass examinations and not for leisure. Children have been tuned to believe that reading is mainly for academic excellence. Many schools have few or no story books for the children and many children hardly read any leisure books. This prohibits children from starting to read early in life hindering the development of a reading culture among such children. During the interviews, the librarian stressed that:

"The kind of education that the children receive is wanting. Many of them visit the library when they cannot read on their own yet they are in upper primary classes. They are used to copying from the blackboard and writing the in their books as given by the teachers"

The reading culture of most children is therefore poor and as they grow, it becomes challenging for them to embrace lifelong learning.

Poverty

Uganda is faced with high levels of poverty especially in the rural communities. Most parents and guardians have meagre incomes and cannot afford to buy books and other reading materials that children need to develop a reading culture in Igombe community and beyond. Many children are first introduced to books when they start formal school. According to the librarian:



“This rural community is faced with high poverty levels. Most people here have no stable jobs and they survive on doing part time and casual jobs. It is difficult for parents to think about buying books for their children when some of them do not even go to school because of lack of school fees”

The failure of children being introduced to books as early as possible hinders them from using them to develop their reading skills much earlier in their lives.

Strategies to improve reading among children

Create a reading-rich environment

This involves making books available and visible at home, at school or libraries. As noted by the librarian:

“The library provides children with a wide range of reading materials and gives them the opportunity to read. Those who have taken reading seriously have benefited from the services that the library offers”

At the community library, children are allowed to choose their own reading materials and also encouraged to explore different types and authors.

Provision of opportunities for reading widely

The librarian allows debates and discussions about books and encourages children to borrow books regularly. The librarian mentioned that:

“Children should be exposed to a wide range of books so that they develop an understanding of the world around them. The more books they read, the more literacy skills they will get”

Children should be exposed to different genres, authors and topics from time to time.

Reading role models

Children should regularly see adults reading for pleasure. Reading role models show children that reading is an enjoyable activity and inspire them to make reading part of their lives. A child stressed that:

“When I see old people and my friends reading, I am reminded that I must read so that I become a responsible person”

Such reading role models should also explain the value of reading to children starting at a tender age and take them to libraries as well so that they can be inspired to develop a lifelong love for reading and also improve their literacy skills.

Making reading fun

Making reading fun is essential in order to make children to love reading. A parent shared that:

“I have noticed that my son loves reading books with pictures. He does not pay a lot of attention to books without pictures”.

Interesting and engaging books should be chosen for the children and books should have interesting stories, filled with pictures with attractive colours and that children can easily relate with the different characters in the books.

Reading aloud regularly

Children should be encouraged to participate in read aloud sessions in schools, at home or libraries so that they can interact with other readers. According to the librarian:

“Reading aloud has a big impact on the children’s reading skills and vocabulary. When children read poems and short stories together, it creates long lasting memories and they always want to do it again and again”

Children should also be encouraged to prompt discussions about what they have read so that they learn from each other.

Collaboration with teachers

There should be a combined effort between the community librarians and teachers so that a feasible reading program is tailored and followed. These two parties should be accountable to each other so that they strive to achieve better reading for the children. A parent shared that:

“When parents and the community librarian work with the schools where our children study from, the children’s reading progress can easily be followed. This will support the children’s reading development”

Classroom reading activities should always be supported by donating reading materials to schools.

Celebrate reading achievements

Readers who excel in reading should be celebrated by rewarding them. They can be given certificates or reading trophy cases can be created by displaying the books that have been read by each child and the achievements they have earned. A child revealed that:

“The librarian always tells us to read many books so that we can become better at reading. He always praises the children who borrow and return many books from the library. I feel very happy when I am thanked for reading books”.

Celebrating children encourages them to read hard so that they can also be recognized and rewarded as good readers.

Discussion

The findings revealed a number of activities children engaged in at Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre. These included but were not limited to participating in read aloud sessions, silent reading, modelling and spelling bee contests. The community library serviced as a space where children enhanced their literacy skills. However, numerous challenges affecting the library were also revealed. The findings of this study clearly indicated that poverty was a significant barrier to the development of a reading culture among children in Uganda. High levels of poverty meant that most parents and guardians had very low incomes and could

not afford to buy books and other reading materials essential for fostering a reading culture in Igombe community and beyond. Many children were first introduced to books only when they started formal schooling. This late introduction hindered their ability to develop reading skills early in life. According to Merga (2020), children from impoverished backgrounds often faced considerable stress, which affected their ability to concentrate on reading. They lacked exposure to reading materials, making it difficult for them to engage with texts meaningfully. Additionally, the high costs associated with printing quality storybooks further limited access for many families.

Poverty is closely linked to fewer academic opportunities for children and reduces their ability to develop essential skills needed for lifelong learning. Children with low literacy skills are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, and these issues can largely be attributed to poverty (Mereba & Mekonnen, 2022). While the community library offers notable benefits to children and the entire community, several challenges still limit its ability to fully serve its patrons. It is essential to address these challenges so that maximum utilization of library resources and customer satisfaction can be achieved. A proper budget is necessary for libraries to meet the diverse needs and preferences of various user groups, including children, youths, and adults. Moreover, prioritizing outreach programs and enhancing mobile library services would allow the library to reach children in their schools and communities more effectively. The study also highlighted the crucial role of library staff in assisting children in locating and using information materials. However, the limited number of staff members serving a large community affected library operations. The library's opening hours were inconsistent, sometimes closing over weekends or only opening on Saturdays for special events. This inconsistency negatively impacted the quality of services provided to library users. In addition, inadequate funding prevented the implementation of necessary security measures within the library. As a result, the library became vulnerable to theft, with past incidents involving stolen computers, printers, and other valuable equipment. Without security personnel or systems in place, the safety of library property was compromised.

Security threats have also been observed by Adewale (2021) and Ahmad (2020) as being barriers to the development of community libraries. Another reason for a bad reading culture in Uganda has also been attributed to Uganda's education systems. In many schools the children mostly read with a view of passing examinations rather than for pleasure or enjoyment. Schools have especially trained children to approach reading as a necessity to score high marks. This is a result of the observation by Innocent (2020) and Merga and Roni (2018) that parent and teachers do not encourage leisure reading appropriately. For children especially, it becomes important to reposition the importance of reading from a value aspect of school all the way to and an enjoyable part of life. Leisure reading should be promoted within school frameworks, and students should be given an opportunity to read a variety of materials during and after perusing their education. Therefore, it is recommended that poverty related barriers should be tackled,

library pragmatic approaches should be strengthened by staffing and financing, security measures should be fostered, and there should be a shift of focus in education to leisure reading in order to build strong foundation for children's reading culture in Uganda. Speaking of such threats, it is high time for community libraries such as Nambi Sseppuuya to gear up and become indispensable literacy champions for children and readers from their communities.

The findings from the also indicated some of the areas that could be strengthen in order to improve on reading among children at the Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre. The first potential area for development is the promotion of a reading culture. This means having books available and in clear sight in the home, school and the library. This means from the home to the school and even the library. In particular, it is established that children prefer to read books of their choice would make them want to read more (Asif & Yang, 2021). The other significant chance is to offer as many options for reading as possible. He pointed out this move made him convinced that introduction of the children to various genres, authors, and topics will help them make sense of the world we live in. It also provides the child with the encouragement to borrow more often therefore improving his or her literacy performances. For children to be motivated the important thing with these children is to have reading role models in their lives. As children watch the adults in the family read, they are encouraged to read in order to access materials for fun and gains.

Parents or caregivers can tell young adults the importance of reading from an early age and can take children to read the books at the library they or she loves. Reading should also be made more appealing. Books that children find appealing because they are colorful and contain lots of pictures may get the children interested in the stories. According to Adewale (2021), when reading is fun, children are willing to read often. Furthermore, there are so many Advantages that a child will get by being encouraged to be part of the read-aloud sessions involving books for young children. Provision of such sessions develop interesting scenes that provoke desire of children to learn stories. The other chance is combined work of the community librarians and teachers. This way they can endeavour to develop good reading plans that are able to support children's learning both at school and in the library. Lastly, encouraging appreciation of children accomplishments in reading can encourage them to read. In this way, it is commendable that their efforts be rewarded or commended in order to further foster their efforts for developing their literacy. Through exploiting these opportunities, the Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre, can go a long way in enhancing the act of reading among children in the society.

Conclusion

Therefore, the purpose of this research focused on establishing the level of effectiveness of Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre and its contribution to literacy development among children in Igombe and the rest neighbouring community. The results of the study show that despite there being several fun and interactive

activities such as reading aloud to the children, reading to the children and book reading sessions the library has its limitations which include lack of funds, lack of qualified staff and insecurity. These challenges therefore denies the library the opportunity to deliver quality services and resources which children requires in enhancement of their reading culture. Coupled with this is poverty and the education system's measures which discourage children from reading, for example, the concentrates on exam results decreases the chances of early childhood education children reading for pleasure. As such the study also found out several gaps that need to be exploited to enhance on reading among children. Sustaining of reading materials, offering different opportunities for reading, illustrating good models, turning reading into a fun activity, repealing the reading aloud, working with the teachers and rewarding children's success are among the strategies that can foster literacy development. That is why community libraries such as Nambi Sseppuuya should be able to overcome such obstacles regarding a valuable source for a positive attitude towards reading and enhancing children's literacy. Indeed, the following will not only help individual children but also educations development of the community in question. Finally, the improvement of reading activities requires funding if the future of the Uganda's youths has to transform from a 'ground of hope' to a lab of developed and empowered youths in a world that is increasingly becoming an information technology hub.

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