
Context Matters

— RESEARCH GRANTS —

2020-2023 Context Matters Awarded Grants (Round 3)

Research title: Adolescents' literacy practices in and out of school in Uganda

Principle Investigator: Dr. Rebecca Nambi
School of Education, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

Co-researcher: Dr. Rovincer Najjuma,
School of Education, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Research location: Kikuube and Wakiso Districts, Uganda.

Research dates: April 2021 – April 2023

Dr. Rebecca Nambi, PhD, is currently a Lecturer for the Department of Humanities and Language Education at the Makerere University's School of Education. She currently teaches Masters level courses on English Language and Literature Resource Development and Management and Theory and context of Language and Literature Pedagogy. She also supervises Masters degree students and PhD candidates, and tutors on English language, Literature in English and Distance Education Programs. Dr. Nambi is the Coordinator of the PhD program in her faculty and she also participates on a number of committees including the Anti-sexual Harassment committee and the Uganda Association of University Women. Dr. Nambi has been conducting research, presenting papers, and publishing articles focused on the topics of education, youth, literacy, and educational research in Uganda and sub-Saharan Africa since 2013.

Summary: Literacy is on the world agenda and it is recognized as a major skill needed for development and personal wellbeing in society. Global monitoring reports by UNESCO place Uganda's youth literacy levels at 89% (UNESCO UIS, 2018) while NDP III (2020) marks the same at 74%. Although these reports indicate that there is an improvement in the literacy rates among the youth, there are few details related to the reading practices of youth as observed in the school or home contexts. The voices of the young readers are also missing in these and other global reports on literacy. Adolescent literacy is a complex terrain to analyze because youth take part in numerous literacy activities most of which are self-motivated and may not directly relate to the school curriculum (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008). The social reading context in secondary school is unique in the sense that learners at this level make personal literacy choices that are 'hidden' to the teacher or parent, creating a gap in the knowledge of what they read or more importantly whether they read.

The research team will explore the literacy practices and habits of adolescent learners in a refugee host community and in a semi-urban rural community in Uganda through sociocultural and critical literacy theoretical lenses. Using a qualitative research approach under the symbolic interactionism paradigm, they will engage both teachers and learners to: establish teachers' understanding of literacy in the context of their students' experiences; determine motivations for

young people's reading practices in and out of school; examine if teachers' views of literacy are similar or different from policy documents for the purpose; examine how adolescents in Uganda perceive how reading influences their lived experiences in the community; and find out the challenges that affect young people's reading practices in Uganda

The research will contribute towards addressing the gap in the limited literature on adolescent literacy in the Ugandan setting, draw attention to what young learners read and write in Uganda and how this may influence their personal and societal development; establish how youth interpret gender, empowerment, community, and their personal realities; and contribute to the global discussion on adolescents' literacy practices in developing contexts.