



## The Benefits of Reading: A Reflection on Nyerere's Contributions to Education and Reading Culture

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper addresses the reading culture during the tenure of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first President of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) from 1961 to 1985. The importance of fostering a reading culture and its consequences for personal and social development is well documented. Various stakeholders have consistently emphasized the need for society to embrace a reading culture for both individual and national betterment. This study was designed to determine the potential academic and lifelong benefits of cultivating a reading culture in society. It was constructed using synthesized information extracted from past and present sources, integrating and analysing that data to generate findings. The study employed a desk research approach, screening secondary data and documents collected from various published sources. Primary data played a secondary role in this research. The objectives of the study were: (1) to determine how reading culture functions as an interlocking system of habits and logistics, (2) to assess the social construction of reading communities, (3) to explore the ideological constructions of reading, and (4) to evaluate the role of reading in healing, serving as an important reference for improving readership culture in academic settings. Findings from the study confirmed the importance and pleasure of reading, as Mwalimu Nyerere once stated: "It is a fact that we must recognize; that in dealing with the modern world, children in Europe have two big advantages over our own children. One is familiarity with mechanical things; the other, and perhaps even more important, is familiarity with books." - Mwalimu Nyerere, Arusha, 29th November 1965. Documented research, along with individual observations, highlights that many people in Tanzania lack the habit of reading books. The noticeable decline in reading culture is alarming and threatens the development of a well-educated and learning-oriented society, including the quality of the nation's workforce. This research concluded that while the problem of poor reading culture is more pronounced in higher learning institutions and has effects on the job sector, it is attributed to several factors presented in this study. The study recommended that steps to promote reading culture are crucial to preventing the collapse of the nation's workforce. It also suggested that promoting reading in schools and universities is essential, and enhancing the reading culture should be integrated into the curriculum.*

**Key Words:** Books, Mass Education, Mwalimu Nyerere, Reading Culture

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### I. INTRODUCTION

As explained by multiple scholarly sources such as Ogugua et al. (2015) and Ariffin (1992), reading culture refers to an environment where reading is celebrated, appreciated, and respected. Reading is the foundation of the curriculum and is crucial for a child's personal, social, and academic success, as well as their overall well-being. It is a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information, or entertainment through the written word. Sometimes, reading culture refers to the habitual and regular reading of books and information materials for leisure, not necessarily for passing exams. It encompasses the love of reading books during leisure time, as well as reading articles and other educational content.

The importance of cultivating a reading culture and its impact on personal and social development is well-documented. Various stakeholders have emphasized the need to embrace a reading culture for the benefit of both individuals and the nation. For example, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (1968) once said, "Books are a very important way to knowledge and to self-improvement; from them, we can learn new ideas, new techniques of working, and new methods. We can learn about the development of man in all its different aspects, we can broaden our understanding of other people and even of ourselves. All the experiences of mankind, all his discoveries and inventions can be learned about through reading" (pg. 67).

Nyerere's views on the importance of books are also supported by Lönneborg (1999), who stated, "Sometimes, it is better to have books than food" (pg. 78). Studies such as Samoff (1990) have shown that reading not only enhances vocabulary and comprehension skills but also improves brain function. Amarteifio (2015) emphasized that reading widely allows individuals to gain insights from different fields and perspectives, enabling them to make connections that others might miss. Additionally, Carson (1999) highlighted that reading books can help develop one's God-given talents to the point where they become valuable to those around them.

Documented research and individual observations reveal that many people in Tanzania lack the habit of reading books. This noticeable decline in reading culture is alarming and threatens the realization of a well-educated, learning society, as well as the quality of the nation's workforce. According to Danladi and Soko (2018), learners in higher learning institutions tend to rely heavily on lecturer notes, have a habit of reading only for examinations, lack individual reading initiatives, and show little interest in reading beyond the scope of exams. As a result, graduates leave institutions with good academic performances but with knowledge limited to exam content, leading to a lack of essential skills needed in the workplace (Mbogoma, 2018).

Although the issue of poor reading culture is more pronounced in higher learning institutions and has significant effects on the job sector, its causes are attributed to several factors outlined in this study. Therefore, this study recommends taking steps to promote a reading culture to prevent the collapse of the nation's workforce. The research synthesized information from the past, gathered data from the present, and analyzed them to produce the findings presented in this paper. These findings can serve as an important reference for promoting and improving readership culture, particularly in the academic environment.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

With the exception of the work by Jamillah (2020), few studies have assessed the current state of libraries, the book industry, and reading culture. Much of the significant research in this area was conducted during the 1970s and 1980s, with very little published in recent years that matches the depth and breadth of those earlier studies. The existing key works (Freire, 1970; Kassam, 1978) allow us to explore the interconnected factors that have shaped the foundations of reading culture in Tanzania.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- (i) To determine the way in which reading culture acts as an interlocking system of habits and logistics,
- (ii) To assess the social construction of reading communities,
- (iii) To determine ideological constructions of reading,
- (iv) To assess the place of reading in healing as an important reference for providing and improving readership culture in the academic environment.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1.1 Lev Vygotsky's Theory (1978) of Cognitive Development

Theoretically, this study is grounded in literacy theories that establish the basis for reading and writing, such as Lev Vygotsky's theory (1978) of cognitive development, which suggests that students learn by connecting prior knowledge to new learning. This highlights the importance of teachers showing students the connections between what they already know and what they are learning. The relevance of this theory, among others, to this study lies in its advocacy for the promotion of reading culture to enhance knowledge acquisition, vocabulary, comprehension skills, and brain function.

While several theories in this field may contradict each other, they all have foundations in different academic studies, reflecting the wide range of learning styles observed in individuals. Ailakhu and Unegbu (2017), renowned scholars in literacy development, emphasize this by stating: "*Reading is more than the sum of its parts. It requires not just the recognition of words, but the ability to make sense of those words in context, to connect them to our existing knowledge, and to build new understanding*" (pg. 34).

### 2.2 Empirical Review

#### 2.2.1 The Concept of Reading

It has been proven that reading sharpens the mind. Not only does it improve concentration and memory skills, but it also boosts creativity and imagination.

#### *What is Reading?*

Reading is the process of looking at a series of written symbols and deriving meaning from them (Ariffin, 1992). It is a mental process in which a person examines a written text and begins to absorb the information from the linguistic message. Reading involves the use of vision to understand the words in a sentence and make them meaningful. Accordingly, Chachage and Cassam (2010) describe reading as a creative process where the reader actively interacts with the text to construct meaning. It is an interactive process between the reader and the text.

In Ariffin's (1992) view, reading is defined as a highly personal activity, usually done silently and alone. This suggests that reading is associated with acquiring information and can be performed either silently or aloud. Reading is the primary avenue for learning. As Onchwari and Keengwe (2018) point out, reading implies that if we do not understand what we are reading, we cannot learn or remember it. Similarly, just as the journey of a lifetime begins with the turning of a page, reading is the sole means by which we voluntarily, often helplessly, slip into another skin, another voice, or another soul (Aina et al., 2011). Reading exercises the brain and increases the ability to assimilate information more effectively.

### *Concept of Reading Culture*

According to Anyachebelu et al. (2011), reading culture is the regular practice of reading, leading to the cultivation of an attitude and skills that make reading a pleasurable, consistent, and habitual activity. Ailakhu and Unegbu (2017) similarly define reading culture as the habit of reading throughout life, not just for academic purposes. They emphasize that, over time, reading ceases to be an uphill task undertaken solely to pass exams; rather, it takes on intrinsic value, with individuals reading for the sake of reading until a natural inclination to continue reading develops. These scholars concluded that the essence of a reading culture is to encourage students to make reading a part of their daily lives and to establish it as a habit that will remain beneficial and enjoyable throughout their lives.

A foundation in reading and writing has been the cornerstone of the educational system since its inception, and discovering new ways to increase student interest in these basic components of learning is a challenge every teacher faces at some point. A nation with a highly knowledgeable, educated, and skilled workforce is strategically positioned to achieve its development goals (Kassam, 2000). Many educators encourage their students to read outside the classroom to enhance reading comprehension, vocabulary, general knowledge, and cultural awareness.

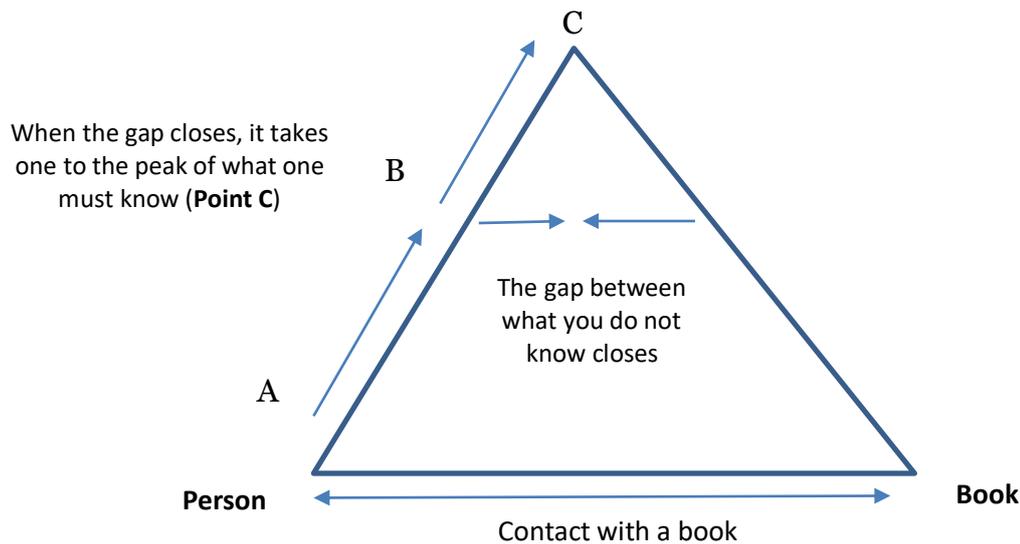
Carson (1999), in his philosophy for success, "THINK-BIG," highlighted books as his "recipe for success." He described books as an invaluable mechanism for obtaining success, stating that reading is what helped him become a "retired world-renowned neurosurgeon" (pg. 98). To Carson, learning is about gaining knowledge and understanding, in contrast to superficial learning, where people cram for exams, sometimes perform well, but retain little knowledge after the test. This form of superficial learning creates what he calls "certificate arrogance disease."

According to Major and Mulvihill (2009), "*Many of our revered celebrities and leaders are avid readers. Indeed, it's hard to find successful people who aren't.*" Reading opens up global avenues for knowledge that non-readers cannot access. As Nyerere (1982) noted, "Through independent reading, children gain a wealth of background knowledge about many different subjects, come to understand story and non-fiction structures, absorb the essentials of English grammar, and continuously expand their vocabularies."

### *Searching the Benefits of Reading*

Libraries offer a wide range of resources for reading, learning, connecting, and recreation (Danladi & Soko, 2018). As Ailakhu and Unegbu (2017) suggested, a "Library Week" should be instituted—a dedicated week designed to educate people about the significance of libraries, their importance, and the benefits they provide.

According to Aina et al. (2011), since as far back as 1981, the National Library of Nigeria has been sponsoring readership promotion campaigns. These campaigns are part of the efforts to boost reading culture across the country, ensuring the message reaches even the most remote areas. Academic and public libraries have also organized several readership promotion campaigns, especially during their annual Library Weeks. During these events, primary and secondary school students are invited to participate, with books distributed to each school. Students are encouraged to read, and winners are awarded book prizes, further motivating them to continue reading.

**Figure 1***When you Read! Healing with Books*

Source: Author (2024)

In their research piece of research work, Ross & Felicity (2023) have highlighted several benefits of reading culture. A strong reading culture helps learners become engaged in their learning and prepares them for success academically, emotionally, and socially. More specifically, aside from its necessity, reading has wide-ranging cognitive and literacy-building benefits. Here's some of them:

*Enhanced brain activity*

Unlike watching television or streamed entertainment, reading requires focus. This engages the mind and stimulates more brain regions than passive forms of entertainment. In a study Ritchie et al. (2015) for example, researchers used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to scan the brains of students before and after reading *Pompeii*, a novel by Robert Harris. In the days after reading sections of the book, they found increased connectivity in the brain areas involved in receptivity for language, plus physical sensation and movement.

*Improved vocabulary*

By exposing students to new words, reading can expand vocabulary. This has been shown in research, such as this 2023 study which found that reading-related activities were the primary cause of vocabulary growth from grades four to ten.

*Developing critical thinking*

Reading widely allows students to encounter different ideas and ways of understanding the world, compelling them to consider what they believe and why. Critical thinking skills are also some of the most highly valued in the workplace, and are linked with experiencing fewer negative life events.

*Increased ability to understand others*

Encountering different ideas also helps us to understand others. Research has indicated that reading literary fiction (fiction books with literary merit) enhances what researchers call 'Theory of Mind', or the capacity to understand the mental state of others.

Furthermore, reading can enhance mental and emotional wellbeing. The therapeutic effect of reading is known as bibliotherapy, which is derived from two Greek words: *biblion*, meaning book, and *therapeia* or healing. This term was first used in 1914 by American minister and author Samuel Crothers, who described bibliotherapy as a "process in which specific literature, both fiction and non-fiction, was prescribed as medicine for a variety of ailments."

More recently, research, such as Ogugua et al. (2015) has proven the health benefits of reading, which include:

Reduced stress – reading can lower stress by 68 percent, according to a study by Mbogoma (2018). He found that reading was more relaxing than listening to music, going for a walk or having a cup of tea or coffee. The results led cognitive neuropsychologist Dr David Lewis to say, "Losing yourself in a book is the ultimate relaxation ... This is

more than merely a distraction but an active engaging of the imagination as the words on the printed page stimulate your creativity and cause you to enter what is essentially an altered state of consciousness."

Management of depression – a 2018 review of studies by Onchwari and Keengwe exploring bibliotherapy and depression concluded that it “appears to be effective in the reduction of adults depressive symptoms in the long-term period, providing an affordable prompt treatment that could reduce further medications.”

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study was constructed using synthesized information extracted from the past, the present, integrated and analyzed that data. in order to generate findings. The study was desk research-based and it screened secondary data and documents that was collected from various published sources. Primary data was sourced and worked as a secondary role.

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Nyerere’s Readings, Publications and his Contribution to reading culture

One of Nyerere’s more important works was a paper called *Ujamaa* (“familyhood”)—The Basis for African Socialism, which later served as the philosophical basis for the Arusha Declaration (1968). the Arusha Declaration- a political program committed to the creation of an egalitarian socialist society based on cooperative agriculture, collectivized village farmlands, mass literacy campaigns, and instituted free and universal education, a need to become economically self-sufficient rather than remain dependent on foreign aid and foreign investment. His thoughts, essays, and speeches are collected in his books:

*Uhuru na Umoja* (1967; *Freedom and Unity*),  
*Uhuru na Ujamaa* (1968; *Freedom and Socialism*), and  
*Uhuru na Maendeleo* (1973; *Freedom and Development*).

He also translated two plays by *William Shakespeare*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar*, into Swahili.

According to Mwalimu’s interests in reading, a break-through in our development should come from- *familiarity with books*, specifically-Where a man and wife can sit together in the evening each reading to each other and when their children are encouraged to learn out of school by reading books which are easily available and hence. According to Mwalimu, he had this to say:

*“inculcate Reading Culture, Make It Our Ambition and passion or appetite”*

Mwalimu created education program known as "Education for Self-Reliance" (ESR) launched at the Arusha Declaration (1968), and this was strongly linked to the development of self-sufficient agricultural communities (Ujamaa) which represented the framework of Tanzanian political and economic patterns.

Primary schools were given top priority, absorbing almost all state resources devoted to education. Primary education was not aimed at bringing the pupils to further studies but was considered as the normal end of schooling for most children. As Nyerere put it that: *“Educational system of Tanzania must emphasize co-operative endeavour, not individual advancement”*

Varied Quotes (away from Mwalimu Nyerere) About the Magic Of Books and reading:

“There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island.”

“To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.” ...

“I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! ...

“Books are the mirrors of the soul.”

Develop your God-given talents to the point where you become valuable to the people around you. Books are an invaluable mechanism for obtaining that success.

“Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill”

“Reading is a good thing as “it broadens someone’s knowledge about something or an issue.”--*Herbat Ali- a Tanzanian University Graduate who do not enjoy reading books. He started reading books while he was in F4 since he did not possess any book when he was young*

#### 4.2 Nyerere’s Quotes About the Magic of Books and the Importance of Reading

“... stored in the books are accumulated knowledge of man and the earth he lives in as well as the literature of different civilizations...”

“Books... can teach us, can inspire us, or can refresh our minds with a pleasure of a good story well told”

“Books... can breakdown isolation of our lives and provide us with a friend wherever we may be”

“...Let us cultivate ourselves with the culture of learning through reading among our young people and among our newly literate citizens”.

“...Learning for the sake of knowledge and understanding as opposed to superficial learning where people are trained to pass exam and not to acquire skills - “*Superficial learning creates certificate arrogance disease*”.

“*learned through hardship. hard work is the surest path out of hardship*”

“...reading as a key to unlocking a child’s full potential...”

## Reading Culture Challenges for today’s World: Some of the Key Challenges that are Impacting the Reading Culture at Large

*The declining reading culture is alarming and threatening the realization of a well-educated and learning society- The Citizen, 2016- updated 2021*

Books have been a source of knowledge and an escape for centuries. However, the way we read has changed in the past decade or so. Today’s world is full of distractions which make it hard for people to focus on reading a book or article without being interrupted by notifications on their phones. The internet has made it possible for people to get information at the click of a button and this has led to less attention span for reading anything that is not entertaining enough. People are getting more used to scrolling through social media feeds than sitting down with a book or newspaper.

*Lack of time:* Nowadays, people don’t have time to sit down and read a book. They are always on the go, they have a lot of things to do, and so they find it difficult to find time for reading.

*Unable to find books of choice:* There is a lot of reading content out there and people don’t know where to start. They are overwhelmed by the sheer number of options and they don’t know what to read. The solution? A library management system in a library that helps readers find the right content for them, based on their interests, reading history, and context.

*Lack of reading habit:* Reading has always been an important skill for children to develop as they grow up because it helps them to be able to learn better at school, do better academically and grow up as avid readers. However, when the habit of reading books is not inculcated, they, as grown-up individuals, do not feel the connection with books and overall reading culture.

*Expensive Hobby:* Books are an expensive hobby. They take up a lot of space, can be costly to buy, and need to be stored somewhere. For some people, they are worth the cost, but for others, it is a cost that they cannot afford.

*Lack of incentives (financial, legal and respect) to readers and authors:* If the country authority do not value knowledge in terms of provide financial and legal support to book authors, then there would be little incentives for authors to read and writing books. It is worth noting that, my book is informed by the work of other authors whom I read.

*Poor learning assessment mode at schools, colleges and universities:* The way we teach our students in schools, colleges and universities has great influence in instilling the reading culture into them. University lecturers for example, have to be competent enough to deliver sessions in such a way that will shape a student to grow into being a good analyst, think critically and independently- rather than training them to pass exam through set of short answer and multiple-choice questions that do not compel students to liaise with BOOKS in the library.

Tanzania specifics (*of declining reading culture*)- a random telephonic survey, October, 2023

Three reasons have been associated with the falling trend of reading culture

Poor learning assessment mode at schools, colleges and universities

Learners in higher learning institutions are over-reliant on LECTURE NOTES, have a tendency of reading for examinations, lack individual reading initiatives and do not have any interest in reading beyond examination scope.

As a result, graduates leave their institutions with good academic performances but with knowledge confined to the scope of academic examination, hence their general lack of salient skills that are necessary at the workplace (Mwita 2018)

Libraries provide enabling environment and materials that offer more extensive and varied information than classroom study alone (Aina et al. 2011, Danladi & Soko (2018). However, findings from Tanzania have shown that;

Majority of secondary schools in the country do not have libraries.

The situation is even worse in the country’s primary school and more acute in public schools.

Few libraries available in the country are not up to the standards required to introduce learners to the world of reading

Few libraries available in schools are merely rooms serving dual roles (i.e. as head teacher’s working space and textbook keeping)

Few libraries available in schools are managed by people who are not qualified librarianship



Considering the role qualified librarian in introducing children to reading and instilling reading habits, their absence in schools undermines opportunities learners need to become independent and habitual readers.

Absolute poverty.

*What about our university students who receive funds for stationery from government but the whole three years can pass without buying even a book?*

*If poverty causes people not to read, we could have seen the rich reading!*

Poor readership foundation from family and early childhood education. That is failure to introduce learners to culture of reading early enough

The negative attitude among many Tanzanians towards reading.

*Too often in our society, a person who sit down to read is accused of being lazy or unsociable!*

*It is a psychologically built up tendency, though false, among many of us that books only matters when we are studying at schools and varsities*

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion and TAKE AWAYS

This conclusion summarizes in brief the findings of the study, with particular focus on (1) the way in which the reading culture behaves as an interlocking system of habits and logistics, (2) the social construction of reading communities, (3) ideological constructions of reading, and (4) the place of reading in healing. Reading develops language skills and vocabulary. Reading books is also a way to relax and reduce stress. It is important to read a good book at least for a few minutes each day to stretch the brain muscles for healthy functioning.

I personally find that the more I make it (reading) into a habit, the more likely I am to bring a book into the public sphere and read when I have a spare moment.

*The Global Partnership for Education underscores the pivotal role of education in human, social, and economic development, as it advances gender equality, mitigates child marriage, promotes peace, and enhances overall well-being. It unequivocally declares education a fundamental human right, one that endows individuals with enhanced life prospects, encompassing employment opportunities, improved health, and active participation in the political arena.*

*Dr. Ben Carson credits reading as being the catalyst to his success. As a young child, Ben was a terrible student. After bringing home an abysmal report card, his mother, Sonya, with only a third-grade education, searched for ways to improve her sons' academic performances. Ben's mother came up with a solution. She required Ben and his brother, Curtis, to turn off the television and to read two books a week from the Detroit Public Library and to submit written book reports to her. While she had difficulty reading the book reports, the results had the desired effect. Through his mother's encouragement and his newfound love of learning, Ben went from the worst student to being the one of the brightest students.*

The avowed aim of learning and reading is to create knowledge to empower human activity (Bacon, 1620)

Niklas (1986) in Charles Sanders Peirce's 1878- "The truth of an idea is found in its consequences. Specifically, what we call "true" is knowledge that yields the expected outcome".

### 5.2 Recommendations

*Instilling Reading Culture in Education System!*

Make reading more accessible, have access to physical books and magazines, so you can read them when free or on the go. Becoming a member of the library can give you access to many new reading materials.

Promote reading in schools and universities. It should be part of the curriculum

a)+ b) = Mwalimu Nyerere emphasized the development of mass education [adult + non-adult education] as a way to incorporate all citizens in the reading culture and thereby building of the nation and its development process by raising their level of economic and political awareness and by improving their workable skills, more especially in agricultural.

Also, joining online communities helps in nurturing the love for reading.

You think you don't have time to read. Hate to break it to you, but if you have time to watch an hour of AzamTV every evening and spend much of your daytime on social media

But every time I spot someone reading on public transport amidst faces entranced on social media, my automatic response is, ah yes-here we have it: a member of the intelligentsia.

I personally find that the more I make it (reading) into a habit, the more likely I am to bring a book into the public sphere and read when I have a spare moment.

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