

INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ERA ON THE READING CULTURE AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN RWANDA: CASE OF GAHANGA PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REMERA CATHOLIQUE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: Communication is a set of various aspects such as reading materials from scholars, books, publications, e-materials etc. Reading culture plays a key role in the way communication flows between people, within organizations, schools (communication between pupils and teacher) and professional career (meetings, conferences, workshops). When the reading culture starts at a very early age, children grow competently with ability to analyze a set of writings, which is the source of the fundamental knowledge. Due to an increasing internet spread, school children tend to reduce time allocated to read publications and books in the library which affect their performances both at school and in their pursued careers. The purpose of this study is to assess the influence of digital communication era on the reading culture among primary school children in Rwanda. The study was guided by the following research objectives namely: Assess the effect of access to internet among school children in the digital communication era in Rwanda; Analyze the skills needed to operate the digital technologies; and Examine children's perceptions on using and adapting to digital technologies. The study was carried out at Gahanga and Remera Catholique Primary Schools, in order to assess both rural and urban perspectives. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The target population of the study is 284 respondents at primary school level from P2-P6, as it is where they learn basic skills of reading which helped them later in their advanced education. Random sampling technique was employed for the study to select the respondents. Questionnaires with close ended questions was used to collect data. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. After findings, suggestions and recommendations was made according to observed results from respondents. The findings indicated that Access to the internet is significantly correlated to Reading culture ($r=0.347$, $p<0.05$). Skills needed is significantly correlated to Reading culture ($r=0.427$, $p<0.05$). Pupil's perceptions are significantly correlated to Reading culture ($r=0.347$, $p<0.05$). From the analysis and discussion of the findings, the study revealed that electronic media use by pupils affect their reading culture. This is because of using abbreviated words in text messages to save time, space and cost. Using figures to represent words, using acronyms in place of full spellings, to save time and cost, and they indulge in words shortening in electronic media communication to save space. The persistent practicing of these patterns of writing contributes to pupils forgetting the correct spellings of words that can influence their reading culture. The researcher is suggesting that further studies could be undertaken in the following areas; The problems and prospects of electronic media use by primary school pupils in Rwanda. Electronic media as a resource for academic enhancement in Rwanda primary institution.

Keywords: Skills needed, digital technologies, reading culture primary school pupils Rwanda.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background:

Reading is an essential tool for lifelong learning. It is important for everyone to develop a good reading culture as to perform excellently in academic endeavors. Reading skills for pupils are critical for academic performance and personal growth. Reading is an important component of student's ultimate literacy development. Moreover, Ezeji (2012) citing Holte, (2008), agreed that reading adds quality to life and provide access to culture and culture heritage. He pointed out that reading empowers and emancipates citizens and bring people together. According to Rubin (2002), reading is an integrative process that starts with the reader and includes the affective, perceptual, and cognitive domains. The digital era is characterized by technology which increases the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover within the economy and society (Jill Shepherd, 204).

It is pertinent to note that pupils who engage in in-depth reading have developed self-confidence and they know that their ability to read can open doors for them. Improving access to relevant information and promoting reading culture are prerequisites for strengthening literacy skills, widening education and learning opportunities, and helping people to address the causes of poverty (Makotsi, 2015). Consequently, the emotion the reader has when reading any information resources either online or offline information helped the reader to consciously understand and know exactly what he or she is reading. Reading can be said to be the bedrock of most forms of learning activities culminating in literacy.

Due to technology development, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air (The Hindu, 2014).

Children even adults would love to watch movies, chat with their friends via social media, and dedicate much of their time to those, rather than reading instructive books that add value to what they acquire in school, thereby making reading a book or any other piece of written material in a quiet or peaceful corner of a library or home, becomes an archaic idea for most school children and adults (The Hindu, 2014).

As a matter of fact, books are more elaborate than movies or other digital materials in terms of details and facts. "When people read, they engage with the inner life in a way that can't with television" Rebecca Jane Stokes, 2013. When someone is reading a book, he/she will have time to analyze it in his own way of thinking rather than watching a TV show, where the director's version wins the audience's mind. Unlike watching the television, reading allows people to develop children's theory of mind.

Reading and academic achievement are essential for research workers and educationists to know that every child whether he or she is gifted, average, normal or backward etc., should be educated in his or her own way but if he or she possesses good study habits, he or she can perform well in academics and in every situation. It is the reading habits which help the learner in obtaining meaningful and desirable knowledge. Good reading habits act as a strong weapon for the pupils to excel in life (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012). Many activities of academic life require the ability to read and write. Reading helps to develop the mind and personality of a person; it also enriches ones' intellectual abilities (Nansoh & Allahde Shehu 2014).

According to Palani (2012), reading habit is an essential and important aspect for creating a literate society in this world. It shapes the personality of individuals and it helps them to develop proper thinking methods and creates new ideas. However, the developments in the Mass Media, had continued to influence interest in reading (hard copy of literatures such as...) books, magazines and journals, among others. Reading adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage (Holte 2008). He pointed out that reading empowers and emancipates citizens and bring people together. Okeke (2010) reaffirms that the art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone.

Palani (2012) is of the opinion that, effective reading is important avenue of effective learning and reading is interrelated with the total educational process and hence, educational success requires successful reading habit. He believes reading is the identification of the symbols and the association of appropriate meaning with them. It requires identification and comprehension. Comprehension skills help the learner to understand the meaning of words in isolation and in context. Before the advent of the television, both the young and the old found enough time to read. Apart from teachers, other professionals used to spend their leisure time in reading both English and vernacular literature. English medium schools almost always demanded extra reading from their pupils. But all these have become a thing of the past. Palani (2012) further added that, nowadays, reading habit has lost its importance as both the young and the old are glued to the

television. As far as educational institutions are concerned, coaching pupils for the examinations seems to be the be-all and end-all of our educational system.

Scholars Shabi and Udofia (2009) noted that active learning from books is better than passive learning and consume less time. For instance, it is possible to take a book anywhere and read it without disturbing other people. While portable TVs and Radios are available, they are not as socially acceptable as books.

Reading according to Yilben and Kitgkka (2008) is a basic life skill as well as the corner stone of child's success in school and throughout life. In spite of the importance of reading as a culture, it has become obvious that children at school no longer read. They only read when they have examination to write, despite that, reading has no meaning to them.

Currently pupils hardly make use of the school libraries, in most cases, excuses are that libraries are not stocked with relevant information sources. But the fact remains that the reading culture created early in the twentieth century during the colonial era has been on the decline towards the end of the century (Yilben & Kitgkka 2008).

Every new media of information and communication technology (ICT) has been a threat to human's interest in reading. The radio, television, cell phone, computer and the internet have captured a big slice of time and reading has taken a back seat (Fayaz Ahmad Loan, 2009). It is visible that people, especially school children have reduced their contacts with the world of books and other reading materials. The children in particular, are carried away by the new media in their leisure time (Copper Wiki 2008).

Reading habits among children are on the decline and the reasons for decline in reading habits among children are offshoots of technological advancements. Pivec (2008) investigated teenagers about their surfing habits and reported that the main rivals for attracting interest of teenagers are TV and Internet watching non-educational scenes just for the sake of fun. Hastings & Henry (2006) reported that 85% of children prefer watching television over reading.

Rwanda has achieved remarkable progress in expanding access to schooling, but there are still significant challenges to address—including the question of how to ensure that all children learn to read. A saying reiterates that: "If you want to hide an African, put it in a book". In Rwandan context, like in many African countries, reading habits are not yet very common. In many instances, newspapers and other written sources of communication are not very adequate in disseminating information, yet sometimes they contain relevant information more than their online versions. This is mainly observed when trying to compare print and online media in Rwanda. People more likely navigate the information online, rather than the newspapers.

A recent study found that only 32% of primary four pupils had attained minimum reading fluency for their grade level. Reading comprehension is also a problem, with 40% of Primary 4 pupils unable to correctly answer questions about simple texts. Yet basic literacy represents a necessary foundation for learning—this issue must be addressed if Rwanda is to reap the benefits of its significant investments in education (Save the Children 2014).

When visiting the Public Library at Kacyiru, which was put in place by the Government of Rwanda (GoR) and partners to facilitate Rwandans with a wide range of reading materials, you find out that a bigger percentage of the people are pupils who have come for a quiet space preparing for their examination, and few adults who have come for the sake of reading or foreigners. This means that children, from primary schools, can rarely appear in the library.

For most Rwandan pupils, a visit to the school library means viewing a book for a few minutes, but never borrowing it and taking it home (Lutheran, 2014). Some observers attribute the low level of reading culture in Rwanda to the Rwandan culture, because written materials did not come to Rwanda, until the arrival of the European religious missions that established themselves in the region around the end of the 19th century, on the eve of colonialism.

As independence approached, there were increasing efforts to expand basic education, but there were still limitations, and even the higher education offered to the very few did not strongly encourage wide-ranging independent reading. (Save the children, 2014). In a bid to promote the culture of reading, the Ministry of Education in Rwanda introduced a four-year program namely "Rwanda Reads". However, the role of reading remains limited in the classroom, and many Rwandans have never adopted the habit of reading for pleasure or lifelong learning.

In this era of advanced technology, parents should play a bigger role in the development of the reading culture within school children, by accompanying their children in the libraries during the weekends and set up guidelines at home which encourage children to read. Additionally, due to importance of the reading culture in the development of the society and the country in general, it needs efforts at social and national level to improve and be part of every citizen habit.

Teachers play a very important role in this regard, by encouraging their pupils to read written materials from libraries, because reading adds value to their skills more efficiently than Television or any other social media asset. This will help children to learn to understand other people's circumstances and perspectives and to empathize with them. The study shows that if reading is not modeled and shared, it is less likely to become a habit for young pupils (Gentil&Walsh 2012).

1.2 Statement of the problem:

Due to effects of technology and internet availability in various spaces and accessible within all levels of people including children, youth and old people, the reading habits are less preferable.

In Rwanda, the literacy rates remain too low: 65.9 percent among adults, 77 percent among youth—for the officials whose goal is to see the country attains middle income status by 2020 (USAID 2011).

Schools, particularly, should be seen as places where pupils learn through reading materials in order to increase on skills got from classes, however this habit is being considered an old style since the emergence of internet.

This research does not exclude the fact that even instructive materials can be found on the internet, due to the growing amount of digital information, and currently most of the children are exposed to them. However, as the research targets primary school from P2-S6, they do not have the maturity to select the necessary information from the internet. The school library is a gateway to knowledge and served as a starting point or road map to reading and the promotion to reading culture.

It is obvious that pupils learn new information and become more competent in their subject matters through reading. Loan (2009), moreover, stresses the importance of reading by claiming that individuals with good reading habits have the chance to widen their mental horizons and to multiply their opportunities.

Internet seems to have reduced the interest in reading of printed materials, vocabulary development and general knowledge, broadmindedness which individuals get from having good reading habits (Ngugi, 2014).

At early age, it is where children develop ability and preference of what they will be doing when they get older. It would be very scaring, if children are not developing the reading culture at their early age, yet this is the very basic source of knowledge and an essential tool for lifelong learning. Since reading is a must in developing other critical language skills such as writing, listening and speaking, this shift in reading habits should not be ignored by school children (Oktay & Tevfik, 2014).

It is definitely noticeable that reading culture is very important, then the question which will be answered by this research is what we can do to influence the reading habits, since digital era affects negatively the reading culture within school children by imposing other easier and digital preferences including movies, games etc. rather than reading books, which should be enhanced by concentrating on reading from books.

Student's characteristics or behaviors such as curiosity for new things, innocence and adventures with little fear of punishment display challenges in terms of safety (Willard, 2009).

The unethical use of internet was found increasingly pervasive the lives of pupils. Parents and teachers are extremely worried on this issue because it can lead to more serious problem as stated in this research. So, it is important that every student practiced good cyber-ethics in his or her daily lives.

1.3. Research objectives:

1.3.1 General objective:

The general objective of the study was to assess the Influence of digital communication era on the reading culture among primary school children in Rwanda.

1.3.2 Specific objectives:

The following specific objectives guided the study:

1. To analyze the effect of skills needed to operate the digital technologies on the reading culture among primary school pupils Rwanda.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

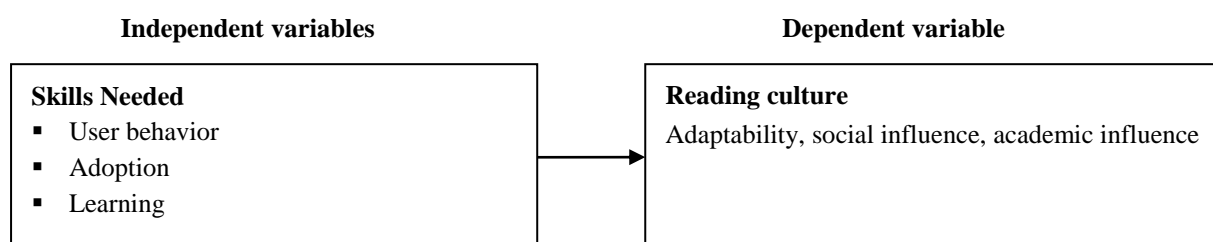


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

3. TARGET POPULATION

According to Mugenda and Mugenda, (2013), a population can be defined as an entire set of relevant units of analysis or data. The study included 28 teachers from Remera Catholique and Gahanga Primary Schools which are the study sites. Additionally, ten parents, whom kids attend primary schools, gave their point of view for the matter, and the local authorities to explain whether there is any facility at community levels which can assist the child for reading, for example library, recreation centers with reading materials like children books, stories for kids, etc. Therefore, the target population of the study comprised of 200 P1to p6 Primary’s school pupils, 28 teachers from Remera Catholique and Gahanga Primary Schools and 10 parents. A total of (238) respondents

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Influence of skills in reading culture:

The study sought the view of the respondents regarding skills needed that derail reading culture among primary school pupils Rwanda. Respondents’ opinion on access to the internet on reading culture was captured using 5-Strongly disagree; 4 – Disagree; 3 – Indifferent; 2 – Agree; 1 –Strongly agree. Table presents findings of perception on skills needed that derail the reading culture; a more detailed discussion of the findings is presented later.

Table 1: Wrongly, spelt words affect correct pronunciation.

| ITEM | SA | A | D | SD | RANK | DECISION |
|---|----|-----|----|----|------|----------|
| Incorrect spelling cannot affect pronunciation | 30 | 33 | 65 | 72 | 2.11 | Rejected |
| Wrongly spelt word cannot be pronounced correctly | 58 | 79 | 44 | 19 | 2.88 | Accepted |
| Abbreviated word and completely spelt one are pronounced alike | 17 | 84 | 70 | 29 | 2.45 | Rejected |
| A missing letter in a word can alter its pronunciation | 79 | 99 | 18 | 4 | 3.27 | Accepted |
| Use of image or figure to represent a word can affect its pronunciation | 48 | 74 | 57 | 21 | 2.90 | Accepted |
| Any word that is not spelt correctly will affect its pronunciation | 65 | 100 | 29 | 6 | 3.12 | Accepted |
| Wrongly spelt word can be pronounced correctly | 18 | 46 | 77 | 59 | 2.12 | Rejected |

The data of the second research question that concern the effect of skills needed on pronunciation are presented in Table This Table shows that out of the 7 items listed, 4 was rated above the cutoff means of 2.50. The highest rated was, a missing letter in a word can alter its pronunciation with a mean rating of 3.27 point while others are, use of image or figure to represent a word can affect its pronunciation, and any word that is not spelt correctly will affect its pronunciation all rated 2.90 and 3.12 accordingly. The least rated was; wrongly, spelt word cannot be pronounced correctly with mean rating of 2.88.

However, the three items that were rated below the cutoff point are; incorrect spelling cannot affect pronunciation, abbreviated word and completely spelt one are pronounced alike and wrongly spelt word can be pronounced correctly all rated 2.11, 2.45 and 2.12 respectively. These are items, which the respondents indicate cannot affect correct pronunciation of words.

Table 2: Correlation between skills needed and reading culture

| | | Skills needed | Reading culture |
|---------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Skills needed | Pearson Correlation | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | |
| | N | 98 | |

| | | | |
|--|---------------------|--------|----|
| Reading culture | Pearson Correlation | .427** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 98 | 98 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Table 2 indicate that skills needed is significantly correlated to Reading culture ($r=0.427$, $p<0.05$). This implies that skills needed would result to Reading culture.

4.2 Discussion of Findings:

Table Shows that a wrongly spelt word can affect its correct pronunciation. This is evident when incorrect spelling can affect pronunciation; wrongly spelt word cannot be pronounced correctly; abbreviated word and completely spelt one are not pronounced alike; a missing letter in a word can affect its pronunciation; use of image or figure to represent a word can affect its pronunciation and any word that is not spelt correctly will affect pronunciation. Abell (1994), posit that Spelling is seen as an indication of status and education. According to him, those who are not good at spelling often feel embarrassed about their lack of skill and are unhappy about allowing others to see what they have written. On his part Gordon, 1994 states that in order to develop spelling, Pupils must be involved in an active writing program in all areas of the curriculum, not just spelling. To pronounce words correctly, pupils must be familiar with correct spellings of the words. Proficiency in mastering correct spellings of words emanates from extensive and intensive reading with the support of the dictionary to crosscheck doubtful words. Grinter & Eldridge (2003) noted that communicators shorten their messages by dropping a single letter; using letters, symbols or numbers to make an appropriate sound; and using standard or ad-hoc acronyms. On the other hand, respondents acknowledge that wrongly spelt words and completely spelt one are not pronounced alike.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis and discussion of the findings, the study revealed that electronic media use by pupils affect their reading culture. This is because of using abbreviated words in text messages to save time, space and cost. Using figures to represent words, using acronyms in place of full spellings, to save time and cost, and they indulge in words shortening in electronic media communication to save space. The persistent practicing of these patterns of writing contributes to pupils forgetting the correct spellings of words that can influence their reading culture.

Correct pronunciation of words is vital for communication and for any word to be pronounced correctly such a word must have been spelt correctly. Incorrect spellings, abbreviated words, missing letter (s) in a word, using image or figure to represent words and wrongly, spelt words cannot be pronounced correctly. All these largely affect pupils' reading and comprehending capabilities.

5.1 Recommendations:

In view of the findings, this study presents the following recommendations that could help in mitigating the influence of electronic media on pupils' reading culture;

1. There should be controlled access to electronic resources, especially those that constitute a source of distraction to pupils.
2. There should be regular user education and sensitization programmes emphasizing the negative influences of electronic media use.
3. Base on the fact that as a student knowledge can only be obtain through reading. Student should imbibe good time management.
4. It is the view of this study that reading should be integrated into the school curriculum to familiarize pupils with the significance of reading.

5.2 Areas for further research:

The researcher is suggesting that further studies could be undertaken in the following areas;

1. The problems and prospects of electronic media use by primary school pupils in Rwanda.
2. Electronic media as a resource for academic enhancement in Rwanda primary institution.

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