

Promoting Shared Responsibilities in Developing Children's Early Literacy and Reading Culture in Rwanda

Evariste Manirakiza¹
Jean Paul Ngoboka²
Jean Paul Roger Rurangangabo³
Vedaste Ndizera⁴
Jean Bosco Kinanira Harerimana⁵
Eric Rwasamanzi⁶

¹manirakizaeva91@gmail.com

²jeanngoboka@gmail.com

³jprurangangabo1@gmail.com

⁴vedasten2009@gmail.com

⁵harerimanajean8113@gmail.com

⁶erwasa6@gmail.com

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}University of Rwanda

ABSTRACT

Reading is of paramount importance in the modern era. It is an invaluable tool to instill knowledge in people and lead them to sustainable development. This study aimed to investigate the shared responsibilities of stakeholders in promoting early literacy and reading culture in Rwanda. The study was conducted in five districts in Rwanda, one in each province, including the city of Kigali. This study is conducted within the framework of the Theory of Emergent Literacy (EL) pioneered by Marie Clay (1926–2007) (Rohde, 2015; Teale, 1986; Tracey and Morrow, 2006), according to which literacy development begins very early in life and children's early reading and writing experiences are of considerable importance in their overall literacy development. The study applied a descriptive research design, which consists of collecting quantitative and qualitative data. The target population was 437,988, which was the total number of households in the five districts. It involved 598 parents in selected households, school administrators, and local authorities. A convenience sampling technique was used to select parents, while a purposive sampling technique was applied to select school administration and local authorities. A questionnaire, interviews, and observation were used as data collection tools. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that parents carry out their responsibilities and interactions with children by cultivating a reading culture and reading stories to them before school age. Findings also showed that parents acknowledge teachers' interactions with children through giving them take-home reading assignments. The strategies that are used to develop early literacy and reading culture include showing pictures, using games and songs, and devoting some hours to reading on specific days in a week. The study identified challenges including parents' illiteracy and poverty preventing them from being involved in their children's education, the lack of enough books in schools, and overcrowded classes. It is recommended that government support be increased by making reading materials more accessible to children; that parents' role in developing the reading culture and early literacy should be more visible; and that there is a need for adult literacy education to enable parents to read to their children and monitor their reading practice.

Key words: Early Literacy, Reading Culture, Shared Responsibilities, Stakeholders

I. INTRODUCTION

Rwanda is a country located in East Africa with a population of about 14 million people. It is divided into various administrative entities with 4 provinces and the City of Kigali, thirty districts, which are subdivided into 416 sectors. Sectors are also subdivided into cells, which are in turn subdivided into villages, the smallest administrative entity in the country. It was at the village level that this study was conducted.

Four languages are spoken in Rwanda, namely Kinyarwanda, English, French, and Swahili, and they are all official languages. Kinyarwanda is a national language, and it is taught as a subject alongside French and Kiswahili. Despite the multiplicity of official languages in Rwanda, 99.4% can speak Kinyarwanda (Rosendal & Ngabonziza, 2023) but only 1.6% can speak Kinyarwanda along with other official languages, while 53.8% of Rwandans only speak Kinyarwanda (the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2022). Note that English replaced French as a medium of instruction in 2008, from primary to tertiary education (Kral, 2023). The Rwandan education structure comprises pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher education.

Rwanda has invested a lot to improve the quality of basic education (pre-primary and primary). The number of children attending pre-primary school is very small, but Rwanda is committed to expanding access to three years of early learning for children aged three to six and will ensure that the percentage of children attending pre-primary schools increases. Primary education in Rwanda is generally free and compulsory and lasts six years, including three years for lower primary and three years for upper primary. The primary education system in Rwanda comprises a wide range of subjects, including Kinyarwanda, English, mathematics, social and religious studies, science and elementary technologies, creative arts, physical education, and French. It is worth noting that starting in 2016, Rwanda has shifted from a knowledge-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum (Rwigema & Andala, 2022).

This paper focuses on shared responsibilities in developing children's early literacy and reading culture in Rwanda. Indeed, reading is an essential ingredient in the promotion of society's literacy. It is through reading that people broaden their imagination, stimulate their memory, and gain knowledge and skills that help them develop themselves and their countries. In this regard, reading provides a foundation for education (Akinola, 2021; Otieno and Hesbon, 2021), and it is a human life aspect (Akinola, 2021). Similarly, reading is viewed as a bridge to career and professional development. Highlighting the importance of reading, Chigbo-Obasi (2021) argues that reading is an essential lifelong activity that determines one's success. A population that is keen on reading possesses appropriate skills, improves the standard of living, and rapidly develops economically (Otieno and Hesbon, 2021). Nzeyimana and Bazimaziki (2020, p. 590) refer to the saying "A reading nation is an informed nation" to emphasize the importance of the reading culture. In short, reading is an invaluable tool to boost the acquisition of knowledge and a key to the advancement of society.

Reading should effectively be cultivated in society from an early age. According to Akinola (2021), reading is a practice that develops in one's childhood. Chigbo-Obasi et al. (2021) contend that reading books to young children is an essential activity pertaining to their lives. The more you read to children, the better they develop their literacy. In the same view, Yang (2016) argues that early childhood is an important stage for personality formation. Indeed, reading widens the children's view of life and enables them to learn about themselves and their society (Kafusha et al., 2021). Therefore, given its importance, reading should start at home.

Despite the value given to reading, it is not a common practice among all people and societies. In fact, some people think that reading is for academicians and researchers, while others state that they do not read because they are busy with other duties. Many people in Rwanda hardly ever read, and it is a common belief that Rwandans and Africans in general do not like reading for information. It is commonly accepted that 'if you want to hide something from an African, you should put it in a book'. Despite school attendance, millions of children around the globe fail to read and write while they have spent several years in schools, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013).

Ruterana conducted a study on enhancing the culture of reading in Rwanda by means of a questionnaire administered to 40 students from different faculties of the former National University of Rwanda. The study suggested that, like in most African societies, oral tradition is still deeply embedded within Rwandan society, and it constitutes a rich foundation for literacy and reading culture development. Thus, the collection and transcription of oral forms of expression and their subsequent translation into other official languages are further suggested as means of enhancing reading culture (Ruterana, 2012).

In the Rwandan context, it was found that there is a poor reading culture (Kabagambe & Kanyika, 2023). Ruterana (2012) notes that the poor reading culture is due to the colonial and post-colonial education systems, reliance on verbal communication, limited access to reading materials, and ultimately the mother tongue status of Kinyarwanda, which is a common means of communication for all Rwandans. Beyond the country boundaries, Otache's (2020) study revealed that, apart from Egypt and South Africa, other African countries experience a poor reading culture. These studies show that Africans in general are not much interested in reading (Haliru et al., 2015, p. 13). Haliru et al. (2015) are of the view that many Nigerian young generation students fail in examinations because of a lack of reading culture or a nonchalant attitude towards reading. Yet, people's interests in reading determine quality information sharing (Nzeyimana & Bazimaziki, 2020) in the current trend of globalization. A sustainable way to change this state of affairs is to develop early literacy and instill a reading culture in children.

It is against this background that this study was conducted with the aim of investigating the shared responsibilities of stakeholders in promoting early literacy and reading culture in Rwanda.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Different policies have been put in place to improve the education system in Rwanda. These include reducing the number of learners in classes, building news classes, and establishing nursery schools and pre-nursery schools known as EDC. Small libraries, commonly known as *isomero*, have been established in some places to ensure that the reading culture is improved in Rwanda. However, studies (Ruterana, 2012; Nzeyimana & Bazimaziki, 2020) have

shown that there is a lack of reading culture in Rwanda, which is partly attributed to the oral tradition and lack of reading materials in Rwanda. Similar studies conducted in other countries have confirmed that poverty is a challenge for the reading culture among children. Indeed, children's academic, social, and behavioral skills depend on their early literacy development (Sapage & Cruz-Santos, 2021). However, the role of stakeholders and the strategies they use to enhance early literature and reading culture in Rwanda are not explored. As such, this study sets out to investigate the shared responsibilities of stakeholders in promoting early literacy and reading culture in Rwanda.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study objectives were (1) to identify stakeholders' responsibilities and interactions to enhance early literacy; (2) to analyze strategies to be used to develop early literacy and reading culture in the community; and (3) to highlight challenges faced by the community while involving their children in reading and suggest solutions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study investigates shared responsibilities in developing children's early literacy and reading culture in Rwanda. It is anchored in the Theory of Emergent Literacy introduced by New Zealander Marie Clay (1926–2007) in 1966 (Johnson, 1999), according to which "literacy emerges from children before they are formally taught to read" (Rohde, 2015, p. 2) and that they acquire "the process of reading long before they pick up a book" (Rohde, 2015, p. 1). According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), the term "emergent literacy" entails knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to reading and writing developed by a child before the age of school (Save the Children, 2013). It describes the behaviors of young children who mimic reading and writing activities using books and writing materials, despite not being able to read and write in the traditional sense. Emergent literacy refers to the earliest phases of literacy development, i.e., the period in a child's life between birth and when the child can read and write at a conventional level (Teale, 1986; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). As Teale (1986) states, literacy development begins very early in life, and children's early reading and writing experiences are of considerable importance in their overall literacy development.

Clay emphasizes early interactions with books and storytelling, aligning with the study's focus on providing access to reading materials and encouraging reading activities from a young age. Both the theory and the study underscore the significance of adult participation in literacy activities. Clay highlights the role of parents, caregivers, and educators, which is mentioned in the study when it puts emphasis on shared responsibilities among parents, teachers, authorities, and community members. This collective effort creates a supportive environment for literacy development. Both Emergent Literacy and the study are also connected in adopting a holistic view of literacy, encompassing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The study demonstrates how principles of emergent literacy theory can be applied in community-based initiatives to improve early literacy outcomes in different settings, like Rwanda. Both Marie Clay's theory of emergent literacy and the study on Promoting Shared Responsibilities in Developing Children's Early Literacy and Reading Culture in Rwanda highlight the importance of early exposure to language and printed materials.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Reading Culture and Early Literacy

Different scholars explained reading culture and early literacy. Kafusha et al. (2021) define reading culture as a practice of reading among people of a particular community. Otache (2020) sees a reading culture as an act of reading as a usual practice or pattern of behaviour. He adds that it is the way of life of people which is characterised by the habit of reading intensively and extensively. Briefly, reading culture is a dedicated and consistent reading lifestyle. Otieno and Hesbon (2021) contend that reading culture involves continuous love for reading and its transmission from one generation to another. People with a reading culture gain correct information and can have a better understanding of themselves, others, and the society; hence, contributing to a positive change (Chimah et al. 2021). Similarly, reading plays an important role in improving human beings (Kabir & Jeroms, 2022) and reading culture is an invaluable feature of life (Rintaningrum, 2019). Akinola (2021) assumes that the difference between developed and developing countries is a result of their citizens cultivating the habit of reading. These assertions reiterate that reading culture should be imbibed by citizens if the future of nations is to be guaranteed.

Early literacy refers to oral language comprehension, print awareness and phonological skills (Maureen, van der Meij & de Jong, 2022). It is the development of language and literacy skills in young children, typically from birth through the early elementary school years. Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong (2022) also contend that early literacy encompasses various skills, including vocabulary development, phonological awareness, letter recognition, and

comprehension, which are essential for reading and writing. As it can be understood in these authors' opinion, early literacy lays the foundation for a child's success in school and probably later in life.

Several scholars such as Preece and Levy (2020), Li and Doyle (2022) highlight the importance of reading culture and early literacy. Preece and Levy (2020) investigated the barriers and motivations to shared reading with young children. Their study revealed that regular reading positively affect children's language vocabulary and make children readers that are more successful. The study also indicated that parental reading frequency positively affects children's language and emergent literacy. Preece and Levy (2020) attest that parents and children shared reading facilitate children to interaction with text. Similarly, Li and Doyle (2022) conducted a study on contextual support in the home for children's early literacy development and found out that shared reading between parents and children enhances vocabulary and language speaking skills in children. Porta (2022) conducted a study on "Literacy Culture Strengthening Programs to Stimulate Reading Interest for Children at Early Age" in Indonesia. Their study revealed that the literacy culture program is of paramount importance and ought to be implemented from early childhood, starting from households to school age.

2.2.2 Importance of Reading

Reading provides invaluable benefits. As Nzeyimana and Bazimaziki (2020) put it, reliable information greatly depends on the extent to which people communicate take an interest in reading. Nzeyimana and Bazimaziki argue that people who read different categories of texts, such as books, magazines, and newspapers, are aware of what happens around the world. Similarly, Otache (2020) contends that one's reading skills develop as a result of frequent reading. The significance of reading is also highlighted in the following quotes from Otache (2020).

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies, but the man who never reads lives only one." (George R. R. Martin) "Reading takes us away from home, but more importantly; it finds homes for us everywhere" (Hazel Rochman). "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest" (Benjamin Franklin). "Nothing is better than reading and gaining more and more knowledge" (Stephen Hawking). "The things I want to know are in books. My best friend is the man who will get me a book I have never read" (Abraham Lincoln). "There are worse crimes than burning books. One of them is not reading them" (Ray Bradbury). "A man is what he knows" (Francis Bacon). (Otache, 2020, p. 29)

The message that is echoed in these quotes is that reading is an essential tool for knowledge acquisition and broadening the reader's mind. A reader is always informed, and this does not necessarily require moving to distant places. Based on these benefits, therefore, frequent reading should be cultivated in the younger generation. In fact, the time when children start nursery school is a fundamental age at which teachers assist them to read through different activities (Maureen, van der Meij, and de Jong, 2022). According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), reading to children yields more language knowledge than interacting with them.

2.2.3 Stakeholders and their Roles in Instilling Early Literacy and Reading Culture

Children's early language and character formation are crucial aspects (Yang, 2016) that require much attention. This can only be ensured when there is a dynamic partnership among different stakeholders joining hands to promote early literacy and reading culture in children. On the one hand, research has shown that home literacy practices are extremely important in the development of early language and literacy skills (Curry et al., 2016). Parents are the first teachers their children have, and they are the teachers because they are the most important people in the education of their children (Lee & Yeo, 2014, p. 123). Thus, it can be assumed that, with parents' assistance, children can develop a reading culture earlier. With reading practice at home, children can grow better both mentally and emotionally.

Ho and Lau (2018) conducted a study on reading engagement and reading literacy performance and found out that parental investment, reading resources, and reading activities greatly contribute to children's achievements. Ho and Lau (2018) also observed that parents from the middle class invested heavily in educational resources, and this created a conducive environment that enhanced children's motivation to read. Dai-Luong (2021) investigated the impact of the home literacy environment on early literacy development. His study revealed that parents' teaching positively affects the knowledge of letters and phonological awareness. Dai-Luong's (2021) study also indicated that parent teaching and access to literacy resources had an indirect impact on literacy. It is worth developing a reading culture, as a reader can learn new skills and new facts. The reader can become more knowledgeable about the whole world and be stimulated by both thought and emotion (Thanuskodi, 2011, p. 79).

On the other hand, as Akinola (2021) argues, teachers come in second place as far as educating children is concerned. Akinola considers teachers as role models who transmit both instructions and knowledge to students, and he suggests that they should put the reading culture at the forefront of their daily duties. The author regards schools as the main player in enhancing the culture of reading. Chigbo-Obasi (2021) argues that parents' engagement in reading

and literacy activities positively affect children’s interests in reading and learning, while according to Gambrell (1996), teachers play an important role in helping children develop into readers who can prove their reading skills while reading for pleasure and information.

In addition to parents and teachers, school libraries have a vital role in developing the reading culture. Chimah et al. (2021) argue that libraries are fundamental to children, youth, and adults’ education and development. As Krolak (2006, p. 5) notes, “school libraries provide access to supplementary materials that complement and enhance the learning provided by prescribed textbooks.” According to Krolak, education is not merely based on memorizing information; rather, it consists of the learner being able to learn independently throughout life. To achieve this, learners have to borrow books from schools and enjoy their right to access them (Save the Children, 2013). This is evident since libraries are sources of information and are essential for children’s literacy development. Aina et al. (2011) also rightly note that libraries contribute integrally to the educational development of schoolchildren and youth. Libraries provide good resources, and quality education and permanent literacy are ensured once children and youth use them (Aina et al., 2011).

Different scholars highlighted the role of teachers and school libraries in promoting the reading culture. Khoiri & Bustomi (2020) investigated the strategies of school literacy culture in elementary schools in Surabaya City, Indonesia. Findings revealed that teachers engage learners in reading books, summarizing and retelling them, creating reading corners, and collaborating with the community to explore library resources. Okwilagwe and Lelikkuma (2020) explored teachers’ attitudes and the reading culture of pupils in Nigeria. Findings revealed a significant relationship between teachers’ attitudes and pupils’ reading culture. They also found out that those teachers motivated pupils to use the library to develop their reading. Canales and Porta (2018) studied early literacy materials and teacher practices in preschool classrooms in Turkey. Findings revealed the scarcity of early literacy materials and activities to boost literacy skills among children. Therefore, enhancing the reading culture and literacy in children requires cooperation from different entities, including, among others, parents, teachers, and more generally, schools and local authorities.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area, Population and Sample

The study was carried out in five districts, one per each province of Rwanda and the city of Kigali. In each province, one district was selected purposefully as it had the highest number of households. In this regard, Gicumbi, Kamonyi, Nyagatare and Rubavu were selected respectively in North, South, East and West provinces. In the city of Kigali, Kicukiro district was selected randomly. It was deemed that the districts were a representative sample reflecting the characteristics of the population of the provinces.

In each district, both rural and urban areas were considered. The study population was as follows: Gicumbi 86, 075 households; Kamonyi 80,468; Nyagatare 105,365; Rubavu 88,842 and Kicukiro 77,238, with the total population of 437,988 households (NISR, 2022).

The sample from the population was calculated using the formula provided by Kothari (2004, p.179). The sample formula is stated as follows: $n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2(N-1) + z^2 p \cdot q}$ (with n being the sample size; z with a value of 1.96 which is the area under normal curve for the given confidence level, p standing for the probability of success with a value of .5 while q representing the probability of failure having a value of .5, e stands for 0.04 of margin error out of 96% of the level of confidence and N being the study population).

Therefore, *with e equals to 0.04:*

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2(N-1) + z^2 p \cdot q}$$

$$= \frac{(1.9)(1.9)(0.5)(0.5)(437,988)}{(0.04)(0.04)(437,988-1) + (1.9)(1.9)(0.5)(0.5)}$$

$$= \frac{(3.8416)(0.25)(437,988)}{(0.0016)(437988-1) + (3.8416)(0.25)}$$

$$= \frac{420,643.6752}{701.7792} = 599.39 \approx 600 \text{ households}$$

The number of households involved in the study depended on the total number of households in each district. This means that the sample was proportional to the number of households in the selected districts, sectors, cells, and villages. Therefore, Gicumbi, Kamonyi, Nyagatare, Rubavu, and Kicukiro had a sample of 118, 110, 144, 122, and 106 households, respectively. In each district, the study was carried out in two sectors, one in a rural area and another in an urban area. Within these sectors, two cells and two villages in each cell were selected randomly. On average, the

average number of selected households in each village ranged between 4 and 26 households. Within villages, researchers conveniently selected households. A request was made to the local authorities of the concerned villages to identify households that had pre-primary and primary children. Within each household, parents, a wife, or a husband were involved in the study. At this level, convenience sampling was used to select the respondent between the husband and the wife when they were both present in the family. The study also involved a number of local authorities at village, cell, and sector levels, as well as school head teachers and teachers. In each sector, two schools with nursery and primary programs were selected.

3.2 The Study Design

The study was a survey using a descriptive research design which entails both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The selection of the design was to address shortcomings that might result from merely using one approach (Jokonya, 2016; Creswell, 2014). With this design, researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

The study used a questionnaire, interviews, and observation. The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, while interviews and observations were conducted to collect qualitative data. The questionnaire was administered to parents in selected households, and it lasted between ten and fifteen minutes for each respondent. Questions were set in English but translated into Kinyarwanda, the national language, to facilitate respondents understanding of the content. For respondents who cannot read or write, the questionnaire was read to them, and their answers were transcribed by the researcher, while those who could read filled out the questionnaire on their own. Questions from both the questionnaire and the interview were based on the research objectives: questions related to stakeholders' responsibilities in helping children develop their reading culture; questions related to strategies used by stakeholders; and questions on challenges they face. All respondents were met at their respective homes.

Interviews were conducted in two selected schools with three teachers: one from nursery, one language teacher from lower primary, and one language teacher from upper primary. Likewise, the head teachers of the selected schools and local authorities were purposely selected. Each interview took around ten minutes. The researchers used interview guides that were either in English or Kinyarwanda. Interviews were transcribed, and those in Kinyarwanda were translated into English. Observations were conducted in libraries within selected schools. The focus was on the kind of books available, the book catalog, the timetable, the register for borrowers, the library size, the reading space, etc. The observations were recorded in the observation guide. It is important to note that 2 out of 600 questionnaires were not completed and were therefore put aside. This means that 598 (99.6%) questionnaires were considered for quantitative analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Researchers analysed two types of data, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Using this software, researchers ran descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages of answers related to the questions in the questionnaire. In order to analyse qualitative data, researchers applied content analysis. To this end, they read the transcriptions of the interviews many times and this helped them to identify different themes emerging from the data. The themes were grouped according to their similarities, differences, and study objectives.

IV FINDING & DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and discusses the key findings of this study. The findings are presented under such themes as stakeholders' responsibilities and interactions, strategies used in developing the reading culture and challenges faced by stakeholders while developing early literacy and promoting the reading culture among children.

Table 1

Response Rate

Sampled households	Answered questionnaires	Response Rate (%)
600	598	99.7%

Table 1 shows the response rate. According to the table, out of 600 questionnaires that were distributed among respondents who took part in the study, 598 were considered. The 2 remaining questionnaires were not entirely filled and researchers decided to put them aside. Therefore, as per the table, the response rate was 99.7%.

4.1 Stakeholders' Responsibilities and Interactions with Children

Various responsibilities assumed by different stakeholders in early literacy development and reading culture promotion are analysed in this section. Emphasis is put on how these responsibilities are perceived by stakeholders themselves.

4.1.1 Stakeholders' Responsibilities

Findings on stakeholders' responsibilities in enhancing early literacy and developing the reading culture are presented and discussed in the following section. Table 1 provides answers to the question to know whether parents instilled the culture of reading in their children before they started school.

Table 2

Instilling the Culture of Reading in Children before they Started School

Answers	Frequencies	Percent
Yes	530	88.6
No	53	8.9
Not given	7	1.2
Not applicable	8	1.3
Total	598	100.0

Table 2 indicates that 88.6% (N=530) of respondents instilled the culture of reading in their children before they started school while 8.9% (N=53) did not. Likewise, most parents stated that they were the ones primarily responsible for instilling early literacy into their children before they started school. They also indicated that this responsibility was shared with elder siblings and any other adult person in the family who knew better about the importance of reading. Parents stated that they used different approaches. The most common ones include encouraging and motivating children, showing them pictures and cartoons, initiating them how to write on chalkboards, slates, papers, and telling them stories. One parent said "*When my children start uttering words, I teach them counting*". Conversely, a few parents admitted that they did not know if it was necessary to do anything for those children and only waited until they went to school.

Similarly, results from interviews with teachers and local authorities indicated that parents had to play an important role in teaching children to read before the age of school. One of the local authorities highlighted this: "*Parents have to provide basic reading skills to their children before they go to school. They have to understand this first.*" These results show that parents in Rwanda generally knew that they were responsible for ensuring that their children had some reading prerequisites before they started school. Indeed, this is a good indication that Rwandans are eager to help their children become knowledgeable and wish they would be able to adapt to the changing future. This implies that the country can certainly be much more prosperous once the reading culture is enforced. This corroborates Akinola's (2021) view that that some countries are more developed than others because their people love to read. Indeed, the way parents are engaged in reading enhances children's motivation to read and learn (Chigbo-Obasi et al., 2021). Table 2 presents data on whether parents read stories to their children before school age.

Table 3

Reading Stories to Children before they Started School

Answers	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	385.0	64.4
No	199.0	33.3
Not given	14.0	2.3
Total	598.0	100.0

Table 3 shows that 64.4% (N = 385.0) of parent respondents stated that they had read stories for their children before they started school, while 33.3% had not. This suggests that most parents were aware of the need to develop early literacy among preschool children. One parent said, "*Anybody who knows the importance of studying can teach him or her reading. Not knowing how to read makes us unhappy.*" Another parent respondent asserted, "*It is the parent who has the responsibility to prepare his or her children's future.*" This implies parents value reading and consider it a cornerstone for any development endeavor. Some even regretted their inability to read. One mentioned, "*I quit school because of problems, but I feel that we have to help them.*" A similar finding is that of Chigbo-Obasi et al. (2022), who revealed a positive correlation between home literacy practices and children's reading motivation. Rintaningrum (2019) contends that reading literacy is a foundation of life and that parents instill it in their children at

home. Indeed, parents in some countries do a great job introducing reading to their children very early, even before preschool (Akinola, 2021).

However, results show that some parents had not inculcated the reading culture in their children before the age of school. Some parents lacked time to help their children develop early literacy and a reading culture; they concentrated more on businesses or income-generating activities to fight against poverty. Others, who seemed to have time, did not have reading and writing materials. There were also a number of parents who were illiterate and, hence, could not help their children. Some other parents had the perception that fathers were the ones responsible for the development of the reading culture of their children. One said, *"I do not know how to read, and the father does not care."* This could be explained by the fact that more men are literate than women in the Rwandan context. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR, 2022), 76% of women are literate, compared to 81% of men.

In addition, some teachers and authorities reported that parents played a minimal role in teaching their children how to read and cultivating a reading culture. In this regard, one teacher said, *"Parents do not feel responsible for the education of their children."* Another teacher mentioned, *"Parents give priority to their everyday activities rather than their children's studies."* These results suggest that some parents did not assist their children in reading for various reasons, and they need to mobilize their children's literacy. This is in line with Chigbo-Obasi et al.'s (2022) study recommendation that parents should be urged to have positive attitudes towards reading in order to establish literacy practices in their home. Table 3 displays information on whether parents asked their children to read.

Table 4
Urging Children to Read

Answers	Frequencies	Percent
Yes	517	86.5
No	63	10.5
Not answered	18	3.0
Total	598	100.0

Table 4 shows that 86.5% (N = 517) of parents urged their children to read at home. This is an indication that parents exercised their responsibility to motivate their children to study after school. Rather than leaving the responsibility of ensuring their children's learning to teachers, these parents were aware that they had a role to play. These findings corroborate Otieno and Hesbon's (2021) research, which indicated a significant positive impact of parents' involvement in Rwandan secondary school students' reading culture. This implies that the parents' contribution to children's reading is of paramount importance. To illustrate this role, one parent said, *"It is a benefit for their parents and the country when children are educated,"* while another regretted dropping out of school but acknowledged their role in helping children's learning.

On the other hand, 10.5% (N = 63) of parents did not urge their children to read. Most of these parents reported that they lacked time. They gave priority to doing business in order to earn a living. In this regard, one local leader observed, *"Parents are too busy to focus on their children."* Similarly, another teacher contended, *"Some parents do not have time to be with their children for long hours. They leave their children with housemaids."* Another teacher mentioned, *"Parents are reluctant to help their children. They do not have anybody to assist them when they are at home."* Another common reason put forward by parents was that some of them were illiterate and therefore could not help their children in their reading practices. Poverty was another reason advanced by parents. One parent stated, *"Life is hard; we live a difficult life, so we do not have time for our children."* This implies that enforcing reading might not be an easy task when people are poor. This corroborates findings in Porta (2022), who, citing a number of studies previously conducted, including Canales and Porta (2018) and Porta and Canales (2021), argue that children from low socioeconomic status are not encouraged to read. Indeed, in the Rwandan context, it appears that the main causes of illiteracy are, among others, poverty and food insecurity (Ready for Reading, 2023). Table 5 displays data on whether teachers give reading assignments to children.

Table 5
Giving Take-Home Reading Assignments

Answers	Frequencies	Percent
Yes	459	76.8
No	65	10.9
Do not know	50	8.4
Not answered	24	4.0
Total	598	100.0

Of the 598 parents, 76.8% (N = 459) agreed that teachers provided children with take-home reading assignments, whereas 10.9% (N = 65) said teachers did not. In addition, 8.4% (N = 50) of parents said they did not know if their children were provided with reading assignments. The fact that most teachers gave students reading assignments indicates that these educators play their role in engaging students in reading, and this practice should be common among all teachers. This finding supports Akinola's (2021) view that teachers transmit both knowledge and instruction and that, they are regarded as second parents to students.

However, some teachers expressed concern that some parents did not assist their children with take-home reading assignments. In this regard, one teacher complained, "One may give homework to children today, and they may bring it back undone tomorrow." In addition, teachers who do not give reading homework assignments to students and parents who ignore this practice fail to exercise their responsibilities in the process. Therefore, collaboration between parents and teachers is required to effectively inculcate the reading culture in children.

4.1.2 Stakeholders' Interactions with Children

One of the aims of this study was to investigate stakeholders' interactions with children. These interactions entailed the assistance and motivation that children received from their parents and teachers in terms of reading activities. This section presents the results on the interactions between children and their parents as well as their teachers.

4.1.2.1 Parent-Children Interaction

Parents play an important role in children's education. They can motivate and initiate reading to their children at home. Table 6 provides information on whether parents read to their children.

Table 6
Reading to Children

Answers	Frequencies	Percent
Yes	407	68.1
No	91	15.2
Others	100	16.7
Total	598	100

According to Table 5, 68.1% (N = 407) of parent respondents pointed out that they called their children to listen to them while reading. Of the 598 parent respondents, 15.2% (N = 91) revealed that they did not call their children. Others, 16.7% (N = 100), include those who said they did not read and those who did not know how to read at all. Most respondents read to their children as a model to motivate them to love and develop a reading culture. In a similar study, Roberts et al. (2005) found an association between home environment and children's language and early literacy skills, which was later supported by Bano et al. (2018, p. 50), who observed that 'if parents read books in front of their children, their children's reading habits will automatically be developed.' This qualitative study was conducted in one of the private schools in Pakistan and aimed at exploring the perceptions of teachers about the role of parents in helping children develop reading habits to improve their school achievement.

In the same vein, putting emphasis on the environment role, Kafusha et al. (2021) argued that children are likely to read when their family members, peers, and teachers read (see also Anandari & Iswandari (2019) for a similar finding). What is more, in this study, parents emphasized that they also asked their children to listen to stories on the radio. For instance, they encourage them to listen to or watch the Itetero program (a radio-TV show for children).

Parent-child interaction is also enhanced by parents' reading encouragement towards their children. Table 6 displays the results on whether parents encourage their children to read.

Table 7
Encouraging Children to Read

Answers	Frequencies	Percent
Yes	389	65.1
No	177	29.6
Others	32	5.3
Total	598	100

Table 7 indicates that out of 598 parent respondents, 65.1% (N = 389) revealed that they encouraged their children to read, while 29.6% (N = 177) did not. Other respondents (5.3%, N = 32) include (i) those who did not

answer the question, (ii) those who did not know how to read, and (ii) those who knew how to read but did not read at all. Parents who encouraged their children to read were willing to help them acquire knowledge and develop a reading culture. Evidently, most parents could encourage their children to read. Not only could this practice develop children's reading culture, but it could also have a positive effect on their school achievement. Mendive et al. (2020) found an increase in vocabulary among children whose mothers read and teach letters to them. This is in conformity with Kafusha et al.'s (2021) view that community influence greatly affects the development of one's reading culture. Similarly, children's increase in reading interests greatly depends on their parents' engagement in reading (Chigbo-Obasi et al., 2021). Obviously, parents' interactions with their children in terms of reading certainly uplift their level of literacy and reading culture.

Teacher -Children Interaction

Results from interviews with teachers suggest that the interaction that can enhance the reading culture in children seems ineffective in schools. One teacher said, "*The class size is a challenge: you may have about 80 children in class, and you cannot assist each child in a 40-minute session. Consequently, you may only have 25 or 30 students who are good at reading, while the rest of the class is not.*" This is a general problem specifically experienced in developing countries, including Rwanda. As UNESCO (2013, p. 23) explains, the quality of education can be compromised by large class sizes in the early grades and in the poorest areas. Another teacher emphasized, "*In a big class, a teacher cannot assist each individual child with exercises in 40 minutes for the class session.*" Another teacher mentioned, "*The class size is a challenge. I have 65 children in my class, and my colleagues have around 60. Of 70 children, you can find that only 25 or 30 can read effectively.*" Teachers reiterated this, while some parents relied on them for their children's education. Some parents said that teachers were responsible for educating children, and others said they were trained and more knowledgeable. In short, teacher-child interaction was limited by the class size.

4.2 Strategies Used to Develop Reading Culture in Children

In addition to identifying the stakeholders' role and responsibilities in promoting literacy in children, the study sought to know the strategies used to develop their reading culture. Table 8 shows the frequency of reading stories to children by their parents in a week.

Table 8

Reading Stories to Children in a Week

Answers	Frequencies	Percentages
Once or two times a month	1.0	0.2
Once a week	63.0	10.5
Two times a week	123.0	20.6
Three times and more a week	198.0	33.1
Not answered	17.0	2.8
Do not know how to read	196.0	32.8
Total	598.0	100.0

Table 8 shows that 10.5% of parents (N = 63), 20.6% (N = 123), and 33.1% (N = 198) read stories to their children once, twice, and three times a week, respectively. This finding indicates that most parent respondents were very interested in reading stories to their children and, hence, instilling in them the culture of reading.

A similar finding is that of Otieno and Hesbon (2021). Otieno and Hesbon found that parents were involved in reading activities like reading together, helping their children do homework, giving them rewards, and buying them key books. Dai Luong (2021) argues that reading culture equips children with the skills necessary to adapt to today's changing world. In contrast to Otieno and Hesbon (2021), Kafusha et al. (2021) found inconsistent reading activities in families. Kafusha et al. found that parents used other strategies to cultivate reading skills in their children. These include motivation, providing reading materials like cartoon storybooks and educational tools like chalkboards, slates, and pencils, as well as storytelling. Some parents even begin teaching numbers once their children start speaking. However, in the case of the present study, 32.8% (=196) of parent respondents do not know how to read and write. Reasons mostly advanced by parent respondents for not frequently reading stories to their children include not having enough time as they are busy working, not having books to read, and not knowing how to read. "*Reading and writing materials are expensive,*" one parent said. Some parents surprisingly confessed that they did not know that it was important to read stories to preschool children.

Apart from parents' efforts to read stories to their children, this study has also revealed the existence of strategies at school and local community levels. In some schools, children are given time to read, while others engage

children in reading competitions. In nursery schools, children are shown storybooks with pictures and asked to name things they refer to. Teachers also use games and songs to shape children's minds. In primary schools, some schools devote some time to reading before class. In these sessions, teachers give special attention to children whose reading abilities are not sufficient. Other schools provide time for reading on specific days. With this last strategy, older children are asked to go to the library to read. Schools also encourage parents to urge their children to read. As far as the community is concerned, local authorities play primarily an advisory role. They generally urge parents to borrow books from school to make it possible for their children to have something to read at home.

Regarding libraries, researchers found that all schools visited during the period of April 2022 and August 2023 have operational libraries. This finding is different from Aina et al.'s (2011) study, which revealed the lack of both public and private libraries in Nigeria and that few existing libraries were ill-equipped. The fact that all schools observed had libraries is an ingredient for quality education in Rwanda. This is consistent with Khoiri and Bustomi's (2020) argument that library existence ensures the sustainability of the process of teaching and learning and that the lack of libraries leads to poor quality education. Indeed, Thomas (1993) points out that school libraries help to fight illiteracy and provide elementary literacy instruction. She outlines characteristics of an effective school library, such as supporting curriculum and instructional goals, providing individualized reading guidance programs, helping students select and evaluate materials, and conducting workshops and discussions to help parents support children's learning (Thomas, 1993, p. 167).

However, though all schools visited in the study area had libraries, researchers noted a number of challenges that need addressing. For example, most school libraries observed did not have enough and appropriate reading books; many of them were subject books. Also, libraries did not have enough reading space or infrastructure, such as tables, chairs, book shelves, etc. It was found from the register that very few books are borrowed from libraries. Some books were found stored in sacks or boxes, which was an indication that they may not be in use. In addition, libraries do not have permanent staff, which may make it impossible for learners to access the books whenever they want. Notwithstanding the status of libraries in schools, they remain an irreplaceable asset in broadening children's horizons, shaping their education, and permitting school excellence (Aina et al., 2011). Therefore, the effective use of libraries in Rwandan schools should not be overlooked.

4.3 Challenges

This section highlights challenges in relation to initiatives aimed at improving children's reading skills. Such challenges include poverty and illiteracy among parents. Highlighting illiteracy as a hindrance to the reading culture among children, one local authority from Nyagatare district lamented: "*Parents can't read; we first need literacy schools for parents so that they can help their children.*" Other challenges mentioned include the lack of basic skills in children when they go to nursery schools, the lack of materials, etc. As indicated above, the problem of lack of required resources is common in poor and developing countries; several researchers have similar findings, including Haliru et al. (2015) for Nigeria; Roberts et al. (2005) for American children from poor families, etc. Local authorities reported that in addition to illiteracy and poverty, there is also a lack of awareness among parents of the importance of reading, which is one of the common challenges hindering the culture of reading. We leave details on literacy-related challenges in Rwanda for further research.

Despite a number of challenges summarized in the above paragraphs, the results show that different stakeholders—parents, the school community, and local authorities—play their respective roles in equipping children with the necessary reading skills. In this regard, a few solutions were suggested by the different stakeholders to address challenges that hinder stakeholders' responsibilities and their interactions towards literacy and reading culture development in children. These include promoting adult literacy in the community to enable parents to assist their children while reading, organizing reading competitions both at school and community levels, and making available enough books and other resources for nursery and primary schools. Other solutions include sensitizing parents to cooperate with schools to find reading materials for their children and reducing the student-teacher ratio so that teachers can assist all children while reading. Such solutions were suggested in similar studies. For example, Merga and Mason (2019) suggested that the reading culture should be established and sustained in schools. Otache's (2020) study proposes that parents practice reading when they are at home, as they transmit this behavior to their children. Otache also suggests raising the public's awareness about the significance of reading. In the same vein, Kafusha et al.'s (2021) study proposes that parents should be encouraged to read to their children. For Akinola 2021, reading culture ought to be a home habit that develops from childhood and is nurtured into adulthood.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the promotion of shared responsibilities in developing children's early literacy and reading culture in Rwanda, analyze strategies to use to develop early literacy and reading culture in the community, and suggest solutions to literacy-related problems faced by the community while involving their children in reading. Findings from the five districts indicated that parents did their best to foster the culture of reading in their children before they started school. They considered themselves primarily responsible for instilling in their children early literacy and a love for reading. This parent's responsibility was shared with elder siblings and any other adult person in the family who knew better the importance of reading. Strategies used by parents to instill the culture of reading included reading stories to the children, asking children to read some written materials, and practicing writing. With regard to teachers, some of the strategies they use include giving children take-home reading assignments, organizing reading competitions, and using games and songs to sharpen children's minds.

This practice supports the Theory of Emergent Literacy because it highlights the fact that children's early exposure to reading is an invaluable ingredient to success in their subsequent learning. This is consistent with Rohde's (2015) argument that school success greatly depends on learning to read. Indeed, children's development of reading and writing depends on the knowledge and skills they acquire during early childhood (Rhyner et al., 2009). In line with Emergent Literacy, Moschovali (1999) contends that literacy-related interactions between parents and children contribute to children's academic achievement (Moschovaki, 1999). According to Yang (2016), emerging literacy highlights the significance of social interactions in promoting reading. Therefore, the findings imply that parents and teachers' willingness and strategies to promote reading in children have an important role in their later reading development.

Despite the efforts made by parents and teachers, a number of challenges were reported, which are highly likely to impede the acquisition of reading skills among the children and their education in general. For example, parents reported that they focus more on their work that earns them a living than inculcating a reading culture in their children. Similarly, teachers reported large class sizes and parents' illiteracy as major impediments to developing the reading culture among children. Given all these challenges, the issues of poverty, illiteracy among parents, and class size need to be addressed in order to promote early literacy among Rwandan children.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made: First, the government of Rwanda should provide support in terms of educating parents, putting in place enough libraries, and providing appropriate reading materials to the community. The issue of reading materials can also be addressed through subsidies in schools so that books can be easily accessible to children from poor families. Also, parents' role in developing the reading culture and early literacy should be more visible. This should go hand in hand with adult literacy in order to enable parents to read to their children and monitor their reading assignments. The existing Rwandan fruitful policies of poverty eradication should be sustained to increase parents' welfare and make them feel more interactive and responsible for their children's education rather than solely focusing on their work, hence giving up their responsibility. In order to enhance teacher-child interactions, ongoing government efforts to reduce the teacher-student ratio through the increase of classrooms and teaching staff should be maintained. Finally, school strategies to enhance the reading culture, such as reading competitions and library use, as well as the provision of enough and appropriate reading materials in schools, should become common practice because they are of paramount importance in developing the reading culture in children.

Researchers cannot pretend that the study was exhaustive in terms of scope and procedures. Due to financial limitations, the study only covered five out of thirty districts. The coverage of the country could be ideal in terms of representativeness of respondents and generalization of findings. Similar studies could potentially be conducted on a wider geographical area, and a different approach to recruiting respondents should be applied. Specifically, family socioeconomic dynamics and students' reading skills should be investigated.

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