

The Contribution of ‘Room to Read’ Libraries and Reading Materials to Literacy Development in Selected Primary Schools of Zambia

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ABSTRACT: *This study sought to explore the contribution of Room To Read (RTR) libraries and reading materials to literacy development in selected primary schools of Zambia from the Lense of respondents. The study employed a descriptive research design which guided the researchers to unfold an in-depth description and understanding of the contributions that Room to Read Libraries made to literacy development and instruction. The study used simple random and typical case purposive sampling to select participants and institutions. The sample size of the study was 50 respondents drawn from two (02) Debs Personnel, one (1) from each district, ten (10) librarians, one (1) from each school, ten (10) Head teachers, one (1) from each school, eight (08) Primary School teachers and Twenty (20) primary school learners, from the selected Primary Schools in Chilanga and Kafue Districts of Zambia. Data was collected through direct observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. The data collected was subjected to content analysis where themes and emerging trends were extracted in readiness for presentation. The findings of the study revealed that most of the respondents alleged that the reading materials were supporting the new policy of using a zonal language to teach initial literacy, while a few of the respondents were not in agreement but said that the reading materials do not support the new policy of using a familiar language to teach initial literacy. Reason being that most of these reading materials were kept in locked storerooms and libraries. Most teachers stated that Room to Read reading materials were useful towards literacy instruction in primary schools as it helped improve learners’ skills in reading and writing, as well as enhanced learners’ motivation to learn, and improved learners’ vocabulary. The study recommended that Ministry of Education should undertake the initiative of building more school libraries and putting library study hours on the timetable in all the primary schools to intensify the reading culture and reading materials to improve literacy levels among learners in Zambia.*

KEY WORDS: Literacy, Reading, Reading Culture, Library, Reading materials. Room to Read.

INTRODUCTION

The reading skill is a crucial component that predicts children's academic success and future career achievements (Mkandawire, 2022; Oyetunji, 2011; Oberholzer, 2005;). "Reading is a basic life skill and a cornerstone for success at school and throughout life, therefore, pupils who can read well can function more effectively in everyday school activities" (Maala & Mkandawire, 2022, p.111; Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018; Silavwe et al., 2019). Children in primary schools read volumes of books to respond to academic demands such as class tasks, assignments, discussions, and homework. "Successful learners in education are those that can read diverse materials across subject areas with comprehension and address the problems assigned to them (Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018; Maala & Mkandawire, 2022). Therefore, efforts to promote reading and writing skills in children should be encouraged and supported by all organisations such as Room to Read which the present study investigated.

Room to Read (RTR) is a global non-profitable American organization whose headquarters is in San Francisco, California. The focus of RTR is to work with various nations across Africa and Asia to improve literacy and gender equality in education. Room to Read was established in Zambia in 2007. It worked across Lusaka, Eastern and Southern Provinces of Zambia with the aim of building teacher capacity in literacy. The vision for Room to Read Organisation was to create a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality. For this reason, Room to Read envisioned a world in which all children could pursue a quality education that prepared them to be fulfilled and make positive change in their families, communities, and the world. Room to Read's tagline is dubbed "World change starts with educated children", (Sunisha et al., 2008). The main objectives of Room to Read in Zambia were: (i) helping children in historically low-income communities to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading. (ii) support girl-child to build their skills to succeed in schools and negotiate key life decisions. (iii) Train and coach teachers in literacy. (iv) Create quality literacy materials (books), and (v) establish library buildings filled with children's books for literacy instruction in both English and local languages. These objectives among others made Room to Read Zambia collaborate with the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and other partners to support literacy initiatives which advocated for early education (Goodin, 2011). Through literacy portfolio, Room to Read Organisation supported Zambian children to become independent readers and life-long learners. This study focused on the contribution of RTR libraries to the development of literacy among children in early grades.

When Room to Read libraries were established in 2012, they were piloted in different primary schools of Chilanga and Kafue districts. They piloted the use of reading rooms, reading materials and Reading strategies in different primary schools to create an environment that promoted Literacy. The results of the pilot were a success as they realized that the library facilities served multiple purposes in schools that included reading and writing spaces, discussion, and meeting

rooms. School libraries improved the quality of learning spaces and creating more room where children could read and interact with developed and donated books to provide children with more reading opportunities. Room to Read school libraries helped to create an environment that promoted reading and writing (Lungu & Mkandawire, 2022). However, its impact on children's reading habits was not consistent among children of parents with less education or other disadvantaged communities. As a result, between 2013 and 2015, Room to Read instituted a series of programmatic improvements, including the introduction of family and community engagement guidelines to help schools increase parental support and involvement in their children's reading activities, stronger coordination between the Literacy Program's reading instruction and school library components; and packages to promote more consistent implementation approaches, such as training of librarians for all its libraries (Sunisha et al, 2008).

Room to Read worked in collaboration with communities and local government across Asia and Africa to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and support girls to complete secondary school with the life skills they need to succeed in school and beyond. In Zambia alone, Room to Read had established 487 school libraries and provided 55 classes with improved reading and writing instructions. There were over 43 school libraries supported by Room to Read in Chilanga and Kafue Districts of Lusaka province, Zambia. Room to Read invested in libraries and training of teachers and librarians until, they transferred the responsibility to the Zambian Primary Schools in those areas. This transfer of responsibility was necessary for sustainability and that, it was to enable them to start new projects to reach more communities in need. Room to Read was very proud of the fact that they had been able to reach about 8,000,000 children and had built more than 16,000 Libraries across the world. Room to Read believed that a library that thrives with rich reading materials helps children to thrive in their reading culture. Libraries have traditionally supported the culture of reading among the communities where they are housed (Kafusha et al., 2021). Towards the end of the organisation in Zambia, Room to Read started putting in place measures for sustainability of libraries after their departure (Wood, 2007). They identified station schools to start running them for sustainability and asked the government to maintain and manage them.

Concept of Library

The definitions of "school library" given by various library scientists and associations reflect the heritage of academic life. A library is a collection of resources that are organized by information professionals or other experts who provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and offer targeted services and programs with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society. Throughout the world the library of a school is considered as part and parcel of the academic set-up. It is created and maintained to serve and support the educational activities of the school. The recommendations of numerous commissions and committees established by different governments throughout the world and various states for the improvement

of school education can bring in desired results provided the school has the full complement of library resources, personnel, and necessary infrastructure. So far, the school library has not been given its rightful place in the primary school level(Reuter, 2007).

Libraries have since ages been associated with education. One cannot talk about library without talking about education. Hence, they cannot be isolated from each other. Libraries are facilities for sustainable development through the support they offer to the educational sector. These services are greatly felt in secondary schools, colleges, and universities even in an informal public setting leaving out primary schools. However, libraries permeate the entire fabric of the educational system. An experience has shown that a country's educational system could be as strong or as weak if the library resources can either support or not support that system. It should be observed that the library is a recognized and essential resources center which no student can afford to dispense with if he or she wants to attain his or her academic goals (Paiva, 2017).

Reading Materials in the Primary School Library

Teaching literacy in a familiar language can be enhanced in children if primary school libraries are supplied with books in familiar languages. There should be a deliberate move to teach literacy using a familiar language from grade 1 and 2 and teaching of literacy using English language from grade 3 and 4 in all the Zambian primary schools. Therefore, enough books in both familiar language and English language should be well supplied in primary schools' libraries to help children with something to read. This is best done when the primary school possesses a library containing a liberal collection of books on all levels with familiar and English languages. High quality literature would seem to have the potential to provide, albeit vicariously, the much-needed experiences that will promote emotional intelligence. It can help the child understand oneself and others better; it demonstrates that there is always hope, and that one can overcome even seemingly insurmountable obstacles; it can foster development of empathy and tolerance. In the developing countries, where high quality of first language literature may not be available or easily accessible to all children, the English language teaching(ELT) program can provide the much-needed literary experiences which can be related to learners' own life experience and reality(Kaur, 2015).

There must be a call for an immediate increase in funding for books in classroom, school, and town libraries. The condition of these libraries has weakened over the last decade; there are fewer books per child, and the condition of the books and the staffing of the libraries have seriously deteriorated. We must reverse this trend because children who have access to books are more likely to read for enjoyment, and thus increase their reading skills and their desire to read to learn. The purpose of this position statement is to emphasize the importance of increased, dedicated funding for the purchase of quality literature of multiple genres. Librarians must purchase enough new books per student, and they must make a concentrated effort to replace older materials for each classroom and school library on an annual basis. Genres should include picture storybooks, novels, biography, fiction and nonfiction material, magazines, poetry, and a multitude of other types to

suit the interests and range of reading abilities of all children Providing books and other print materials for Classroom and School Libraries A Position Statement of the International Reading Association (IRA), (Baker ,2016).

There is a need for the recreational reading, also referred to as pleasure reading or extensive reading, which involves learners' language, self-choice of reading material. This freedom of choice is thought to motivate students to read according to their interests. By engaging in the reading of a large amount of material of their own choosing, it is assumed that students strengthen their language abilities. Recreational reading in a second language classroom generally excludes the use of formal comprehension testing, and thereby is thought to reduce the role of anxiety in second language reading. The practical issues involved in setting up a recreational reading program in the second language classroom revolve around whether or not graded or simplified readers should be used, what the role of the teacher should be, if follow-up tasks such as having students fill out comment sheets should be used, and how to set up an in-classroom library of recreational reading materials,(Bordonaro, 2011).

In the primary school context, it is not enough to build and stock a school library. The information resources must be made accessible to children, who must be educated and encouraged to use the resources effectively for lifelong education. Primary school children must develop a reading habit that will encourage literacy and lifelong education. Devices such as open access, special sequences of books in prominent places to attract children, placing books within convenient reach of children will encourage use for lifelong education.

Libraries are as important for children as education itself. A library service implies both availability and accessibility of library facilities and services to the user and the willingness and ability of readers to use the facilities and services. Information is power and access to information is indispensable to individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Children need the library for effective learning for lifelong education, in consonance with the National Policy on Education (1993), which states that, the aim of basic education is to equip individual with such knowledge, skill, and attitude that will enable them to live meaningful and fulfilling lives, contribute to the development of the society, derive maximum social economic and cultural benefits from the society and, discharge their civil obligation(Newark,2000).

School librarians develop a resource base for the school by using the curriculum and student interests to identify and obtain library materials, organize, and maintain the library collection in order to promote independent reading and lifelong learning. Materials in the library collection can be located using an Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). Often these catalogs are web-based on which students can gain access both at school and from home. The development of skills in reading continues to be of outstanding importance, but the techniques for promoting the skills have undergone change. The primary school of the past was entirely dependent upon the textbook.

Learning by rote was considered the end of teaching. Today, however, educators are aware that learning is accelerated and broadened using many and varied devices and materials. The library becomes increasingly important in the new teaching, for not only does it supply enrichment materials in all areas, but it also supplies materials at all levels of difficulty. Its store of books, pictures, pamphlets, maps, films, filmstrips, recordings, and all other printed media makes it a gold mine for each teacher and for each pupil. The child who is surrounded with good books of all kinds reaches out well beyond the classroom routine and becomes involved in learning under the most productive system of all, for his learning is self-directed.

In addition, there is a vital relationship between reading skills and reading activities. The reading programme at the beginning of schooling is concerned with the instruction of reading techniques, but it stresses understanding and interest on the part of the pupil. An adequate programme must therefore supply children with something to read. This is best done when the primary school possesses a library containing a liberal collection of books on all levels and on many subjects. As the child progresses with reading his curiosity can be stimulated more and more to seek answers through print. He also develops satisfaction in his contact with literature if he has an ample book collection from which to borrow books. It is only through extensive reading that a child can develop judgment about books and to acquire standards of appreciation and taste. The library affords this opportunity to explore books-to taste and choose, to read and absorb, to widen horizons. The library also provides a place for reference, reading and for obtaining information(Krashen, 2004).

Young children who demonstrated a voluntary interest in books were rated by their teachers as displaying high performance in all areas of school achievement. They also performed well on a standardized achievement test in other studies, classrooms were filled with large numbers of trade books, and teachers were asked to encourage free reading. Improvement in children's reading achievement, gains in vocabulary and comprehension, and increased reading were noted, and better attitudes toward reading were reported than were exhibited by children in comparison schools who did not participate in such programs.

Access to books refers to the availability of quality literature in classroom, school, community, or home libraries. Children with adequate access to books have many books to select from daily, both in and out of school. Additionally, school libraries and classrooms must have an adequate amount of reading material for each child to create a fair balance between children who receive access to books outside of school and those who do not. Access means not only availability of books, but also time for reading them Regular periods need to be set aside in school for independent reading. Providing access to books also includes supplying a quiet, comfortable place to read. Another important part of access is librarians and teachers who know both books and children and who can make good recommendations that match the interests of children with the content of books (Krashen, 2004).

Children become fluent readers when they have opportunities to practice reading. Without appropriate access to books, children will be taught to read, but will not develop the habit of reading. If schools fail to provide children with an opportunity to practice skills in the meaningful context of literature, substantial numbers of children will choose not to read for pleasure or for information on their own. Additionally, research has found a relation between the amount of time that children read for fun on their own and reading achievement. Children in classrooms without literature collections read 50% less than children in classrooms with such collections. School libraries are necessary partners for the provision of children's access to books. Libraries often provide their own programs for children and parents to enhance the joy of reading and easy, free access to books. In these efforts, they can and often do collaborate with schools. It is important to look at a study that demonstrated the value of using the school library to provide children more access to books (Mahwasane, 2017).

Children with limited access to print due to lack of school libraries usually fail to breakthrough to literacy. Schools that have up-to-date book collections in good condition often have children who breakthrough to literacy. Additionally, many of these schools received extra funding for online access, interactive video resources and a higher percentage of these schools belong to networks. The American Library Association (ALA) has recommended that school libraries plan acquisition programs that are integrated with the instructional program of their school. Such a school program should decide what types of books are needed to help the school and the library achieve instructional goals. Librarians and teachers also need financial support from school budgets for book purchases and for school librarians to help with the use of the books (Satgoor, 2015).

In the Zambian situation, are there enough local familiar language books that support Literacy? Reading materials are not only for the education, enjoyment, and entertainment of all members of the school community, but also to enhance and expand the school's curriculum. In many schools, school libraries are staffed by librarians, teacher-librarians, or school library media specialists or media coordinators who hold a specific library science degree. In some jurisdictions, school librarians are required to have specific certification and/or a teaching certificate. The school librarian supplies children with educational books. The question is how useful are the reading materials in Zambian Primary Schools?

Tambuluakani & Bus (2011) did a study and the findings were that a lack of familiarity with the language of teaching is blamed for illiteracy rates beyond 40% among people who live in nations in Africa or Asia in which dozens of languages are spoken. For a critical test of the importance of familiarity with the language in which initial reading is practiced, the study took the Zambian situation as a natural experiment and tested effects of a fit between the local language spoken in the homes and playground and the language officially designated as language of instruction. The study selected 12 state-funded primary schools from three districts likely to differ in match between children's language and language of instruction. From each school 10 high- and 10 low

achievers were random taken, in all 240 pupils, and tested them after 18 months of instruction Pupils made more progress in word reading fluency in a Zambian language and English when basic reading skills are practiced in the children's most familiar Zambian language (Mkandawire, 2017).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed a descriptive research design due to its suitability for describing the situation as they exist. The study used the survey research which involves acquiring information about one or more groups of people, perhaps about their opinions, characteristics, attitudes, or previous experiences, by asking questions and tabulating the answers. The survey research is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from the participants or items considered to be representative of the entire group. In other words, only a part of the population is studied, and findings from this are expected to be generalized to the entire population. A survey is a systematic method used to gather information from (a sample of) entities to construct quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members. Qualitative studies are largely investigative processes in which researchers gradually make sense of a social phenomenon by means of contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the object of study (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021).

The target population is the aggregate of cases about which the researcher would like to generate. Polit and Hungler (1999:37) refer to the population as 'an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications.' A population is a group of individual's persons, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement, for example a population of presidents or professors, books, or students. A population is the entire set of cases in which a study is interested. It is the full set of individuals or of objects having some common characteristics. The population of this study was drawn from the following: Debs officials, Librarians, the Head Teachers, Class Teachers, and Learners in selected Primary Schools in Chilanga and Kafue Districts of Lusaka Province of Zambia.

Sample Size

A sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole (Webster, 1985). When dealing with people, it can be defined as a set of respondents (people) selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey. A sample size is a sub-set of a population selected to participate in the study or a fraction of the whole selected to participate in the research project. Participants' selection determines the population to which research findings are generated. The procedure that was used for assigning participants to different treatment conditions (random assignment) which determined whether bias existed in the data collection method (Creswell, 2013).

The sample of the study was two (02) Debs Personnel, one (1) from each district, ten (10) librarians, one (1) from each school, ten (10) Head teachers, one (1) from each school, eight (08) Primary School teachers, four (4) from each district and Twenty (20) primary school learners, two (2) from each Selected Primary Schools, making a total of 50 participants targeted in selected Primary Schools in Chilanga and Kafue Districts, Zambia.

The process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population is known as sampling. Sampling is the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable Sample or a representative part of a population for determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. In this study, both simple random and purposive sampling techniques were employed (Rosenthal, 1991).

The simple random sample was done to select learners as participants which gave every case of the population an equal probability of inclusion in the sample. A complete frame (a list of all units in the whole population) was needed.

Purposive or judgmental sampling is a strategy in which settings, persons or events are selected deliberately to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices It is where the researcher includes cases or participants in the sample because they believe that they warrant inclusion.

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select the Debs Personnel, Librarians, Head teachers and Class teachers were included in the study. Purposive sampling relies on the decision of the researcher, based on some well-known criteria. This was so because these were chosen for the rich information they had. The sampling process required the development of a sampling frame, whereby in this study was the current category of all the named samples above.

Saunders et al (2007) argue that a sample size of 30 or more for instance, will usually result in a sampling distribution that is very close to the normal distribution and the larger the absolute size of a sample, the closer its distribution will be to the normal distribution. Hence, simple random sampling was used for all the Primary school Learners since it gave each case in the population an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Data collection methods are strategies researchers use to collect information and these include interviews, focus group discussion, observation, questionnaire, and document analysis (Mkandawire, 2019). The qualitative data collection methods used in this study includes observation, open-ended questionnaire, and face-to-face interviews. The findings were collected through a variety of methods, and the researcher used three (3) types of research instruments while conducting a qualitative study.

Direct observation check-sheet: With direct observation, the researcher studied the activities that were happening in the library without participating or interfering. The observation check-sheet was used in conducting research inside the library to observe the librarian work culture. Marshall and Rossman (1989:79) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study". Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a "written photograph" of the situation under study.

Open-ended In-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher by speaking to participants on one-on-one setting. The qualitative interview is central to data collection. However, the most important component is that for the information obtained to be more authentic, the researcher had to create a good connection with the source. Significantly, the subjects of the interview process are the interviewees.

The researcher approached the interviews with a predetermined list of questions or topics for discussion but allows the conversation to evolve based on how the participant responds. In certain instances, the researcher had identified certain topics of interest and used a formal interview guide for the conversation but allows the participants to freely participate. Interviews were conducted to Debs officers, Head teachers and Class teachers which were successfully done. The researcher engages a small group of participants in a conversation designed to generate data relevant to the research question which was conducted to eight (8) participants from each district visited and was specifically for learners who used Room to Read libraries. Library observation sheet was used to librarians was done effectively to the learners.

Data analysis refers to examining what has been collected in research and making deductions and inferences. It also involves uncovering underlying structures, extracting important variables, detecting any anomalies and testing any underlying assumptions, scrutinizing the acquired information and making inferences. The process of evaluating data using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided. Data from various sources was gathered, reviewed, and then analyzed in readiness for presentation of finding (Rosenthal, 1991).

Qualitative data approach was done to capture participant's opinions. This was coded into themes to provide for flexibility in data collection using percentages, frequencies, tables, figures, pie-charts and pictures. All these were applied to ensure accurate analysis of data.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings on the contribution of the libraries and reading materials provided by Room to Read in primary schools are presented in themes below.

The Room To Read Materials Were in Line with National Policy

Respondents alleged that the reading materials were supporting the new policy of using a zonal language to teach initial literacy. Furthermore, they observed that the Room To Read reading materials were useful towards literacy instruction in primary schools as it helped improve learners' skills in reading and writing, as well as enhanced learners' motivation to read, learn, and expanded learners' vocabulary. For example, the two District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) had this to share:

DEBS from District 1: We have noticed a tremendous improvement in literacy levels in these primary schools where Room To Read Organisation has built these libraries. Most learners are able to read and write with fewer difficulties because of the reading materials that were provided. It's also good that they provided materials in local languages which support the policy of teaching children in Zambian languages.

Another DEBS from another district 2 said:

What room to read is doing in primary schools is commendable as it helps our children to develop a culture of reading. Many children want to read but lack of materials affect this greatly.

A head teacher from one of the schools had this to share:

The idea of having an NGO support government in the provision of facilities like libraries and materials is something we cannot forget because it supports our Primary Literacy Programme. We need more of such organisation to help us with resources to run schools smoothly.

The teachers who were interviewed alleged that the reading materials were supporting the new policy of using a zonal language to teach initial literacy and that they were happy to use those books to teach Literacy under the Primary Literacy Programme (PLP).

One of the teachers said that:

Teacher 7: Yes, we have books in local languages from grade 1-4. Although sometimes we ask learners to donate books if they have them at home". Room to read organisation provided a lot of books in local languages which teachers used to teach Primary Literacy programme (PLP) in grade 1. However, most of these books are not well maintained due to limited library infrastructure.

From the response above, teachers felt that the libraries and materials found in them were useful in guiding instruction as guided in the Primary Literacy Programme that is running in Zambia.

Primary Schools Lack Teaching and Learning Materials

Multiple respondents stated that the teaching and learning materials are not enough to supply every learner with a book. In support of this voice, the following are the voices from teachers.

Teacher 1: *They do buy books but they are not enough to give to every child in class. The RTR organisation came here and donated some materials which are mostly found in the library which they built. The materials are okay, but they are not used in classes as the topics sometimes are not in line with what we teach for a day.*

Teacher 2: *No, there are no books in our local languages because there are no local writers. Books in local languages are very few in our Zambian primary schools because there are no local language authors. The RTR organisation provided many reading materials which supported the use of local languages, but only very few materials are well maintained after RTR left Zambia.*

Teacher 3: *The major challenge we have here is books across classes. Yes, from Grade one to seven there are very few books, and some classes have to share one book with ten or more pupils in class. Yes, we go to class every day and for me, whatever i do there is created by me because children need to do something.*

Teacher 4: *Its not only books but everything. We don't even have charts, flash cards, maps and others that we can use in these classes. I don't know what we can do to help ourselves.*

Other teachers reported that the lack of teaching and learning materials is a huge problem in schools and it has affected the implementation of the Primary Literacy Programme (PLP) which supports the use of Zonal familiar language to teach initial literacy. The lack of teaching materials in schools was also reported by (Chileshe et al., 2018) who observed that schools in Zambia are hit by chronic lack of teaching and learning materials across grade levels. In some cases, this challenge spills over to colleges and universities.

The RTR Libraries were Locked and Not Accessible to Learners and Teachers

Teachers and learners expressed concerns that the facility with resources in their schools remained closed during active hours of the school. They noted that the closure of libraries was more pronounced after the introduction of Primary Literacy Programme. The following voices were expressed.

Learner 1: *We don't go to the library because teachers closed it. I don't know they just closed it. No. We don't have books to read but teachers come with them to class.*

Learner 2: *I have never been in the library to read books. Because the library is closed but they opened it last week Monday to get something there.*

Teacher 5: *The library has been closed for some time. Am not sure why because one teacher said pupils used to destroy books and that's why they closed it. A library study is not on the timetable as the case was during RTR project as such we are not given enough time to use the library.*

Teacher 7: Sometimes, these libraries are locked and are not used by anyone. It is now used as a classroom for some classes. However, there are times when it's just a normal library and it works like that with very few materials.

A teacher who was assigned to the library equally stated that the library had been closed for some time, but it started opening occasionally. From the response above, it can be noted that the intention of Room to Read organization on the use of reading materials in the libraries were not well achieved because most of these libraries were locked and learners had no access to them.

Sustainability of RTR Libraries and Materials

Head teachers and teachers assigned as librarian expressed concerns that the RTR libraries may need more attention from the schools and governments. It was observed that most of the head teachers said that RTR contributions of reading materials were not well sustained in those primary school whose libraries were turned into classroom while only few said that they were well sustained and useful after RTR left Zambia because libraries were in full operation. This was the fear Room to Read Organisation had before leaving Zambia that these Libraries were not going to thrive as expected. These respondents had the following voices to share about the libraries and materials.

One head teacher said that:

Due to over-enrolment of learners in these schools, it is difficult to maintain the reading materials because there are not enough storerooms to keep these books. Most of these reading rooms were turned into classroom due to lack of classrooms.

Another head teacher from another school said that:

Our schools have been upgraded to combine schools were both primary and secondary schools use the same infrastructure. Therefore, the libraries are mostly used by secondary school learners because the space is not enough for both primary and secondary learners.

Another head teacher said that.

Our school does not have enough Librarians to help the learners use the libraries efficiently and as such learners are not allowed to go to the library on their own.

Only few librarians who were found in two schools had said that RTR libraries were sustained and that the reading materials were useful for teaching literacy in both English and Local languages. This was one of the main purpose Room to Read contributed these reading rooms.

Most of the Primary school pupils said that RTR libraries were not used in most of those schools because, secondary school pupils occupied the space and Primary school pupils were not allowed

to use the library, and as such most of the reading material for primary school learners were kept in the storerooms. Room to Read stocked the libraries with reading materials for local languages from grade 1-4 and English language from grade 5- 7. However, these books are not in use because most of these schools were upgraded to secondary schools and primary schools did not have an independent library room and as such, those without libraries were not doing better generally since the reading materials were not exposed to learners.

One of the primary school learners mentioned that “*Mostly, books available are in English language which is very advanced as compared to the levels of primary school learners*”. Children should have an opportunity to read books that develop their knowledge to improve literacy levels. This was not in line with Vygotsky (1978), theoretical framework which says Learners must actively develop their knowledge in the learning process. According to this theoretical framework, scaffolding instruction is the “*role of teachers and others in supporting the learner’s development and providing support structures to get to the next stage or level*” (e.g., others can mean Librarians).

The RTR Libraries and Materials Expanded Learners Vocabulary and Literacy Development

Teachers and librarians stated that during the time when libraries were open, most pupils used to go there to borrow books, read from there and teachers used to take classes there. Some teachers even forced certain learners to read certain books at their level. This process helps many learners to develop the art of reading and in the process, expanded their vocabulary and fluency. The following voices were shared.

Librarian 1: We used to receive classes for an hour and children would be asked to read from the library. This act helped many children to develop reading skills and actually they were reading easily. Others would read the same passage many times and the more they read, the faster and precise they became at reading.

Librarian 2: Children used to play with books in our library but that was okay because they were getting familiar with many things about the book. Others that were slightly older would seat and read from there and do some activity from the library. Teachers could come and borrow certain books but now, the library is leaking when it’s raining, and most materials are no longer there.

Teacher 7: Our library is still working and learners are improving their reading skills there. I think we need to create time for all pupils to be going there so that pupils can develop reading skills. In the same vein, the library needs more materials to be bought and the school needs to stop using it as a classroom unless, it’s a class for reading or using the library.

Teachers and pupils require to be spending time in the library so that teachers can demonstrate to pupils how to read and scaffold them in needy areas. The reading skills can be expanded in

immeasurable ways in learners (Mumba & Mkandawire, 2020). In addition, “the goal of the educator when using the scaffolding teaching strategy is to help a learner become an independent and self-regulating learner who is a problem solver”, This is so because, children who learn to read can then read to learn content subjects so that they can become independent learners for life(Goodman,1990).These findings agreed with Tambulukani and Bus (2011)who discovered that: a lack of familiarity with the language of teaching is blamed for illiteracy rates beyond 40% among Zambian children. The findings are also tandem with Mkandawire etal., (2023) who raised multiple factors contributing to low literacy levels in Zambia. For a critical test of the importance of familiarity with the language in which initial reading is practiced, they looked at a Zambian situation as a natural experiment and tested effects of a fit between the local language spoken in the homes and playground and the language officially designated as language of instruction.

These findings are supported by Mkandawire (2022) who observed that lack of teaching and learning materials in schools has for long contributed to low literacy levels in Zambia. Therefore, any initiative aimed at providing reading and writing materials in schools must be sustained and supported. Moreover, access to books refers to the availability of quality literature in classroom, school, community, or home libraries. Children with adequate access to books have many books to select from on a daily basis, both in and out of school. Additionally, school libraries and classrooms must have an adequate amount of reading material for each child to create a fair balance between children who receive access to books outside of school and those who do not. Access means not only availability of books, but also time for reading them Regular periods need to be set aside in school for independent reading. Providing access to books also includes supplying a quiet, comfortable place to read. Another important part of access is librarians and teachers who know both books and children and who can make good recommendations that match the interests of children with the content of books.

Children become fluent readers when they have opportunities to practice reading. Without appropriate access to books, children will be taught to read, but will not develop the habit of reading. If schools fail to provide children with an opportunity to practice skills in the meaningful context of literature, substantial numbers of children will choose not to read for pleasure or for information on their own Additionally, research has found a relation between the amount of time that children read for fun on their own and reading achievement. Children in classrooms without literature collections read 50% less than children in classrooms with such collections (Mahwasane, 2017).

In addition, the views above do undoubtedly correspond with qualitative sentiments made by Wood (2007) whose views bordered on the importance of donating books and publishing local language reading materials to enhancing literacy instruction in ways that would help Grades one (1) and two (2) children “crack the code” and gain the foundational reading skills on which to build their literacy. To help learners break the reading code, reading instruction needs multifaceted

approaches with diverse resources in both English and Zambian languages (Mkandawire et al., 2022). Room to Read establishes multi-lingual libraries and fills them with local language books published by the Organization or purchased country well as donated English books, creating a colorful space with posters, games, furniture, and flooring. Local language publishing program. Room to Read sources new content from local writers and illustrators and publishes high-quality local language children's books for distribution throughout the network of schools and libraries, (Wood, 2007).

This is also in line with Kaur, (2015) also emphasized by saying that there should be a deliberate move to teach literacy using a familiar language. Therefore, enough books in familiar language should be well supplied in primary schools to help children with something to read. This is best done when the primary school possesses a library containing a liberal collection of books on all levels with familiar language.

Implications of the study findings

Research implications of this study basically refer to the impact that these study findings might have on the future research or policy decision and how they may affect the target communities and primary schools in Zambia.

The implications of RTR libraries and the Reading Materials to Literacy Development in Selected Primary Schools of Zambia suggest that:

If learners do not have regular access to engaging books and other literacy materials to practice their literacy skills, they are less likely to become lifelong readers and achievable learners. Therefore, it is important to include books and literacy materials in every learning environment because, a well-equipped library is one of the most effective places to promote and develop learners emerging literacy skills. This may help to reflect learner's interests, their cultural background and learning preferences.

Reading materials are useful in the school library when learners become good and better readers with the ability to read and understand a wider variety of books, which can give both pleasure and information which can help them learn the sounds of letters in spoken language and understand that story books come from words printed on the page.

Reading materials can enhance learners learning in the sense that they have the ability to encourage emergent thinking processes, allowing learners to produce new knowledge as well as experiencing the world from multiple perspectives, for example, it may help learners acquire text structure and familiar language development which can help provide them with prior knowledge of their writing skill. It is important to place an emphasis on the usefulness of reading materials in the primary school library because, it helps learners to develop higher levels of focus and concentration.

In the Zambian Educational System, there must be enough libraries and reading materials to cater for the learners in order to promote reading comprehension. If learners in primary schools can be given opportunities to interact with different reading materials, then reading comprehension may be well-achieved. If teachers can be resourceful to provide proper reading material to teach reading, then learners will be able to understand the importance of books and the role of libraries in primary schools. Suffice to say that parents and teachers should work together to support and help learners to achieve a common goal of better education for all the Zambian children. The significance of these findings shows that the Contribution of ‘Room to Read’ Libraries and Reading Materials in those selected primary schools where they were well-maintained has helped learners to develop their literacy levels. This was confirmed by one of the respondent who said that: RTR libraries were sustained and that the reading materials were useful for teaching literacy in both English and Local languages. This was one of the main purpose Room to Read contributed these reading rooms.

All in all, the study findings are important to Zambian Education Sector for the ongoing practice, policy-making and further future research.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that, the usefulness of the reading materials set by Room to Read libraries. Supported the new policy of using a familiar language to teach initial literacy because Room to Read Organization looked at the importance of donating books and publishing local language reading materials to enhancing literacy instruction in ways that would help Grades one (1) to four (4) learners. However, the use of reading materials in both English and Local (familiar) languages in those primary schools were not maintained after Room to Read (RTR) Organization left Zambia.

Usefulness of the Reading Materials in Zambian Primary School Libraries must develop children’s reading habit in both English and familiar languages that will encourage literacy and lifelong education. Devices such as open access, special sequences of books in prominent places to attract children, placing books within convenient reach of children will encourage their usefulness for lifelong education. This can only be done when all the primary schools in Zambia have enough School libraries which may promote the reading culture among primary school learners. Hence, the need to build Libraries in all primary schools and put library studies on the timetable from Early childhood education (ECE) to grade 7 in order to support the new policy of using a familiar language from grade 1 to 4 and English language from grade 5 to 7, in order to improve literacy levels in Zambian Primary Schools.

The study made the following recommendations.

- (i) Although Room to Read (RTR) Organization no longer operates in Zambia, the country appreciates the initiative of establishing libraries in schools and the study

recommends that the government must support and maintain these libraries in schools.

- (ii) The study recommended that the Ministry of Education should undertake the initiative of building more libraries in schools where there are none.
- (iii) Schools and the government should put reading hour on the timetable in all the primary schools to intensify the reading culture and reading materials in order to improve literacy levels among learners in Zambia.
- (iv) School where RTR built libraries should find ways of maintaining and improving them.

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