



Promoting a reading culture through a rural community library in Uganda

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Abstract

This paper discusses what is meant by “reading culture”, and how a rural community library in Uganda can contribute to promoting one, by posing the question: How does a community library promote a reading culture in Uganda, and how successful is it in doing this? Data consist of semi-structured interviews, observations, and the library records of borrowed items. Street’s (1984) concepts of “autonomous” and “ideological” models of literacy are adapted to develop a framework of critical questions. The findings indicate that the library is based on a local initiative, relatively well resourced, and fairly well integrated in the community. Together, these indicate the gradual development of a reading culture. Rather than assuming libraries and literacy are intrinsically good, this article stresses the need to take on a critical view of the role and function of community libraries in developing countries, and suggests a framework for doing this.

Keywords

community libraries, reading culture, Uganda

Introduction

“We Ugandans lack a reading culture” is a lament I often heard during my fieldwork in Uganda. Some people pointed to the oral tradition; reading has no precedence in Ugandan culture. Others stressed the fact that books and other reading materials are not available, at least not in a language and with a content that make people want to read. Is the little reading that takes place due to the fact that Ugandans hardly have access to books? In a rural community where books are scarce and reading habits are limited, will a community library make a difference in how much is read, and how people perceive and value reading? These questions are central to exploring the notion of *reading culture*.

The need to “develop a reading culture” is becoming a popular phrase in Africa (e.g., Kachala 2007; Lehnhard 2012; Parry 2000), but how does this differ from the “old” notion of “developing literacy” (e.g., Gough and Bock 2001)? *Reading culture* moves beyond a focus on decoding skills and connotes a culture in which literacy is widespread and reading is a daily and life-long activity (Magara and Batambuze 2005). A reading culture relies heavily on text for political and commercial communication (Griswold 2000, p. 117). Other scholars stress the social and

affective aspect of reading, particularly reading for pleasure, as an indication of a reading culture (e.g., Dent Goodman 2008; Dent and Yannotta 2005; Parry 2009). Schools constitute an obvious connection to reading, and perhaps more so in Africa than in many other places, since, as some claim, people stop reading when they leave the schools and universities (Bakka 2000; Magara and Batambuze 2005). But there can be no doubt that adults in Africa also read, if not as much, or as much for leisure, as many, including the Ugandan president Museveni, would like to see (Museveni 2009).

A reading culture presupposes adequate and appropriate materials, but also a *culture* where reading of various kinds is part of everyday life. A community library usually addresses the supply of materials and reading space and makes efforts to promote reading. This study reports on one such library, Caezaria Library by building on a theory of literacy that is applied to the context of community libraries. The question that this study attempts to address is: How

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does a community library promote a reading culture in Uganda, and how successful is it in doing this?

Community libraries and reading culture

The term *community library* has been used to describe a particular kind of library, and the use of the term has been discussed in several publications. Dent and Yannotta (2005) give the essence of it when they write, “they are created by and for the local population and usually not supported with government funds” (Dent and Yannotta 2005, p. 40). Stilwell (1989) emphasises that they must be rooted in the community, and ideas and solutions should not be imposed. Mostert (1998) provides a detailed description of community library criteria: The community library should be established at the request of the community, fully co-operate with it and be included in participative management. It should provide information linked to the everyday lives of community members, and staff that are known to and trusted by the community should provide face-to-face contact to solve the user’s problem. Several authors (Adimorah 1993; Alemna 1995; Mchombu 2009; Mostert 2001; Onwubiko 1996) stress the importance of locally relevant materials, including the role of rural libraries to collect and be repositories of local or indigenous knowledge.

The term community library is often used quite broadly, and can cover everything from a lending scheme working out of a classroom with a box of books, to sizable and well-stocked buildings set up by foreigners or NGOs, with little or no connection to the local community. As a descriptive term to categorize libraries it is more useful to operate with a narrow definition of community libraries: *a library, or a library-like collection and lending service, that is not part of a public library program and is run by one or more people from the community it serves*. This definition demarcates community libraries vis-à-vis public libraries without stipulating more specific criteria that one might expect from a community library, but can be more difficult to operationalize or narrow the definition too much. Such criteria for what community libraries often are, and probably should be, include: (a) the library is started on the initiative of, or together with, people of its community; (b) the library strives to serve the information and literacy needs of its community through its materials and services; and (c) the library is integrated with the community and schools through cooperation, outreach programs and events, and otherwise establishes a sense of community ownership of the community library. These criteria are similar to those of Mostert (1998), but fewer and more pointed. The initiative,

materials and services provided and the connection to the community that the community library serves are important, and these criteria will be elaborated below under the theoretical framework.

There are currently 32 public libraries in Uganda (National Library of Uganda 2013) in addition to the community libraries that do not receive public funding. Uganda Community Library Association (UgCLA) has rapidly increased its member base, from the initial 14 in 2007 to 100 in March 2012 (Dent 2012). Their size, activity and the amount of support they receive vary greatly, and Caezaria Library is one of the member libraries with the largest collection and longest time of operation (Kate Parry, person communication).

Kitengesa Community Library is apparently the best-documented and researched community library in Uganda. The library was set up to provide reading materials and other services to the community, but it was also intended to serve as a site for research (Parry 2005, 2009). From day one the library has taken care to keep records of books and borrowings, and since its inception, a number of researchers have been involved and several publications have been written about the library (Dent 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2012; Dent and Yannotta 2005; Parry 2004, 2005, 2009. See Dent 2012, for an overview). The books have been purchased to meet the needs of users, so it offers many Ugandan publications, and only some selected foreign book donations have been accepted. Kitengesa Community Library has also been mentioned as a site for a budding reading culture in the literature on community libraries: “The amount of leisure reading observed in Kitengesa is a sign that a reading culture is developing among the students” Dent and Yannotta (2005, p. 52).

The freedom of students to interact with reading materials on their own terms is a key component in the development of a reading culture, and the library supports these types of interactions. (...) This quest for independence – framed in this case by student reading habits (e.g. reading, sharing reading materials, and talking about what is being read) – is suggestive of development of a reading culture, and the desire to read for overall self-improvement. (Dent 2012, p. 130)

This quote speaks of a notion of reading culture that goes beyond access and amount of reading; reading culture is also a matter of *how* people read, and *why*. Outside Uganda, Dent Goodman (2008, p. 523) reported from Burkina Faso and Ghana, “One of the most encouraging findings from the survey? was the fact that 100 per cent of students reported that they read in their free time”.

This previous research does give an indication that libraries bring about more reading and suggests that a reading culture may be in the process of developing in their respective communities. But they do not offer any framework for analyzing the role of community libraries in promoting a reading culture, which the follow section sets out to do.

Theoretical framework: Community libraries in light of autonomous and ideological models of literacy

Street (1984) introduced the term *autonomous model of literacy* to refer to a narrow view of literacy that treats it merely as a set of skills, detached from the social context in which it exists. He attributed this view to several prominent literacy scholars at the time, and argued that this view ignored the ideological nature of literacy. More than just a set of decoding and encoding skills, Street argues, literacy is a social practice, embedded in power relations, and in different settings there are different literacies serving different purposes and functions. While this perspective of literacy has yielded much research on the meanings and functions of literacy in the developing and developed world (e.g., Barton 1994; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Street 1993, 2001), it does not appear to have been used to analyse one of the core institutions that promotes literacy – libraries.

While community libraries are not as hotly debated as literacy (Street 1997), there are underlying assumptions and epistemologies that influence how people conceptualize community libraries, and hence also how they think they should be developed and supported. Analogously to autonomous and ideological models of literacy, the roles and functions of community libraries can be seen in two contradictory ways. Like literacy, community libraries are, arguably, often thought of as intrinsically good (Parry 2011). In the field of literacy, particularly teaching of literacy to adults in the developing world, the parallel notion, that literacy is intrinsically good, has been problematized (e.g., Street 1993, 2001). But libraries, and the provision of books to the developing world in general, are likely to be accepted as intrinsically beneficial to “development”.

Parry (2011) picks up the notion of linguistic imperialism discussed in Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (1994), and raises the question whether community libraries in Africa can be seen as a form of linguistic imperialism. In the case of the members of UgCLA, Parry concludes that given the libraries’ strong local connections, emphasis on relevant collections including books in the local language, this is not

the case. However, this is something people working in this sector should be aware of. In a study from Tanzania, Plonski (2009, n.d.) writes about the donations of millions of American books through the NGO Books for Africa. The author also raises the issue of relevance of the donated books in terms of content and language, but concludes that for financial reasons and the current role of English, the books are a valuable contribution. The teacher and administrator participants of the study claimed that the donated books did not cause any “cultural harm”. However, it seems this concept was conflated with the use of books in English, as all quotes from participants on this issue addressed the use of English (as opposed to Kiswahili). There was no mention of local/African books other than the need for textbooks that matched the national curriculum, and a recommendation to provide “books more tailored to the local cultural situation and especially tailored to the local syllabus/curriculum could be very valuable” (Plonski 2009, p. 122).

Although the question of language seems to receive some attention with regards to community libraries (e.g., Dent Goodman 2008; Parry 1999, 2011), other aspects might be ignored, and there is a risk that people working with community libraries assume an “autonomous” view of community libraries. Such a view is not likely to be explicit, but might very well serve as a tacit epistemological foundation of a project or organization working with community libraries in the developing world. Assumptions based on an autonomous view of community libraries include:

- Community libraries are intrinsically good
- The main purpose of community libraries is to give students access to books so that they can acquire subject matter content and improve their English language skills
- Literacy is a set of skills that are learnt in school and can be practiced at the library
- In countries where English is the national language and the language of instruction, providing English materials is the main responsibility of the library
- Any additional book is welcome; a larger collection means a better library.

In contrast, an ideological view of community libraries acknowledges the sensitive nature of language and literacy, and by extension, community libraries. This view raises questions as to the relevance of materials, hidden agendas, ideologies, and unintended consequences of naïve attitudes. An ideological view assumes less and questions more, including:

Initiative

- Why, and by whom, was a particular library, or library program, initiated?

Purpose

- What purposes can, and should, a community library have?
- Can the library be more than just an extension of the school; can it offer something qualitatively different from what schools are offering?

Materials and services

- How should books in English, and books from overseas, be balanced with books in the local and/or regional language and books from Africa?
- What kind of books and materials are in demand, or likely to benefit the users?
- Should all donated books be accepted?

Integration

- How is the community library regarded by and connected to the local community, including schools?
- To what extent does the community library collect and disseminate local and indigenous knowledge and practices?

In practice these extremes – the completely naïve and the fully critical – are more like ideal types than anything else. But the purpose of this analysis is to point out the need for a critical analysis of community libraries, and how this can be done. The questions raised in the ideological view do not provide any answers by themselves, but given a (fairly) clear standpoint with regards to language, literacy and development, these questions do invite certain answers, or avenues for how community libraries can promote a reading culture and local language materials in congruence with the needs and wishes of the local community.

Research site and methodology

Caenzaria Library is located in Ajjija trading centre in Buikwe District (during the fieldwork it was part of Mukono District) in central Uganda. Ajjija consists of some 20 shops, a church and a mosque on three streets that are joined by a roundabout. It is only 70 km from Kampala, but it takes about three hours to go there by public transport. There are nine primary, one vocational and four secondary schools with a total of about 2700 students within a radius of three

kilometres of the library, according to the estimates that the director of the library made.

This article reports on a section of a larger study of Caenzaria Complex Public Library (henceforth Caenzaria Library) (Stranger-Johannessen 2009). Caenzaria Library was chosen for being a relatively well-stocked and well-functioning library on the basis of a recommendation by Professor Kate Parry, a prominent scholar on literacy and community libraries in Africa. The data collection techniques included field notes, semi-structured interviews, observation and the library records of borrowed items. I conducted interviews with one primary student (grade 5), five secondary students, two teachers and the three library staff – eleven interviews in total. Frequent users were selected from each category. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, and was transcribed shortly afterwards. I waited for several weeks before conducting the interviews since I wanted to get to know the library, nearby schools, community and potential participants. By doing this I hoped to develop some preliminary understanding of the library and its role in relation to student learning, but also to get acquainted with the users and staff so that we would establish some degree of mutual trust and familiarity. At the same time I would identify some students and teachers that I could interview. The interviews were conducted in English, except the one with the youngest student, which was done in Luganda and translated into English by my translator, who also served as a cultural broker.

Findings

As the literature review suggested, developing a reading culture is not just about quantity of reading, or establishing that the amount of reading increases due to the presence of a community library, although increased reading is important. Equally important is what kind of reading takes place, as well as socio-cultural aspects of reading and the library, such as how the library as an institution plays a role in the users' identities and relation to literacy. The findings are organized according to the criteria suggested for a community library above, which roughly correspond to the questions outlined in the theoretical framework.

Initiative

Caenzaria Library was the brainchild of the library director, a local farmer who owns a small factory for removing husks from coffee beans. According to the library coordinator, the purpose of setting up the library was “to inculcate a reading culture among local people”. The director built it in 1999 with no

external support and started operating it in December 2000. The library opened before the building was fully constructed with his collection of textbooks together with around 60 magazines.

After some time he came into contact with the National Library of Uganda (NLU) and in 2002 they started a partnership. NLU has provided workshops for him and the librarian, and channelled books from international donors, notably Book Aid International (BAI), but other NGOs have also contributed with equipment and other support over the years. Since April 2007 the library had received a monthly grant of 300,000 Ugandan shillings (approx. US\$ 150) to pay for a librarian, a coordinator, security, stationery and other petty expenses from the NGO Under the Reading Tree (UTRT). This amount was adjusted to 375,000 shillings the following year.

Since it started getting support from UTRT, the library had two paid staff: a librarian and a coordinator. The librarian worked full time, i.e. six days a week. She was a plumber, but had been trained in Kampala for one month by NLU and on one other occasion. The coordinator was not stationed full-time at the library, but promoted the library by visiting surrounding schools and writing reports to UTRT. However, since he started studying in Kampala (prior to the fieldwork) he had not been able to keep up with visiting schools on a regular basis. Officially there was a library board, but it rarely convened and only played an advisory role.

Materials and services

Only the librarian was present and interacting with the users on a daily basis. She opened between nine and ten o'clock in the morning and closed around six o'clock in the evening. On Saturday the opening hours were shorter, and on Sunday it was usually closed. There were no opening hours posted anywhere.

Caezaria Library was spacious, and included a room adjacent to the library itself where some students went to read after opening hours – mainly their own notes. The books were classified and shelved into sections. The book collection numbered 9377 copies according to the library records, but some might have been lost or otherwise not included in the present collection. About 200 newly donated books were stored in boxes in the director's home because of lack of space. The library records showed that 324 books were checked out over the course of the 42 days (Sundays, school holidays and some other days had no books checked out).

Apparently all the textbooks for primary school came from Great Britain and the United States, except

some textbooks for lower primary in Luganda. The storybooks in English, on the other hand, were of a wide variety and covered all levels of difficulty and the majority were published in Africa and portrayed Africans and African culture. This is worth noting, since there are many accounts of children's books from America or Europe that end up in the hands of African children, whose options are limited to stories which may be culturally inappropriate or difficult to relate to and understand (e.g., Rubagumya 2009; Waruingi 2009).

Books suitable for secondary students and teachers included novels, storybooks, "past papers" (old exams), textbooks, atlases, encyclopaedias, dictionaries and "pamphlets". The pamphlets were made in Uganda and were summaries of the subject matter. They were much more popular and simpler than textbooks, and typically enumerated facts, factors, advantages and disadvantages, or otherwise gave a simplified presentation. Almost all the textbooks were donations from the United States and Great Britain, with a few exceptions.

Local community and schools

There were four primary schools and one lower secondary school within easy walking distance from the library, and more schools two or three kilometres away. Several student participants attested that their teachers encouraged them to use the library so that they would learn to read and speak English better. There was a considerable difference in library use between schools: a few nearby schools represented the vast majority of borrowed books and library visits. In 2006 the library director built Kagombe Secondary School (all names are pseudonyms) because he wanted to see the library being used more and as a response to requests from the community. Students from this school were also the most frequent users, and some students helped the librarian with small tasks like cleaning. Some of these students often came in the evening to read from a room adjacent to the library that had an electric bulb and was unlocked.

Another way of increasing the use of books was the "borrowing in bulk" scheme, which meant that a teacher went to the library and borrowed a large number of books (mostly storybooks, between 60 and 200, the library records indicated), and brought them back to the school for the students to read. This scheme had been going on for several years, but only a few schools were involved.

The library organized several events to which students and their teachers were invited. The most frequent event was primary quizzes, in which two

classes of grade seven students from different schools were invited to the library about once a month, and after a short lecture on the library, they were asked to read for half an hour. Then the actual quiz took place; an oral competition between the two schools on exam questions. In the past there had been meetings of various kinds, including one for farmers, but all of them had discontinued at the time of data collection.

The library arranged two large annual events: Book Week, Children's Christmas. Book Week was celebrated all over Uganda, and at Caesaria Library 2500 students, teachers and other invitees came to learn about the library, read, use the computers, watch a drama, listen to speeches, take part in competitions, and other activities. The scope of Book Week, and the number of people involved, did not have any parallel in the small trading centre. Children's Christmas was a smaller event, and involved snacks, decorations, music and a play of the birth of Christ. Unlike for Book Week, students came for Children's Christmas on their own – not as part of a class excursion.

Claims of new behaviour and attitudes

When I asked the respondents what the library had done for them, every one of them praised the library very much. They mentioned that the library provided books and had brought about more reading. One secondary school student participant, Margaret, pointed out that she had also learnt about some characteristics of books: "Before I didn't know that this is the author, this is the title. When I got a book, I just read. Now I can know that this is the author, title, publisher".

The director reported that in the beginning it was very hard to invite students to come to the library, and he almost had to lure them in. "They were shy in the beginning, they would just peep inside. Now they march in without knocking". Margaret had a personal account of what the library had done for her in this respect: "I can come to the library with so many people without fearing anyone. I tell the librarian what I want. Before I couldn't. . . . I'm not shy now, I'm confident". The primary school student Daniel gave a similar account:

The library has helped me so much in that I never knew how to read both books written in Luganda and English. Even my behaviour and my performance in class have improved since I started coming to library. Also, at least I know how to use the computer. . . . If the library wasn't in existence I wouldn't have been who I am now. It has done something good in changing my life and I feel so good (translated by the research project translator).

Discussion

Initiative

Like many other community libraries in Uganda, this was largely the product of one person (sometimes it is a group of people) with a burning desire to help his community. Unlike some joint Ugandan–foreign initiatives, there was no funding or support from outside in the beginning, and the library collection at the outset was very meagre, consisting of the director's old textbooks and some magazines. As an owner of land and coffee bean processing factory, the director was financially better off than many other individuals in Uganda who start a community library, and this is likely to have contributed to the collection and facilities the library enjoys today.

The explicit desire to foster a reading culture by setting up a library gives an indication of a reflective view of the purpose of the library. The library is not treated as an extension of the schools in the community – if anything – almost the opposite is the case: Kagombe Secondary School was built to support and increase the use of the library. Clearly there is a connection between schools and community libraries, but this connection is more than a desire to improve exam scores. Activities that are more geared towards fun and reading for pleasure attest to this, such as Book Week and Children's Christmas.

Purpose, materials and services

The collection was fairly well balanced in terms of Western/African books in English. This is not to say that the ratio was anywhere close to 1:1, but both fiction and non-fiction were relatively well represented, considering that this is a rural community library in Uganda. Books in Luganda were not many, but at least some titles were available. Luganda books were not in high demand, but it is hard to tell whether the demand would have been higher if the collection were bigger and more appealing. With the role of English so central in the school and for securing a professional job, it is not surprising that books in Luganda receive less attention. Another point is that this study was carried out one year after the new curriculum came into place, and it is possible that English was used as a medium of instruction to a large extent before the new curriculum was introduced, thus favouring reading in English.

The question of whether donated books cause "cultural harm" (Plonski 2009 n.d.) is problematic. It polarizes books as either "harmful" or "beneficial", leaving little room for nuances. But more importantly, it misses the point: the main *potential*

problem with book donations is not that they may be more or less culturally harmful (or irrelevant, inappropriate), but that in many cases children can't read about their own culture *in addition to* another culture and that money is spent on shipping foreign books (in English), not printing African books (in African languages). Just as *The Jungle Book* can be enjoyed in Western countries, so can children's books on North American or European life be enjoyed in Africa. But if such books are the only ones that users can choose from, the donated books can be seen as undergirding the cultural (and linguistic) imperialism that they are sometimes accused of (Phillipson 1992; Parry 2011).

Caezaria Library served several purposes. It provided supplementary reading materials to secondary school students and teachers, fiction in English and Luganda, a space to read and study, and a venue for events like Book Week and quizzes. It was also a social space for meeting people and relaxing. There were very few public spaces like this in or around Ajijja trading centre where students could go to socialize or relax. The church and mosque were institutions where people socialized, but people went there on specific occasions, and children went there with their families – not on their own – as was the case with the library. Other than the schools, church, mosque, and the distant health clinic, there were no institutional spaces that children frequented, except the library. While the former were organized by and visited in company of parents, the library was the opposite. It was a place for students and other children to meet and interact with adults on their own terms, and familiarize themselves with a public building and public institution, in a society where these were relatively few. These features might help young users develop a degree of independence, but also a sense of entitlement and ownership.

Lareau (2011) describes how black and white middle class children in the United States are brought up to feel a sense of entitlement through discussions and multiple organized activities, such as sports and music lessons. These activities, Lareau argues, make the children used to interacting with other adults, and prepare them for adult life, such as how to behave in job interviews. In institutional settings “middle-class children learn to question adults and address them as relative equals” (Lareau 2011, p. 2). Although the lives of American middle class children are in many ways very different from the lives of rural Ugandan children, the library might serve some of the purposes that organized activities do for the American middle class children. Through the library the students interact with adults other than their parents and teachers, and they familiarize themselves with the library as

an *institutional space*. With the paucity of public institutions in rural Uganda, getting comfortable with the library, not just the library building, but also the library as an institutional space, can give confidence, and perhaps a sense of entitlement. This confidence is valuable in its own right, but might also be central when the students visit or move to a city, where dealing confidently with institutions and institutional spaces is part of everyday life.

One of the earliest things a child learns about books is what they feel and look like, and how they “work”: they have a front cover, one side is up, and pages must be turned gently. There is text (which is meaningful) on the pages, and often pictures. Some children learn all of these things at home before they go to school, but with the paucity of books in Uganda, that is often not the case. Because books are relatively scarce and often treasured, they are sometimes kept away from children, as many accounts of books being locked up in schools attest to (e.g., Muwanga et al. 2007). In this environment, the policy of “putting books in the hands of children” (Eilor 2004, p. 55) is important, not only so that they can read them, but also so that they can get familiar with and confident in using them.

A second step is being able to place books in a larger context: Where do books come from? Who writes them? Who produces them? Again, in a very print-rich environment these are aspects of understanding that children might learn at home, or without explicit teaching. But this is less likely to happen in Uganda. As the student Margaret in the quote above attested, this is something she learnt at the library. An understanding of the origin and context of books is not merely a matter of knowing facts and categories, it is also an understanding of the technology of texts, and a step towards an understanding of how texts are co-constructed by the reader and the author.

Ownership is one of the cornerstones of a reading culture: a sense of ownership of books and materials, and the institutions and structures that offer and facilitate their use. It is when people start taking the library for granted, when they “march in without knocking”, that we see signs of ownership. 324 books borrowed over the course of 42 days speak of a sense of ownership of books: they are not just read in the library – carefully, surreptitiously – but brought home and read, each book perhaps by several people. The data on the use of the library do speak of a library in use, and can be interpreted as an indication of a budding reading culture. But it is also insightful to flip the perspective, and investigate how the library meets challenges in promoting reading and supporting a reading culture.

Integration

Apart from book donations, most of the foreign support was fairly recent. This means that the library could be said to have strong local connections (Parry 2011), although the library board that officially governed the library did not actually convene. While this might be seen as crucial to many Western organizations, this did not appear to be of great importance to this library. When the library first started, people in the community did not quite understand what it was all about. Time seems to be a key factor in the success of a library, in terms of building a collection as well as securing support and reputation within the community. At the same time, some level of outside support, in the form of books and otherwise, appears to have been crucial for this library.

Like several other community libraries in Uganda, Caezaria was working closely with one school. Students and teachers from this school represented a considerable part of the usership. This can be interpreted in positive terms; having ties with a school increases the use of the library. But it also raises the question whether this happened at the expense of use by other schools: Did they feel that the library “belonged” to Kagombe Secondary school, and that they were less welcome?

The borrowing in bulk scheme was an excellent way of forging ties and reaching out to other schools, and increasing the use of the library. This was particularly valuable in the case of faraway schools, whose students would not be likely to go to the library on their own. The library had a collection of Ugandan and East African books, but none of local origin, such as local stories, local history or traditional medical practices, which some scholars deem important.

Conclusion

When talking about what a library does or can achieve it is important to look beyond the basics – beyond a static count of books in the collection, number of users or books borrowed, even though these can give a rough indication of how “successful” a library is. What is also needed is an analysis of the larger picture: the origin, purpose and integration of the library, in addition to the materials and services it provides. All of these should be analyzed critically, through asking questions about purposes, functions and ideologies. Central to this is the role of language, which is a contentious issue, and with no right answer. I would argue that offering and promoting local language materials is important – for cultural, social and educational reasons. But English is clearly also important. Finding the balance is not an easy task, and is likely

to cause discussions among scholars, teachers, librarians, and users.

Reading habits are largely developed in youth; people who don’t read for pleasure in their youth are not likely to do much of that when they get older. There was a tendency for primary students to read fiction and secondary students to read non-fiction (textbooks and other school-related materials), but the division was not completely clear-cut. Secondary students did read some fiction, but felt compelled to spend most of their time reading for exams, and in that perspective reading for pleasure was something of a luxury. This is unfortunate, since knowledge of English is important for all school subjects, and perhaps reading more fiction would actually benefit them academically as well, but this was not specifically encouraged by teachers. At the same time the development of a reading culture should not be reduced to leisure reading.

Through its local initiative, explicit purpose of promoting a reading culture, ample and relatively varied collection and events, and cooperation with schools, Caezaria Library goes a long way in promoting a reading culture in its community. At the same time there are numerous challenges, and one should be careful with ascribing too much importance to a single library. A reading culture does not develop in a vacuum, and a community library can only be a small step on the way for the larger community to take up reading for leisure and widespread functional use of literacy. Caezaria Library does not work miracles, but is an important contribution to the development of a reading culture in Uganda.

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