

- [Contents](#) |
- [Author index](#) |
- [Subject index](#) |
- [Search](#) |
- [Home](#)

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Poster session

Investigating reading culture in Tanzania

[Jamillah R. Gabriel](#)

Introduction. This poster is an investigation of reading culture in Tanzania via the lens of Africana critical thought and everyday life theory.

Method. Informal interviews were conducted to gauge an understanding of the cultural from various perspectives including libraries and the book industry.

Analysis. This subject is explored using analytic autoethnography to understand the culture in relation to the lived experiences of this author.

Results. The paper illuminates issues and concerns around the country's current reading culture and relation to information behaviour, highlighting factors that play a major role, such as book retail, libraries, and publishing.

Conclusion. There is much more that can be done to improve reading culture in Tanzania. Perhaps the future lies in the grassroots organisations that are working hard to develop and sustain it.

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Introduction

This study is an exploration of the reading culture as it exists today in Tanzania with an eye towards select factors that contribute to reading culture and how they have manifested within Tanzanian society. A trip to Tanzania and subsequent research revealed that there was a relative absence of reading culture among Tanzanians and that the factors influencing this state of reading were multiple and varied. To better

understand the reading culture, or lack thereof, it is also important to examine how libraries, literacy, publishing, and the book industry have all played a historical role in shaping the culture. These factors as well as cultural barriers are explored in order to illuminate reading practices in Tanzania. Ideas around reading as resistance and grassroots organisations as agents of change are also discussed towards a critique of hegemonic systems and conversation around community building.

Problem statement

While there have been some studies that assessed the current state of libraries, book industry, and reading, much of that work was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, with very little published in recent years that matches their depth and breadth. What does exist beyond these key studies (Kaungamno, [1972a](#), [1972b](#), [1980](#); Bgoya, [1988](#)) enables us to explore the intertwining connections that have created the foundations of reading culture in Tanzania. This broad examination of reading culture looks closely at the influence of these entities on the information behaviour and practice of Tanzanians through a lens that privileges African critical thought (Rabaka, [2006](#); McDougal, [2014](#)) and everyday life theory (de Certeau, [1984](#); Rothbauer, [2005](#)).

Significance and relevance

Very few studies exist that tell us about contemporary reading culture in Tanzania and the obstacles that keep Tanzanians from reading. While some may disagree whether there is or is not a national reading culture, the general consensus is that there are significant barriers to overcome in order for Tanzanians to strengthen their reading practices. Reading is often an indicator for and impactor of other things such as literacy, education, recreation, etc. which signifies the importance of understanding the culture and how it affects the community (Sarjent, [2005](#); Ifedili, [2009](#); Ruterana, [2012](#); Sandwith, [2016](#)). Grassroots organisations have emerged to promote reading and literacy alongside writing for the greater good of the community and its people (E&D Vision Publishing, [n.d.](#); Soma Book Café, [n.d.](#)). This poster is meant to foster an understanding of why reading culture has been hindered and why it is vital to the community.

Content

This poster will provide background of reading culture, explore the primary factors that contribute to reading culture in Tanzania (literacy, libraries, publishing, book retail), examine the perceived obstacles to its development, and discuss current efforts to promote the culture, as well as avenues for future research.

Conclusion

This study only scratches the surface of the state of reading culture in Tanzania. My intention was to obtain a better understanding of the various factors that have had some impact on reading culture, while also gathering various perspectives from the Tanzanian people who are affected by reading culture. Whether it exists or does not, or is just lacking in ways is debatable, but it seems clear that many are invested in improving it beyond its current state. Libraries, publishers, booksellers, organisations, schools, and more are all vital in strengthening Tanzania's reading culture and all have a role to play to ensure that reading is more than a task to be undertaken for higher education. In the end, promoting reading culture for leisure and pleasure will have a long-term positive affect on education which can only benefit the nation. But it is important to examine how the country got where it is and what can be done to make the necessary changes that will transform reading culture for the betterment of Tanzania and its people.

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48 Last updated: 3 December, 2020

-
- [Contents](#) |
 - [Author index](#) |
 - [Subject index](#) |
 - [Search](#) |
 - [Home](#)
-