Module 1

The role librarians and library staff can play in early literacy development

Learning objectives

- Understanding the challenge of achieving early literacy success in an African context.
- Defining the role librarians and library staff can play in developing their young patrons' early literacy skills.
- Looking at what our libraries are currently offering, what we can do better, and what we can learn from each other.
- Thinking about what we'd like to achieve by completing this course.

Introduction

Why is this course necessary? Early literacy development is a foundational building block for academic achievement, lifelong learning and sustainable development. More so, when children are exposed to literacy-rich environments with age-appropriate resources in their mother tongue, they internalize learning as part of their everyday lives.

AfLIA survey results: Equipping African librarians with requisite skills that will drive development

Based on the belief that it is essential to ensure that the voices of the global South are integral to the discourse, planning, and funding of early literacy initiatives, these course objectives were informed by the findings of a survey conducted by African Library and Information Associations and institutions (AfLIA). The questionnaire was put together to get some insight into how public library staff in Africa see their existing roles and responsibilities when it comes to early literacy, and how they'd like to engage and interact with children in their communities going forward.

The course aims to train public and community librarians in African countries to understand and practice techniques for teaching children vocabulary development, print and phonemic awareness in mother tongue and English. The course is also expected to lead librarians and

library staff to a deeper understanding of how to prompt the creativity of children, as well as how to use open licensing to increase appropriate reading resources for the target age group through the translation of existing stories into mother-tongue languages.

In the survey, AfLIA asked: What skills do you think librarians need to help children learn basic literacy skills?

These are some of the answers that were given:

- How to tell stories in a captivating way
- Basic teaching methods and skills
- How to teach phonics and vocabulary
- How to communicate with children
- Translation skills
- What is open licensing and what does it mean for librarians
- How to create and translate stories on online platforms

African librarians SPEAK UP

AfLIA asked librarians and library staff what skills they need to help children learn basic literary skills. This insightful and valuable data was used to inform the direction of this course, and you can see a sample of the answers that were provided below.

- strategies for book selection and teaching children how to choose the books they want, and how to read by themselves
- basic foundation education skills for young children, activities that support basic literacy
- how to deliver information to children in a way they understand
- encourage children to pay attention to print, looking at books, words on cereal boxes, posters etc.
- how to find books online, licensing and piracy
- desire to meet and serve the library's user community, working with children from marginalized communities
- storytelling and story reading skills, dramatizing stories, making posters for story time and online storytelling
- creation of children's activities, arts and crafts for children, games, puppet shows, singing and poetry
- promote a culture of questioning, information seeking and discovery
- be enthusiastic, exercise initiative and independent judgement, self-learning and professional development
- how to attract children's attention and entertain children in a learning environment
- Accessing of online sources and how to use online resources for children
- Interpreting mother tongue, language translation and adaptation, teaching phonetics in local languages
- how to use the local languages in reading and writing stories for local consumption
- providing age and skill appropriate learning for struggling readers

Can you think of any other skills that are important for early literacy learning that are not mentioned here?

- phonetic awareness, spelling, vocabulary and the relationship between letters and sounds

The state of early literacy on the African continent

When it comes to children and early literacy, the statistics are overwhelming: a large proportion of children in African countries are not able to read, and since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and subsequent school closures, this situation has only become worse.

UNESCO published a report titled, 'If you don't understand, how can you learn?' One of the key recommendations from this report, which we will delve into in more detail later in the course, is that children should be taught in a language they understand, preferably their mother tongue. If they can receive at least six years of mother tongue education, their early literacy skills, like reading and writing, will be greatly improved and they won't fall behind when transitioning to learning in an English medium or other mainstream language environment.

According to the World Bank, by the age of ten, all children should be able to read proficiently, and understand simple texts. Typically, if children don't learn to read by this age, they won't learn to read successfully during their school career, which affects their acquisition of other key skills, like maths and science. The World Bank calls this 'learning poverty'.

'Learning poverty' is a world-wide phenomenon, however the situation is particularly problematic in sub-Saharan Africa. Before COVID-19, more than eight out of ten students did not meet minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, while more than 32 million primary-school aged children were deemed out of school.

This World Bank blog shows that education has been hit hard by the pandemic. COVID-19 is likely to severely limit progress on reducing learning poverty and dropout rates are expected to increase.

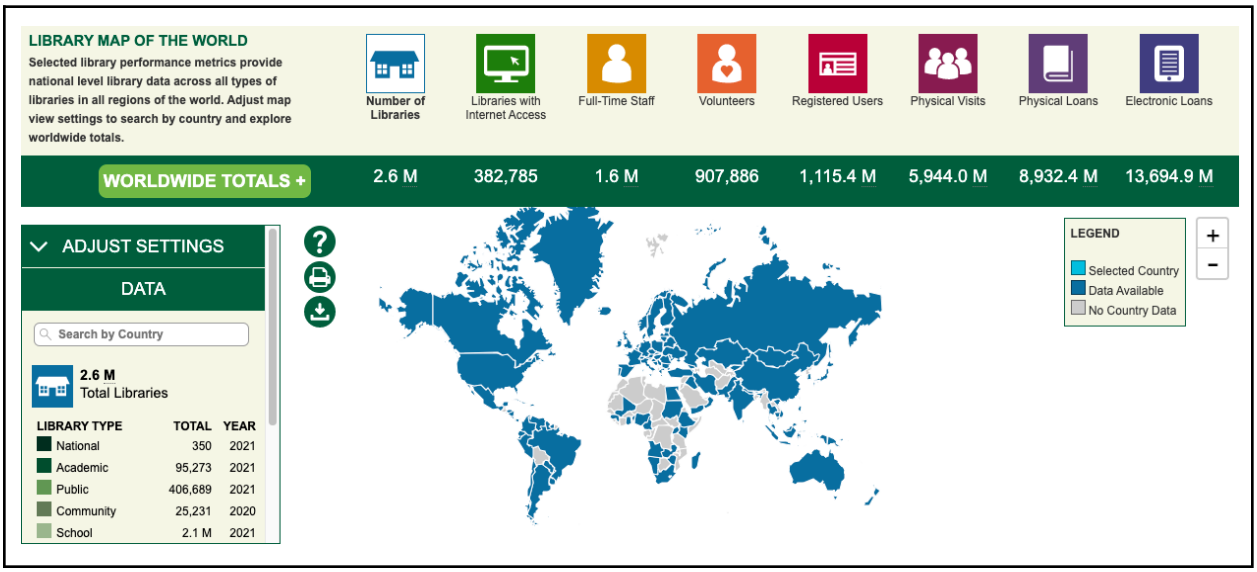
School closures during the pandemic exacerbated these problems, and although schools have reopened, a lot of work needs to be done within our communities to put our children and their early education back on track.

So, how can we help to turn things around?

Libraries have the power to change the trajectory of every African community.
Come along with us. – Dr Nkem Osuigwe

Embedded as they are within the communities they serve, librarians and library staff are in a unique position to help turn things around. By building on existing relationships within their communities, harnessing their core skills, sharing their innate love of books and reading, and drawing on their story-telling abilities, they can stage interventions, provide support to early literacy teachers, host programmes that complement existing school curricula, and disrupt the trend towards 'learning poverty'.

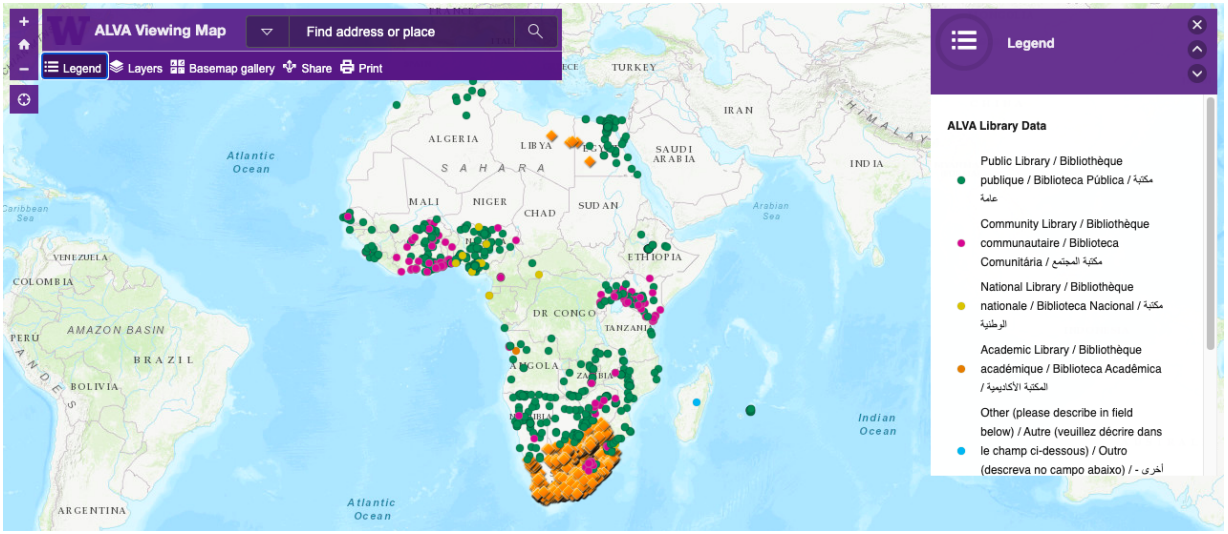
As we progress through the course modules, the discussions generated within our cohort groups and our peer-to-peer learning activities will focus on identifying these early literacy 'interventions' and how we can put them into practice.



Source: IFLAMAP.ORG (CC-BY 4.0)

Caption: The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has a library map which shows that there are over 2.6 million libraries in the world, 112,297 of these can be found in Africa. Visit the interactive map to view the data available for your country.

<Alt Text: This image features a data map of the world representing all the libraries in the world. The key can be used to filter the map to show the number of libraries, type of libraries, internet access, staff and other details.>



Source: [ALVA Viewing Map]

Caption: The Advancing Library Visibility in Africa (ALVA) Project, is a [data portal] put together from a [collaboration] between the University of Washington's Technology & Social Change Group (TASCHA) and the African Library & Information Associations & Institutions (AfLIA), shows where these libraries are situated.

Can you see your library on this map? Which libraries are your friends, colleagues and cohort group members from?

What roles can libraries and librarians play in early literacy development?

Discussion prompt 1.1 – Moodle forum

Discuss these points within your cohort group and contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. As librarians and library staff, how can we complement what early literacy teachers are already offering in schools?
2. Do you or your colleagues have a relationship with early literacy teachers in the schools in your community? If you do, compare notes about these relationships with your cohort group.
3. How can we work alongside teachers, parents and guardians to add value to what children are learning at school and at home?

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the

group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

This UNESCO policy brief outlines how libraries can be used to support national literacy efforts. Read through the text below and think about these points in the context of your library and your role at the library. However, keep in mind that some of these points may not be valid in the context of your library, due to funding or for other reasons.

Libraries can serve as partners in raising awareness of the important role played by families in developing the literacy skills of children and adults. To contribute to an intergenerational culture of reading and lifelong learning, libraries should:

1. Be conveniently located, inviting and welcoming;
2. Be a safe space for families, especially girls and women, to meet and learn;
3. Where possible have comfortable furniture in a colourful space, so that children and families enjoy spending time reading and learning together;
4. Provide child- and family-friendly areas with attractive picture books, games, crafts, etc.
5. Identify, create and provide resources in local languages with local content;
6. Where possible, investigate the provision of digital devices for children and families to play interactive reading games;
7. Organize regular family literacy activities run by specially trained staff;
8. Engage families, carers and other community members in family literacy and intergenerational learning;
9. Reach out to vulnerable families in order to disrupt the generational cycle of low education and poverty.

So then, looking at this list, when it comes to early literacy, your role as a librarian or library staff member within the community, might be broader than you had initially thought.

This video created by Ubongo for their Akili and Me YouTube channel is about the emotional skills preschoolers need when starting school for the first time. Do you think librarians and library staff also have a role to play in preparing children for the transition to school and the development of their social emotional skills, along with their early literacy skills?

Starting School with Akili | Emotional Skills for Preschoolers

Group activity 1.1 – Moodle

Within your cohort group create an action-based and realistic mission statement that outlines what the role of the library should be when it comes to **early literacy**; that declares your purpose as librarians and library staff; and describes how you will serve your customers.

Each type of library — public, school, and academic — should have a central, guiding mission statement that defines the library's purpose and describes who the library serves. – American Library Association (ALA)

Submit your mission statement via Moodle. This can be completed as an individual or group *exercise.

*This is a completion exercise, although the assignment won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

The library as the place where children want to spend their time

How do we attract life-long library patrons, starting from a young age? Let's explore the idea that everyone is welcome.

Listen to the audio / read the transcript before looking at the discussion prompts below.
Video link on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3EJnOGC3UE
Transcript

As librarians how can we make children fall in love with reading and become confident readers and seekers of stories

Dr Nkem Osuigwe

> *Children are naturally curious. Once they start talking, they are full of questions. They want to find out things and love to explore. It's a new world for them and they want to know the what, where, why and when of everything. Reading stories to children helps to expand their curiosity, explore the 'new world', exercise their brains and gain the*

potential to keep on being curious, learning and finding out about things. Stories expose children to new words and concepts and start them learning.

Introducing and reading stories to children helps them to understand that there is a lot more than what they can presently see, touch or feel and encourages them to engage more with the world around them. This begins to stir up their imaginations and starts them on a journey of discovery, of asking more questions and the excitement of what's-at-the-next-corner as they begin to read themselves and get access to storybooks. When this curiosity is built up in the library, children have access to innumerable books. Invariably, this helps them to identify books as unending sources of information for fun, discoveries and learning.

How can we make children fall in love with reading? Libraries are key!

Libraries are critical in creating a life-long love of reading in children and in providing assistance for the development of literacy skills for groups that may need special attention such as preschool and elementary school children. Libraries carefully select and acquire books targeted at such groups so that they have materials for activities and events for them. The books are also strategically shelved so that pre-school and elementary school children can easily access such materials.

Such a literacy-rich environment exposes children on a daily basis to visual learning props/aids, print and digital materials as well as language development opportunities that encourage children to see books as 'things' they can have access to for play and discovery or explore for fun, new concepts and understanding of their world. This is crucial for communities where parents and caregivers can hardly afford toys or books for children for leisure reading or even school activities; the library bridges the gap for such children.

Beyond books, Libraries also organize activities that attract children to reading and learning what is within the pages of books. These include story hour programs which integrate other activities such as word games, sing-alongs, spelling etc. Research has affirmed over and over again that providing early reading experiences, such as preschool story hours by libraries contributes in no small measure to the vocabulary growth, literacy skills development and reading achievement of children when they start schooling.

The library also provides a safe space with child-friendly furniture and facilities for parents and caregivers to come with children, and have books to teach them letters and words that aid language development and early literacy development.

And librarians…

Books on shelves or digital devices cannot explain themselves. Librarians play significant roles in setting up the library space to be conducive for children, making story hours fun and interactive and acting as guides where necessary for parents and caregivers in building literacy skills for children, and sometimes for the parents and caregivers too.

Librarians also give children the opportunity to read for pleasure, and to develop a life-long love for the act of reading for pleasure, so that reading becomes a hobby and a go-to activity that's not only confined to primers in the classroom.

<ends>

Discussion prompt 1.2 – Moodle forum

Discuss these points within your cohort group and contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. Currently, what is it about my library that attracts children?
2. What kind of atmosphere, tools, resources are needed to make it a place where children want to spend their time?
3. As a librarian or library staff member, what can I do to make children feel more welcome?
4. What kind of books would you like to have in your library? Keeping in mind that your library may depend on book donations for the children's section, which might limit the selection.

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Additional optional reading:

- Growing young minds | How museums and libraries create lifelong learners https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/growingyoungmindsexecsum_0.pdf
- What if classrooms were rooted in care? https://hewlett.org/what-if-classrooms-were-rooted-in-care/

- Why early childhood development is the foundation for sustainable development https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/why-early-childhood-development-is-the-foundation-for-sustainable-development/

Formalizing library programmes that encourage early literacy

In Module 2, we are going to look at how to make the library environment early childhood friendly. Before we get there, let us discuss existing library programmes that encourage and promote early literacy.

Librarians should focus on ways of developing their libraries into intellectual centers as a catalyst for learning, discovery, innovation, collaboration, and scholarly breakthroughs. In today's educational environment, simply focusing on library space planning is not sufficient. Librarians should focus on ways that the library can become beacons for both interactive learning and knowledge creation across both the physical and digital realms. Librarians should be able to offer solutions for current library needs as well as ensuring that their facilities can respond to future changes in pedagogical and technological trainings. – Fredrick Otike, Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, Kenya

Discussion prompt 1.3 – Moodle forum

Discuss these points within your cohort group and contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. Within your cohort groups, compare the library activities you have on offer at your own institution, or alternatively, activities you have seen elsewhere or read about. When doing so, be sure to make a note to show if these activities are available at your library, or if they are activities you have seen or read about elsewhere.
2. Talk about which early literacy goals they set out to achieve.
3. Would you like to build on these activities, and how?

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

< Image from Adonia Katungisa article, AfLIA>

Case study 1: <u>Mobile book boxes, Kampala</u>

Reading empowers and prospers. Children read more when there are books available for them. School libraries provide the opportunity for young people to read for broader understanding

outside of what is taught in the classrooms. The inadequate number of libraries and paucity of books, hinder the academic achievement of young people.

With this in mind, Adonia Katungisa, Director of National Library of Uganda, decided to take book boxes to primary schools in Kampala, so that children would not miss out on the benefits of having books to read beyond classroom texts. Adonia formalized his plan with the Directorate of Education and Social Services, selected the appropriate texts for primary school pupils, and identified schools the National Library could partner with.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Case study 2: We Love Reading, Jordan

We Love Reading aims to have a positive impact on children, adolescents and their families throughout Jordan and the Arab world by creating a generation of children who love reading books. The programme seeks to achieve this through the establishment of a library in every neighbourhood in Jordan, supported by women trained in reading aloud. The women read to

children aged between four and 10 years old in their local communities, using age-appropriate reading material.

The “library” as a learning environment is established in an existing and commonly used public space. This location should be easily accessible for neighbourhood children, which is why mosques and other community centres were selected to be appropriate institutions for the reading sessions. The book collection consists of as few or as many books as can be gathered through donations from individuals or organizations or created by We Love Reading. The children love to hear the same story over and over again. A read-aloud session is held every weekend and afterwards the books are given to the children to read at home. Later, the books are returned so that other children can borrow them.

Image source: National Library Uganda
Caption: A librarian from the National Library of Uganda shows two young children how to use a toy that allows them to listen to the sounds made by each letter of the alphabet.

Alt Text: This image shows a librarian from the National Library of Uganda showing two young children how to read the alphabet using a toy that emits the sound of the letter when that letter is pressed. The librarian is wearing a blue t-shirt. They are all sitting on a carpet.

Review the case studies above and think about types of existing library programmes:

- Programmes that occur during the school term, in collaboration schools or other entities
- Holiday learning programmes
- Combined programmes for parents / guardians and children
- Other stakeholders' activities such as story-teller-in-residence programmes or guest readings
- School readiness programmes

Group activity 1.2 – Moodle

As a group, brainstorm an idea for an early literacy focused library activity or programme that you would like to implement. Submit a brief outline that describes the activity considering the points below.

1. Define a goal for this activity, what would you like to achieve?
2. Who is your target audience?
3. What resources are required (if any) to launch your programme? (people, stationary, books, marketing, translation services, internet, etc.)
4. ·Which institutions are you partnering with for this activity?
5. What are your indicators of success?

Submit your plan via Moodle. This can be completed as an individual or group *exercise.

*This is a completion exercise, although the assignment won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Additional optional reading / viewing:

- Funda Wande | Creating after school reading clubs

242 Creating after school reading clubs

- TED Talks | How to inspire every child to be a lifelong reader. Available online here.

Module 1 references:

The following resources were consulted in the development of this module.

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