

## **Uncovering reading habits of university students in Uganda: Does ICT matter?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can improve reading habits among university students. We also investigated the influence of home culture, school culture and disposable income on reading habit. Our main objective was to assess the effect of ICT on the reading habit of particularly university students in Uganda. We adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach for the study in order to get an in-depth understanding of how the ICT phenomenon impacts reading habits. Participants from four universities in Uganda were interviewed. Major findings indicate that most of the students find the use of ICT a necessity that lends a helping hand in accessing reading sources. The school culture, home culture and disposable income also impact the reading habit of students and particularly have an influence on ICT and reading. We also found that most participants were initiated into reading by use of force at home. This study provides a unique contribution through empirical evidence that ICT indeed impacts one's reading habit and thereafter proposes policy implications that may improve the reading habit of students through ICT interventions.

**Keywords:** *Information and Communication Technology, Home culture, School culture, Disposable income, Reading habit, Uganda*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The pervasive nature of information and communication technologies (ICT) has resulted in a fundamental shift in the way people access and read materials. Reading is an interactive process of sense making from printed or written words and is key to success in any academic pursuit and indeed in life. However the black people have rhetorically been known to have a poor reading culture. Lewis H. Michaux (a black American activist and book seller who lived between 1884-1976) once said "the best way to hide something from a black man is to put it in a book". A person's reading habit is developed over time; it therefore goes beyond the ability to just read and write to play a very crucial role in a person's day-to-day life to a point when it evolves into a habit and eventually a culture. According to Jönsson and Olsson (2008:27) "a reading culture means that reading is part of a specific culture and a habit that is shared and valued highly by that particular society". The African culture is "an oral society" where people do more chatting than reading (Jönsson, & Olsson 2008; Mulindwa as cited in Nalusiba 2010). Research on reading

culture in the African context has been conducted in the recent past by many researchers (Aliyu & Bilkisu 2012; Doiron & Asselin 2010; Ifedili 2009; Jönsson & Olsson 2008; Kaberia 2012; Nalusiba 2010; Ogwu 2010; Otike 2011; Owusu-Acheaw, 2014; Ruterana 2012a, 2012b). These studies have attempted to assess the reason for the continued poor reading culture of Africans and proposed ways of improving it. This poor reading habit has been attributed to factors such as the colonial education system, limited access to reading materials, effect of the mother tongue (Ruterana 2012a), poor government policies, (Aliyu & Bilkisu 2012; Otike 2011), poor parental training and nurturing, limited disposable income, reluctance by teachers to nurture it and the rooted use of oral communication (Doiron & Asselin 2010; Kaberia 2012; Nalusiba 2010). Jönsson and Olsson (2008) purported that we are faced with two cultures; the home culture that is dominated by oral communication usually in a local language and the school culture that is based around colonial education system centred on reading and writing. Even though the oral culture of Africans allows for interaction within their society, reading and writing is a global and dominant culture that must be adopted for interoperability with other cultures.

Previous research studies on whether ICT has impacted reading culture have mostly been limited to the Western context (Liu 2005; Nicholas, Huntington, Jamali, Rowlands, Dobrowolski & Tenopir 2008). Africa has tapped into ICT with a lot of public and private sector reforms to benefit from it; however has ICT had any effect on the reading culture of Africans? Ugandan universities (Baryamureeba, 2007) have embarked on developing ICTs and specifically access to the Internet to facilitate learning and reading through subscription to e-resources. Bradford (2012) establishes that technology has rewired the brain infrastructure and hence impacted our reading habits, specifically looking at deep reading. This notwithstanding, the reading culture has seemingly not significantly changed. In many cases, students in Africa only read classroom materials whenever there are assignments but do not engage in leisure reading (Kaberia 2012; Nalusiba 2010). Ifedili (2009) emphasizes the importance of good reading culture that succinctly include improvement of individual's welfare, social progress and international understanding.

In this study, we delve on reading habits of university students in terms of reading class work and leisure reading. Leisure reading is any reading done by choice for pleasure. It has been found to improve "fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, cognitive development, verbal skills, content knowledge", among others (Covert, 2009:1). The extent to which university students use these ICTs for reading may be linked to their home and school culture; whether they were exposed to them at an earlier time and disposable income; their ability to afford the ICTs. We therefore also attempted to make the connection of the home culture, school culture and disposable income with ICT and reading habits. Information is power and a key enabler for personal and societal development (Ifedili 2009; Ogwu 2010; Ribeiro as cited by Nalusiba 2010; Ruterana 2012a). This implies that failure to generate or tap into information leads to a retarded growth of not only the person but the country at large. The importance of literacy is demonstrated by the annual World literacy day celebrations commemorated on 8<sup>th</sup> September every year. Uganda has set up "vision 2040" with plans to become a middle income knowledge-based economy by the year 2040. This however may remain a far cry if the persistent problem of poor reading is not tackled first.

The main objective of this study was to assess the effect of ICT on the reading culture of university students in Uganda. We also investigated other salient causes of poor reading habits that in a way impact reading culture. The study was therefore guided by the following research questions;

- (1) What is the reading habit of the university students in Uganda?
- (2) How does home culture influence the reading habit of university students in Uganda?
- (3) How does school culture affect the reading habits of university students in Uganda?
- (4) How does disposable income impact the reading habit of university students in Uganda?
- (5) How does ICT impact the reading habit of university students in Uganda?

The results of this study will be useful to education policy-makers in Uganda in the application of ICT in education in order to inculcate a reading culture and make reading more enjoyable. This will ultimately benefit the entire country as the people will have more access to information that can help shape their decision making. The findings will also benefit other oral societies and add to the pool of knowledge on ICT and reading.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We adopted a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological approach for the study. The approach was selected because it enables a researcher to describe the meaning of lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon for several individuals (Creswell 2009). According to Moustakas (1994) hermeneutical phenomenology is one that is oriented towards lived experiences and interpreting the texts of life (hermeneutics). The researcher studies a phenomenon and makes an interpretation according to the meaning he/she depicts from the lived experiences of the people. Hermeneutical phenomenology possesses an interpretive attitude which allows phenomena to show themselves in an intelligible manner to mankind. However, the research design of qualitative studies is not fixed and sometimes approaches may overlap each other, it is therefore important to ensure flexibility in the design.

Three public universities and one degree awarding institution in Uganda were selected for the study. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants from these universities. Purposeful sampling method was selected in order to identify participants who are already using ICT and hence able to offer valid insights into how ICT has impacted their reading habits. According to Creswell (1994) the recommended sample size for phenomenological design is usually between 5-25 participants while Morse (1994, as cited in Mason 2010) suggests a sample size of at least 6 participants. A total of 15 participants were interviewed for this study. The unit of analysis was students; Bachelors Degree, Postgraduate Diploma, Masters Degree and Doctoral students. The participants comprised of 10 Bachelors Degree students, 2 Postgraduate Diploma students, 2 Masters Degree students and 1 Doctoral student. This participant representation is consistent with the student makeup in most Ugandan universities.

Interviewing and observation were the main methods of data collection. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and sign off on the accuracy of the transcription after verbatim transcription of the interview text. We used the principle of crystallization (Ellingson 2008) to ensure trustworthiness by using more than one source of data to inform the study. These comprised of the confirmative interviews with the participants, our own reflective and observational notes, and reviews of the transcripts by the participants. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously in order to decide how to test the emergent conclusions as supported by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). QSR NVivo 8 software and Ms Excel were used for data analysis. QSR NVivo is software used for analysis of qualitative data.

For ethical purposes, the participants were requested to participate at their own volition. Permission was sought from the participants before proceeding with the data collection. Appointments were sought prior to the interviews in order to establish a convenient time for the participants. We fully introduced ourselves, the purpose of the study, the duration of the interviews, and data collection methods. Permission to audio-record the interview was also sought. The venues for the interviews were selected by the participants to suit their comfort in order to reduce bias presented by the environment surrounding them. For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms were used to disguise the participant's identities and the participants were duly informed.

## THE ANALYSIS

### Reading Habit of university students in Uganda

The first research question we attempted to answer was; what is the reading habit of the university students in Uganda? We investigated the reading attitudes and habits of university students. From our findings we found interesting titles that some participants used to describe their reading habits; Ronald<sup>1</sup> defined himself as a reading hater, Vivian as a teachers' child hence is accustomed to reading, Suzanne as an ardent reader and Elaine as a lazy reader.

Seven of the participants indicated that they spend most of their leisure time on the Internet especially social media sites. They also indicated that they spend time watching TV and listening to music, visiting friends and family, reading literature and newspapers, praying, reading class materials, sports and any other social activities such as drinking. The question was multivariate in nature therefore participants indicated more than one activity. The finding shows that not as much time as was indicated by other researchers such as Kaberia (2012) is spent reading class materials. Studies by Ifedili (2009) and Owusu-Acheaw (2014) found that students read prescribed textbooks only during examination period in order to pass the examinations; very few students buy novels to read for knowledge and pleasure. The finding is a point of departure from those findings because our participants indicated that they engage in leisure reading more often than prescribed textbooks after class hours. However, this may be the case because they consider reading class materials something done at school and not during their leisure time.

Also, eleven of the participants agreed that they actually enjoy reading even though it's not in preparation for an examination; with only four saying they do not like reading. Asked if they find time for leisure reading, almost all the participants (thirteen) responded in affirmative. The most read and owned literature types were spiritual building books, self-building/motivational/inspirational books, newspapers and documentaries, politics/economics, culture, current affairs, novels/entertainment books and lastly literature on social trends. This question was multivariate too therefore participants indicated more than one category of material for leisure reading.

Another question was asked on what motivates them to read and they indicated that they read for self-growth and inspiration, to gain information and knowledge, to keep up with trends for entertainment, for spiritual growth and for pleasure/relaxation. For example Bruce responded, *"I am a dynamic person but it comes with a price. When I am talking with other people, I don't like to seem ignorant. I have a lot of friends from different countries so when I am interacting with them, I want to be articulate and talk with confidence to sensitize the ignorant ones, and exchange ideas with intellectuals like you. You know, so that they see that you actually know what you are talking about. I read to gain knowledge and information so that I can hold constructive conversations with friends"*. Bruce shows that he reads in order to belong to society. Reading is mostly an individual endeavour and activity that leads to individual gains and eventually affects the entire society. Eight of the participants indicated that they read on a daily basis while seven said they don't.

### Home culture

The second research question was; how does one's home culture influence their reading habit? The African home culture is deeply ingrained in many aspects of our lives. According to Gamsrieglar (2005) and Hall (1976) Africans fall under the high-context culture group that is characterised by long-lasting relationships, exploitation of context, spoken agreements, insiders and outsiders clearly distinguished, cultural patterns ingrained, collectiveness, belongingness,

<sup>1</sup> All names used are not real names of participants.

patience and slow change. The African culture is also an oral culture or society where people prefer talking to reading which is considered solitary (Jönsson & Olsson 2008; Kaberia 2012). People come in contact with home culture (Jönsson and Olsson 2008) that affects many aspects of their lives. A study by Yoke, Anuar and Vasuthavan (2008) establishes that the society is the most contributing factor or enabler of lifelong reading among Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Johor students. The theme “home culture” was developed to cater for all activities, influences, interests, motivations and resources out of school that may influence reading habit.

Twelve of the participants stated that their parents encouraged them to read at home. Many of the participants who indicated a semblance of encouragement to read by parents however stated that it was more like “forcing” them to read. For example Linda said *“Yeah, my dad mostly. At first it was more like forcing but with time we got accustomed to it. My dad was doing his Masters [degree] so he would actually wake us up to read with him”*. Elaine said, *“Yes, especially my mother. She would actually sometimes force us to read. Things like awaking us at night to read for an examination. I remember my father was so against it and also us reading class work during holidays but my mother always got her way. You know; orders from above [laughs]. But I appreciate it now; I guess I would be worse”*. Ian’s reading was sometimes enforced by use of a cane. He said *“not encouraging me but more like forcing me to read. I didn’t really like reading then, so my mother would just force me with a cane besides her. But I would actually read only when I wanted to”*. Some few participants like Vivian and Suzanne showed total encouragement without much force from their parents. Vivian exclaimed *“as a child of teachers my parents taught me how to read. I actually learnt how to read and write before I started school”*. Daniel on the other hand mentioned that in his childhood there were lots of house chores that didn’t leave time for reading. He said *“My parents only encouraged me to read class work. There wasn’t even much time to read things like story books, there was a lot of work at home”*.

On whether there is a connection between earlier exposure to ICT at home and its usage in reading; most of the participants indicated that they were only exposed to computers during high school and university and not at home. Linda whose father owned a desktop computer indicated that the exposure made the use of ICT easier for her at a young age and therefore she learnt to adopt it in many activities such as reading. Daniel said, *“I never heard of computers until high school, maybe if we had one at home it would be easier for me because I just learnt how to search for information using ICT resources when I reached university, actually after first year. Initially I could only use a computer to type documents and play games”*. This is indicative that students exposed to computers at home from childhood adopted it in reading more easily.

One outstanding response was that most of the nurturing into reading was done by mothers. Nine of the participants specified that they were nurtured into reading by their mothers. Martin’s response was *“My parents did nurture me to read. My father is a teacher by profession but he joined politics, you know how politicians are [smiles], they don’t have much time for their family. My mother who would have maybe encouraged me is illiterate, she can’t read herself”*. In the African culture, most of the nurturing of children is left for the mothers in most families. Asked if the education level of mothers significantly impacts the nurturing, Martin further said *“Yes, you know mothers usually have more time for their children and so can help with such things like teaching them to read so if she is illiterate she can’t really nurture you into reading”*. The negative impact of poor parental training and nurturing on reading is supported by other researchers (Doiron & Asselin 2010; Kaberia 2012; Nalusiba 2010).

The findings indicate that there is a strong influence of our home culture on our reading. Thirteen of the participants agreed that their parents actually ensured to provide them with books to read at home, while a significant number of them (nine) had friends with books that they could share. Asked if they think reading disconnects them from society; eleven of them said no. Albeit being from an oral society, most participants do not believe that reading will cut them away from the

society. One participant, Bruce, explains *“I believe reading exists within a society and a peaceful one for that matter. Therefore society simply creates a superior platform for the betterment of me as a learner. And in most cases before we read or write any literature we are inspired by our societies. So reading does not deprive me of my society”*. Another participant Ronald however said *“Sometimes reading cuts me away from the society especially during examination preparations where I don’t need any interference or distractions from the society”*.

Even though half of the participants said they have read books written in vernacular before; with the exception of Ronald, all of them said they would rather not read it now mostly because they believe they would be too slow in reading since they are more proficient in reading English. Ronald said, *“Not all the books I read were written in English, some of them were written in Luganda and Lusoga [local languages in Uganda]. I still prefer books written especially in Luganda.”* The study by Tembo and Norton (2008) that posits that reading and instructions should be done in local languages at an earlier stage to improve our reading habit is disputed here because despite seven of the participants indicating that their early reading was partially done in a local language, they would rather not continue doing that because it makes them slow and may cause them to reduce their reading as it will be considered a time wasting venture. The influence of home culture therefore provides the environment in which individuals make their decision to read or not to read.

### School culture

Our third research question was; how does one’s school culture affect their reading habits? We investigated activities and resources available right from lower school that may have influenced participants’ reading habits. The participants were asked if they had libraries in their primary and secondary schools, whether they actually had access to the books, whether they used to read them and whether they had computer resources.

Nine of the participants indicated they had a library in Primary school while all of them had libraries in Secondary school. However, some of the participants said they didn’t have access to the books. Linda said *“Yeah, we did have a library, but we would never be allowed into the library. The Headmaster would just give books to the teachers who brought them for us”*. This shows how hard it was to get the books. Martin stated that *“For me I saw a library for the first time in secondary school. We used to just read our teachers’ notes. After school, I mostly spent time fetching water, rearing animals and other house chores so reading was not really something I had time for then. You know it is worse if you are from upcountry”*. He gives a twist of how house chores deterred him from reading and this was the same sentiment got from Daniel and Nathan. Nathan mentioned that going to a boarding school afforded one more time to read. He said *“Yes, definitely, at least they go for preps [preparations is the time when students are expected to do personal reading] and don’t have a lot of housework to do. In my Primary school I was in a day school and after school I would have a lot of house work to do, there wasn’t enough time to read. So the little reading time would be spent reading class work”*.

Asked if participants had ICT resources such as computers and Internet connectivity at school, all indicated that they didn’t have them in primary school level while some had them in secondary school level. Elaine said, *“The first time I saw a computer was in my final high school year, at first I thought it was a television set [laughs]. But it was only used by the school administrators not students, I think there were only two computers in the school. As for Internet, I am sure even the head teacher didn’t have access to it. I started using the Internet to search for reading materials for class work during my Masters programme”*. Elaine completed high school in 2001. The younger participants indicated that they were taught computer studies in high school and used to access the Internet from Internet cafes. Bruce mentioned that; *“I used to read newspapers from*

*the Internet as early as senior four and so I always knew I could find information from the Internet".* The participants who had access to ICT resources in school generally showed that it was easier for them to search for information from the Internet compared to those who didn't. The ones who were not exposed to computers in primary and secondary generally took longer to learn how to search for information online.

Most of our reading is thought to be done at school or due to school (Kaberia 2012). Reading should not be taken merely as a school activity but a life activity because of its ability to enhance the chances of success at school and beyond (Ifedili 2009; Jönsson & Olsson 2008). However, reading in the African culture is thought of as solitary, antisocial, abnormal activity that is reserved for school (Machet 2002 as cited in Jönsson & Olsson 2008). It is also something that is concluded with the end of formal education as people do not see its need and prefer to use oral and performing arts thereafter (Tötemeyer as cited in Nalusiba 2010). Worse of all, there is reluctance by teachers to nurture reading among students in school (Doiron & Asselin 2010). Just like the home culture, school culture lends the environment in which individuals make their decision either to read or not. As supported by Kabeira (2012) and Owusu-Acheaw (2014), many people read prescribed text books in order to pass an examination.

### **Disposable income**

We also attempted to answer the research question; how does disposable income impact the reading habit of university students in Uganda? For one to be able to read there is need to have access to reading materials mostly obtained by purchasing them. However many Africans are still struggling to have basic items and therefore have no income to buy books (Kaberia 2012; Nalusiba 2010). We probed participants on whether it makes more meaning for them to buy reading materials or ICT devices that can then be used to access reading materials. Fourteen of the participants indicated that they would rather use their limited disposable income to purchase ICT resources than books. For example Elaine said, *"I have the disposable income alright, but to use it to buy books, that is just not something I do a lot. Besides, books are bulky. For ICT resources at least I don't run out of data bundles, I have a smart phone and a laptop. Those I don't mind, I access a lot of reading materials from the Internet than I would if I were to use that money to buy physical books."* Elaine explained that she easily accesses a plethora of reading materials using her ICT devices. Only Suzanne indicated she would rather buy books because her office offers her adequate ICT resources already therefore she can use those to access additional reading materials. Suzanne indicated that she prefers reading physical books but the issue of disposable income is one that comes to play when deciding which one to use.

Researchers such as Kaberia (2012) and Nalusiba (2010) attribute the poor reading of Africans to the limited disposable income and state that many Africans are struggling to have basic items and therefore have no income to buy books. Some of the participants we interviewed mentioned that having a physical book is more of a bother. They mostly attribute their discomfort to the responsibility of keeping the book in a good condition, especially if it is borrowed because failure to do that comes with a penalty in most cases which in turn eats up their limited disposable income. Most of the participants showed hesitation in spending their disposable income to buy books but were more willing to use the same to purchase or access ICT resources. Martin said *"Yeah, ICT is more affordable, when you use the Internet to search for information or reading materials you get much more than what you would have got from buying the materials. The cost of accessing the Internet is too cheap now. I just load MBs [Megabytes] of 300 shillings [Uganda shillings] and I am able to access the Internet for a long time. At least I can afford that easily but there are no books at 300 shillings"*. This shows that for reading to improve, there may be need to spend our limited disposable income, both personal and national on improving ICT that will in turn be used to access reading materials.

### ICT intervention

Our last and major research question was; how does ICT impact the reading habit of university students in Uganda? We sought to find out how ICT is used to enable reading such as the use of Internet and devices to access reading materials. The questions were geared towards establishing whether the participants had access to these and if they in any way impacted their reading.

All the participants indicated that they access the Internet, with fourteen of them on a daily basis except Doreen who said she accesses once in 2 weeks unless there is need. The most common way of accessing is using university WiFi, this indicates that all the universities sampled actually offer Internet connectivity even though inadequate sometimes. For example Martin said, *"I don't have a laptop and so I have to rely mostly on my phone to access the Internet. When at the university I use the WiFi but the bad thing it is only around this place [circles the area we were]. It used to be in some other parts of the campus too but it just went off and we don't know why. So if you want to access WiFi you have to come here and look for a place to sit because it is always crowded"*. Eleven of the participants also said they access the Internet using their mobile phones, with seven of them using Modems and five going to Internet cafes. This question was multi-variant and therefore some participants mentioned more than one access method.

We established that among the activities that the participants engaged in while online, reading was salient. For example Laura said *"Social news, I love reading celebrity gossip, it's the first thing I check for when I go online. I also check my mails, Facebook and sometimes I search for materials for school assignments"* hence showing her inclination to leisure reading over Internet sources. Linda on the other hand said *"Most times I am searching for materials for assignments, like the project that I just presented required a lot of coding to develop so this semester has been spent mostly looking for the codes and reading to build my system. But once in a while I also read entertainment stuff, inspirational stories. The other main one is social media; I love it a lot especially Facebook"*. This shows Linda's inclination is to reading class materials via online sources.

Downloading of information in video format seems to also take centre stage, with eight of the participants saying they source for them compared to only seven participants who search for audio data. In the African setting, information is conveyed through narrations and demonstrations because it is a chatting society (Nalusiba, 2010). Audio and video formats may interest readers more because they are closer to what the African society is accustomed to than text format. Nathan said *"Video is the best, you are able to really see the person and the illustrations he is doing. Videos usually give more information and you are able to get it in a shorter time than when reading. When you read for a long time, you even end up dozing off; at least videos are more interesting"*. However due to bandwidth issues, the download of video and audio format is still limited though preferred. Linda's reservations for video downloads was *"Video would be the best but it's just too expensive to download. They consume a lot of data but they are more interesting."* Therefore, whenever possible participants use videos in order to maximize their utility (understanding or enjoyment).

### ICT and Reading

All the participants agreed that ICT improves reading. For example Bruce said *"There is a positive correlation between reading and ICT. ICT has made access to reading materials 100% cheaper. It helps when you are constrained by time or money.... I always load data bundles worth UGX"*



2,000 and use that for a whole week and I am able to download a lot of things. The print books are always very old so at least what I find online is preferable to read." Elaine also said "To me ICT really has helped improve my reading. I wouldn't read even a quarter of what I read now if not for ICT.... printed materials are too expensive compared to reading on the computer screen".

In this case, ICT is seen as an enabler of reading; something that makes access to reading materials more affordable and easier. The inclination of most participants towards choosing to spend their disposable income to purchase ICT resources instead of physical reading materials can be explicated by the fact that they appreciate that these ICT resources can enable them access even more materials to read. Bruce however concluded by saying "*The University provides WiFi but there is a problem of electricity outages [which is quite a common occurrence]. When power is off and you want to access something online, you wish you had a hard copy*".

A number of researchers such as Liu (2005), Nicholas et al. (2008), Pew Research Center (PRC) (2014) have conducted research on ICT and reading. Our unique contribution is in terms of introducing home culture, school culture and disposable income to shape the flow of the interview towards the final output which was how ICT has impacted reading habits of university students in Uganda. In the interviews, we established that all the participants likened computers and the Internet to reading showing that ICT improves reading. These findings present an interesting opportunity to improve reading habits and eventually reading culture of university students in Uganda as a vehicle for the much needed change. PRC (2014) conducted research specifically on e-reading (reading from e-resources) and also found that as devices increase, e-reading has also increased among Americans, unlike the many connotations placed by some authors on the negative influence of technology such as television, video games and the Internet on reading claiming that with the rise in technology, leisure reading has constantly declined in America. ICT also presents many new positive effects on reading (Ofstad 2005). Andrew (2004, as cited in Ofstad, 2005:47) in his conclusion said;

"We need to make reading, which is in its essence a solitary endeavour, a social one as well, to encourage the great thrill of finding kinship in shared experiences of books. We must weave reading back into the very fabric of the culture, and make it a mainstay of community".

ICT has gone a long way in facilitating social structure by enabling communal reading, for example Oprah's Book Club uses ICT to keep many people together and engage them in communal reading (Ofstad, 2005). Sites such as Amazon.com also enable people to find books related to what they like reading by suggesting them to buyers when they visit the site and also offer reviews that persuade one to buy the books. One of the participants of this study; Ian when asked if he has ever purchased a book online said "*No I have never; I just check sites like Amazon to see the latest books*". Only one participant indicated that he had ever purchased a book online. This low trend is mostly attributed to underdeveloped infrastructure to enable the purchase as Vivian stated when she said "*I have never purchased online, how do I even begin? Those people want debit or credit cards which I don't have. How do you purchase books online by the way?*" Internet bookselling has also availed the opportunity to people to access almost all print books in digital format therefore ICT can be seen as a catalyst for reading.

## CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

In this article, we sought to investigate four variables that influence the reading habit of university students in Uganda. Our main finding is that in the group of adult learners we interviewed, there seems to be a crucial relationship between the use of ICT and their reading habit. The high-context culture group under which Africans fall is characterised by long-lasting relationships, exploiting context, spoken agreements, insiders and outsiders clearly distinguished, cultural

patterns ingrained, collectiveness, belongingness, patience and slow change (Gamsriegler 2005; Hall 1976). Subsequently the reading habit may continue to improve with collective effort of which we found ICT as a facilitator for this collective effort and oral society.

Ofstad (2005) posits that in the future, reading will move from paper and ink to screens and possibly render the traditional physical books obsolete without necessarily shifting the leisure reading culture but only the medium of reading. Our findings show that the shift towards technology is inevitable and therefore getting accustomed to it is something of a necessity. Ofstad maps out the shifts which came with resistance from spoken words, to written words, to printed words and now to screened words but remarks that it's natural for people to resist change and to also inevitably adopt the change. He recommends that instead of fighting technology, we should use it to popularise reading. ICT motivates pupils in schools to gain more interest in school work (Passey, Rogers, Machell & McHugh 2004). With the growth of ICT in the country, more effort should be put in using it to enhance reading due to its ability to avail information in formats that interest our cultural set-up; audio, video and pictorial coupled with enabling easier sharing of the literature. With low disposable income, our findings reveal that most people would rather spend their money acquiring ICT resources that will enable them access reading materials than physical books. The web has been used increasingly as a reading source (Hassan 2007) therefore expending on ICT resources may also increase reading. Bradford (2012) however puts forward that using technology presents dynamic interactions that require multitasking which in turn robs a reader the ability to concentrate on one thing, something that is necessary in deep reading. According to Bradford, some school of thought argue that the multitasking presented by technology inhibits the growth and maturity of the brain while another school of thought concludes that it actually hastens brain growth and maturity.

This article sought to investigate the use of ICT to build a sustainable habit of reading among university students in Uganda. Despite the many articles on reading habits of the African people, (Aliyu & Bilkisu 2012; Doiron & Asselin 2010; Ifedili 2009; Jönsson & Olsson 2008; Kaberia 2012; Nalusiba 2010; Ogwu 2010; Otike 2011; Ruterana 2012a, 2012b), few have been done in the purview of ICT; which lends us our main contribution on the subject of reading. The importance of reading is placed on its ability to foster personal and national growth (Ogwu 2010:102, Ribeiro as cited in Nalusiba 2010). Therefore it is something that must be fostered in people to achieve personal and societal growth.

In order to foster a reading habit, the results of this study lead us to make some recommendations; universities should divert some of the finances they use to buy physical books into subscribing to e-resources and ICT infrastructure, the Government of Uganda should also partner with schools and universities in the endeavour of providing ICT infrastructure right from lower levels of education. We also recommend that government owned ICT resource centers should be implemented around the country where people can go in to access reading sources either at no charge or at a subsidized charge. We found a remarkable influence of home and school culture on one's attitude towards reading. We therefore recommend that schools should work in partnership with parents to collectively improve the reading habits of students. Schools and parents should provide students with reading materials and possibly devise means of ensuring some time is put aside while at home to read. Our participants indicated that they prefer information in video format but are sometimes hindered by the limited bandwidth. We recommend that universities improve Internet connectivity with adequate bandwidth. There should also be a means of converting some of the existing information into audio and video format to support the African oral society. With the recent debate on enhancing local language teaching in schools (Tembe & Norton 2011; Tembe & Norton 2008), our findings reveal that most people would rather not read literature written in their local languages. As a result, we recommend that policy makers conduct more research on the issue before making a conclusive policy.

Lastly we recommend that further research is carried out on other factors affecting reading habits of Africans, our study is limited to only four variables. This study was limited to only university students in Uganda, the scope should be expanded in future studies to cover reading in other African countries and other levels of education especially lower levels since inculcation of reading at those levels would be desirable. Being a qualitative study, we interviewed only 15 participants, we therefore propose that a quantitative study should be conducted to further explore the issue of ICT and reading.

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