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Do Culturally Engaging Reading Materials Matter? An Analysis of Rural Libraries in Burkina Faso

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Analysis of Rural Libraries in Burkina Faso

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this research project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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ABSTRACT

Academics have noted the lack of culturally relevant reading materials in African libraries. Book collections are primarily composed of donated materials from western countries intended for a western, rather than African audience. This research project aimed to gain insight onto children's reading preferences in the rural Burkina Faso and to learn about the popularity of local photo books that were added in 2009. Quantitative methods examined library book checkout records in three categories of African, French, and local photo books. Additionally the library subscription records were used in order to gain information about the children including age, gender, and ethnicity. Qualitative methods consisted of focus groups with the parents of library users to learn more about reading preferences, and what books and other library resources are considered most useful. Data gathered demonstrated that children's books with African authors received the most checkouts and that local photo books are becoming increasingly popular. Parents also noted the popularity of African literature and considered them to be useful reading material.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the harmful legacy of colonial education and the importation of European

languages, a continued regard for formal education creates a great need for written

material (Mchombu 151). Although libraries offer a potential solution, they experience

difficulties integrating into African society due to their colonial past. Academics have

documented the history and the shortcomings of libraries in Africa, deeming many

African public libraries as "anachronistic and inappropriate" (Mostert), that were

"imported without any consideration of the real situation of continent and the information

needs of the African people" (Issak 12), and tailored toward the needs of newly created

class of African elites (Odi 600). A variety of issues make it difficult to address those

shortcomings, including a lack of cooperation between libraries and agencies, the absence

of a good alternative library model, a shortage of well-trained library staff, and

insufficient finances for facilities and materials, especially reading materials that are

relevant to the African socio-economic context and culture (Mostert)(Issak 12, 22).

Statement of Problem

One critical area of weakness in libraries is the lack of relevant and engaging

reading materials. In fact, the most common reasons for dissatisfaction with the libraries

are the poor range of book selection and the lack of popular books (TNS RMS East

Africa 23). Part of this is because the domestic publishing industry is typically very

small, with approximately 300 titles published a year in an average African country

(Mchombu 152). As a result of this low production, especially when combined with

financial restraints that prevent purchasing new materials, most African libraries stock

books donated or discarded from western countries. As a result, many books in libraries are often irrelevant or culturally inappropriate in the context of the African communities in which they are located. There are countless examples of book "dumping," where practically useless reading materials are shipped to Africa with little thought to the needs of the reader. "Dumped" books include outdated manuals, travel guides, study guides without texts, and materials written in irrelevant languages (Durand and Deehy 166-1667).   Other studies have concluded that culturally relevant books and textbooks should be accessible in African communities if possible (Jönsson and Olsson 84)(Plonski 142).

In an analysis of the successful non-profit book publishing initiative Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED) which creates relevant reading materials in local languages in Senegal, John P. Hutchinson draws the following conclusions:

- Rich documentation contributing to a print-rich environment is critical for any language regardless of the forum in which it will be used;
- Rich documentation functions as an important weapon against language marginalization and a tool for convincing partners to e.g. an education system who are skeptical about the capabilities of a given African language;
- There are readers and a potential market for African language literature provided that meaningful reading materials are available at affordable prices;
- People will spend their money to read something worthwhile;

- African language publishers can sustain themselves in "francophone" Africa;

- A literacy program is meaningless without meaningful literature. (32)

Despite the destructive nature of colonization in Africa and current struggles mediating between native and colonial languages, relevant reading materials have the potential to empower marginalized people in African society.

Book dumping and user dissatisfaction with library reading materials highlight a need for culturally relevant reading material in both subject matter and language. Since it has been shown in developing countries that children's attitudes towards reading gradually become more negative throughout their schooling (McKenna, Kear, Ellsworth 952), one would expect this phenomenon to be even more prevalent in developing countries when there is a lack of engaging children's books in the beginning of a child's literacy development. Therefore the absence of quality, engaging reading materials is a major factor impeding the growth of a reading culture in Africa. Some non-profits and organizations operating in Africa such as Little Hands Books, Room to Read, Friends of African Village Libraries, and ARED have implemented programs that use culturally relevant children's books, but there is no research related to the impacts of these projects and whether culturally relevant books are preferred to western books. Academics note that it is necessary to analyze user needs in order to provide valuable information on what types of reading material should be supplied in libraries (Mostert)(Kebede 116)(Issak 22). This project serves as a way to quantitatively and qualitatively analyze user needs in regards to children's reading preferences and to gain insight into the needs of older library users.

Purpose of Project

Using book checkout data, the primary focus of this research project was to learn whether the children's library usage is affected by the addition of African and locally produced reading material. To encourage reading, it is necessary to provide interesting and useful reading materials, especially when readers are at a young age. Once attaining some literacy skills, users of the library can make use of other informational resources. In addition to the quantitative analysis of check out records, this research also used qualitative methods to address which resources are perceived as useful and which resources should be added to the library.

This research is important since it examines a more successful adaptation of the colonial library, known as community resource centers or community libraries. While all libraries in Africa are based upon the western library structure, these libraries are better than others in taking into account local needs and reading preferences. These community resource centers or community libraries are defined by Dent Goodman as "built to serve the needs of rural populations outside the reach of standard information services....these libraries share a common goal, to provide basic reading material to communities where such resources would otherwise be hard to come by" (523).

The community library model used in this study is supported by the organization Friends of African Village Libraries (FAVL). This organization provides reading materials from African authors, translates reading materials into local languages, and publishes children's photobooks created with pictures taken in the villages where the libraries are located. FAVL operates and works with affiliated libraries in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Uganda. In Burkina Faso, the country in which is FAVL

most active, FAVL has worked with local villages to open twelve libraries since 2001. With the data gathered from library book checkout records and opinions gathered from focus groups of parents of children who use the library, this research provides information about children's reading material preferences, how parents think the libraries are useful, and how they should be improved to better meet community needs. While there is much research concerning the poor state of public libraries in Africa, Kevane and Sissao note that there are very few studies examining the impacts of well-functioning libraries, such as the community library model (203). This research reveals that in well-functioning villages with a variety of resources, children prefer books that are culturally relevant, suggesting that greater efforts toward providing such materials for children and adults alike should be implemented.

<div align="center">Significance of Research</div>

While this research is limited to a specific region and library model in Africa, the findings support the promotion of literacy and access to information by looking at needs of a specific community. Many academics claim that there is no "reading culture" in Africa, but this statement should be qualified with the fact that there are very few useful and interesting reading materials in the first place. With greater knowledge of and access to popular reading materials, there is a better chance of developing a reading culture. Because reading habits later in life are highly influenced by attitudes toward reading during childhood, supplying engaging reading materials for children is an important component in developing positive attitudes toward reading.

This research shows that it is worthwhile for international development organizations and local governments to supply literature better suited to reading

preferences in the African context. Some may tout the benefits of information

technology, but communities may not be able to achieve those benefits without basic

numeracy and literacy abilities (Wessels 139). Engaging reading materials encourage the

local "reading culture" which in turn increases literacy rates and allows access to a larger

body of information, while also avoiding burdening African libraries with uninteresting

and irrelevant books. While there are many other aspects of African libraries that may

need to be adapted to best fit the needs of their communities, because books are already

in place as an aspect of literacy development, it is more efficient to make them more

culturally relevant. This research addresses one key shortcoming of the current public

library model and justifies the efforts of alternative library models to provide culturally

relevant reading materials.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

This study is regionally limited to the southwestern area of Burkina Faso. Despite

this limitation, this research still serves as an example of what cultural preferences and

perceptions exist elsewhere in Africa. Due to the challenges of conducting research in

developing countries with a different culture, there were a variety of limitations in both

the quantitative and qualitative portions of this research.

For the quantitative portion of the study, several issues with the data affect the

accuracy of the results. The same ten children's books in each category studied (French,

African, and local photobooks) as initially selected were not always available in each of

the five libraries, therefore substitutes with similar popularity were chosen at the

discretion of the local librarian and myself. Additionally, due to missing library records

from lost checkout cards, missing subscription records, or general errors in transcribing handwritten information, the data was incomplete.

For the qualitative portion, this project was limited by the availability of subjects for focus group style interviews, as well as communication and cultural issues. Due to potential difficulties interviewing children -- for example, discomfort being interviewed by a foreigner -- adult participants were chosen for the interview portion. Although I was familiar with French, the official language of Burkina Faso, many parents did not speak French so the librarian acted as an interpreter. There were also difficulties in assembling focus groups because most adults' schedules were restricted by their work in the fields. In addition, when interviews are conducted by a researcher from a different culture, responses are subject to inaccuracies. As a result of these factors, as well as transportation and time constraints, complete focus groups were limited to only the villages of Bereba and Dimikuy, with several individual interviews conducted in Dohoun.

<div align="center">Theoretical Rationale</div>

Literacy development theory pertaining to developed countries and international development work is a complex and changing academic area. Although literacy is widely viewed as a positive force in society, there is contention concerning how best to teach literacy, how exactly it benefits the learner, and even the very definition of literacy. Currently, the two primary conceptualizations of literacy are the dominant, traditional cognitive theory or the "autonomous model," and the more recent "ideological," sociocultural theory of "New Literacy Studies" (Davidson 246-250). Supported by knowledge concerning the specific phases of literacy development in order to help teach reading and writing skills (Davidson 247), the cognitive approach views literacy as a

technical and neutral skill that is unconnected to specific context. According to this viewpoint, attaining literacy improves cognitive ability and economic prospects (Street 77, 2003). The socio-cultural approach sees literacy not as a skill that will lead to a certain outcome, but as a social practice differing greatly from culture to culture. There is not one "literacy" but many "literacies" that are dependent upon cultural context. Brian Street, an outspoken advocate for "New Literacy Studies" and the ethnographic approach in learning about these specific contexts, criticizes the cognitive approach for imposing a western-centric view of literacy on other cultures (77-78). This new school of thought provides an interesting perspective on how typical literacy campaigns are failing.

This research approaches the topic of literacy from an international studies background, rather than an educational background adhering to either of these approaches, and therefore draws ideas from both theoretical frameworks. Although it appears that they are in direct opposition, some recent research has begun to merge the two approaches (Davidson 252-255). As American classrooms become increasingly diverse, with students from different cultural backgrounds, educators are acknowledging that a "one-size-fits all mentality for teaching reading simply does not work" and strategies must be developed to address these challenges (Schumm and Arguelles 6-7). Western organizations working with education and literacy must do the same by acknowledging the diverse cultural contexts among the countries in which they operate. Street and other ethnographic researchers state that while most people are concerned about the impact of literacy on people, it is more useful to look at how "people affect literacy" (Kulick and Stroud qtd. in Street 25, 1993). Critical of many international literacy campaigns, Street believes that a "less ethnocentric and less top-down approach" is necessary, and points

out that many literacy programs are unsuccessful because many participants do not

perceive the program to be useful in their own lives (Street 2, 1993). Unlike New

Literacy Studies, this study does not use ethnographic research, but uses ground-level

research to better understand how local context and interests can be incorporated into

literacy (and education) development programs.

Literacy development theory regarding motivation is also particularly relevant as

a theoretical framework for this study. Successful reading instruction requires an

exposure to print through a variety of reading materials in both schools and libraries

(Schumm and Arguelles 7). Learning to read requires hours of practice and access to

books of a suitable reading level that cater to a child's interests and preferences (5).

Previous research has shown that personal interest in a book's subject matter (intrinsic

motivation) is positively correlated with reading comprehension (Guthrie and Knowles

161-2). From this academic perspective it is vital for new readers, especially children, to

access engaging reading materials in order to nurture their interest in reading.

Another theoretical rationale for this project is based upon international development

theory, which sees libraries as a viable way in which to reach Millennium Development

Goals. By providing access to information, libraries help create a "knowledge society,"

which is "viewed as a source of development because of the recognition and

acknowledgement of the importance of human rights, freedom of expression and

empowerment, and fight against poverty" (Ocholla 21). Although some academics

critique top-down literacy programs and the western library model, they are not

completely against further support of libraries. Rather, they remain hopeful that these

resources can be adjusted to be more effective and culturally appropriate (Mostert)(Issak

21)(Nyana 11-13)(Hutchinson 32). The global initiative Beyond Access also believes

that libraries could become an efficient and widespread resource to alleviate poverty, and

has documented libraries all over the world that provide information pertaining to each

one of the Millennium Development Goals ("Libraries Powering Development"). They

also note that libraries are a particularly useful resource because they are already quite

prevalent, with 230,000 libraries in developing and transitioning countries. Consequently,

organizations focused on increasing literacy in Africa have expanded their work by

setting direct goals toward accessing information that is vital for economic development.

CHAPTER 2.

BACKGROUND

Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions of the global South where illiteracy is

most prevalent. Of the ten countries with the lowest adult literacy rates, seven are located

in West Africa, where an estimated 65 million adults are illiterate—40 million of them

women (Pearce 2). In 2007, Burkina Faso had an adult literacy rate of 28.7%, one of the

lowest in the world (*World Bank*).

A variety of organizations are working to increase literacy rates, including the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Education

for All (EFA) run by the World Bank, and The United Nation's Children's Fund

(UNICEF). In order to promote the educational focus of the Millennium Development

Goals the United Nations implemented the United Nations Literacy Decade program in

2003, with the goal of increasing literacy 50% by the year 2015. The Literacy Initiative

for Empowerment (LIFE) developed by UNESCO serves as a framework for this

program ("United Nations Literacy Decade"). Additionally, the measurement of literacy

rates between the ages of 15-24 is one of three ways the UN demonstrates the success of

the Millennium Development Goal number two—which aims to ensure all children are

enrolled in primary schooling by year 2015 (Office of the Special Adviser on Africa).

While the global international development agenda has generally had a stronger focus on

increasing literacy rates and access to education, illiteracy is an aspect of a much greater

global problem.

Access to information is also recognized as essential for the development of poor

countries. As information and communication technologies (ICT) are integral to to

today's global economy, the international community describes the lack of ICT in developing countries as "information poverty." Gebremichael and Jackon note that the root causes of "information poverty" are theorized to be tied to "information illiteracy, a lack of resources, governmental censorship and control, established information policies or lack thereof, and internal information infrastructures that lag behind the industrialized West" (268).

This research stems from the belief that access to knowledge is beneficial and necessary for the development of any country. Although some argue that the oral transmission of knowledge is more appropriate for some cultures, literacy through the written word is undoubtedly one vital way in which knowledge can be obtained and is integral to participation in today's competitive, globalized world. Many believe development is impossible without a highly literate population (Richmond, Robinson, and Sachs-Israel 9)("Investing In Development"). Literacy is viewed not only as vital for a nation's development but, along with education, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that literacy is a fundamental human right. The same applies to the right to access information: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

In developed countries, where technology frequently replaces the need for paper reading materials, libraries could be considered an antiquated resource. However, for developing countries, some academics and international development organizations believe they can be immensely useful. Attaining literacy is important, but the ability to

access high-quality, interesting reading materials is equally important to foster positive

attitudes toward reading to use and maintain these skills (Worthy, Moorman, and Turner

23-24)(Knuth, Perry, and Duces 174-192). Literacy campaigns in the past have been

flawed as they often ignore the importance of reading materials after the attainment of

literacy skills (Knuth, Perry, and Duces 174-192)(Hutchinson 23).

Many nonprofits of all sizes work with this issue by supporting libraries in Africa,

including Room to Read, Books for Africa, Literate Africa Project Inc., Global Literacy

Project, Inc., Friends of African Village Libraries, and the African Library Project.

Another global initiative is Beyond Access: Libraries Powering Development, a

consortium comprised of IREX, EIFL, IFLA, Makaia, Civic Regeneration, TASCHA, the

Riecken Foundation, and READ Global, with financial support from the Bill and Melinda

Gates Foundation. According to Beyond Access, libraries play a key role in achieving

the Millennium Development Goals by empowering women, supporting children's

education, and providing information on agriculture, health, and business. In poor

regions of the world, libraries can serve as information hubs that aid in the development

process ("Libraries Powering Development").

Although one might be inclined assume that challenges in increasing literacy and

narrowing the information gap are due to a lack of international attention or finances, it is

important to note that western forms of transferring information can be quite different

culturally from many African societies. Gebremichael and Jackson note that reducing

information poverty requires one to understand "how users in developing countries

physically, mentally, and emotionally go through the process of information retrieval."

Because ICT is developed in Europe, Asia, and the United States, "languages, customs

and other cultural dimensions of these societies are reflected in the majority of the world's ICT software, operating systems, and programming" (275). This same problem is even present in what the west views is the simplest form of information "technology," the written word. One must recognize that the introduction of the written word to Africa was a direct result of European colonization, and that western education is still fairly recent in the history of African societies. Western development organizations must acknowledge cultural these cultural differences if they are to succeed in improving literacy, ICT, and access to information.

The Importation of Western Educational Structure

Due to historically different methods for gaining and transferring knowledge than in other societies, the written word was not the dominant mode of communication in Africa until the onset of European colonial education in the early 19th century (Brock-Utne 17). Instead, many African societies used an educational system that involved the entire community, hence the proverb "it takes a whole village to raise a child." Education was not a formal institution, but an intertwined combination of participatory activities such as rituals and ceremonies, practical labor skills, and the study of history, poetry, riddles, storytelling, and proverbs (Bassey 15-17)(Fafunwa 1974).

During the colonial regime, western education was a direct threat to these traditional forms of education and the associated culture. Many authors and academics including Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Babs Fafunwa, Brigit Brock-Utne, Adolphe Amadi, and Magnus Bassey have proclaimed the negative effects of a western education system more tailored toward Europe economic interests than it was toward the betterment of Africa. The colonial government offered privileged

positions to those who were able to attain western education, and often required this new African elite to accept other elements of western culture, especially in French colonies such as Burkina Faso.   Western education helped maintain control in the colonial regime by creating a rift in traditional society since these new administrative positions offered a social prestige that influenced the rejection of African culture. Amadi notes that European colonialism was able to effectively exploit peoples and territories by dominating not only politically and culturally, but also psychologically as Africans were taught to believe that their traditional culture and people were inferior (229-230). Furthermore, since formal schooling was brought by in an attempt to teach Africans to study the Bible, acceptance of Christianity was a prerequisite to obtaining western education (Bassey 2-3, 27). Quite clearly, the interests of indigenous Africans were not a priority to the European colonizers. Today, it is of great importance that the leftover western education structures from colonization are not causing cultural harm, but are instead designed to improve lives and protect the culture of today's post-colonial African nations.

European Languages

The adoption of European languages through colonial education has also created significant problems in today's struggle to create a literate Africa. Thiong'o (11-12) and Lavoie (662) note that children were ridiculed if they used local languages in school instead of the colonial language, creating the perception that local languages were inferior. Today academics still debate whether colonial languages should be used in Africa's educational systems and, in turn, whether they should used in libraries. Although using maternal languages is shown to increase literacy rates, there are strong

political and economic reasons for West African countries to maintain French as an official language (Kone 6). Despite the fact the using one's native language is more effective for learning, many Africans view French as the more useful language locally and globally. For students, learning French increases the possibility of pursuing more lucrative careers. On a national level, African countries are hesitant to remove French as an official language because of their dependence on France for the financial support of development projects (11, 13). Abandoning French as an official language would also be costly without textbooks in local languages or manuals of language instruction and grammar (16). As a result, it is unclear as to which language former colonies should use for their national educational resources.

Educational Issues in Burkina Faso

As a former French colony, Burkina Faso's education system experiences many of these challenges concerning European education structures and language. Burkina Faso is a small, landlocked country in west Africa bordering Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Mali, and Niger. Because French colonizers were more interested in coastal colonies, schools in Burkina Faso were developed later and were not as plentiful in other countries such as Benin, resulting in very low enrollment (Ouedraogo 392). Even after independence in 1960, curriculum was still centered around French language and culture (Lavoie 663).

Since colonization, education in Burkina Faso has improved, but continues to experience setbacks. In 1976, education was reformed and began to cater toward the rural population, intending to "create a more democratic, economically effective and less culturally disruptive educational system" (Lavoie 664), a change which included the

legalization of the three major indigenous languages of Moore, Dioula, and Fulfide. Thomas Sankara, who served as president 1983-1987, further supported increased literacy in indigenous languages by creating 1,400 alphabetization centers among rural areas. However, due to a lack of materials in these languages, the assassination of Sankara in 1987, and World Bank structural adjustment programs, educational reforms came to a halt (664).

Other efforts by the state, as well as the many international campaigns and western organizations previously mentioned, have also improved education in terms of higher enrollment and literacy rates. School enrollment and literacy rates (both adult and youth) have steadily increased over the years, but are still well below the rates of other developing countries (*World Bank*). And while the percentage of students repeating grades continues to drop, the current grade-repeating average of 15.1% is stilled deemed a failing grade by UNESCO (UNESCO qtd. in Lavoie 664). Lavoie attributes this failure to the monolingual schools in Burkina Faso, which only instruct in French rather than indigenous languages.

Alternative educational models that include local languages have experienced some success. For instance, Burkina Faso has reformed its education to be decentralized, allowing schools to be catered toward community needs and locally spoken languages (Kone 8). In 2005, Burkina Faso had 110 bilingual schools using an early exit model, where a mother tongue language is used as the language of instruction until Grade 3 after which the transition is made to French (Ilboudo cited in Lavoie 664). While academic achievement in the early-exit model is not as effective as in the late-exit model, where French is introduced even later in schooling, the early-exit model has been shown to

provide better academic results than the traditional monolingual schools (Heugh cited in

Lavoie 665). This sort of bilingual education strikes a balance between the preservation

of local culture and the acquisition of an international language. Despite these successes,

it will take time for new model to fully replace French monolingual schools, and many

Burkinabé still view French as superior language for finding economic opportunity.

　　　　Although access to primary education has improved for Burkinabé children, there

is still room for improvement in terms of effectiveness. School enrollment is at 79%, but

there are still issues with gender disparity, repeating grades, and drop-outs (*World Bank*).

Furthermore, higher governmental spending in Sub-Saharan Africa has not always

guaranteed a quality education that meets minimum learning achievement rates. As

Michaelowa notes, quantity and quality of the education must go hand in hand to produce

high learning achievement. Therefore, greater attention must be paid toward specific

educational inputs such as books, and their effect on achievement.

Although books (especially textbooks) have been shown in a variety of studies to be

effective inputs for learning (Frölich and Michaelowa 3), most Burkinabé do not have

access to them. According to Kevane and Sissao, there are very few bookstores, and the

informal book kiosks have a limited selection (204). Regardless of the limited book

options, with 46.7% of the population below the poverty line most Burkinabé are not able

to purchase books, especially in rural areas ("The World Factbook"). Libraries would

then seem a useful alternative, but they are still few in number and low in quality. There

are 17 Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle (CLAC) and 28 Bibliothèques

Communales de Lectures Publiques (BCLP), but these libraries suffer from poor

accessibility and low quality reading materials. These collections are outdated and

primarily composed of French literature and grammar rather than African literature

(Kevane and Sissao 204). Given its cultural history, small incomes, and poor access to

high-quality reading materials, it is of little surprise that there is not a significant reading

culture in Burkina Faso

CHAPTER 3.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of literacy has been on the global development agenda for several decades, and many non-profits have recognized the important role libraries can play in the development of a poor country. Library resources are a means to practice reading skills, gain information, and to provide other beneficial services to rural African communities. However, African libraries are often in a state of disrepair and lack relevant reading materials, which raises the important questions regarding how to improve going forward. Today questions remain as to how libraries can be improved to better serve African societies. This section covers previous work on several such questions, specifically: the definition of a good library, the impact of libraries and reading materials, and the benefits of culturally relevant reading materials.

Definitions of Good Libraries

While academics have documented the failures of the western library model in Africa, they also assess current models and give recommendations regarding what libraries should accomplish. Simply increasing finances for libraries is only one part of the equation to produce successful libraries that can meet the needs of their users (Issak 21)(Mchombu 155). There is a great need for revamping the libraries' programs, materials, and human resources. To create a better library model for African communities it is essential to learn from the academics in this field of library development.

Improved Resources

One obvious area for improvement, and where this research is focused, is the provisioning of useful resources in both content and form. In terms of printed reading material, more books by African authors and other engaging reading materials -- do-it-yourself manuals, pamphlets, and newspapers -- are necessary if libraries to become widely used (Mostert)(Issak 22). Written information should also be "repackaged" in formats better suited toward the reading levels of the rural populace (Okiy 129). Because potential users are often illiterate or semiliterate, it is vital to supply non-print resources to suit their needs. According to Davis, varied forms and formats of material are needed to "meet informational, recreational, and educational needs of each community" (132). This would include three things: reading materials translated into local languages (if the user prefers the local languages or did not learn the official language through formal education); audio visual programs such as posters, radio, and films; and oral methods of transmitting knowledge such as group discussions, workshops, person to person interaction, storytelling, poetry, and drama (Nyana 16-17)(Mostert)(Dent Goodman 513)(Okiy 129-130). Additionally, local knowledge can be harnessed through both oral and print methods, aiding in communicating subjects such as farming, weaving, brewing, and local history (Mostert, Nyana 17).

Academics believe that libraries can serve as a valuable focal point for social life in communities in addition to being an informational resource. Issak states in her literature review on public libraries in Africa that libraries can serve as "a meeting point for leisure, learning and entertainment, where people can socialize in a safe environments...no other institution or organization gives to the people this opportunity

within towns, villages, and neighborhoods across the country" (17). These suggestions demonstrate that an adapted model of the western library could provide valuable resources that foster development, especially in rural areas.

Improved Leadership

Librarians are important in making sure resources are obtained and utilized, and many existing shortcomings with libraries can be remedied by increasing their responsibility and knowledgeability. Qualified librarians exist today, but training is still needed to improve and refresh skills (Issak 21). To ensure libraries can afford the needed adaptations, there must also be strong leadership in order to seek financial support and cooperation from the government, donors, the publishing industry, and other interested parties (Mchombu 155)(Issak 22). Furthermore, to ensure that changes can be effectively implemented, librarians must be a knowledgeable human resource, trained in both print and oral culture. They must also able to facilitate these new library programs, such as storytelling, using audiovisuals, and utilizing their position as a member of the community to tap into local knowedge (Nyana 16-17)(Dent Goodman 513). To improve library usage, librarians serve a key role in publicizing and explaining the library's services, through word of mouth, meetings, and workshops (Nyana 17). Not only should the services be promoted, but a clear connection must be made between the library and it's impact on community development (Issak 21)(Davis 132).

Partnerships should also play a key role in library development. As in the case of the Ghanaian library system, leadership through national library boards can play a vital role in helping local librarians with their knowledgeability and publicity, creating a more proactive library system. Along with the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana Library

Board is responsible for advising on choices of building, staffing, and stocking of

libraries; supervising and inspecting libraries; and organizing in-service trainings,

workshops, and seminars for librarians (Alemna 38). To better meet the particular needs

of people in rural areas, Okiy recommends that national library boards have a special

division just for rural public libraries (129). The Beyond Access consortium also

recommends that libraries seek partnerships with government initiatives and NGOs

("Libraries Powering Development").

Section Summary

In addition to the extensive literature demonstrating the weaknesses of the current

library model, many academics provide a very clear vision of the right steps to take to

improve public libraries. These overlapping recommendations are already visible in

alternative library models, and future work should continue to focus on additional options.

As these new library models continue to develop, it is important to measure their impact

as a viable resource through which communities can access information.

Impacts of Libraries and Reading Materials

In developed countries, extensive research has shown the benefits of reading

materials in a child's learning, and recent research has demonstrated similar benefits in

developing regions. Western researchers have shown that access to reading materials

leads to superior standardized testing scores, better attitudes toward reading among those

aged 6-12, and positive effects on the literacy development of younger children in both

developed and developing countries (Fisher, Lapp and Flood 179)(Neuman 306).

Despite the poor conditions of African libraries and the lack of a "reading culture," there

is evidence that access to reading materials has a variety of positive benefits for students

in developing countries. Not surprisingly, these effects are similar to those experienced in developed countries and include better performance in school, increased reading ability, and positive attitudes toward libraries. Results in these areas were demonstrated with a variety of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Performance in School

Both textbooks and books for leisure reading improve skills in listening comprehension, reading, writing, and related language skills,. While western donated textbooks have been criticized for cultural inappropriateness, they still have positive impacts on education. Research demonstrates that both western textbooks and textbooks geared toward local language and culture can improve reading fluency and comprehension scores.

In secondary schools in Tanzania, Patrick Plonski completed a prominent study on the impacts of western textbooks on academic achievement. Plonski monitored improvements in reading fluency and comprehension through assessments administered before and after the textbooks and library books were available, as well as with a control group that was not given books. His research demonstrated that access to books increased reading and fluency and comprehension scores (89, 103). Additionally, Plonski conducted interviews with teachers from the schools, which revealed that the books were considered very useful and that there was a great demand for more. It was also found that teachers did not view English as causing cultural harm, but there was an expressed desire for books published in Kiswahili and designed to the local curriculum (109-110, 116).

It has also been demonstrated that even limited numbers of students with access to textbooks can positively affect the reading scores of peers without textbooks due to

"enhanced motivation or competition or sharing of knowledge" (Frölich & Michaelowa

3). In a qualitative study, Dent Goodman used the same FAVL libraries that were used in

this research, and concluded that the libraries positively affected local students and

recommended that the FAVL model be replicated in other rural communities (512).

An in-depth quantitative and qualitative study in Uganda also demonstrated that

access to a community library positively affected student learning despite limitations.

The researcher, Stranger-Johannessen, noted five circumstances that limited the library

use:

1. The curriculum, the exams and the traditional way of teaching,

2. Lack of reading culture,

3. Lack of library tradition and the library not being rooted in the society,

4. Limited resources and under-qualified staff,

5. Discrepancy between language of instruction (LOI) and language of

communication. (112)

The research method included observation, questionnaire surveys of secondary students,

and interviews with students, teachers, and library staff (42, 54). Students were the main

users of the library, using primarily storybooks and textbooks, and seemed to read more

because of the library. In this way the library served as a place for socialization and

recreation, and as an extension of school as a place to study. Outside the library, students

had very little access to reading materials, but they read the Bible, the Quran, and their

class notes (111).

A series of "Book Flood" studies completed in the South Pacific, Singapore, Sri

Lanka and South Africa demonstrated the beneficial relationship between reading

materials and school performance. Since children in developing countries have limited exposure to English, and learning a language is difficult without good resources and instruction, primary schools were "flooded" with high-interest, illustrated storybooks written in the target language of English. All locations in the study experienced improved reading as measured by tests administered before and after the flood. The author and researchers of this study believe the "Book Flood" method would be useful in learning other languages in addition to English (Elley et al.)

A five year school library intervention study with the Literacy Project, which took place in two townships of South Africa, also demonstrated that access to reading materials positively benefited the students. Research methods included interviews with teachers, observations, questionnaires, and reading test. The study showed that introducing school libraries improved reading assessment grades in both township schools, familiarized children with reading for pleasure, augmented skills and knowledge gained from the classroom, and caused the children to be more enthusiastic about reading (Wessels 129-132).

Reading Habits

With students as the primary library users, libraries are most often used as an educational resource rather than as a resource for leisure reading (Issak 72)(TNS RMS East Africa). However, a variety of studies have drawn a clear connection between access to reading materials and leisure reading habits.

In regards to an alternative library model, there are two studies that address reading habits in the community library model of the FAVL libraries. In a quantitative study, secondary students that lived in villages with no library, a public library, or a

FAVL run-library were given a questionnaire about reading habits. Researchers asked students how many well-known African novels they had read, how many books they had read in the past 30 days, and how many they read in the past year (Kevane and Sissao 205). It was found that although reading levels were quite low, the presence of a library did increase reading by roughly 50% (209). Another study of the FAVL libraries by Dent Goodman demonstrated through surveys that there appeared to be a lot of leisure reading, which may encourage development of a reading culture (527). According to both studies, FAVL community libraries positively impacted reading habits.

Other studies on both primary and secondary schools in other regions of Africa have seen similar results. In South Africa, twenty disadvantaged primary schools were given new book donations. The researcher used a qualitative method of data collection, collecting data both before and after the book donations (Nassimbeni and Desmond 97). As a result of the donation, 15 of the 20 schools saw increased voluntary reading from the students, as well as an increased use of books by teachers (Nassimbeni and Desmond 101). Similarly, in a survey of the reading habits of Botswanan students (ages 12-15) during school holidays, most students enjoyed reading both academic and leisure reading materials (Arua and Arua), demonstrating that this group did not show the characteristics of a poor reading culture (597-58).

Perceptions of Libraries and Reading

Although the majority of Africans do not use libraries, most people view the presence of libraries in their communities as positive. The largest study concerning perceptions toward libraries was published by Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL)

(TNS RMS East Africa). This study examined public libraries in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe to learn about perceptions of libraries from national and local stakeholders (municipalities, ministries, public agencies, media, etc.) and the public (both users and nonusers). Using a wide variety of surveys and in-depth interviews, the research showed that the majority of both users and nonusers alike view libraries as important or even essential to individuals and communities. Local and national officials also viewed the libraries positively (148-149).

This study also examined attitudes toward the user satisfaction with certain resources in the library. When examining attitudes toward books and periodicals on a scale of "excellent," "good," "bad," and "very bad," most users described the resources as "good" or "excellent." However, a different survey from the same study showed that the largest areas of user dissatisfaction were the variety of books and a lack of interesting books. The presence of relevant reading materials was also shown to have the largest potential for motivating nonusers to start using the library (155-159).

During the Children's Reading Tent project, interviews with children and adult facilitators examined the concepts of a reading culture and literacy in the context of Uganda (Jönsson and Olsson 1). The children's viewpoints associated reading and writing primarily with school whereas storytelling, another Children's Reading Tent activity, was viewed more as a leisure activity. This was because storytelling is culturally relevant in that it teaches history and how to behave, serves as a socializing activity, and provides advice and moral lessons. Clearly reading and writing are viewed quite differently from storytelling, but these two types of literacy do overlap. The children appeared to link these two activities together according to their own needs in a form of

"bicultural mediation," a way of balancing culture at school and at home. Additionally, adults viewed the development of a reading culture as useful for entertainment, gaining knowledge and solving problems in everyday life, in addition to being necessary for development, economic growth, and to "avoid ignorance and backwardness" (79-80).

Studies examining other issues related to reading habits and reading materials also report positive attitudes toward reading among students (Machet 1)(Arua and Arua 597)(Nassimbeni and Desmond 101). In a study completed by Jönsson and Olsson, most children and adults see libraries primarily in terms of study-related information (TNS RMS East Africa 18). However, librarians surveyed in the study described the benefits gained by users, such as developing "new skills and learning something new" or obtaining "new ideas, new interests," in addition to merely school related benefits.

One unique study in Uganda examined how female users of a community library perceived libraries to be useful for girls and women. The researcher observed and participated in the activities of the Kyato Community Library for a year and during this time she conducted interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions (Jones 126). The study demonstrated that the community library, with its proximity and quality personnel, was useful for women in many ways including community engagement, adult English and literacy instruction, and providing a safe, neutral space for women to meet with others. The researcher also noted that the reading materials provided by the library were beneficial to the female users. These reading materials included a wide variety of books and literacy resources, some which were written in local languages and others that were written very simply and geared toward those with little or no English reading ability (127-130).

Section Summary

Much work is required to improve African public libraries, but research supporting their benefits does exist. Previous research has justified the usefulness of libraries by measuring their positive effect upon school performance, reading habits, and also by demonstrating a consensus among Africans that libraries are valuable resources. If simply having reading materials and libraries at their current status is already beneficial, then the prospect of improving African libraries should certainly be considered for the future.

Culturally Relevant Reading Materials

Research related to reading preferences in Africa is extremely limited. In some studies of the beneficial impact of reading materials engaging and age-appropriate books are used, but genre and subject matter are not mentioned (Nassimbeni and Desmond 96)(Fisher, Lapp and Flood 179). Less research has been completed that reveals specific preferences on subject matter and younger age groups, but several studies have been conducted on reading preferences for high school ages.

In Burkina Faso, two studies have revealed the specific genre preferences of adolescents. The first study, by Kevane and Sissao, measured the reading habits of 10th graders by grouping students into four categories: without public library, with public library, without FAVL library, and with FAVL library. All categories demonstrated interest in African novels, traditional stories, and history (207), but the study was limited since researchers did not look at gender or other age groups. Using focus groups of young women and interviews with teachers and librarians, Dent Goodman also found that

African literature was very popular, with newspapers, short stories, comics, and textbooks also among the most popular (526).

A study completed by Nomakhosazana Hazel Rasana similarly examined reading preferences of adolescents in South Africa. The researcher conducted focus group interviews and questionnaires with 11th graders regarding preferred reading material, authors, and language for reading. The results showed that students preferred love, sports, and politics. Females tended to prefer love, fashion, and beauty, which corresponded with their preferred types of reading materials (magazines, novels, and recipe books) while males tended to prefer sports, politics, religion, and computers that corresponded with their preferred type of reading materials of Bibles, sports magazines, and the internet. Shakespeare was among the favorite authors, as were Satyo and Mtuze, Xhosa novelists and playwrights. English was predominantly stated as the preferred language (180-185).

Although few studies in Africa link reading preferences to younger age groups, two such studies were conducted by Myrna P. Matchet. Those studies looked at both fiction and nonfiction reading preferences among children ages 7-16 in an urban area in South Africa, with the children categorized into two groups: Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) and Key Stage 3 (ages 11-16). Her first study, in 2003, focused on fiction reading preferences. It was found that the younger group preferred "school stories" and "religious stories," followed by "animal stories," "stories set in the past," and "adventure stories" (24), while the older group of students had more pronounced gender differences with "love stories" and "school stories" being preferred by girls and "horror," "humor," "mysteries," "adventure," and "fantasy" for boys. Her study on non-fiction in 2004 showed that more than 50% of children claimed to read non-fiction materials at least

sometimes, but that this trend was more common among boys. In order to understand which non-fiction subjects were popular, Matchet had the children rate various categories on a five-point scale. For example, certain subjects were more popular with one gender than the other. "Sport" was a popular topic for boys, while "how the body works" was more interesting for girls. Interest in subjects like "machines," "how things work," and "outer space" decreased with girls as age increased in contrast to the boys, whose interest level was similar across age groups. Interest in subjects "religion" and "the rest of the world" did not change significantly based on gender or age. The study also demonstrated that younger age groups preferred simple books with pictures, as well as activity books and magazines, rather than computers, encyclopedias, or books with a lot of facts. This differed from older boys and girls, who preferred magazines and computers for reading information-based material (11-17).

Section Summary

As in western countries, factors like age and gender have significant effect on reading preferences, but local context also plays an important role. Because African libraries do not often supply high interest reading materials, this research is helpful in demonstrating to western organizations and local governments which types of reading materials should be supplied. However, some of these studies do not fully acknowledge the vast differences between western and local literature, or between the needs of urban and rural areas.

Summary

The literature reviewed reveals a promising future for African libraries. The articles discussed demonstrate that libraries can evolve their resources to meet local needs,

that there are benefits to having better access to reading materials, and that careful

selection of reading materials can increase reading and encourage a reading culture.

However, there is still very limited research concerning reading preferences. Little

research has been completed to understand children's reading preferences in rural areas,

or to compare different kinds of reading material, such as donated western materials or

reading materials geared toward local interests and written by local authors. This gap in

academic knowledge should be addressed if improvement to African libraries is going to

be made. If libraries are to fulfill their goal of providing information through written

material, it is essential that reading interest begin at an early age.

CHAPTER 4.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While libraries are accepted resources in western countries, there is controversy concerning whether they are equally appropriate and effective in developing countries. Despite the ineffective library model leftover from colonial times, the African library still has redeeming qualities. Using research on the impact of reading materials and alternative library models, academics have demonstrated the benefit of libraries in general, but little research has been completed concerning local preferences and perceptions toward different types of reading materials. Information about reading preferences is especially important considering recent efforts by western organizations to support library development by providing reading materials. This research outlines how the western-centric library model should be altered in response to local reading preferences and perceptions of what resources are considered most useful.

This study examines the usage of culturally relevant (African and western literature catering toward African culture) and donated western materials in rural libraries of southwest Burkina Faso. This project used both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine which children's books were popular, as well as which children's books and other resources the children's parents believed were most useful.

Quantitative methods addressed the following research questions:

1   How often are African literature and local photobooks checked compared to French literature? How does this vary based on gender, ethnicity, and age? How has this changed over time?

2   What are the demographics of library subscribers in regards to age, gender,

ethnicity?

A research team recorded book checkout information for 10 books in three

categories of children's books -- French, African, and local photobooks (LPB) -- and also

copied the library's subscription records, which contained demographic information

about the library's subscribers. This showed how frequently a book was checked out and

by which demographic groups.

Qualitative methods addressed the following research questions:

1   Which reading materials are most popular with children?

2   What are parents' attitudes toward the libraries?

3   What do parents believe should be done to improve the libraries?

The qualitative study used focus groups with parents of library users that were

conducted with help from the local librarian who translated and clarified questions.

These focus groups also answered whether African literature, local photobooks, or

French literature are more popular with children. This portion of the study revealed the

parents' perceptions of the libraries and which reading materials they believed to be most

useful. Additionally, speaking with the parents provided many useful suggestions about

which resources and programs should be added to the library.

Setting

The study took place in five of the twelve rural libraries in southwest Burkina

Faso managed by an American NGO, Friends of African Village Libraries (FAVL).

These five villages -- Karaba, Dohoun, Bereba, Dimikuy, and Sara -- are located in the

Tuy Province in Bwa country, where the largest ethnic groups are Bwaba and Mossi, and

other minorities include the Peulh, Fulani, and Dafine. The primary industry is agriculture, with cotton being the main cash crop.

FAVL has been working in Burkina Faso since 2001 and has developed a specific community oriented model for its libraries. Initially the local community provides a building or building site, forms a local management committee for the library, and selects a member of the community to hold the position as the librarian to be trained and supervised by FAVL. The training of librarians and other staff involves learning how to manage the library and facilitate in children's programs, which include read-alouds and other activities such as arts and crafts, singing, telling riddles, and summer reading camps. In addition to the reading room that holds books, each library has a shaded community space outside. FAVL provides the books (typically one to two thousand), pays the salary of the librarian, and oversees the libraries through periodic check-ins and required reports from the librarians concerning finances and operations. The use of FAVL libraries as a research setting is unique in that, unlike many African public libraries, FAVL's financial support from United States funds is used to purchase and produce a wide range of reading materials aimed at local interests.

These community libraries are stocked with a variety of books, including many which are published in and donated from western countries. However, FAVL also strives to provide more culturally relevant books from African writers, and also produces children's books created from photos taken in the villages. These local photobooks are created yearly by American volunteers and students from Santa Clara University's Reading West Africa study abroad program, and are geared toward new readers in order to engage them with local themes on subjects such as cooking, how to make certain

products of the village, riddles, occupations, animals, hygiene, and religion. These books are primarily written in French, the former colonizing language, but some reading materials have been created that are written in Dioula, a local language.

Sample/Participants

The sample for the quantitative portion of the study was selected by myself and the librarian, and consisted of 10 children's books from each of three categories: African, French, and local photobooks. The children who checked out these books were a self-selecting sample since they checked out the books prior to the data collection. In order to gather a wider range of perspectives concerning reading materials, the parents of children who use the library were interviewed in a focus group, with the village librarians assisting in the selection of suitable focus group subjects based on local knowledge of the community. All of the participants selected for the focus groups in Bereba and Dimikuy were women.

Data Collection/Procedure

For analysis of book checkouts in the quantitative portion of the research, local research assistants transcribed checkout records for 10 books from each category (see Appendix A for a sample of the book titles that were used). Since some books were not available in all of the libraries, alternative titles with similar popularity were selected as a substitute. Using the checkout cards placed in each book, assistants recorded information including the title of the book, where the book was published, when the book was introduced to the library, and how many times the book was checked out, including exact dates and names of the library user. In addition, assistants used the library subscription registries to track demographic information for the library users. This information

included name, gender, age (at the start of their library subscription), neighborhood, school, school year, and ethnicity. Only the subscription records from 2009-2012 were recorded due to time constraints and because most of the children's books examined in the study were checked out in this time range.

For the qualitative portion, I synthesized information obtained from both focus groups and general observations of the library. The observations included noting which types of people came into the library and which sections of the library were most frequently visited. FAVL libraries have previously received American volunteers, so the presence of a researcher was not unusual, and I was already somewhat familiar with the libraries and the library staff due to a previous stay in villages in 2009 through the Reading West Africa study abroad program which works in conjunction with FAVL. In addition to my general observations, I conducted focus groups with the librarian and parents of children who use the library in order to document their perceptions toward certain reading materials. In the focus groups I asked the following questions:

1. How many children do you have and how many like to read?

2. What are your child's favorite books to read?

3. What are your child's favorite book genres?

4. What types of books do you think are most useful for children?

5. How do you think the libraries are useful for students?

6. What resources or programs would you like to see more of in the libraries?

The qualitative and quantitative research methods used in this study can be replicated in future studies to determine reading preferences and library uses in other areas of Africa, especially in testing new kinds of reading materials developed for the

African context. The data collection portion of this study in particular can be replicated

as long as there are accurate book checkout and subscription records and a variety of

reading material categories.

Data Analysis

The primary data analysis pertains to the quantitative portion of the study on book

check out records. Both checkout records and demographic information were first

entered into a spreadsheet and cleaned of transcription errors. Following that, the data

was joined and then imported into R for data manipulation and using the ggplot2 library

for plotting.   This system provided greater flexibility in the design of the data plots.

CHAPTER 5.

DATA AND MAIN ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of this research study, gathered among five

villages in southwestern Burkina Faso. The results of the focus groups and general

observations are presented first, followed by the quantitative and most significant part of

the study. The goals of this study were to understand children's reading preferences,

especially in relation to literature containing local themes versus western donated

literature, and overall perceptions of the libraries.

Focus Groups

Due to a variety of constraints I was not able to conduct focus groups in all five of

the villages. Nevertheless, the responses were sufficient to provide a number of insights.

There were similar patterns between the responses of the three villages and my

observations of the libraries.

Reading Culture

The libraries were not as busy as usual, but there were still signs of avid readers in

the villages who made good use of the library's book collection. It was primarily older

students, both male and female, who regularly came by the library to checkout books for

leisure reading during their summer break. Some younger children came by to check out

books, but due to summer break and a lack of children's programs there were far fewer

children than when I had previously volunteered during fall and winter. Although

students and younger children made up the majority of people checking out books during

the rest of the year, observations and focus groups revealed that some adults (more men

than women) also checked out books. There was even one elderly man at the Dohoun

library (who had an African novel in hand) who frequently checks out books and

expressed his appreciation for the library. All of the focus group participants reported

that the majority of their children liked reading. The few children the parents reported

that did not like reading were generally not of reading age or not enrolled in school.

Attitudes

While speaking with library users and parents of children who use the library,

nothing but positive things were spoken about the library. All of the focus group subjects

expressed that the library was a useful resource and that their children liked using the

library. The library was most often seen as useful for providing activities and

entertainment during vacation, allowing children to learn how to read, study French, and

their more about their own culture. The parents also appreciated that the library is a

nearby resource and that their children do not have to travel to neighboring villages for

library access. One student who was staying Bereba visiting his family during summer

vacation, but who goes to school in Bobo Dioulasso (the second largest city in Burkina

Faso), said that there were no libraries available for him to use.

Literature Preferences

Although none of the parents in the focus groups knew the specific titles of books

their children read, they were aware of their children's favorite genres. The parents

reported that tales, comic books, history, and African literature were the most popular.

When asked which book genres were most useful, responses were similar: history,

African literature, books in French, and books about life in Africa. Based on my

observations, students went to the African literature section first and browsed in this

section more frequently than in the French literature section, although scholarly manuals were also a popular choice for students.

Recommendations for the Library

The suggestions from the focus groups regarding which books, programs, and other resources should be added to the library were very interesting. Book suggestions included books for students, pedagogical materials for teachers, new African novels more books in Dioula (a prominent language in the region, but with few children's books available), and books in Arabic (most likely for the study of Islam, a common religion in the region). For younger children, the focus groups also recommended that the library supply even simpler books, as well as games for children of non-reading age. The parents requested more of the existing children's programs, to have them more often and for a longer duration. They also requested additions that would benefit their own use and access to the library, such as literacy classes for adults, and electricity in the libraries since evening is often the only time many adults have available to read. For young men and women, the parents suggested that libraries also provide resources to teach about their roles in society such as household obligations for girls, as well as substance abuse issues regarding drugs, alcohol, and smoking. Additionally the all female focus groups seemed to enjoy using the library for socializing and discussing improvements for the library, and suggested doing this type of activity again in the future.

Library Record Data Collection

The following data was obtained by recording all library subscriber information from 2009-2012 in five FAVL run village libraries checkout information for 10 popular books from each of French literature, African literature, and local photobooks (LPB).

The data collection portion of the study provided valuable insight into children's reading preferences, reading habits, demographics of library users, and evidence regarding how FAVL libraries are succeeding in increasing reading in the villages.

Subscriber Demographics

Although I did not see many young students in the libraries during the month of August, the data showed that children are by far the most common users of the library. The majority of library subscribers were near the age of 10 (Figure 1), male (Figure 2), and of the Bwaba ethnic group, the largest ethnic group in the region (Figure 3). However, many ages were not entered in the subscription records, perhaps indicating that very young subscribers did not know their own age. Of all the library subscription records with recorded ages, the majority of these subscribers were of typical student ages (high school age and younger).

Figure 1
Library Subscribers by Age
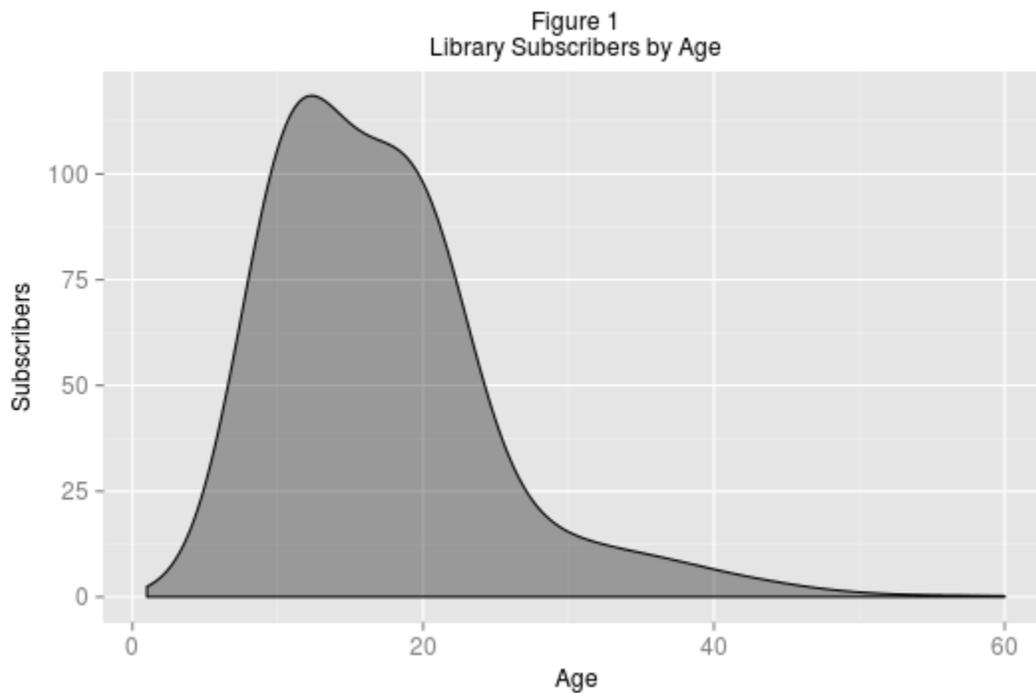
Figure 2
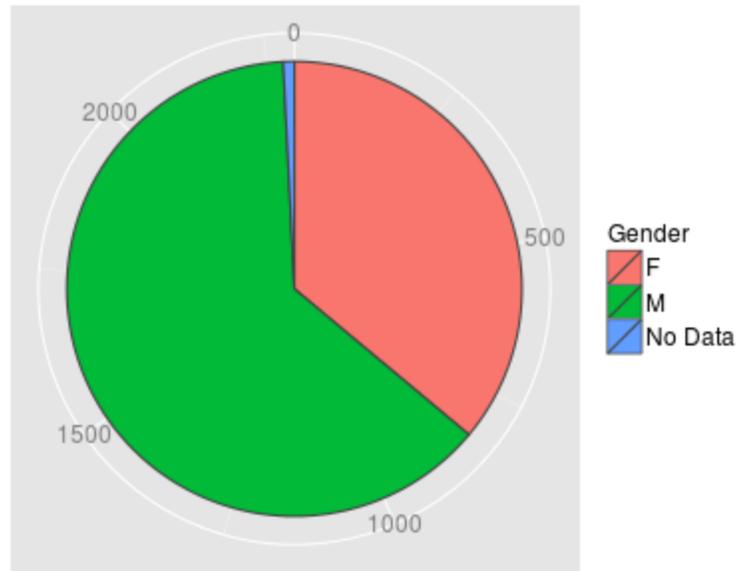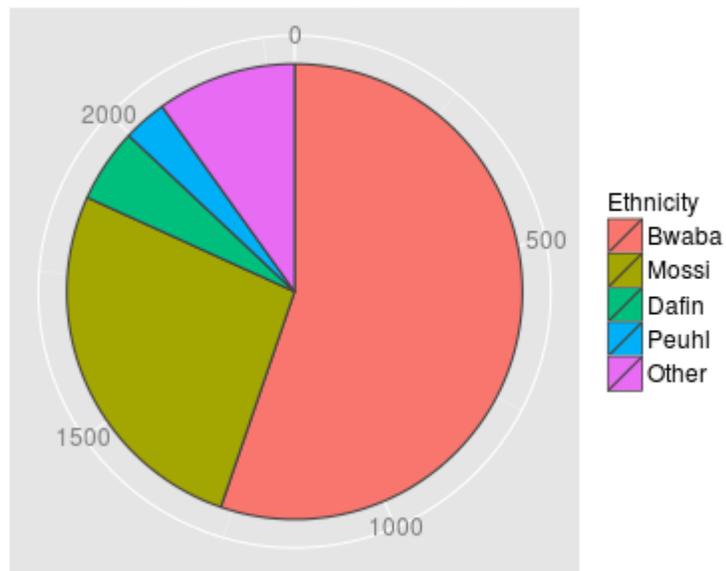Library Subscribers by Gender

Figure 3
Library Subscribers by Ethnicity

Reading Habits

The data also demonstrated that book checkouts have increased significantly in the past three years, in all age groups (Figure 5), and in all of the libraries except for in Dimikuy -- the library with the least complete records (Figure 4) -- which had the most book checkouts during the year 2009, the year the library opened. Book checkouts varied highly with the season, with decreased checkouts during the summer, presumably because children were out of school and possibly helping their parents with the crops or other housework (Figure 6).
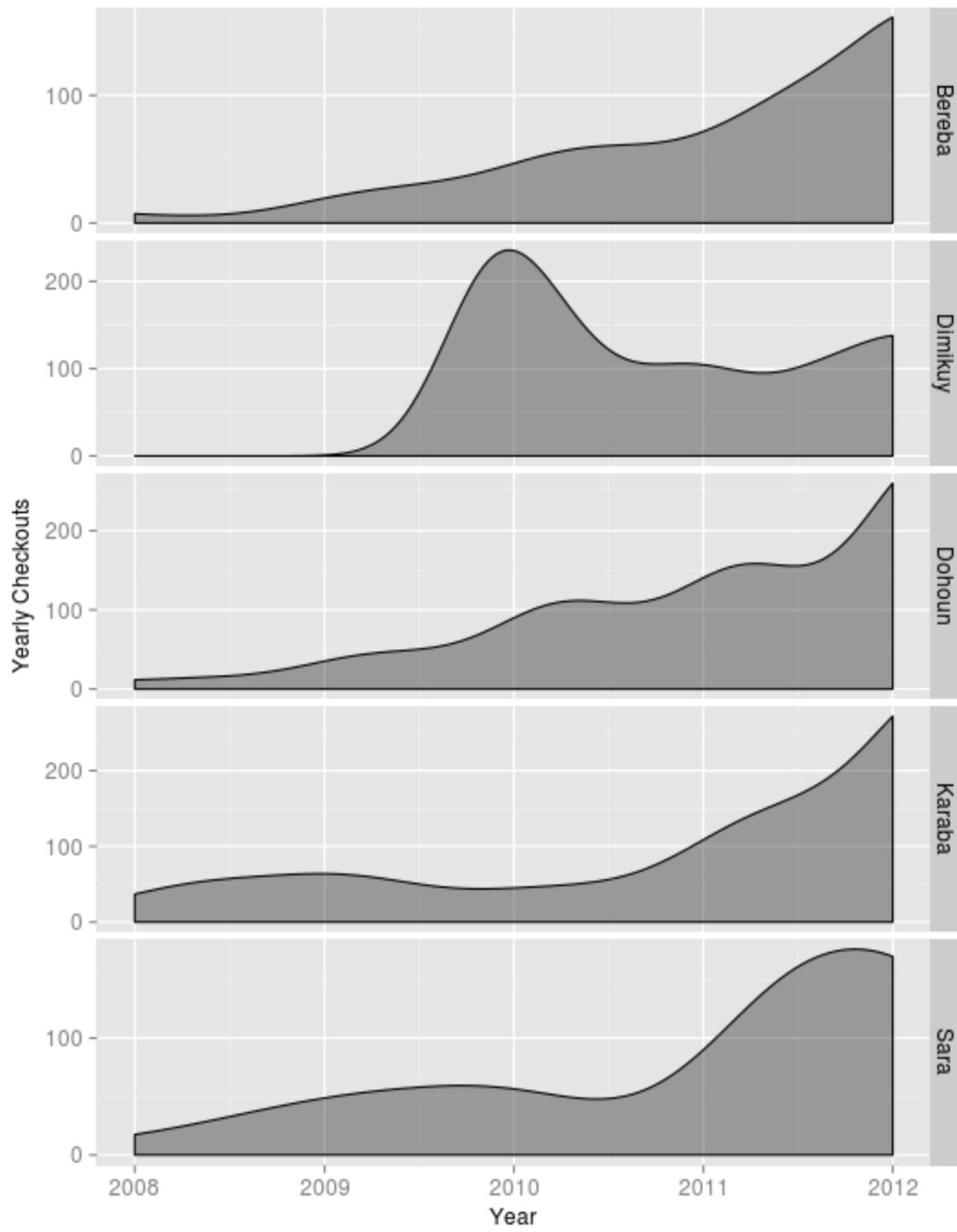
Figure 4
Book Checkouts Over Time by Village

Figure 5
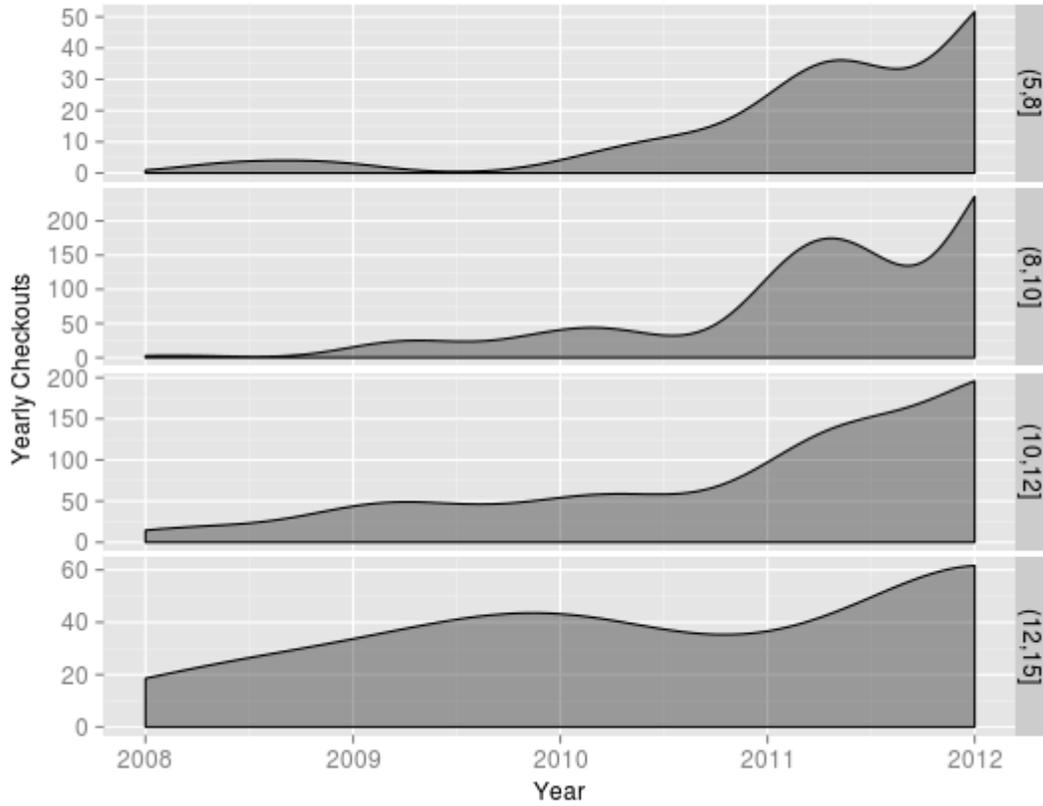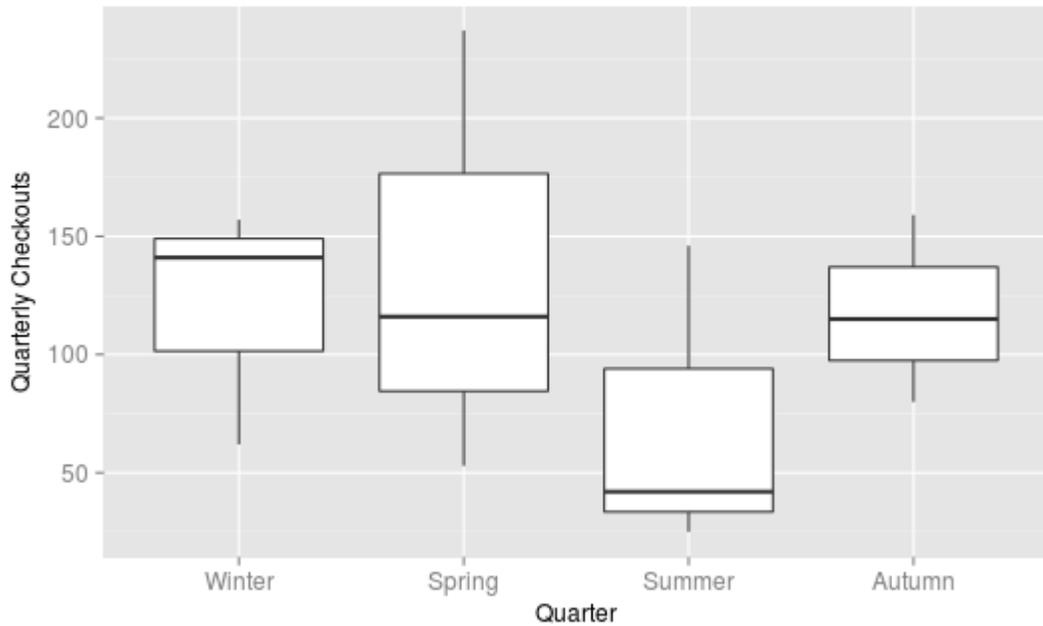Book Checkouts Over Time by Age

Figure 6
Seasonality of Book Checkouts

Children's Literature Preferences

The data showed a strong preference for African children's literature overall (Figure 7), as well as for both genders (Figure 8), major ethnic groups (Figure 9), and all age groups (Figure 10) when looking at the combined checkouts for each category across all libraries. The second most popular category was the French children's literature, followed closely by the local photobooks (abbreviated as LPB in the following figures). Although African children's literature was the most popular for both genders, females tended to prefer the local photobooks over French children's books, while males preferred French children's books. The checkouts according to ethnic group (Figure 10) also showed that African children's literature was preferred by all ethnic groups, but Bwaba children preferred French children's literature over the local photobooks.

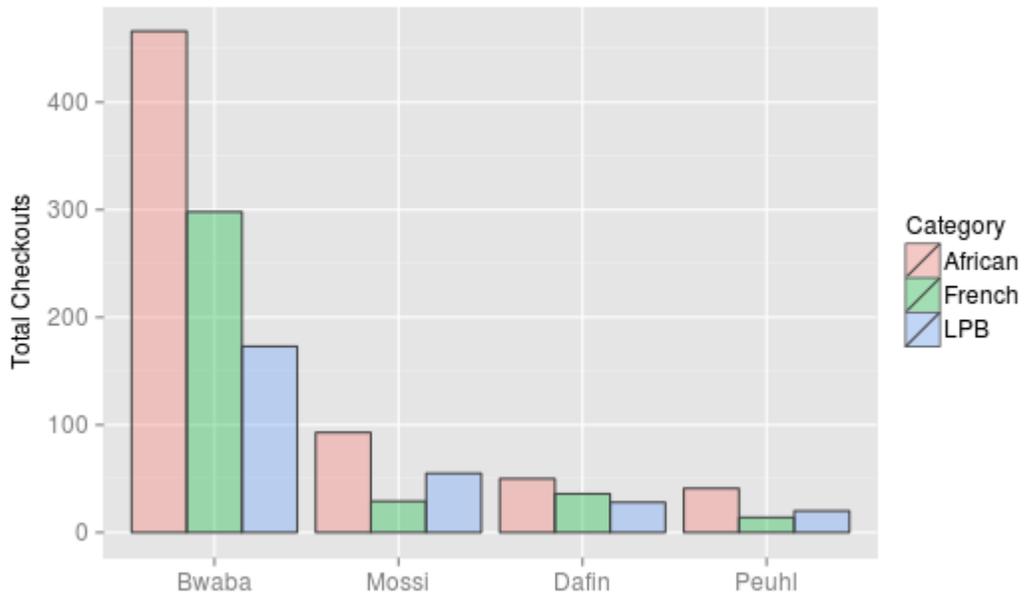Figure 7
Total Checkouts per Category
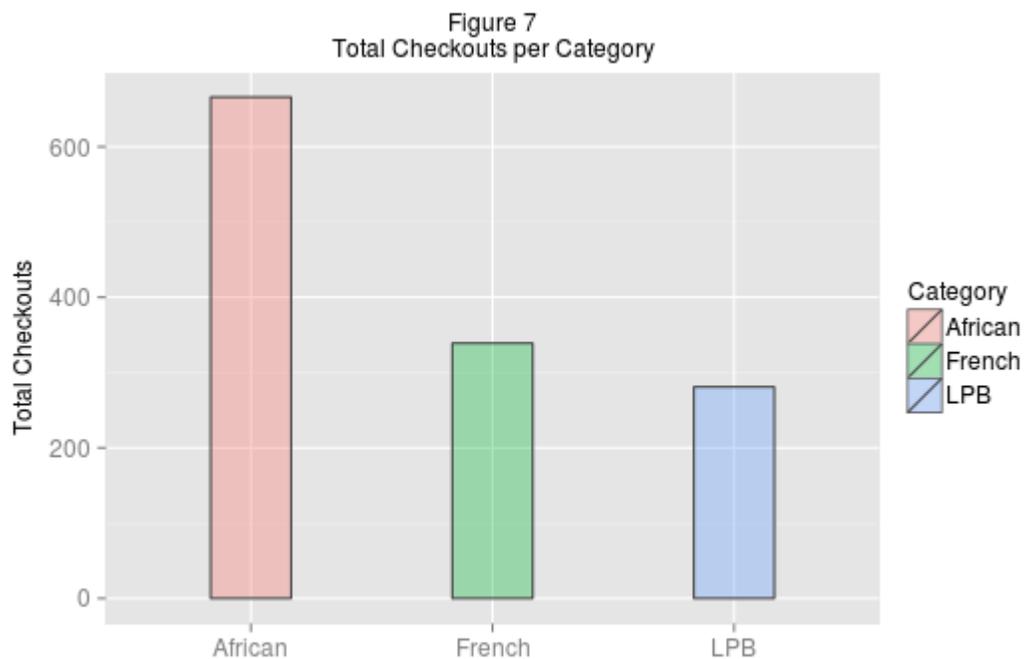
Note: LPB = Local Photobooks

Figure 8
Book Checkouts by Gender
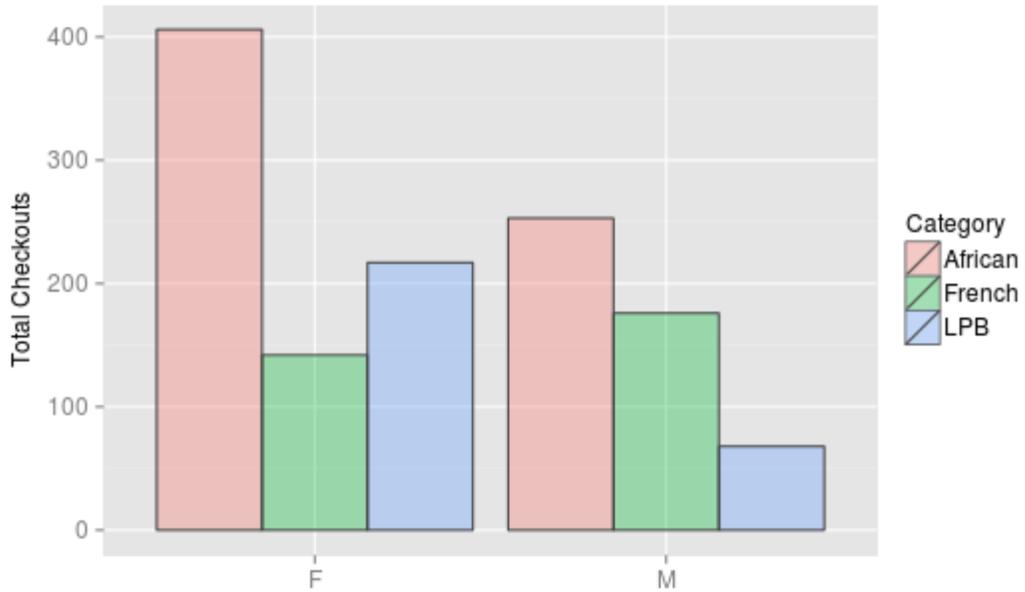
Notes: Checkouts with no gender data in record not listed

Figure 9
Book Checkouts by Ethnicity

Notes: Checkouts with no ethnicity data in record not listed

Although the total book checkouts show that French children's literature is more popular than the local photobooks (Figure 7), there are several trends that demonstrate the increasing preference for local photobooks when compared to French children's literature. The local photobooks were more popular than French children's books with the youngest children (Figures 10 and 11), with checkouts decreasing in this category as age increased. The most compelling evidence for the increasing popularity of local photobooks is seen in figures 12 and 13. These figures demonstrate that not only have book check outs for local photobooks increased over time (Figure 12), but that they have done so by displacing French books, rather than other African selections, as a portion of yearly checkouts (Figure 13).
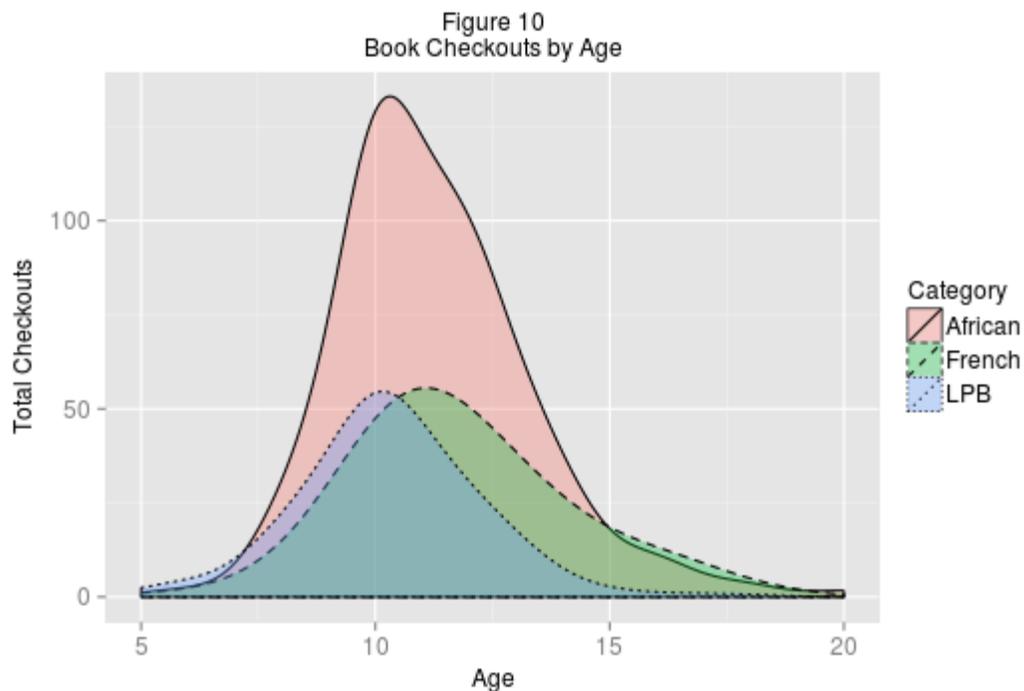

Figure 10
Book Checkouts by Age

Figure 11
Book Checkout Fractions by Age

Figure 12
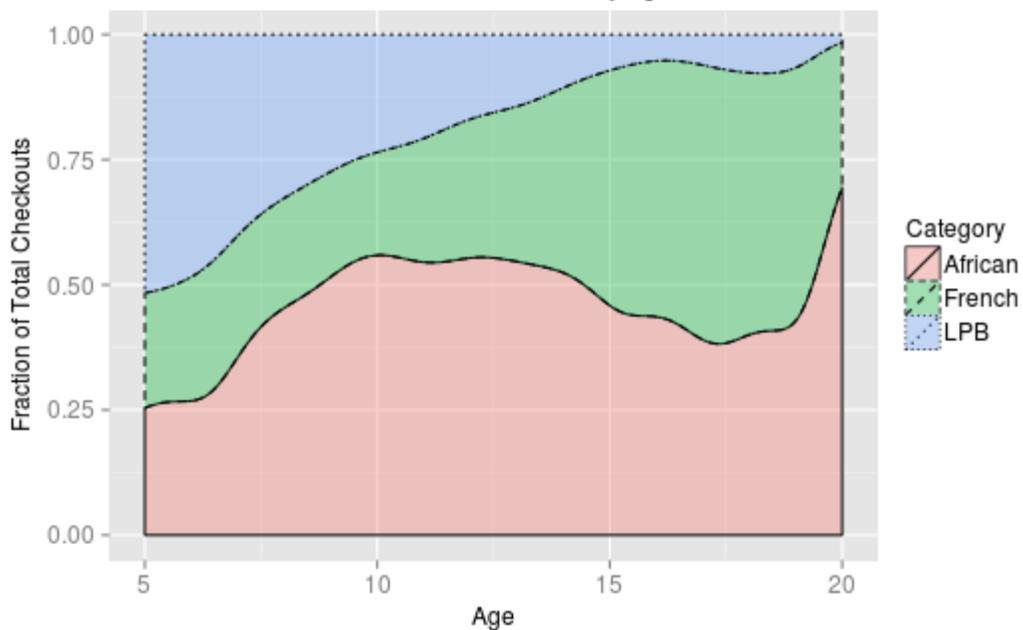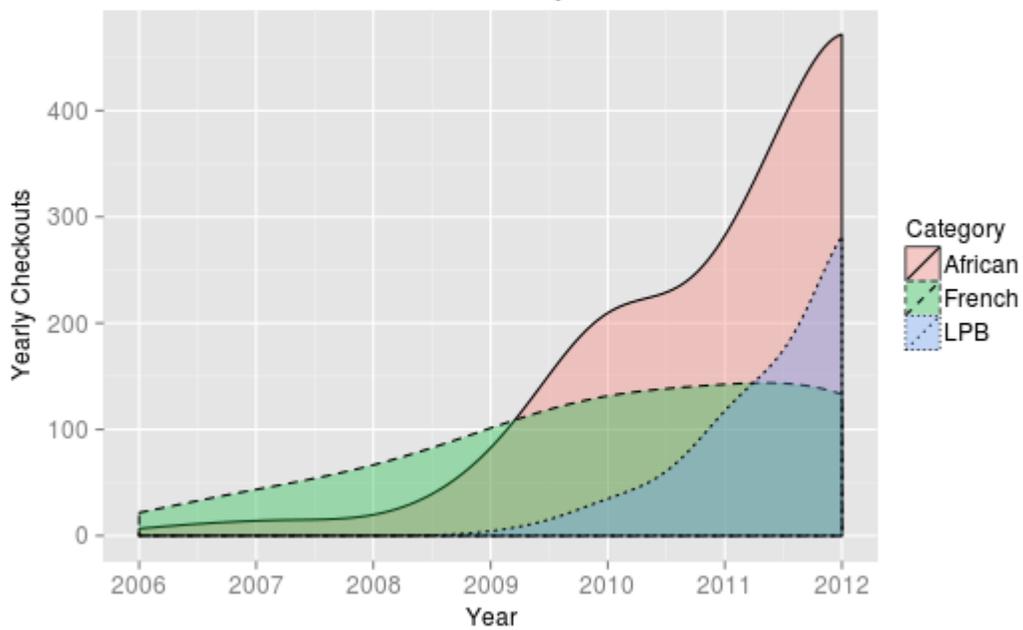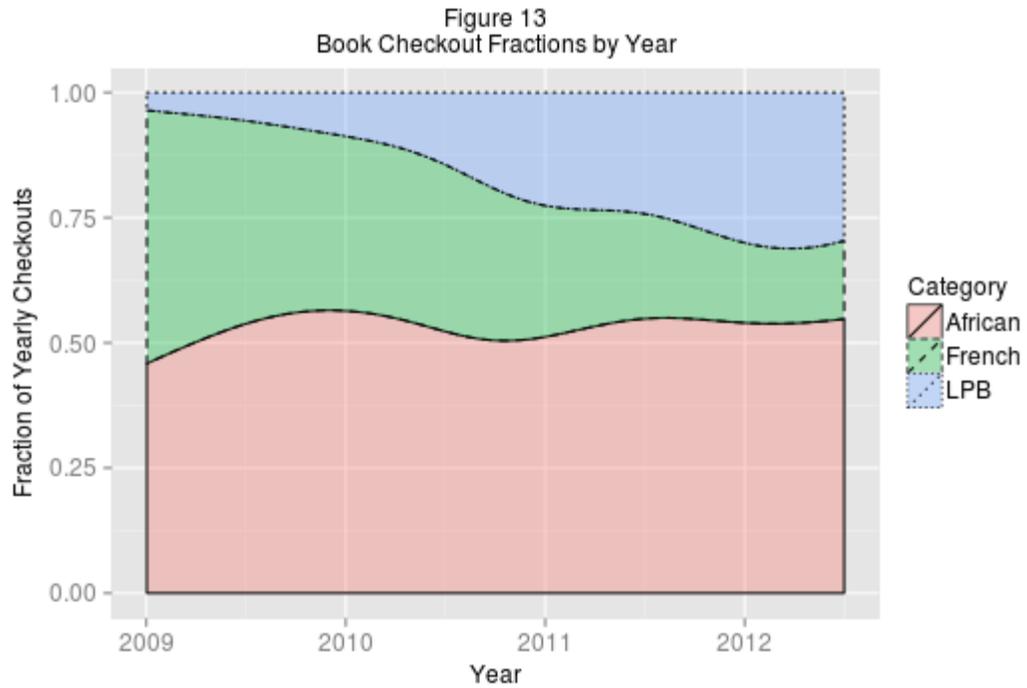Book Checkouts by Year

Figure 13
Book Checkout Fractions by Year

It is important to note that a significant portion of the book checkout data was not easily matched to gender and ethnicity from the subscription information, thus these trends may differ to some degree from the true category preferences.

CHAPTER 6.

DISCUSSION

This research confirms the hypothesis that culturally relevant reading materials were more engaging than children's books tailored for a western culture, since children's books with African authors and locally produced photobooks were found to be more popular than western books.

The basis of his research can be summarized in three questions:

1 Subscriber demographics:

Who are the users of the library? What are the demographics of library subscribers in regards to age, gender, and ethnicity?

2 Children's reading preferences:

Which reading materials are most popular with children? How often are African literature and local photobooks checked out compared to French literature? How has this changed over time?

3 Parent's perceptions of the library:

What are parents' attitudes toward the libraries? What do parents believe should be done to improve the libraries?

Because FAVL libraries are an exception to the standard public African library in that they are well-functioning, include a variety of reading materials, and emphasize good record keeping, these libraries provided a unique opportunity to use the library records as a key area of analysis for this study. General observation and focus groups with parents of library users was a qualitative portion of the study that helped form a fuller analysis of how reading materials are benefiting children in this region. Although many questions

addressed by this study overlap with previous research, there were many new insights gained from this research.

Subscriber Demographics

As noted in by Issak and TNS RMS East Africa, students around the age of 11 were the primary users of the libraries run by FAVL. Although Issak described this as a weakness of libraries since there are a very higher number of students compared to adults, this could potentially change. The results from this research show that culturally engaging resources are more popular, suggesting that students who start reading culturally relevant literature at a young age might be more likely to continue reading during adulthood.

The data also shows that males are more likely to register as library subscribers, which is not ideal considering global efforts to improve females' access to education, literacy skills, and information. However, this study showed that females had a higher number of checkouts, indicating that they were generally more avid readers than male subscribers. This might be due to the fact that many of the local photobooks were written about cooking and women's activities, which would also explain the increased popularity of this category among female subscribers. One of these books is *Ma mere et moi* (My mother and I), a book about the daily life of a young girl and her mother in a village.

Ethnicity did not seem to play an important role in determining reading preferences, with African literature preferred across all three major ethnic groups. According to the data, the only variation was that Bwaba children favored French children's books over the local photobooks, although this could be explained by the fact

that French children's books are in larger supply and have been in the library longer than the local photobooks.

Children's Reading Preferences

The results of Kevane, Sissao, and Dent Goodman in their research on FAVL libraries demonstrated that African literature, traditional stories, and history were all popular, which agrees with the results of this study. Hazel Rasana also noted that 11th graders in South Africa stated African authors as some of their favorites, while Kevane and Sissao made similar observations in Burkina Faso. Therefore combined with the results of this study, African authored books appear to be popular regardless of age.

The locally produced photobooks are common in all FAVL libraries, but based on their popularity as demonstrated in this study, their integration into other African libraries could be very beneficial for promoting reading. Although the French children's books have been in the libraries much longer and are greater in quantity than the local photobooks, the local photobooks have recently surpassed them in popularity. Photobook checkouts were shown to rise, in contrast to the French children's books, which have been displaced as a preference. In the future it seems reasonable to assume that local photobooks will continue to increase in popularity, while the French books decrease in popularity. The local photobooks were more popular with girls than boys, and most popular with the youngest age groups (who are the target audience for these books). Unfortunately, due to inconsistencies in the data collection process and the unavailability of representative books in all villages, it was difficult to determine reading preferences within these categories (i.e. stories, animals, and cooking).

Parents' Perceptions of the Library

The parents of children who frequent the library expressed positive views toward the library as also noted in the study "Perceptions of Public Libraries in Africa," where even non-users of the library viewed libraries as important for communities. Not only did parents state that libraries are useful for children to learn how to read, they also viewed tales, history, African literature, and books about life in Africa to be most useful, indicating that they do see libraries as compatible with and relevant to African culture. The parents also saw the libraries as potential resources for their community since they mentioned a desire for adult classes and electricity so that they could use the library in the evening. Additionally, because some suggested the library add more resources for young men and women about societal roles and substance abuse, they view the potential of libraries as more than just an informational resource, but as a community center that can be useful for all age groups that are living in the villages. This lends further credence to the notion that libraries can serve as a "neutral" space, as in the Kyato Community Library in Uganda studied by Jones, where any member of the community, even women, can congregate and access information. In this way, libraries can move past their colonial history of catering toward the upper echelon of society, and instead work to empower poor communities.

CHAPTER 7.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A vestige from the destructive period of European colonialism, libraries in Africa were originally intended to reinforce the colonial regime by supporting the education of elites rather than provide relevant information to indigenous societies. Since the end of colonialism, academics have reexamined the western library structure, documenting its failures and articulating new ideas as to how the libraries could benefit African societies. In the past, the international development industry has focused on achieving high rates of school enrollment and literacy levels rather than providing reading materials and supporting libraries. In a modern world highly dependent on information technology, new initiatives realize the need to not only support education in developing countries, but the need to also provide increased access to information.

Libraries in Africa are an example of a "chicken or the egg" problem: because libraries lack high quality reading materials, libraries are not widely used; but when libraries are not widely used, there is little urgency from African governments and other international organizations to supply high quality reading materials. As a result, the book collections of African libraries do not contain sufficient reading materials with relevant themes and subject matter to engage or be of use to readers. There is much hope that libraries can be community resource centers in the future, particularly for rural communities, but before this can happen, additional research must be completed to demonstrate how libraries help communities.

Focusing primarily on empirical research, this study revealed the positive impact of relevant reading materials by demonstrating their popularity over western donated reading material. Through the use of focus groups, this study also described how parents perceive the libraries as useful for children, and their suggestions for resources they would like to see added to the FAVL libraries. This research also provides an essential needs analysis for FAVL libraries regarding how they can meet the needs of users in this region of Burkina Faso, while also providing information on the types of resources that could be added to other African libraries. Better resources for poor, rural communities contributes to increased literacy and increased access to information, factors which have the potential to promote economic development while still respecting local culture.

Recommendations For Practice

Based on the results of this research, providing relevant reading materials with local themes and African authors is essential to encourage reading among children. Governments should support the local publishing industry to foster the growth of African literature and make African literature more available, and international development organizations should help fund this production. Additionally, non-profits that give western book donations should instead look for ways to support local book production and dissemination. Teachers in western countries can support the growth of Africa's publishing industry by using African novels in literature classes and encourage that the books be donated to African libraries after classroom use.

Due to the popularity of the local photobooks with young children, it would also be advisable for western organizations to assist in funding their production. High quality children's photobooks can be created without professional photography skills and

equipment, just as in FAVL's photobook project, and websites like FastPencil provide cheap alternatives to quickly publish books. Funding can also be allocated for centers in more urban areas so locals can create their own books based on their knowledge of their village's culture and history.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this research showed the popularity of three broad categories of reading materials, it also revealed a need for accurate library records to achieve a more detailed analysis of reading preferences. Even one exceptional FAVL library still had some issues with record keeping: some library checkout cards had been lost or discarded when the librarian ran out of space to record checkout information. As mentioned in the limitations of this study, there was difficulty in matching names from book checkout records to subscriber names in the subscription notebook, which made it difficult to link book checkout information to demographic information and produce more accurate correlations between book checkouts, demographic information, and book subject matter. Provided a library has good records, similar research can be completed to gain more insight on reading preferences. Additional research completed in the format of this study, but with better record keeping, could examine children's book preferences in regards to specific themes, such as cooking, cars, or stories. With accurate library records one can also examine the correlation of these themes to demographic information such as age and gender.

Summary of Conclusions

In summary, the following results of this research can be summed up into four research questions that were answered by a quantitative and qualitative research methodology:

1 African literature was the most popular category of children's books. Local photobooks showed increasing popularity and appear to be displacing French children's books. Tales, comic books, and history were specifically noted by the parents as popular.

2 Checkout frequencies of the childrens books examined have increased over the past three years.

3 Parents viewed the library as a useful resource for children and students to learn how to read, learn French, learn about culture and other things, and to provide entertainment.

4 The parents had many recommendations for the library with suggestions for reading materials, greater length of children's programs in frequency and length, as well as added resource and programs geared toward young adults and adults.

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APPENDIX A

Sample of French Children's Books Used

French title	English translation
Bambi	Bambi
Le pingouin qui n'aimait pas le froid	The penguin who didn't like the cold
Les bonnes idées de Mickey	The good ideas of Mickey
Benjamin et la nuit	Benjamin and the night
Nounours Lapin	The teddy rabbit
Les sept nains et le diamant	The seven dwarves and the diamond
Le petit chapéron rouge	Little red riding hood
La souris et la grenouille	The mouse and the frog
Petit ours brun et la sieste	The little brown bear and nap
Le roi lion	The lion king

Sample of African Children's Books used

French title	English translation
Fati et l'arbre a miel	Fati and the honey tree
La voleuse de sourires	The thief of smiles
Le retour de la voleuse de sourires	The return of the thief of smiles
Le Billet de 10,000f (the 10,000f bill)	The 10,000f bill
Le coq qui ne voulait plus chanter	The rooster who did not want to sing
l'enfant de l'oeil du ciel	The child from the eye of the skey
Le petit garçon bleu	The little blue boy
Les colombes de la paix	The doves of peace
Sinabani la petite dernière (the youngest)	The youngest
l'épopée de de Soundiata Keïta	The epic of Soundiata Keïta

Sample of Local Photobooks used

French title	English Translation
Allons chercher du bois	let's go look for wood
Comment fait-on le coura coura?	how do you make coura coura?
Comment fait-on le dolo?	how do you make dolo?
Comment fait-on le tô?	how do you make tô?
Comment fait-on les beignets?	how do you make beignets?
J'aime le benga!	I like benga!
La recolte du coton	the harvest of cotton
Ma mere et moi	my mother and me
Mon livre préféré	my favorite book
Qui veut chanter? Le vagabond et la forge?	Who wants to sing? The vagabond and the forge?