
Context Matters

— RESEARCH GRANTS —

2022-2024 Context Matters Awarded Grants (Round 4)

Research title: Advancing Critical Literacy Practices of Secondary School Teachers in Uganda

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Research dates: February 2022 – January 2024

Summary:

According to the Ugandan Population and Housing Census of 2002, Uganda had the lowest literacy rates within the East African region. It is asserted in the report that literacy is important because as a country Uganda “needs citizens who can actively participate in democracy” therefore literacy education should “not only concern reading and writing, but also about personal dignity, the right to participate, the empowerment of the marginalized and excluded, and the opportunity to learn in a variety of ways and settings” (p.43). Implicitly, the report acknowledges literacy as a human right and highlights the causal relationship between critical literacy and the promotion of sustainable development. Critical literacy is a concept involving the use of critical thinking to motivate the ethics of “democracy, equity, and social justice” (Freire 1970; Kunnath and Jackson 2019). Education has a role to play in promoting critical literacy particularly because of its potential to contribute to sustainable development. Critical literacy should become an essential part of teaching praxis and more importantly of teacher education programs. This study is therefore interested in examining how female teachers encourage production of counter-texts and the challenges involved, how they encourage learners to read against the grain and to be resisting readers, and most importantly the study seeks to know how these teachers can be supported to achieve a critical stance in their praxis.

This study will draw on the experiences of in-service female teachers who are former students of Kyambogo University who majored in English and Literature as their core-teaching subjects for their Bachelor of Arts with Education degree program. The research team will interrogate female teachers’ knowledge of critical literacy, their experiences and challenges teaching with critical literacy, the gaps and the opportunities that can be harnessed to support the teaching with and learning of critical literacy in secondary schools in Uganda. The study is partly premised on the assumption that a critically literate teacher will produce critically literate and empowered learners.

Through the in-depth analysis of a select group of teachers, this research project has the potential to advance the critical literacy skills and knowledge of these secondary school teachers and their students; and contribute context specific evidence for what critical literacy and gender inclusive teaching looks like and means in Africa. It will also enhance opportunities for female in-service teachers to network, learn and develop skills and good practices.

Dr. Dorothy Atuhura holds a PhD in English with minor in Women's & Gender Studies, from the University of Missouri, Columbia (USA), a MA English Literature from Makerere University (Uganda), an MA Linguistics, University of Leeds (UK). She is currently a lecturer and Head of Department, Department of Literature and Film Studies at Kyambogo University, Uganda. Dorothy is an educationalist, who is passionate about girls education and working to reduce barriers to their development.

Aisha Nansubuga is a Graduate Fellow in the Department of Literature and Film Studies, Kyambogo University, Kampala, Uganda. She is an experienced researcher who is currently working as a Research Assistant under Dr. Dorothy Atuhura in an ongoing research project at Kyambogo University on sexual harassment. She is also pursuing a Masters of Arts in Literature and has successfully finalized her dissertation. She has a passion for promoting research through critical reading and analytical writing and to help influence and formulate key policies.