Investigating reading culture among students in higher learning institutions in Tanzania

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This paper presents findings of a survey conducted in some selected higher education learning institutions in Tanzania to determine the reading patterns of students when they undertake extracurricular activities.. The purpose was to ascertain whether students utilize their time in reading various informational materials for purposes other than academic activities. Electronic questionnaires were conveniently distributed to students at DUCE, IDRP Dodoma, Law School of Tanzania, RUCU Iringa, SLADS Bagamoyo, SUA Morogoro, SUZA, Tumaini University (DSM campus), UDSM and Zanzibar University. The study findings indicate that students spend their spare time reading print and e-newspapers, books and magazines, and access social media that cover aspects such as sports, economic, technological and social issues. They are motivated to read by their desire to learn new aspects of life, expanding their vocabularies, improving reading skills, and acquiring new information. The findings also indicate that students spend their time watching TV, talking to friends, listening to radio, playingand watching games. Furthermore, it was revealed that too much academic work, limited internet connection and family responsibilities are among factors that inhibit their reading habits. The study recommends that academic libraries should work out means to create conducive reading environment for students by stocking more reading resources, conduct more outreachprograms to attract more readers, create reading and writing clubs at schools to empower students in education at large and launch TVprograms which will attract more students to read and learn when undertaking extracurricular activities. .

Keywords: reading culture; reading habits; information resources;; problem-solving skills; academic libraries.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that reading fosters creative thinking, builds inquisitive minds and enhances lifelong learning abilities of a person (Bulgurcuoglu, 2016). Reading habit needs to be developed and nurtured in life using various ways, most of which require much efforts and determination to be achieved. Reading should not occur as a result of conscious pressure resulting from academic tasks or as a way to prepare for employment (State et al., 2010). Rather , it has to occur all the time in order to build up a person's mind and enable him/her criticize, analyse, create, imagine, determine their well-being and view the world in its totality (Ogbonna & Eze, 2015). Thus, reading is a tool for sustainable development as it is capable of manifesting changes in people's life styles through attainment of better education and employment which together bring in better incomes (Igwe, 2011).

Reading culture is encouraged by reading habits of an individual whereby the latter occur as a daily activity. As such, one should not stop reading at any level throughout the entire life. Reading should take place at any point in life pleasurably and regularly, in such a way that it becomes part of an individual's life activity (Chettri & Rout, 2013). When an individual cultivates the reading habit over time in life through encouragements by teachers, librarians and colleagues, his/her reading culture becomes stronger   Since reading habits are inculcated from the adolescence age, a student at an academic institution is expected to master the reading skills in order to excel academically. At this stage a student should have had access to the library resources as well as other sources of academic support that in a way should be responsible in encouraging his/her reading habits (Doris et al., 2013).

Statement of the problem

Libraries play a fundamental role in ensuring that students endeavour to value and cherish reading as part of their daily life activities. Thus, it is undisputable that through use of libraries a student sharpens reading and writing skills (Matthews, 2014). However, it has not always been possible for libraries to ascertain the reading habits of their clients without making deliberate efforts in finding out whether they exists or not. A number of studies such as Kasungamno & Ilomo, (1979); Rubagumya, (1993) and Masabo (2015) were carried out to identify factors affecting reading culture in Tanzania. These studies reveal that students' reliance on lectures and hand-outs, lack of interest in reading when there are no examinations and classroom activities and poor tendency of individual learning are some of the factors that impede growth of the reading culture. Cognizant of these challenges, a survey around academic libraries in Tanzania was important to determine the extent to which students realize the need to read when doing extracurricular activities.

Literature Review

Various studies have been conducted on reading habits and culture of students in academic institutions. Reading habit is associated with basic literacy: the ability to read, write and speak a particular language. The basic literacies may lead to fundamental elements in information literacy skills (Anunobi & Ukwoma, 2016). Reading culture is a catalyst for a national development as it creates an income generating individual who has the requisite skills in reading and writing. The failure to equip such an individual with this important skill often leads to poor national development for having citizens who are unable to read or

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write. These basic literacies are very important as they enable an individual to sharpen his/her mind and develop rational reasoning capacities which are paramount in bringing about economic growth and development which in turn lead to projecting individual's feelings of greatness in life (Igwe, 2011). Reading for pleasure also assists in improved vocabulary and mathematical abilities especially among young people. State et al, (2010) argue that reading encourages an individual to appreciate and apply the general phenomenon of life more constructively by contributing to a meaningful democratic and cohesive society through appreciating the rule of law and human rights stipulated in existing government policies.

Reading culture promotes lifelong learning skills of individuals when they apply critical thinking and problem solving skills. According to Bulgurcuoglu, (2016) lifelong learning is a result of on-going critical thinking process that humans develop over time in their minds which result into a behaviour. The behaviour occurs due to a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that crop up when someone identifies a problem, finds proofs for assumptions, obtaining information to check whether the proof is right and using this process as a lifelong attitude. As such, critical thinking is necessary in enhancing reading habits of students for it encourages them to educate themselves through reading, analysing, synthesizing and interpreting world events correctly, and by obtaining the right information that eventually helps them throughout their lives. Thus reading habit helps to sharpen intellectual development and academic excellence of students by bringing up productive, independent, critical thinking, objective, creative and self-confident individuals who have different perspectives and open minds.

Pervious research such as …… also reveal that although reading culture is responsible for bringing up responsible citizens, it is often hampered by poor reading environments. This is a common situation in academic institutions in African countries where there is poor infrastructure, higher illiteracy rates and meagre resources, . Researchers such as Abdul-jabbar (2016) and Igwe, (2011) attribute these challenges to focus on other media such as television, radio and movies, lack of reading interests as well as the absence of reading resources. Igwe (2011, 5) mentions economic hardships, high prices of reading resources, lack of indigenous reading materials, high costs of publishing books and lack of encouragement among local authors to write books as factors that constrain reading culture. Despite the challenges, academic libraries still play a central role in promoting reading

culture among students for they acquire and maintain reading resources that students use for academic and leisure purposes. g. Thus, it was necessary to find out reading habits of students in academic universities in Tanzania to establish better ways in which the culture of reading could be inculcated among students

Methodology

This study employed quantitative method in which a convenient sampling technique was used to administer questionnaires to a total of 200 students as follows: DUCE (20), IDRP Dodoma (20), Law School of Tanzania (20), RUCU Iringa (5), SLADS Bagamoyo (5), SUA Morogoro (30), and SUZA (10), Tumaini University (DSM) (30), UDSM (50) and Zanzibar University (10). Theses institutions were selected owing to their course levels and diversities, and distribution of their locations. Questionnaires were distributed electronically to students whose e mails were provided by reference librarians in their respective libraries. The e mails were obtained from students who had consented to be contacted in case of any such future surveys. It was expected that students whose e mails were available in reference units of respective libraries would make a good representation of regular users of library services and resources, and would provide suggestions on appropriate measures that libraries could employ to promote reading culture of students in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. This survey focused on students as source of data. As such, information obtained from students on their reading culture and ways in which libraries could be improved to meet their needs was considered of paramount importance for this study. Upon completion of data collection , the Microsoft Excel was used to compile and analyse quantitative data. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. These include views of students on what libraries should do to encourage the reading culture of students in academic libraries. Additionally, secondary data obtained through a review of related literature was incorporated to further confirm a number of factual aspects such as challenges facing reading habits and efforts undertaken to address the same.

Presentation and discussion of the Study findings

Characteristics of the respondents

Out of 200 students who were contacted by e mail using an electronic questionnaire participated in this study, only 105 (i.e. about 52%) of the respondents returned the questionnaires. A total of 75(70.8%) of the respondents were male while 30(28.3%) of the

respondents were female. Their distribution was categorised according their affiliation as indicated in Figure 1 below:
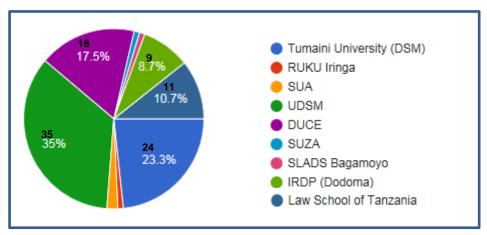

Figure 1: Institutions (Source: Survey data, 2016)

Figure 1 above shows that out of f 103 students, 36(35%) of the respondents were from UDSM, 24(23.8%) Tumaini University (Dar es Salaam), 18(17.8%) DUCE, 11(10.9%) Law School of Tanzania, nine (8.9%) IRDP Dodoma, two (2%) were from SUA, and RUCU, SUZA and SLADS had only one each (two respondents did not respond to this question).

The second question in the questionnaire sought to collect information on respondents' level of studies. The findings are summarised in Figure two below: Figure 2 below summarises the above results.
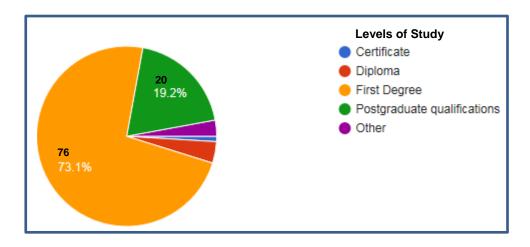

Figure 2: Levels of study (Source: Survey data, 2016)

Figure 2 above shows that a total of 76(73.1%) of the respondents who participated in the survey were pursuing undergraduate degree studies while 20(19.2%) of the respondents were doing postgraduate courses. Moreover, there was a total of four (3.8%) of the

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respondents who were pursuing diploma courses, 3(2.9% were on practical attachments and one (0.9%) was pursuing a certificate course. One respondent did not respond to this question.

Information Resources Consulted for Reading Purposes

Respondents were asked whether they read during their spare time. Ninety-four(89.5%) of the respondents said they preferred reading during spare time, seven (6.7%) of the respondents said they did not, while four (3.8%) of the respondents were not sure about it. Respondents indicated that they had various reasons for reading during their spare time. For example, 67(63.8%) of them indicated that they read in order to improve their learning of new things such as improving vocabulary, 58(55.4%) read for want of every day information for personal use, 49(46.7%) read in order to improve their reading skills, 36(34.3%) read for relaxation, 33(31.4%) read for entertainment while 5(4.8%) of the respondents read out of habitas well as passing time respectively.

When respondents were asked to indicate frequency to which they read newspapers,

31(30%) of the respondents indicated that they preferred reading newspapers on daily basis, 33 (32%) said irregularly, 28 (27%) said that they read newspapers on weekly basis while 7(6.8%) of the respondents said on monthly basis and two (1.9%) of the respondents said they were not sure or could not read newspapers at all.

Respondents were further asked to indicate frequency and reasons for which they read print books. The results are presented below:
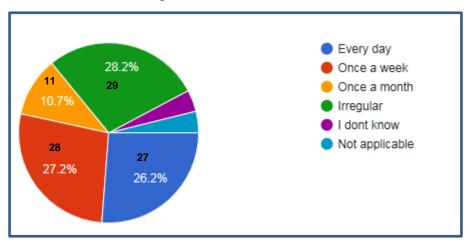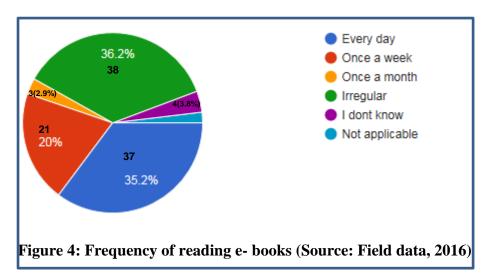

Figure 3: Frequency of reading print books (Source: Field data, 2016)

As for print books, 27(26.2% of the respondents indicated that they read them on daily basis, 28(27%) on weekly basis, 29(28.2%) on irregular basis, 11(10.7% on a monthly basis while 4(3.9%) either did not read or were not sure about their reading frequency (five respondents indicated not applicable).

Reasons for reading print books included getting access to technological issues which garnered 50 (,48.5%) of the respondents), 43(41.7%) social events, 42(41.8%) scientific aspects, 17(16.5%) legal issues while 16(15.5%) of the respondents mentioned other preferences such as fiction, stories, religion, etc.

Regarding e-books frequency of use, the results are summarised in Figure 4 below: Figure 4 below summarizes their responses.

Figure 4: Frequency of reading e- books (Source: Field data, 2016)

Out of 104 respondents, 37(35.2%) of the respondents said they read e-books daily, 21(20%) weekly, three (2.9%) once a month, 38(36.2%) read e-books irregularly while four (3.8%) were not sure (three respondents did not respond to this question).

Reasons for reading print books included getting access to technological issues (56,55.5% respondents), 47(46.5%) respondents read about scientific issues, 45(44.6%) social issues, 38(37.6%) politics while 19(18.8%) read about legal issues.

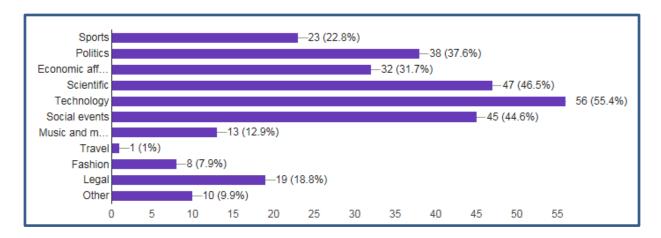Figure 5 below summarizes their responses.

Figure 5: Type of information read in e-books (Source: Field data, 2016)

Furthermore, respondents indicated that they were interested in reading print magazines in which case out of 105 respondents, only 12(11.4%) respondents read magazines daily, 27(25.7%) weekly, 13(12.4%) monthly and 39(37%) on irregular basis. In addition, five (4.8%) were not sure while 12(11.4%) did not read at all.

When asked to point out reasons for reading print magazines, 57(54.3%) respondents indicated that they preferred reading about social events, 54(51.4%) preferred politics, 42(40%) sports, 38(36.2%) economic affairs and technological issues, 25(23.8%) scientific issues, 22(21%) fashion, 21(20%) music and movies while 13(12.4%) were on legal issues. Figure 6 below summarizes their responses.
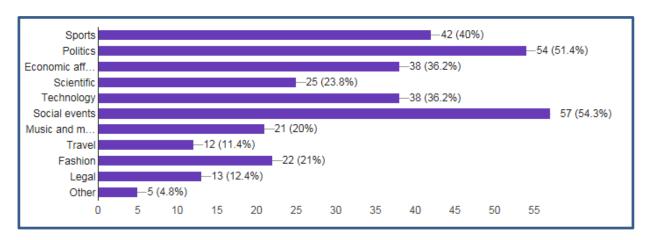

Figure 6: Type of information read in print magazines (Source: Field data, 2016)

In addition to print magazines, the survey shows that respondents preferred reading e-magazines. Out of 105, 26(24.8%) respondents read e-magazines daily, 21(20%) weekly,

10(9.5%) monthly, 36(34.3) on irregular basis, four (3.8%) were not sure while 8(7.6%) did not read e-magazines at all.

Respondents indicated further that they were interested in reading e-magazines for various reasons. For example, 52(49.5%) preferred reading about politics, 45(42.9%) technology, 43(41%) sports, 42(40%) social events, 31(29.5%) economic affairs, 29(27.6%) scientific issues, 19(18) music, moves and fashion respectively while 18(17%) read about legal issues.

Other Reading Sources

Apart from reading the traditional reading resources, this survey sought to find out whether respondents read from other sources. It was revealed from the survey that respondents spent time reading on social media resources such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs or Wikis. For example, out of 105 respondents, 64(61%) read Facebook daily, 13(12%) weekly, 4(%) monthly and 18(17%) respondents read Facebook irregularly while 6(6%) did not do so. Figure 7 below summarizes their responses.
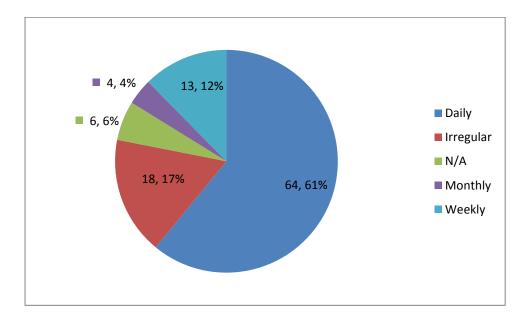

Figure 7: Frequency of Reading Facebook (Source: Field data, 2016)

The same was the case for Blog, YouTube and Wiki where there were quite a number of respondents who read on them quite regularly than was the case with Twitter which seemed to have fewer respondents who accessed it regularly to read what was there.

In addition to social media, respondents indicated that they preferred other activities. 32(30%) of the resondents said they preferred watching TV, 25(23.8%) of the respondents

said they preferred talking to friends, 17(16%) listening to a radio, 11(10%) watching and playing games, 6(5.7%) preferred gardening, 4(3.8%) went to social clubs while 8(7.6%) preferred other activities such as playing guitar, writing programming codes for games, exercising and sleeping (two respondents did not reply to this question). Figure 8 below summarizes their responses.
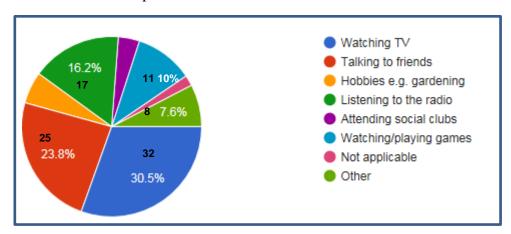

Figure 8: Other preferences apart from reading (Source: Field data, 2016)

It was established that respondents had varying reading habits. For example, out of 105, 57(54.3%) of the respondents indicated that they spend their time reading a book or other resource daily while 31(29.5%) would spend a week before doing the same. The same applied for 7(6.7%) of the respondents who considered themselves to be occasional readers who would spend up to a month before reading anything academic. On the other hand five (4.8%) respondents indicated that they read on non-routine occasions when they were travelling or on holidays and 3(2.9%) were not sure while others would only read when in need of information. Figure 9 below summarizes their responses.
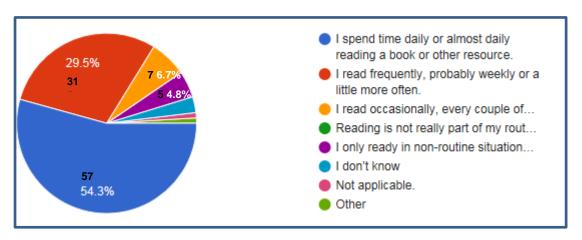

Figure 9: Summary of respondents' reading habits (Source: Field data, 2016)

In short, more than half of the respondents would read on daily basis.

The Role of Reading Habits in Promoting Lifelong Learning

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed to a number of aspects that assist in promoting lifelong learning abilities among students. These include the role of reading in shaping minds, rational reasoning, acquisition of lifelong learning skills, development perspectives, creative and problem solving skills, development of modern societies, foundations of learning, academic performance, speaking skills and proficiency in language. It was revealed that respondents were optimistic that if reading culture was instilled among them, they would be better future lifelong learners. For example out of 105 respondents, 76(72%) of the respondents strongly agreed that reading sharpens individual's mind while only one respondent disagreed to the statement. In addition, 83(79%) strongly agreed that reading is instrumental for acquiring lifelong learning skills while only one respondent disagreed. In addition 90(85.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that reading improves academic performance and excellence while only one respondent disagreed to the statement.

Obstacles to Reading Habits and ways to Encourage Reading Culture and Lifelong Learning Abilities

Respondents were asked to point out factors that interfere with their reading habits. The results show that 54(51.4%) of the respondents mentioned too much academic work interferes with their reading habits, 35(33.3%) of the respondents mentioned lack of reading habits due to limited internet connectivity, 29(27.9%) pointed out too much family responsibilities, 22(21%) mentioned job responsibilities, 20(19%) of the respondents said they were not be able to afford buying books and accessing reading resources while others mentioned factors such as erratic electricity, too many disturbances, vision problems and few or no reading resources to their favourable topics.

Based on the above obstacles, respondents were asked to suggest ways through which reading culture may be promoted among students in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. One respondents made the following remarks:

> *Academic libraries should acquire relevant books and other materials that meet customerneeds. The information contained should be current and in both formats, print or electronic. Also, academic libraries should liaise with the academic departments so that both enable customers to get relevant content (books, journals, magazines, e-books, e-journals etc.). For example in colleges or universities academic libraries should provide reference books to students*

> *as it appears on course outline. When a lecturer assigns an assignment then a student should not struggle to get a document from the library.* (Respondent 27, IRDP)

Apart from furnishing libraries with requisite reading resources and improving reading environments, one respondent from DUCE had this to say:

> *Libraries should sensitize students on the importance of reading not only for academic excellence or job attainment but also excellence in reasoning and thinking, decision making, self-awareness, imagination, innovation and self-confidence. They may do so by introducing reading programme either once per week or a month in order to motivate students and users to have habit on reading.*

However, one PhD student from UDSM preferred to provide his opinion in Kiswahili. Here is what the respondent said:

> *Library zinaweza kuboreshwa kwa kuweka namna tofauti za usomaji, kama sio lazima kusoma kitabu mtu anaependa movie anaweza kukisoma kitabu kama kimetayarishwa kwa njia kama ya movie au documentary, masimuliza ya kitabu hicho. Mfano kitabu cha Bencarson Gifted hand wengi hawajasoma ila wameangalia movie yake. Hivyo napendekeza vitabu vingi ziwe na Cd zake (compact disc) zenye movie ya kitabu. Library zikiwa hivi itakuwa rahisi kwa watu wengi kupenda kujisomea.*

The above quotation literally implies that libraries may be improved by providing different ways of inculcating reading habits such as through movies, documentaries, literary works such as Bencarson Gifted hand (which came out in form of a movie), and by including Movie CDs within books. The above comments demonstrate that libraries have an important role in promoting reading culture among students at larger.

The above results reflect inspite of the fact that students read during their spare time, their reading habits are not well demonstrated. For example, while 28(26.7%) of the student respondents read print books daily, there were about 29(27.6%) of the respondents who read on weekly basis and another 29(27.6%) of the repondents whose reading patterns were irregular. By and large, the results consistently indicate that there are more students whose reading patterns are irregular but this fact is watered down by their preferences to other social media such as Facebook and YouTube. Igwe (2011) advises that it is high time for libraries to invest more on common media that is regularly accessed by readers than sticking to the ones that may end up discouraging readers to access useful content responsible for promoting their reading culture. In this regard, Internet and TV have emerged to pose as alternative media to books, which should therefore be utilized effectively (Akanda et al., 2013). This is further echoed by one of the respondents from DUCE who participated in this survey as the comment below demonstrates:

> *Academic Libraries should design digital libraries so that users should access its resources using the gadgets they always use including Mobile Phones, Tablets, Laptops and other related social media.*

Much as their reading patterns seem erratic, this study revealed that apart from reading, many students resort to other activities. . These include watching TV, listening to radio, talking to friends, gardening and so on. Based on such scenarios, it is quite evident that libraries should consider new strategies of reaching out students in their most preferable ways of spending their academic life apart from reading and encourage them to read in a bid to build their lifelong learning capabilities. Examples from the following extracts by respondents reflect what librarians in academic institutions should do:

> *Academic libraries should provide conducive environment for reading; incentives for readers and provide other services that attract users such as Coffee cafes, discussion forums and so on to improve reading culture.* (Respondent 4, LST)

> *Libraries should do more of outreaching programs to attract more readers. They should create reading and writing clubs at schools to empower students in education at large as well as motivate the winners. They should also have a display TV (programs) with educative channels which will attract more students in learning and reading to uncover more stories in the world.* (Student 6, DUCE)

Results from the survey reveal that students demonstrated the importance of reading habits in encouraging lifelong learning skills, which are important in life both during and after studies.. Lifelong learning skills enable an individual to gain confidence, mental stimulation and satisfaction in life. A person who acquires lifelong learning skills is well informed, hence, accumulates relevant lifelong experiences and is able to make informed decisions during stressful and difficult moments (Hyde & Phillipson, 2014).

Despite the importance of reading culture to individuals in a modern society, this survey revealed a number of factors that impede success. These include lack of reading resources in libraries and among individuals, l and lack of favourable reading environments. O ne respondent made the following comment:

> *Libraries should create convenient reading environments by making more physical space, add more resources to fit the number of library users as well as create atmosphere that is as conducive to learning as possible.* (Respondent 4, LST)

The above comment is echoed in the literature For example, Abdul-jabbar (2016) recommends that reading culture can be developed among individuals across the nations by creating reading friendly environment in libraries as well as developing lecturers and academicians the culture of reading. This may be achieved by giving students tasks that may require them to read beyond the academic limits so as to enhance their thinking capacities Reading clubs and competitions are very important in making students creative thinkers and maximize resources. .

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings show that reading culture among students with regard to print media is still low among students. Perhaps this is due to emergence of other media such as web 2.0 tools and multimedia. Despite being engaged in various reading activities, challenges such as too much academic work, limited internet connection and family responsibilities are among others, that constrain their reading habits. Thus, librarians have to play their role in cultivating and maintaining reading culture among students by creating conducive environments and acquiring resources that match with the ever-evolving academic reading practices.

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