THE MAKING OF A READING SOCIETY
Developing a Culture of Reading in Rwanda

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DEDICATION

To you my wife Marie Chantal,
My sons Romeo Lucky and Jason,

For your love, support, understanding, exceptional patience
during my long absence from home,

This thesis is dedicated.
Acknowledgements

This doctoral thesis is a culmination of a long journey of life experience, studies and research. In the following lines, I would like to thank a number of supportive people who contributed to its completion. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge an invaluable support I received from Associate Professor Ingrid Andersson, my supervisor, whose provocative and insightful comments and suggestions have sharpened my thinking. I will always be grateful. On the same note, I am also indebted to Dr Monica Sandlund, my co-supervisor and Professor Sven Andersson for their support, critical reflection and constructive inputs on my work. I am also greatly indebted to Late Professor Lars Owe Dahlgren (RIP) and Professor Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren for their encouragement and support to Rwandan PhD students in Linköping. You will be remembered for your seminars on teaching and learning in higher education held in Rwanda.

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Linköping, August 2012
Pierre Canisius Ruterana
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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The development of life-long reading interests and reading habits is a constant process which begins in the home, improves systematically in the school and is carried on in later life through the influences of the general cultural atmosphere and the conscious efforts of public education and public libraries (Bamberger 1975: 43).

Background

This thesis addresses the publicly felt problem of lack of a reading culture in Rwanda (Baleeta, 2005; Parry, 2005; Ndikubwayezu, 2009; Ruterana, 2012). It explores home literacy practices which pave the way for lifelong learning through the development of reading habits. Government authorities and the media often speak about the lack of a reading culture and low levels of literacy among the Rwandan population in general which slow down the implementation of public policies (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [MINECOFIN], 2007). Yet, the benefits of a reading culture are numerous, as highlighted in one of Minister Habineza’s keynote addresses. He noted:

The reading culture is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning. Becoming a skilled and adaptable reader enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. Reading is not just for school, it is for life. Reading, in all its variety, is vital to our becoming better informed, having a better understanding of ourselves and others, and to our development as thoughtful, constructive contributors to a democratic and cohesive society (as cited in Ndikubwayezu, 2009: 11).

Habineza emphasized that most Rwandans do not find interest in reading because they are not aware of the advantages associated with it. It is therefore the responsibility of those who are enlightened (authorities, teachers, researchers, parents and others) to showcase the value of reading and pass it on to the younger generation in order to give them a chance to be the best they can be in life. This does, however, not demean the long and rich oral tradition that was a vehicle for oral literacy before the coming of print literacy.

The overall assumption of this thesis is the conviction that reading above and beyond the basic search for information is a lifelong educational activity of capital importance for the whole population. And the promotion of the reading habit has been on UNESCO’s agenda since 1972 with the proclamation of the International Book Year. One of the themes of the year was the promotion of reading habits (Bamberger, 1975). This agenda was retained because it was believed that many people’s literacy acquired in or outside school could be lost simply because ‘reading is not a part of their cultural environment, and books attuned to their tastes are not easily accessible’ (Idem, p. 38). To perpetuate this agenda, UNESCO has
devoted the date of April 23 every year as the World Book Day. The theme retained for 2011 was "paying a world-wide tribute to books and authors, encouraging everyone, and in particular young people, to discover the pleasure of reading."

Similarly, research in reading claims that reading is an important part of modern education (Mialaret, 1975; Tötemeyer, 1994; Rosenberg, 2003). It is essential for people to increase their knowledge and awareness of other cultures and ways of thinking. In his treaty on learning to read, Mialaret (1975) remarks that extensive reading, i.e., reading above and beyond basic or functional reading, fosters the reader’s personal, moral and intellectual growth. It is also a source of inspiration, and entertainment, and gives insight into ourselves and others. He emphasizes that these benefits can only accumulate maximally if readers choose to read during their leisure time, and if reading becomes a lifelong habit. Additionally, the philosopher James Russel Lowel (quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987) in his Democracy and Other Addresses: Books and Libraries (1893) describe the value of extensive reading as

That is the key which admits us to the whole world of thought and fancy and imagination; to the company of saint and sage, of the wisest and wittiest moment that enables us to see with the keenest eye, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voices of all times (Robinson & Good, 1987: iv).

From both Mialaret and Russel Lowel, I deduce that making a nation a reading one is equipping it with the most reliable tool for enhancing literacy levels and its ensuing advantages. Thanks to reading, we have an inexhaustible source of knowledge and information. Thus, it is the most effective way to learn more throughout the human life. The evolution, multiplicity and diversity of human knowledge require everyone to continually read for the acquisition of more knowledge. This is in line with Dénoyer (1980) who holds that the education of men and women continues into adolescence and adulthood through reading. Moreover, Mialaret (1975) suggests that reading is a faithful friend, a true friend that does not betray. He believes that anybody who likes reading is a saved person – saved from ignorance, boredom and loneliness. However, I cannot ignore the fact that in several literate societies there is an increasing number of aliterates, i.e., people who are able to read but choose not to (Beers, 1996). In this respect, my contribution towards building a literate and reading society is to raise Rwandans’ awareness on their essential role in laying strong foundations for literacy in children and lifelong reading habits in the population at large. For this reason, the overarching aim of this thesis is to increase the knowledge of Rwandans on the development of emergent literacy and a reading culture.
**Motivation**

The motivation for conducting this research sprang from my own literacy experiences and practices and reading habits during my childhood within my home and close community, then later in primary and secondary school and at the university as a student and lecturer. More importantly, there have been and are still criticisms (in media, education forums, and political speeches) levelled against Rwandans in general, and students in particular, that they lack a culture of reading. In this regard, I thought of carrying out research first to shed light on the students’ reading experiences and habits as well as current early literacy practices and reading habits in Rwandan families, environments and schools. Secondly, I wanted to contribute to the creation and rise of awareness about the importance of early literacy and reading habits development for Rwandan children in particular and the whole population in general.

My literacy experience has been modest. I was born in a rural area of Northeastern Rwanda. I was the fifth born of the family, had an elder brother and two elder sisters who were in schools when I was growing up. My father had attained primary education, which was good enough at his time in the 1950’s, and was the kind of parent who wanted his sons and daughters to be schooled at the highest possible level. My mother had attended catechism school, and she read the book of prayers and hymns. Our home was not poor in literacy practices. I observed both my mother and father reading on a regular basis. Our father also read to us quite often. There was plenty of reading materials kept in his wooden shelves. These included some religious books, the Bible, the book of hymns, catechism and archives of two popular newspapers *IMVAHO* and *KINYAMATEKA* in Kinyarwanda, the mother tongue to Rwandans, to which my father was a regular subscriber. Another common form of literacy practices in my home was storytelling mainly done by my elder siblings. Also, my mother would often teach us tales and fables. Additionally, as my elder siblings were attending school, I also learnt some language game, heroic poems, puzzles, puns, riddles from them and traditional songs they were singing at home. Some of these oral genres were also listened to and learnt from the radio as we possessed a radio set. We loved the evening cultural programme, *igitaramo*, which aired most of these traditional oral genres.

At the age of seven, I started primary school education. There was no pre-school structure in my village at that time. The first three years of primary school were done at this village approximately three kilometres away from my home while the next five years were done in another village approximately ten kilometres away. The school did not have enough books. I can remember that one book was shared by three children, the child in the middle holding the book. A French book that has left an indelible mark on my memory is “*Matins*
“d’Afrique” (African Mornings). But why do I still keep this in my memory? Because the book was in French, and that was the first time I was introduced to a foreign language. It was in the second grade in September 1978. At the time, French was introduced as a school subject in the second or third grades according to different places and competences of the teachers. Another thing that stuck to my mind was a radio-cassetophone with audio tapes to accompany lessons in French. All the children were pleased to listen to the radio as many did not have it at home. We could also note a different tone, accent, and pronunciation from our teacher’s. We were eager to imitate the speaker from the tapes.

When I was able to read and write well, I asked my parents to subscribe to the children’s newspaper *Hobe* for me. This was a monthly educational and recreational paper written in Kinyarwanda. It was home for short stories, riddles, puzzles, puns, fairy tales and jokes. Since the creation of Hobe in 1954, its objective, as described by its founder Bishop Bigirumwami (1977) was the promotion of a reading culture in the Rwandan society specifically targeting children from the age of seven to fifteen. In this respect, it aimed at reaching three specific target groups. First, school children who only read at school and did not have any book or magazine to read at home; second, pupils who dropped out of school after they had acquired some reading skills and a taste of reading so that they would not forget to read; and third, all households in which there were adults who could read. I remember that I often took the paper with me in the bush where I was looking after cattle. Many children of my age whose parents had not subscribed to *Hobe* always borrowed it from me, and they would seldom bring it back as it was torn out. Besides children’s *Hobe*, I also borrowed something to read from my father who always lent me with a warning that if I tore anything, he would not lend me any longer. I was always careful with my dad’s books and materials.

After my primary education, I entered a Junior Seminary, a boarding high school run by the Catholic Church. That is where I found a library in which I was allowed to work after three years of schooling to help the school administration to fulfil its duties. The library was as big as three classrooms with shelves of textbooks, atlases, maps, novels, newspapers, journals, magazines, geography and history books, dictionaries, and other reference books. Pupils had access to it during lunch break (from 1 pm to 2 pm) and two more hours in the evening and during the weekend. A borrowed item was to be returned after two weeks, with a possibility of extension of as many times as needed. Not all schools had well equipped libraries. Some pupils from other schools would tell me during vacation that they did not read anything except recommended readings to complement a given theme from the content covered.
I still remember that the first book I borrowed was *Le Petit Prince* (The Little Prince) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. This was a lovely small book with interesting stories that all the children entering the Seminary enjoyed reading. As I was growing up and acquiring a good command of French, I read many other books, magazines, novels and stories – mainly from the West Francophone Africa. To motivate pupils to read many books, the school always organized reading competitions in which those who had voraciously read many books were awarded dictionaries, cash prizes, clothes, and many other prizes. I still have my reading diaries in which I kept summaries of books I read. My thirst for reading was spearheaded by the fact that I was majoring in language arts (Latin and Modern Languages).

In 1992, I started my undergraduate studies and was enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Indeed, the nature of departments in the faculty was such that students were compelled to read avidly if they wanted to succeed. The university library was well equipped and I observed many students reading. However, many a time our lecturers taxed us of not reading enough to the standards of university students. I could understand these criticisms since not all the students had been lucky to be born in literate families, and then study in good schools which had libraries and valued reading. Irony of history: on my turn, ever since I have been lecturing, I have been myself taxing my students of lacking reading habits. This is indeed the reason why I decided to investigate the students’ reading experiences, the children’s narrative experiences, the status of literacy practices in Rwandan families and schools with the purpose to create and develop a reading culture in Rwanda.

*Context*

In Rwanda, like in many other African societies, there is a predominance of oral communication in people’s daily interactions, which makes people depend and rely on oral sources for their information and communication (Dike, 1995; Kwikiriza, 2000; Parry, 2000; Rosenberg, 2003; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011). Hence, it is common to hear people saying that the reading culture in Africa is poor or simply inexistent. Commeyras and Mazile (2011) in their study on the culture of reading among primary school teachers in Botswana emphasize that the rich oral traditions in many African nations seem to eclipse the print culture. Indeed, before the African colonisation, the oral tradition was Africa’s initial form of literacy. This means that the people’s wisdom, norms, values and language were basically transmitted by word of mouth. Traditional practices were learned by the young generation who observed closely what their elders were doing and saying. There was story telling mainly done in the evening around the fireplace; there were riddles, tongue twisters, metaphors,
similes as well as idiomatic expressions to convey messages of wisdom; there were songs and dances used to convey specific important messages such as instilling good behaviour in the young generation and helping them to grow up as wise and useful members of the community. The grown up taught children tales, traditional songs, riddles, tongue twisters, nursery rhymes, myths, legends and proverbs in a bid to bring them into close contact with and revive their cultural heritage (Rugamba, 1981). This strong oral tradition in most Rwandan households where family members tell tales mostly in the evenings before going to bed is documented by Reverend Father Hurel (1922: 2) as he writes:

Tout le monde, jeunes et vieux connaissent sur le bout de doigt la plupart de contes, et cependant personne ne s’en lasse. On les écoute toujours avec le même enthousiasme. Nous en avons maintes et maintes fois fait l’expérience nous-mêmes, soit à l’école avec des enfants ou des jeunes gens, soit dans d’autres réunions composées exclusivement d’hommes pris au hasard dans la masse. La plupart prêchent une morale qui ne ferait pas mauvaise figure dans nos pays civilisés et chrétiens. La vanité, la suffisance, la gourmandise, la lâcheté, la paresse, l’infidélité, etc. y sont flétries avec un à-propos du meilleur goût.

[Everybody, young and elderly people, have most of the tales at their fingertips and nobody seems to weary of them. They always listen to them with the same enthusiasm. We have at several times done the experiment, either with schoolchildren and young pupils, or with exclusively groups of men taken at random in the crowd. Most of these tales convey a moral lesson that would put up a good show in our civilized and Christian countries. Vanity, self-importance, greed, cowardice, laziness, unfaithfulness, etc. are condemned with an aptness of the best taste (My translation)].

However, it is assumed that in this twenty-first century, reading and writing traditions are integral to living successfully, and illiteracy is equated with failure to cope with the demands of life and prosper in modern times (Dénoyer, 1980; Staiger & Cassey, 1983; Kwikiriza, 2000; Parry, 2000; MINECOFIN, 2007; UNESCO, 2009). In this regard, in its visions through the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) and Rwanda Vision 2020, the Government of Rwanda considers the lack of a reading culture and low levels of literacy among the Rwandan population in general as a very big challenge to human capital development (MINECOFIN, 2000; 2007). Hence, literacy development is eyed as a key factor that will facilitate the transition to human resource development and a knowledge-based economy. Literacy encourages divergent and rational thinking thereby raising some kind of critical consciousness in the lives of individuals who apply it to suit their purposes.

A literate population is more likely to take charge of its own destiny and development and to participate in public life. A literate population is also more likely to achieve objectives such as linguistic and cultural development. [...] there is a positive correlation between literacy and the standard of living: that is to say, if a person is literate, that person is also likely to be richer (MINECOFIN, 2007: 21).
The same position is also held by Staiger and Cassey (1983: 8) in their guide for reading campaigns in developing countries. They write:

The benefits of literacy are not only of an economic nature but also can have a significant positive impact on the quality of intellectual and spiritual life of individuals, and help all segments of the population become true participants in the development of their countries. Perhaps through these efforts governments will come to recognize that the development of the reading habit is as essential to the well-being of the country as universal primary education and basic literacy programmes.

In a related development, a few decades later, UNESCO (2009) still has to emphasize that literacy is a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment. Literacy is an essential means of building people’s capabilities to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society. More importantly, literacy is a catalyst for learning throughout life.

**Aim and research questions**

The overarching aim of this thesis is to increase the awareness of Rwandans about the development of emergent literacy and a reading culture. Four different studies investigated experiences of literacy practices among tertiary and primary students and reflections of stakeholders on how to cater for emergent literacy and a reading culture in Rwanda. While reading for this research, I was inspired by the sociocultural perspective of literacy development (Vygotsky, 1978; Street, 1993, 1996; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Barton, 2001; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001) as well as the emergent literacy perspective (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). It is hoped that a PhD study in the area of emergent literacy and reading habits development in Rwanda will raise the public awareness of its essential role in laying strong foundations for early literacy and lifelong reading habits in children that will be translated into a culture of reading in the Rwandan population at large. In this respect, four papers with different perspectives but which converge to the ways of developing a reading culture and how literacy events can reflect societal issues are presented. The study was guided by the following research questions:

(i) What are tertiary students’ experiences of literacy practices and what do they claim are the reasons for the existing poor reading culture in Rwanda? (Paper I).

(ii) How do Rwandan families say that they cater for early literacy and reading habits in children? (Paper II).

(iii) What do teachers claim can develop children’s early literacy and reading habits in schools? (Paper III).
(iv) How can children’s discussions during literacy events elucidate pertinent societal issues in Rwandan schools? (Paper IV).

These research questions are discussed in detail through the four articles that are presented in the second part of this thesis.

**Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first one consists of five chapters that describe the overall research built on the four articles. The first chapter is a general overview describing the underpinning of the researched problem. The second chapter presents the conceptual framework focusing the sociocultural and emergent literacy perspectives of literacy development within which the four studies are framed. The third chapter concerns the methodological considerations, including the research design, data analysis procedures, ethics, and quality issues. The fourth chapter provides summaries of the four articles which make up the empirical part of the thesis. It also highlights the contribution and interrelatedness of the four articles. The fifth and last chapter of the first part includes a concluding discussion of the findings, their implication, the contribution of the thesis, and possible further research.

The second part consists of the following four articles, three of which have been published in journals and one that has been accepted for publication as a book chapter.

3. Teachers’ reflections on parental involvement in emergent literacy development in Rwanda (Accepted for publication as a book chapter in *Cultures of Educational Policy: International Issues of Policy-outcome Relationships*).
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis is based on sociocultural and emergent literacy theories pertinent to the
development of a reading culture and literacy. Indeed both perspectives address the critical
importance of social, historical and cultural contexts for human cognitive development and
social interactions with the support of cultural tools.

On one hand, in the sociocultural perspective, literacy develops alongside people’s
historical, cultural and social contexts and takes different shapes depending on these contexts
(Street, 1993, 1996; Barton, 2001; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001;
Wagner, 2001). This perspective is rooted in Vygotskian theory which emphasizes the
importance of social and cultural contexts in the human experience in which learning takes
place and how the context impacts on what is learnt (Vygotsky, 1978). According to
Vygotsky, learning and development are embedded within social events and occurring as a
learner interacts with other people, objects, and activities in a collaborative environment. In
the course of development, Vygotsky sees cultural tools as important means to mediate the
social and cultural engagement of the learner. He argues that when children participate in
cultural and social activities with the guidance of more skilled partners, they internalize
cultural tools which may be anything physical (books, pens, pencils, library, bookshops,
materials, signs, etc.) or psychological (language). These cultural tools are hailed to facilitate
the acquisition of higher mental functions which are acquired through a system of practices
common to a specific culture and used independently by members of the society (Vygotsky,
1997).

Vygotsky (1997) describes higher mental functions as deliberate, mediated, and
internalized behaviours. He asserts that the higher functions of intellectual activity arise out of
collective behaviour, out of cooperation with the surrounding people, and from social
experience (Vygotsky, 1993). In this respect, it is held that early childhood education is the
first step in a long process in which young children are engaged in the acquisition of tools and
the development of higher mental functions that develop through social interaction with and
scaffolding by the people in the child’s world. According to Vygotsky, these interactions with
the social environment, including peer interaction and scaffolding, are important ways to
facilitate individual cognitive growth and knowledge acquisition. Scaffolding refers to all
kinds of support provided by an adult or peers for children learning how to carry out tasks
they could not perform alone. Vygotsky’s (1978) perspectives on scaffolding suggest that
learning first takes place on a social level before it takes place on an individual level. Related
to scaffolding is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is characterised as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). This refers to both what the child is capable to do together with adults and peers as well as what he or she can do independently. He maintains that development within the ZPD depends upon social interaction and the range of societal skills that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone.

On the other hand, the thesis is based on emergent literacy theory which suggests that literacy development begins before children start formal instruction in elementary school. It also suggests that literacy development is continuous and ongoing, and that parents have a powerful influence on children’s literacy development (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Reutzel and Cooter (2004) claim that an emergent literacy perspective values the literacy experiences young children engage in at home and at school during their early years. The knowledge of literacy forms develops as an individual listens and speaks, and eventually is exposed to print and are continuously developed over time. It is held that the minds of young children absorb information about language, literacy, and print concepts by interacting with the world both orally and through print. Hence, parents and teachers can foster a child's emerging literacy development through the creation of oral and print-rich environments which provide access to spoken language through rhymes and riddles, songs, books, writing and drawing supplies, and literacy play materials. These tools constitute important cultural conditions within the sociocultural theory perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) as they mediate children’s literacy experiences both at home and school. In this process of development, the social interaction between the adult and the child is important as the latter learns literacy through conversation and involvement in literacy practices.

**Reading culture and literacy**

Behrman (2004) defines a culture of reading as an integrated pattern of reading behaviours, practices, beliefs, perceptions and knowledge. Magara and Batambuze (2005) in their study on ways of creating a reading culture for Uganda refer to a reading culture to mean a culture where reading is part of the people’s living and constitutes a habit that is shared by members of the society. The term ‘culture’ is complex and difficult to define, but I will lean on Vygotsky’s definition in this thesis. He defines culture as ‘the product of man’s social life and
his public activity’ (Vygotsky, 1993:164). In this regard, culture is understood as consisting of people’s ways of being in the world, behaving, and acting, based on what they have observed in the society. It refers to the attitudes, manners or habits shared by a given group of people in order to achieve common goals. For this matter, a reading culture refers to the response that community members accord to reading and writing in their everyday life. A reading culture development depends upon the response of community members to their daily needs and purposes. Describing how one school community in Uganda responded to the call for fostering a reading culture at their school, Parry (2000), for example, states that all members of the school were encouraged to read at school and at home. Teachers dedicated a specific time to read during the school day, students had a choice in what they read, and there was school support in this endeavour by providing books to classrooms. So, reading played a significant role in the everyday life of the school community members. All along this thesis, I perceive a reading culture as a culture in a society where reading is highly valued and at the same time is a habit among its members.

The promotion of a reading culture in African nations is viewed by many scholars as one way of boosting students’ academic excellence and lifelong learning (Rosenberg, 2003; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Parry, 2005; Kachala, 2007; Kelechi, 2010; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011). While designing strategies for developing a reading culture among the rural masses in Malawi, Kachala (2007) asserts that the reading culture promotion is important in the sense that the future of all citizens requires self-education and lifelong learning, hence the sought academic excellence cannot be achieved and sustained if there is no culture to keep on reading for continuous self-improvement. In the same reasoning, Rosenberg (2003), investigating the promotion of a reading culture in seven African countries, namely Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, recommends that reading per se as an activity be made a pleasurable activity to the community from an early age. In addition, Magara and Batambuze (2005) claim that for a reading culture to be possible, reading must be part of all aspects of life and not only certain parts such as school or work. Reading has to play a significant role in people’s day-to-day life and become a habit in order to constitute a reading culture. In this regard, as investigated above, a culture of reading among people implies that they share common attitudes, manners, beliefs and habits or interest in reading (Behrman, 2004).

The development of a reading culture ideally starts at an early stage of childhood and gets nurtured up to adulthood with the support of cultural tools. However, studies conducted in many African countries (eastern, southern and western Africa) demonstrate that the
majority of children come from households where they hardly ever see adults reading and some of them are barely literate. Even within literate households, adults do not often practice reading for lack of reading materials (Rosenberg, 2003; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Kachala, 2007; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011; Ruterana, 2012). According to Dempsey (2010), before making their children good readers, parents need to read themselves and set an example for their children. He advises that in order to create a reading nation, we have to befriend our libraries and have fire in our bellies to cultivate a passion of reading. However, this ideal is marred with difficulties in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America especially due to the weak book industry sector, with very few institutions such as libraries and bookshops, and the poor purchasing power of the population. All these contribute to a severe shortage of reading materials, making the acquisition of reading and its sustainability almost impossible for all but the elite (Ambatchew, 2011; Ruterana, 2012). Therefore, a reading culture in a society assumes that reading is part of everyday life of its members, i.e. that people practise reading at home and during their leisure time. Then reading becomes a habit that will be hard to drop, to use the words of Dempsey ‘reading will be like eating peanuts, where you don't feel like stopping’ (Dempsey, 2010: xviii).

Secondly, the definition of literacy in this thesis is influenced by the sociocultural approach to literacy in the light of Street (1993, 1996) in his cross-cultural approaches to literacy and preface to social uses of literacy; Prinsloo & Breier (1996) with their social uses of literacy; Barton (2001) with his literacy in everyday contexts, and Verhoeven & Snow (2001) in their introduction to sociocultural viewpoints on literacy and motivation. Street (1993) states that literacy is a hybrid of literacy practices encompassing different representations of reading, writing, speaking, listening and oral tradition which influence one another. Also, Cochran-Smith (1984) asserts that the concept literacy should be understood as a term encompassing writing and oral language development within literate environments. This view extends the concept of literacy from the commonest opinion that literacy etymologically is the ability to read and write, and use numeracy. It is held within the sociocultural perspective that the meaning of literacy is not just limited to the above meanings. Clinard (2005:3), for example, defines literacy as “the ability to use thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and writing to solve problems, complete tasks, and communicate wants, needs, feelings, and ideas.” In this respect, these literacy practices, i.e., different representations of reading, writing and oral traditions, depend on and are developed from social and cultural contexts in which different people live.
Additionally, within the framework of the UN literacy decade (2003-2012), UNESCO offers an inclusive definition of literacy meaning the ability to understand and employ printed and oral information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community in order to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential (Torres, 2000). Moreover, UNESCO (2010), within the context of Education For All (EFA), conceives literacy as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all people in a rapidly changing world and a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life. So, it is necessary to promote literacy which would help the population face community challenges and strengthen their ability to participate in various activities aimed at promoting good governance and democracy (Freire, 1994). In this regard, people would be able to use literate skills to participate fully in their development, improve the quality of their life, make informed decisions, develop critical and autonomous thinking, and continue learning. In this thesis, I perceive literacy as a concept that includes reading, writing and orality within a holistic understanding of language and as a catalyst for learning throughout life. At the same time, I am of the view that people’s social and cultural context influences their acquisition and development of literacy and its related use.

**Literacy as a social and cultural practice**

From a sociocultural perspective, literacy is viewed as a social practice that is closely related to people’s everyday life (Street, 1993, 1996; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Barton, 2001; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001). Barton (2001) views literacy as a practice that is intimately linked to everyday life of people, and emphasizes that children acquire important parts of it through exposure to literacy practices in their home environment. In the same connection, Street (1993) asserts that people in their particular contexts influence the concept of literacy, hence a sociocultural perspective ‘enables us to see how literacy is incorporated into the receiving culture’s already existing conventions and concepts regarding communication’ (Street, 1993: 25). Similarly, according to McLane and McNamee (1990), the development of literacy is a profound social process, embedded in social relationships, particularly in children’s relationships with parents, siblings, grandparents, friends, caretakers, and teachers. This comes as a challenging approach to views once held that literacy is only a practice learned and used in school, thereby emphasizing decontextualized basic skills. In addition to the above, the central tenet of the sociocultural view of literacy is the literacy-oracy mix. This view of literacy emphasizes the description of people’s literacy practices, including writing, reading and oral tradition, as social and cultural practices of everyday life in their home
environment (Street, 1993; Crawford, 1995; Barton, 2001). In her study on early literacy, Crawford (1995) argues that different sociocultural contexts influence the way literacy is understood and given meaning, and that even every family consists of its own unique culture that affects literacy. Indeed, in the light of the Vygotskian perspective, Crawford contends that literacy is socially constructed and culturally specific. This implies that children’s daily literacy experiences will obviously vary from child to child in culturally different families. Heath (1983) for example in her book, *Ways with words*, shows how parents in different communities support their children in literacy development in different ways and what impact this has on their children’s success at school.

According to the proponents of the sociocultural approach to developing literacy, the centre of attention is not on how literacy affects people but on how people affect literacy. In this respect, Street (1993: 25) for example states that people have to ‘actively and creatively apply literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs.’ Literacy should therefore be used to enable them learn how to survive, develop their full capacities, live and work in dignity, participate fully in development, improve the quality of life, make informed decisions, develop critical and autonomous thinking, and continue learning. Similarly, Prinsloo and Breier (1996) in their research investigating the uses of literacy in South African social contexts argue that it is important to study people’s understanding of what they do with literacy and the value they give to their literacy activities.

The sociocultural approach has come as a challenge to the proponents of the autonomous model of literacy who exclude oral communication from literacy (in its strictest sense). Since its development in the 1980’s, this approach has been referred to by a number of names and the most common used are new literacy studies and cross-cultural approaches to literacy (Street, 1993, 1996; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001). According to Street (1993), the autonomous model of literacy views literacy mainly as the ability to read and write, and treats it as independent of the social context. Street maintains that this view on literacy as a practice that exclusively deals with reading and writing is problematic because it downplays the experiences of people with a long oral tradition. This model, found in the works of Ong (1982), Olson (1985), and Goody (1986, 1987) and others, perceived literacy as a neutral technical skill that is universal and based on the same predictable cognitive processes. These authors stress the divide between the oral and the literate and how literacy can transform and develop human cognitive structures. Goody (1987), for example, states that written language as opposed to spoken language is more likely to bring greater awareness of contradictions and illogicalities in thinking. As for Ong (1982), he claims that no other single invention has
transformed the human consciousness as much as the written language without which abstract and logical thinking would not be possible. Street (1993) states that the focus of this model has been on how literacy affects people and on the individual learner who is passively transformed by literacy. Although Ong and Goody imply that the oral and written language are separated from each other, and that the written language is required in order to develop certain analytical powers, Street (1993: 6) claims that ‘the distinction between oral and literate is overstated’ since, the concept literacy does not only include reading and writing, but also the oral tradition. He goes on to state that different literacy forms and communication patterns are part of the concept literacy and both form a hybrid. In this sense, Hornberger (1989) strengthens this argument as she claims that these literacy practices are intersected and interrelated continua, and are always embedded in oral uses.

Although not all theorists within the sociocultural approach include orality in their definition of literacy, they see both literacy and orality as interconnected concepts that affect each other. This provides a clue to the understanding of their stance. Indeed, from the etymological viewpoint, literacy is associated with letter and the ensuing state of being able to read and write the alphabetic print. In this regard, Moje (2000) admits that although the concept of literacy encompasses written and oral dimensions, it can never be detached from its strong historical link with written text. In her view, the written literacy representation will therefore always be the primary form of literacy. And indeed in this globalized world in which written communication is the rule, we often see that people who are unable to decipher the written signs are relegated to inferiority positions. However, Street promotes a view that

Literacy is part of the communicative repertoire and like other parts, including oral discourses, registers, codes and dialects with which it interacts and frequently merges, it is a social construction not a neutral technology: it varies from one culture or sub-group to another and its uses are embedded in relations of power and struggles over resources (Street, 1993: 28-29).

This ensues that literacy should not be viewed as one single concept with one meaning, but rather be seen as a concept encompassing many different meanings and modes of communication depending on the context. That is the reason why there exist many different literacies in the world. In the present dissertation, since I argue that, from a sociocultural perspective literacy is viewed in terms of what people can do with it in relation to their particular needs, the centre of attention is the creation and development of a reading culture in Rwanda at the present moment.
Emergent literacy development

The concept of emergent literacy was introduced and first employed by Marie Clay in 1966 to describe the behaviours used by young children when reading and writing even though they could not actually read and write in the conventional sense (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The emergent literacy also involves skills in listening and speaking, singing, using objects, pictures, gestures, or any combination of ways in which a child understands and interprets experiences. Research on early and emergent literacy (Morrow, 1995; Spreadbury, 2002; Paratore, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 2000) shows that with lots of opportunities to see and engage in meaningful literacy activities and interaction with adults and peers, children become conventional readers and writers. The basic components of emergent literacy include print motivation, i.e. interest in and enjoyment of books; print awareness, i.e. knowledge of how print works, how to handle a book, to follow words on a page, etc.; vocabulary, i.e. knowledge of names of things; narrative skills, i.e. ability to describe things and events and tell stories; letter knowledge, i.e. their names and sounds, and finally phonological awareness, i.e. ability to hear, segment, blend, and manipulate and play with the smaller sounds in words (Reutzel & Cooter, 2004; Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

According to Tracey and Morrow (2006), the central tenets of the emergent literacy theory are threefold: (i) listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interrelated; (ii) literacy development is continuous and ongoing; and (iii) parents have a powerful influence on children's literacy development. Theories of emergent literacy suggest that there are continuities in children’s literacy development between early literacy behaviours and those displayed once children can read independently. This means that children are always in the process of becoming literate through compounding their new knowledge, adjusting their old knowledge to the new paradigm, and exploring the environment. In this process of literacy development, young children play active roles in constructing their own understanding of the world through exploration. In this respect, Teale and Sulzby in their influential book Emergent Literacy: Writing and Reading, assert that ‘at whatever point we look, we see children in the process of becoming literate, as the term emergent indicates’ (1986: xix). In the same line of reasoning, in a study on children’s literacy knowledge, Neuman and Roskos (1997) state that literacy starts at birth, if a child is surrounded by a literate society, and lasts until the time when children read and write conventionally. In addition, Strickland and Morrow (1989) in the introduction to their book on emerging literacy relates literacy development to the ‘continuous process which begins in infancy with exposure to oral language, written language, books, and stories’ (p.vii). They add that this process has roots in
the home, with branches extending to other environments. Similarly, Neuman and Roskos (1997) argue that, behind the emergent literacy theory, there is emphasis on the importance of the early years in establishing a foundation for literacy and creation of environments that engage children in print and oral activities. This is what Lancy (1994:3) refers to saying that “if literacy is influenced by conversations a child has participated in, by being read to, by opportunities to enact stories in play, and so on, it follows that his or her literacy will be dynamic. It will grow and change. It will emerge.” In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate some researchers’ views on and application of emergent literacy theory with emphasis on the critical role of children’s home and school environments in their literacy development.

**Home and school literacy development**

Research has shown that there is no better place for children to begin their literacy journey than at home and the literacy practices available in a given society influence in many ways how children will acquire literacy in school. Home literacy practices are said to nurture and stimulate children’s love for reading, thus developing early literacy from infancy. Research on literacy development in early childhood (Holdaway, 1979; Morrow, 1995; Spreadbury, 2002; Paratore, 2005; Tracey & Morrow, 2006; Paratore, Cassano, & Schickedanz, 2011) shows that the home and parents are important first educators of children. Purcell-Gates (2000), in her family literacy research, states that research on ways in which children experience and learn from home literacy practices suggests that these practices are facilitative of later literacy achievement in school. Paratore et al. (2011) maintain that parents are the prime sources for early literacy development and inculcation of good reading habits among children, thus making them avid, willing and responsive readers through interactions with them in the first months and years of life. It is indeed believed that much of what children learn is learnt at home (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982; Morrow, 1995; Spreadbury, 2002).

Similarly, studies have demonstrated that the availability of literacy materials at home, the family’s beliefs in literacy as well as the exposure to literacy modelling by adults relate to the child’s literacy development (Dickinson & Tabor, 1991; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Snow et al. (1998) in their study on preventing reading difficulties showed that children whose parents had a history of reading problems were at risk as they did not have enough support in their early literacy learning and reading from their parents. Also, Baker (2003) and Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) in their studies on the role of parents in motivating struggling readers and parental involvement in the
development of children’s reading skills respectively pointed out that the parents’ involvement in the children’s interest in literacy activities and their own interest in these activities are important factors for the children’s early literacy development. However, many parents are unaware that the non-assistance to their children to obtain important preliteracy and early literacy experiences constitutes a handicap for their children in the long term (Heath, 1983; Klesius & Griffith, 1996; Snow et al., 1998). Moreover, in their study on the love for reading, Cramer and Castle (1994) claim that an inviting home environment and positive attitudes towards reading are crucial for literacy development and affect the way a child learns. The inviting home environment referred to is the one in which parents tell stories and read aloud to their children as often as possible, parents participate in their children's reading, i.e. speak with them about what they read, and finally parents help their children recognize that books secure, lighten and beautify their lives. They argue that

Children’s interest and attitudes are affected by two major factors: first, the climate in the home, which surrounds the child from birth and carries explicit and implicit messages about the value of reading and second, the child’s own competence in reading. (…) Some environmental factors can be altered, such as availability of reading materials in the home, frequency of home literacy events, the nature of parent-child literacy interactions and parents’ attitudes towards their role in their children’s literacy development (Cramer & Castle, 1994: 74).

There are several factors that concur in the child’s literacy journey to attain the desired literacy. These include the child’s attitude to literacy, their background experience and home life, parental and social influences. Morrow (1997) stresses that the quality of the home literacy environment correlates most closely with children’s early literacy ability. Similarly, Bettelheim and Zelan (1982) also maintain that parents need to be convinced that they are their children’s first teachers and that they have an immediate effect on their learning and literacy development. These authors go on to advise parents to be willing to spend some of their time, resources and energy in nurturing their children’s growth in literacy. More importantly, they claim that parents from all walks of life, all economic and educational levels can help create family cultures that encourage their children to become actively literate adults and lifelong readers.

After home, comes school. Schools are privileged places where the sown family seed of literacy will continue to grow. Teachers have great responsibilities for children’s literacy development. The continuity between home and school is an especially important experience for children. Langer (2004) in her statement on developing the literate mind stresses that beyond the home, the school is the major environment for literacy development. Children go
to school with some literate knowledge to which is also added schooled literacy experiences. Also, Martello (2002), discussing the many modes of becoming literate in early childhood, claims that early childhood teachers contribute to the building of literacy pathways in the foundational preschool and early school years through good choices of types of books for reading, shared readings and interactive and elaborative discussions on books, etc. They should ensure that there is continuity between home and school literacy practices.

Other studies that investigated the linkage between home and school in the literacy development of young children reached important findings that highlight the importance of an appropriate literacy environment in the home (Dickinson & Tabors, 1991; Paratore et al., 2011). Therefore, in order to achieve literacy fluency, parents need to work cooperatively with schools and teachers to link young children’s needs at home with those in school. This is also advocated by Mehan (1992) in his study on understanding inequality in homes and schools. He maintains that parents and educators work cooperatively in order to modify the schooled learning environment. Additionally, Paratore et al. (2011) in their research on supporting early and later literacy development at home and at school attribute children’s literacy development problems to the inadequate attention in their early years to various literate behaviours that exert influence on both the beginning and later phases of children’s literacy development. In brief, it is important to help children get motivated to learn to read and to remain engaged in the process of becoming literate both at home and at school, and beyond. For the process to be effective, parents should take opportunities to read with their children, tell and talk about stories, say nursery rhymes and sing songs because children learn best by observing, practicing, and doing things with parents, peers, or siblings. In a study on sibling negotiations and constructions of literacy events in Tanzania, Frankenberg, Holmqvist, Rubenson and Rindstedt (2011) also highlight the important role played by older siblings as models of literate behaviours to younger siblings in the transition between home and school. However, in the present study, the parents’ role modelling practice is often marred with difficulties since they themselves did not see or observe their parents, peers or siblings engaged in some of these literacy activities.

To conclude, based on the above framework of the sociocultural perspective on literacy development which views culture and society together with cultural tools as important factors in affecting children’s literacy development on one hand, and the three central tenets of the emergent literacy theory on the other, I agree with Neuman & Roskos (1997) in their study on literacy knowledge in practice where they argue that it is necessary to provide opportunities, information and support for parents regarding their children's early literacy
development and their role as their most important teacher. By so doing, parenting skills and literacy development for children can be enhanced and fostered. At the same time, there should be favourable conditions in the learning and teaching school environments to foster literacy development, hence creating continuity between the contexts of home and school literacy practices. By the same token, the lack of congruency between what children see, experience and learn at home and at school as well as in the society at large can affect their literacy development and reading culture. All in all, a reading culture and literacy development cannot be logically separated from the particular social, cultural and historical milieu in which they take place.
3. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research design

This thesis subscribes to a qualitative design. The overall aim of a qualitative research is to strive to understand a certain societal behaviour, explain its raison d’être, and provide answers to related concerns. Sandelowski (2003) provides the following attempt to describe the features of qualitative research:

What makes a work deserving of the label *qualitative research* is the demonstrable effort to produce richly and relevantly detailed descriptions and particularized interpretations of people and the social, linguistic, material, and other practices and events that shape and are shaped by them. Qualitative research typically includes, but is not limited to, discerning the perspectives of these people, or what is often referred to as the actor’s point of view.

As earlier said, the overarching aim of this thesis is to increase the awareness of Rwandans about the development of early literacy and a reading culture through an investigation and exploration of current practices of some targeted participants. My investigation concerned how Rwandans understood, experienced, and interpreted the researched problem, i.e. low literacy levels and lack of a reading culture. Hence, the thesis relies on interpretations and perspectives of the participants in three different studies conducted. The forth study is an illustration of how interactions around a text from oral sources can develop the participants’ (children) interest in reading, how the participants relate the text to their life and learn to think critically. The investigation was extended to a relatively small number of participants and settings, but a qualitative research can generate elucidating findings despite a small sample of participants.

According to Bryman (2008) and Silverman (2001), data collection methods stem from a methodology adopted, a research topic and purpose of the research being investigated. In this respect, the methods used in the four papers that constitute this thesis include open-ended questionnaires, interviews, storytelling, and conversations with children. An open-ended questionnaire, also referred to as a qualitative questionnaire, was most suitable for this exploratory research where challenges as well as the possibilities of developing early literacy and a reading culture in Rwanda are in focus. With a qualitative questionnaire, the respondents are free to provide answers in their own words; hence there is a great chance that they provide rich and detailed responses about the researched topic. More importantly, for this particular case where the participants were not willing to be interviewed, possibly due to the past socio-political context of the country in which social upheavals and wars culminated in
the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, the qualitative questionnaire was of great importance. However, in some circumstances, open-ended questions may be more demanding on respondents especially when they are less educated. In the latter case, the respondents may not provide the expected rich details and the depth of responses. Similarly, as Frey (2003) notes, an open-ended question can prompt a lengthy, detailed response, much of which might be irrelevant to the topic, and which may be difficult to code.

In this regard, in study one, an open-ended questionnaire was used; in studies two and three open-ended questionnaires and interviews were used while in study four, storytelling was used. The questionnaires were written in both Kinyarwanda and English and the participants were free to respond in the language of their choice. Most participants responded in Kinyarwanda, the mother tongue for all Rwandans. As for the interview, a semi-structured interview guide was used with the participants who did not know how to write and read (four parents) in study two. An in-depth interview was also conducted with eight selected teachers for clarity and more information on statements made while filling in the questionnaire in study three. The interviews were done face-to-face and I met the participants in their home or at their work places. They were held in Kinyarwanda, tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim and later translated by myself for analysis and interpretation.

Concerning the storytelling technique, children in study four were asked to tell Kinyarwanda stories or tales focusing mainly on plots with human characters, and involving both sexes. According to Davis (2007), storytelling is a democratic approach that provides a useful and credible method of collecting and revealing research data from children. The participants narrated fairy tales, stories and fables, and they told jokes. They were also asked to discuss the stories in gendered groups, that is, girls seated alone in their rows and boys in theirs to make sure that both girls’ and boys’ voices were heard. I was interested in investigating how children discuss a current societal issue, gender equality, departing from oral sources which still provide pleasure to many people in Rwanda and are part of their everyday communication (Kagame, 1978; Erny, 2002).

**Participants and settings**
The selection of participants was done using convenience sampling technique. The participants’ participation was determined by their availability and willingness to take part in research (Bryman, 2008). Morse (2003) defines convenience sampling as selecting the sample by including participants who are readily available and who meet the study criteria, and are able to reflect on and articulate their experiences. It involves a sample drawn from that part of
the population which is close at hand. The convenience sampling is deemed more legitimate when it is not easy to gain information from the population. However, the convenience sampling has the disadvantage that it is not an accurate representation of the population. Even so, Bryman (2008) assures that this does not suggest that convenience samples should never be used. At the same time, this sampling was strategic as I wanted to explore variation through the lenses of urban – rural and literate – illiterate conditions.

The participants and settings were selected taking into account the overarching aim of the thesis, that of increasing the awareness of Rwandans on the development of early literacy and a reading culture. This requires a joint involvement of families (parents), teachers, and students. To this effect, a sample of one hundred participants composed of forty university students, thirty nursery and primary school teachers and thirty parents were targeted. Also, one hundred ninety-eight school children in classes of primary two, four and six (aged between eight and twelve) from one rural and one urban school were involved. As for the urban and rural settings, the choice was motivated by different socio-economic and educational conditions associated with both settings which are likely to affect literacy and reading culture development. Concerning the public and private divide, private schools are usually religious-based, with relatively better funds to pay for teachers, construct buildings, pay for textbooks, and other essential school facilities which make them the best schools in the country.

In study one, *Enhancing the culture of reading in Rwanda: Reflections by students in tertiary institutions*, students in a higher education institution with a motto *illuminatio et salus populi* (light and salvation of the people), were my prime informants to describe the researched problem as they hail from all corners of the country. They had also in common that they had excelled in secondary school and managed to obtain a place at a prominent public university. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to forty students from nine different faculties. Questions aimed to reveal the students’ reading experiences, and evolved around the causes of the poor reading culture in Rwanda in general, and among students in particular and the strategies to develop reading habits and literacy. Thirty-five respondents from different departments and majors returned the questionnaires. These are Agriculture (AG), Arts and Humanities (AH), Applied Science (AS), Economics and Management (EM), Journalism and Communication (JC), Law (LW), Medicine (MD), Science (SC), and Social, Political and Administrative Sciences (SPAS).

In study two, *Exploring home literacy practices among Rwandan families*, the participants were thirty parents from both urban and rural areas, literate and illiterate, and
whose children attend nursery and lower primary schools. Both schools were public. I liaised with children’s parents through the children’s communication notebooks in which teachers had written a note to introduce me to their parents, and the ones who responded favourably in writing or verbally took part in the research. An open-ended questionnaire was taken by children whose parents had confirmed their willingness to take part in the research. Questions turned around literacy activities that parents engage in with their children, literacy resources available in homes, and the parent–child interaction. The ultimate purpose was to find out how parents cater for early literacy and reading habits development in children at home. Interviews with three rural and one urban illiterate parents who had consented verbally were also conducted. Twenty-four parents participated, including twenty returned questionnaires and four interviews.

In study three, *Teachers’ reflections on parental involvement in emergent literacy development in Rwanda*, the participants approached were thirty teachers from both public and private nursery and primary schools in urban and rural settings. Three nursery and three primary schools were targeted. Four of the schools were public while two were private. Of those participants, thirteen teachers of nursery schools and eleven teachers of lower primary schools participated. Open-ended questions aimed to reveal the teacher’s reflections on the children’s literacy skills when they come to school, whose responsibility it is to develop the children’s literacy skills and reading habits, the socio-linguistic environment in literacy education in Rwanda, and the kind of help that parents could provide to support and promote early literacy and reading habits in their children. A follow-up in-depth interview was also conducted with eight teachers to know their expectations on literacy knowledge from children coming to start nursery and primary education as well as literacy skills they would recommend to the parents to work on.

In study four, *Children’s reflections on gender equality in fairy tales: A Rwanda case study*, the participants approached were children aged between eight and twelve from six classes (Primary two, four and six) in both urban and rural settings. They were asked to tell Kinyarwanda stories or tales focusing mainly on plots with human characters, and involving both sexes. With regard to the choice of research sites, the aim was to crosscheck urban and rural children’s reading and storytelling habits as well as their constructions and understanding of gender in their oral stories vis-à-vis gender issues that are topical in Rwandan policy and education today. In total, twenty-four stories, including fairy tales, jokes, fables, and a song were recorded. For the sake of the scope, purpose and focus of this study, jokes, fables and the song were left out. Only one fairy tale among seventeen tales was
selected: *Umugani wa Ndabaga* (The fairy tale of Ndabaga), known by most people in Rwanda. This fairy tale is among the very few antithetical tales to the dominant fairy tales circulating in the Rwandan literature with a female heroine. There is a myth in the Rwandan oral literature built around a girl by the name of Ndabaga who is said to have excelled more than any other male warriors at the battlefield. She is credited with extraordinary courage and formidable fighting skills that led to the victory of her side. It is the most narrated fairy tale in both schools and in both fourth and sixth grades. However, it did not appear among the second graders, so they are not included in this study. The children were asked to say the source of their stories, lessons drawn from them, their reflections on female and male characters in the stories, if they want things to change, and to contextualise the story with regard to today’s situation of gender relations in Rwanda.

The table below summarises the data collection tools, participants and their settings.

**Table 1: Summary of data collection and participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Participant’s settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Open-ended questionnaire</td>
<td>35/40 students</td>
<td>9 university faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Open-ended questionnaire Interviews</td>
<td>20 parents 4 parents</td>
<td>Urban and rural settings Urban and rural settings 2 public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Open-ended questionnaire Follow-up interview</td>
<td>24/30 primary and nursery school teachers 8 selected teachers</td>
<td>Urban and rural 3 nursery and 3 primary schools 4 public and 2 private schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Storytelling, group discussion and conversations</td>
<td>198 school children</td>
<td>Urban and rural schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations relevant to the four studies that constitute this thesis have been discussed in each study, and are only referred to in general in this section. All along the data collection, principles of informed consent and respect for invasion of privacy were adhered to (Gustafsson, Hermerén & Petersson, 2006; Bryman, 2008).
According to Gustafsson et al. (2006), in the principle of informed consent, the research participants must obtain sufficient information about the study and how it may affect them. They must be given information in a comprehensible manner, using a language readily understandable and intelligible to them. Finally, the research participants must be assured the freedom and sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate, and thus minimizing the possibility of coercion, undue influence, or harassment. In this respect, the participants in my studies received information beforehand regarding the ethical aspects associated with research such as a written permission to conduct my research from the district authorities in charge of education where the schools were located, my name and affiliation, the aim of the research, and the way the research material was to be treated and results used. They were told that the results only were to be used for the purpose of research. They were also reminded that participation was entirely voluntary. As a consequence, some participants did not bring back the questionnaire. Even so, in study 1, participants declined the interview mode I had planned, but rather preferred a questionnaire. So, they preferred the mode that was convenient to them. I have noticed that many people in Rwanda refrain from being interviewed, audio or video-recorded due to the socio-political and historical context of the country. I have had similar experiences in previous field research. They rather prefer an open questionnaire and provide enough and detailed responses.

With regard to the privacy and confidentiality, researchers must ensure confidentiality related to individual research participants (Bryman, 2008). The researcher must also avoid any personal identifiers such as individual names in their research reports which could lead to the identification of the participants. With regard to their security, participants should be assured that the information collected will not be publicly disclosed in a way that a specific person can be identified. Indeed, in a dialogue I held with teachers, some of them expressed some concern that my research might be an evaluation or inspection mechanism of their teaching practice and performance especially in the English language. But I assured them that it was neither an evaluation nor inspection, and that the data were going to be anonymously elaborated. Only labels urban and rural, female and male, nursery and primary are used in the selected quotations.

**Data analysis procedure**

The qualitative data in the papers of the thesis were thematically analysed (Boyatzis, 1998; Patton, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2008) by searching for significant themes in the participants’ thoughts and reflections. Thematic analysis consists in identifying, analysing
and reporting patterns within the data. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis ‘minimally organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail’ (2006: 79). Boyatzis (1998) refers to significant themes to mean those patterns that describe, organize and interpret some parts of the searched phenomenon. During this search, the researcher has to familiarize him/herself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the themes and subthemes, as Bryman (2008) says, emerge from a thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts that make up the data.

In the first stage, I read and re-read the responses from the questionnaires, and listened carefully to and transcribed the recordings. The next stage was the identification of relevant concepts and information with regard to the overall aim. The third stage consisted of dividing concepts into potential themes which were then applied on the whole material. The strength of a theme ‘depends on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). The fourth stage consisted of developing codes (Boyatzis, 1998) that would be used to analyse the findings. At this particular time I proceeded with choosing quotations that would illustrate and support arguments being made. According to Boyatzis (1998), the last stage concerns the interpretation of the information and themes in the light of a theory or conceptual framework. While interpreting and reporting the findings, my influence is inevitable due to my theoretical and epistemological commitments, first as a lecturer in higher education, second as a parent who has the responsibility of instilling emergent literacy in my kids, and finally as one citizen among a population whose reading culture and literacy levels are wanting. However, I have tried to keep this influence to the minimal level.

The empirical data were drawn from the questionnaires, interviews, narratives and discussions on narratives. In total, seventy-nine questionnaires were collected and analysed. Twelve interviews were also recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed. Children’s narratives, interactions and discussions about the narratives were also recorded. One selected fairy tale and related comments and responses from the children were transcribed in Kinyarwanda and translated into English. A second translator proofread and validated the translated narrative. As earlier said, most participants used Kinyarwanda in their responses. This means that I had to translate into English most quotations that were used in the articles. As a trained and professional translator, I managed as much as possible to accurately and faithfully render the intended meanings the participants wanted to convey.

Finally, the selection of quotations was based on variation and richness of information provided in the participants’ responses that contributed to the understanding of the researched
problem. In this respect, as an example in study four, there is uneven use of quotes from girls and boys, rural and urban, and grade levels. There are more citations and elaborate statements from the urban school than the rural school. This can be justified by the fact that the political discourse on gender gets more easily translated into actions through family and school practices in urban settings than rural ones. Success stories of gender equality in urban settings are more visible, hence urban children were more eloquent. This is in accordance with Morse (2003), who states that at the writing-up stage, the researcher purposely selects the best examples of quotations to illustrate points made in the developing argument. I attended to data that only provided relevant information and more explanation to contribute to the understanding and discussion of the researched topic. Hence, the provided information was a basis for the constitution and choice of specific themes discussed in the four papers of this thesis according to my interpretations.

**Quality considerations**

Findings in qualitative studies are often weighed against measures of credibility, transferability, and validity— in other words, to what extent they can be generalised. Inspired by Larsson’s (2009) pluralistic view of generalization of findings in qualitative research, I can see the generalisation of the findings of my study in other contexts along two lines of reasoning, i.e. enhancing the generalization potential by maximizing variation and the generalization through recognition of patterns. In the first line, Larsson states that covering more of the variation in qualitatively different views will enhance the generalizability of the study. With regard to my study, variations of different participants’ views from rural versus urban, public versus private, literate versus illiterate were used. This has the potential to capture and describe fully the researched problem. As far as the second line of reasoning is concerned, Larsson argues that research texts can communicate ways of seeing something that was taken for granted. He states that a reader is invited to notice something they did not see before. In this study, the making of a reading nation, many people including academics, political authorities, media, etc. have been utterly saying that a culture of reading is missing among Rwandans. But these were mere statements as there was no research evidence in the area of family practices and emergent literacy development that pave ways to reading habits and a culture of reading. In this respect, the findings in this study can be regarded as ‘patterns or configurations which can be recognized in the empirical world’ (Larsson, 2009: 33).

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the credibility of the study lies in the judgment to attest if the findings and conclusions are reasonably presented with regard to the
empirical data. In this respect, in line with my research, the discussions and conclusions are made following the many quotations provided by the respondents. In this way, as Lincoln and Guba (2000) and Patton (2002) point out, it is important to give thick descriptions since they allow whoever wants to make their judgment and own interpretations on the basis of the respondents’ quotations. Hence, in my studies, arguments are supported by the respondents’ voices on their lived experiences. As for validity in qualitative research, Smith (2003) refers to a valid study as one whose results have met the tests of plausibility and credibility. In other words, the judgment of validity should be about the extent to which an account is faithful to the particular situation under consideration. It ensues that a study is plausible when an account of a situation is likely to be true given the existing state of knowledge of that situation while the credibility refers to whether the researcher’s judgment is accurate given the nature of the problem, the circumstances of the research and the characteristics of the researcher.

Moreover, in order to increase the visibility and validity of my study, the articles in this thesis have been discussed in higher education seminars, peer reviewed by different journal reviewers, and presented in international conferences. This is another sign of credibility whereby Miles and Huberman (1994) speak of other researchers’ presence in the research process. Hence, article 1, *Enhancing the culture of reading in Rwanda: Reflections by students in tertiary institutions*, was presented at the European Society for Research on Education of Adults (ESREA) conference held at Linköping University, Sweden, in 2010 (23-26/09/2010). Article 2, *Exploring home literacy practices among Rwandan families*, was presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) held at Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany, in 2011 (13-16/09/2011). Article 4, *Children’s Reflections on Gender Equality in Fairy Tales: A Rwanda Case Study*, was presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) held at Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany, in 2011 (13-16/09/2011).

Concerning the possibility of transferability of the findings in this study, Smith (2003) maintains that we do not always expect replication in qualitative research, rather a careful account of how the researcher has obtained and analysed the data. This corroborates Bryman’s (2008) treaty on social research methods, who asserts that replication in social sciences is not common. As far as the present study is concerned, it takes as a case study Rwanda. I understand that the conditions and contexts of the participants that are presented might be unique, but the felt problem of lack of a reading culture, low literacy levels and other issues raised as well as interpretations made are similar in many developing nations. In this respect, Smith (2003) observes that it is possible that another researcher in another setting.
may repeat the observations and findings, but one should not be concerned once this does not happen.
4. SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

Introduction
This section includes summaries of the four empirical studies that make up this thesis, their interrelation and contribution to the researched theme, i.e. the making of a reading society. Although they have been written with different perspectives, approaches, and participants, all the four studies contribute and converge to investigate and problematize issues of creating and developing emergent literacy and a culture of reading. They present in many ways the circular character of the problems that make hard to find a solution to creating and developing a reading culture. The starting point was the assumption that cultivating a reading culture is important to the development of any individual and any nation. In fact, many Rwandans, regardless of the divides of literate and illiterate, urban and rural, rich and poor, rely more on talking to each other for their day-to-day information and communication. Indeed, many African studies have shown that rich oral traditions are often perceived to eclipse print culture, and at the same time, much dependence on the oral tradition slows down the culture of reading. These studies investigated the promotion of a reading culture in some African countries (Kwikiriza, 2000; Rosenberg, 2003; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Kachala, 2007), the reading culture among school children (Behrman, 2004) and teachers (Commeyras & Mazile, 2011).

The first study sprang from my own experiences and observations as a former student, lecturer, and reader, and a growing concern and criticism (from various media, academic and political authorities) about the lack of a reading culture prevalent among Rwandans in general and university students in particular. The aim of this study was to investigate students’ reflections on their previous reading experiences and discuss ways and strategies to develop early literacy and a reading culture in Rwanda. The study found that the participants acknowledged the prevalence of and a very good exposure to an oral tradition in most of their families, and that they have not been nurtured in a love-reading environment either at home or at school. Drawing on my own experience and the findings from this study, and knowing the Rwandan proverb “Umwana apfa mu iterura” (Literally: a child dies during its upbringing, meaning that once a child loses a good early exposure in life, he or she is lost forever), I decided to explore home literacy practices among Rwandan families (Study 2) to investigate current practices that are susceptible to foster emergent literacy and reading habits with the aim to develop a knowledge base about how to cultivate a reading culture. It was found that parents lack information on and are unaware of what kind of practices they can involve their
children in to develop their emergent literacy and stimulate their thirst for reading. In this regard, the study recommends that parents, from all walks of life, be informed on best practices to set up a rich literacy environment that promotes the reading to and with children, encourage interest in books, print awareness, narrative skills, writing, singing, and other early literacy activities in their homes. In so doing, the parents will generate thirst for reading by familiarizing children with books, stories, plays, and so on, right from the young age as it may not always be easy to arouse their interest once they have grown up.

Based on the findings from the above studies, I decided to approach nursery and lower primary school teachers (Study 3). They reflected on literacy knowledge children possess when they start nursery and primary education, on opportunities and challenges of developing emergent literacy skills and a culture of reading for young children in Rwanda as they are the first ones to meet the children right from home and have expectations on what kind of literacy skills they have to bring to school. They also shed light on parents’ involvement in all this enterprise. Early literacy development issues constitute a key to successful literacy and education for all campaigns underway in Rwanda. Besides, they are a bone of contention among education stakeholders, i.e. parents, pupils and students, teachers and political authorities with regard to the rhetoric of who is responsible for low literacy levels and a poor reading culture among Rwandans in general.

Placed at the end but conducted first is a study with school children to inquire about their knowledge of the oral tradition, namely storytelling, since the first literacy education is acquired through oral modes (Study 4). Also, the participants’ home and social environment is mostly oral. In addition, I wanted to inquire about their reading habits at this tender age because at this age range children are considered as young readers who are eager to practice and master the newly acquired reading skills. In fact, according to the emergent literacy theory, young children become literate by being meaningfully engaged in activities involving reading, writing, speaking, drawing, playing, etc. (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). The study revealed strong ties with storytelling and little acquaintance with print literacy. The children learn stories from oral sources via a long storytelling tradition. Since oral traditions have been used by Rwandans as a powerful tool and methodology of imparting knowledge since time immemorial (Kagame, 1978), they can also be used as leverage for building and strengthening both the reading and writing cultures among the population. They must be collected and compiled in written form to be read in schools by the young generation who find them both educational and pleasurable since they help them identify themselves within their culture.
Children can be lured into reading those marvellous stories, and in the long run they can develop a reading culture.

Also, knowing that children’s literature is home for gender stereotypes (Tsao, 2008) and that fairy tales can have the potential to work consciously or unconsciously on children’s psyche to free and support them (Bettelheim, 1976), the study dealt with children’s reflections on the gender equality issue, which is a topical issue today in Rwanda. The latter is actually known today for its highest female representation in Parliament all over the world and commitment to building a new society based on principles of equal opportunities for all, women and men in the post-genocide era. So, the reading about contents with gender stereotypes can offer a privileged opportunity to children to re-examine their gender beliefs and assumptions, leading them to adopt more egalitarian attitudes. More importantly, this article serves as an illustration of the social uses of literacy whereby children apply literate skills to defend their rights.

All in all, although in this study Rwanda is taken as an example, the issue of lack of a reading culture and low literacy levels and practices will be recognized in many African and developing nations. I will argue that different descriptions and reflections on possibilities and challenges of making a society a reading one within the perspectives of the four studies converge to the culmination of the researched topic. Below are the summaries of each article in details.
**Study 1**
Enhancing the culture of reading in Rwanda: Reflections by students in tertiary institutions

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**Background**

“If you want to hide something from Rwandans, you will only need to put it in a book. But if you want something to be known, just whisper it to one person,” an adage in Rwanda goes.

This study was inspired by criticisms from different academic, political authorities, and the media levelled against tertiary students in Rwanda that they lack a culture of reading. Yet, the possession of this culture is a *sine qua non* for a successful educational system. The poor reading culture among the population in general and students in tertiary education in particular impacts not only on the educational standards but also on the entire nation’s welfare by slowing down the implementation of public policies. This concern about the lack of a reading culture is also felt by many other scholars in many African countries, viz. eastern, southern and western Africa (Rosenberg, 2003; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011). So, the purpose of this study was to investigate university students’ reflections on causes of a poor reading culture prevalent among students in tertiary learning institutions in particular and suggest a strategy to enhance a reading culture in Rwanda. The following questions guided this study: What do students claim are the reasons for the existing poor reading culture in Rwanda and what could be done to promote it?

**Methods**
The study, conducted in August 2008, subscribes to a qualitative design. It relies on responses from open-ended questionnaires from university students. The selection of participants was done using convenience sampling techniques. Available and willing students from nine different faculties took part in the research. They received an open-ended questionnaire which focused on the students’ reading experiences (when, where, with whom their interest in books started), their home and early school reading environment, and the culture of reading in Rwanda in general and within students in particular. 35/40 respondents from different faculty departments returned the questionnaires, and a thematic analysis was done.
Findings and discussion

Four themes emerged from the analysis: lack of a reading culture, insufficient reading materials and resources to acquire them, education system that did not inculcate into students the love and habit of reading throughout their schooling and the predominance of an oral tradition in most families over the writing and reading tradition, what makes it harder to encourage a culture of reading. The study reveals that most participants acknowledged that they lacked early reading experience with their parents and siblings at home and during their first years of school, whereas a culture of reading and good reading habits should start at an early stage of childhood and be nurtured in schools up to adulthood. The reason is the low literacy rate in Rwandan families (illiterate parents). Also, aliteracy affects the minority who can read, with the result that the oral mode remains prevalent.

The participants also believe that the prevalence of the storytelling tradition among Rwandan households impacts on the reading culture. This oral tradition was the initial form of literacy through its several different forms of expression—storytelling, poems, proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, songs, dance, and so on—and was passed on from generation to generation, and the Rwandan society still has links with it. Many people derive more pleasure from the oral modes and performing arts—talking, singing, dancing, and socializing—than from the rather private and individual reading of a book. More importantly, the participants put forward the lack of appropriate reading materials in the language accessible to many together with a conducive reading environment with the presence of libraries, bookshops, circulation of newspapers throughout the country as the most important obstacle to the culture of reading in Rwanda in general. The book market is essentially in French and English (foreign and official languages) with very little in Kinyarwanda (official and mother tongue). The issue is that only very few Rwandans are conversant with English and French. There is also a clear absence of school, public, and community libraries across the country while the latter are hailed for improving the reading culture. Moreover, the limited purchasing power among the population is another important hindrance to the culture of reading since, only few people can afford to pay for books and other materials for reading such as newspapers. Finally, the participants pointed to the academic tradition (teaching, learning and evaluation) that emphasized reliance on course notes reading and evaluation mechanisms that require students to memorize and write exams using only their notes.

Indeed, for a reading culture to exist and be visible in Rwanda, reading should be made part of all aspects of life and be a concern for the whole population, starting from an early age. It should also be more emphasized in school curricula than ever before at all
education levels. With a positive attitude towards reading at an early age, chances are that children grow up reading for fun and entertainment, and for gaining knowledge and information to solve everyday problems that directly affect their livelihoods. Finally, the success of the reading culture will depend on assistance given to Rwandan readers through reading campaigns and the promotion of books, and establishment of libraries in the vicinity of the population.

**Study 2**

*Exploring home literacy practices among Rwandan families*


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**Background**

This study on home literacy practices in Rwanda examines family practices, beliefs, and resources to document and understand how Rwandan families support and develop their children’s early home literacy, considered as a milestone to later reading achievement and education success. The poor home literacy environment prevailing in Rwandan families is reportedly said to obstruct early literacy development and subsequent acquisition of a reading culture. Research provides evidence that a rich home literacy environment plays a vital role in nurturing early literacy skills and impacts later reading achievement of the children and their intellectual self-fulfilment. Parents are the trusted prime source for early literacy development and inculcation of good reading habits among children by setting a rich literacy environment that promotes the reading to/ with children, writing, storytelling, and singing in their homes. However, many parents do not know what home literacy practices and their importance that they already perform in their interactions with their children such as storytelling, book or newspaper sharing, etc. Some parents do neither realize that they are important role models for their children. Similarly, some other parents tend to focus so much on just reading that they forget other literacy practices.

Home literacy practices encompass a wide range of practices—narration, storytelling, reading aloud, book sharing, parent-child interactions, availability of and access to literacy materials, etc. – occurring in families. It is indeed assumed that children’s literacy is nurtured when their families support practices that promote language and reading activities in the home. Additionally, children’s literacy development is linked to the social practices that surround them and emerges when they observe and participate in these culturally situated
literacy practices through the support of their parents, siblings, or adult members of children’s literate communities (Teale, 1986; Dyson, 1992). More importantly, parent–child interactions with and about books not only build and consolidate their social bonds but also develop especially children’s oral and written language and a desire and thirst to read (Heath, 1986; Marsh & Thompson, 2001). This is why home literacy practices have a strong and enduring effect on children’s literacy skills and language development. However, as Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) in their study on preventing reading difficulties in young children note, families differ enormously in the level to which they provide a supportive environment for children’s literacy development. The following question guided this study: How do Rwandan families say that they cater for early literacy and reading habits in children?

Methods
This study, conducted in April 2009, subscribes to a qualitative design as it relies on open-ended questionnaires and interviews from selected rural and urban, literate and illiterate Rwandan families. The study reports on home literacy practices of 24 families with children attending both nursery and primary schools. The choice of the settings was motivated by the socio-economic and educational conditions associated with both the rural and urban settings which are expected to affect home literacy practices. The selection of participants was done using convenience sampling techniques. The participants expressed to me, by writing or verbally their availability and willingness to take part in the research. An open-ended questionnaire meant to provide information on the kinds of literacy activities which families are involved in and literacy materials available to cater for home literacy development and a reading culture at home was written in both Kinyarwanda and English. I also arranged and conducted interviews in Kinyarwanda with parents who said they could neither read nor write.

Findings and discussion
This study investigated how parents describe home literacy practices, literacy environments and their attitudes to early literacy development in selected rural and urban, literate and illiterate Rwandan families. The findings from the study revealed three themes in relation to home literacy practices in the selected families. These include activities fostering literacy that parents engage in with their children, literacy resources available in homes and their instrumental use, and the parent–child interaction. It was found that home literacy activities in Rwandan households are fewer in rural settings, and largely differ in terms of activities which affect literacy practices at home. The study has also shown that many parents do not sense and value their role of engaging their children in home literacy activities. Additionally, both rural
and urban families are not well informed on the importance, the availability of, and access to a range of literacy materials that promote children’s early literacy development.

With regard to the parent-child interaction, the study shows that it is not popular among the participants whereas research has evidence that with child-parent interaction, families equip their children with a warm and loving setting for language and literacy development, and lifelong reading, thus making them avid, willing and responsive readers. Finally, it was found that all parents, regardless of the urban–rural, educated–less educated divide, need to be encouraged and mobilized to engage their children in any home literacy activity since they were delighted to learn more of home literacy practices. Thus, it is necessary to build and strengthen parents’ confidence that they can support their children’s literacy development on the basis of any literacy related activities available in their households. Despite the fact that this study was conducted at a small scale in the country, I suggest that it has a potential to sensitize parents and all literacy development stakeholders, and raise their awareness on the importance of home literacy practices in children’s early lives and success in education.

**Study 3**

**Teachers’ reflections on parental involvement in emergent literacy development in Rwanda** (Accepted for publication as a book chapter in *Cultures of Educational Policy: International Issues of Policy-outcome Relationships*).

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**Background**

This study examines nursery and lower primary school teachers’ reflections on parental involvement in children’s emergent literacy with the purpose to gain knowledge on developing emergent literacy for young children in Rwanda and other countries with similar challenges. To achieve this aim, the following questions guided this study: (1) what are teachers’ opinions about the literacy knowledge children possess when they start nursery and primary education? (2) What do teachers claim can develop children’s early literacy and reading habits in schools?

The study was inspired by the presidential decree on quality standards in education for nursery education (Ministry of Education, [MINEDUC] 2009) and the early childhood education policy in Rwanda (MINEDUC, 2011). These policy documents are among many education policies that have been put in place over the past 17 years in order to spearhead early childhood education in families and communities. MINEDUC (2011) wants to improve
the parents’ knowledge and skills in child development as they are the child’s first teachers to ensure that all children, infants and toddlers, are prepared for success in school and life and are ready to begin school at the correct age. Efforts are put on sensitising local authorities, opinion leaders, parents, communities and journalists about the importance of children’s early literacy development. This will contribute to fill a critical need in literacy for the whole population to reach the universal goal of education for all. In addition, early literacy development issues in Rwanda are worth investigating as they constitute a key to successful literacy and education for all campaigns underway (MINEDUC, 2009). They also constitute a bone of contention among education stakeholders, i.e. parents, pupils and students, teachers and political authorities with regard to the rhetoric of low literacy levels and a poor reading culture among Rwandans in general. Thus, my point of departure is that it is a vital undertaking to hear from nursery and lower primary school teachers as they are the first ones to meet the children right from their homes and have expectations about what kind of literacy skills they bring to school.

This study is anchored in the theories of literacy development within the perspective of emergent literacy theory (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Lancy, 1994; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Research conducted in emergent literacy development for young children has shown evidence that children’s literacy skills develop and increase faster when they receive consistent literacy experiences at home and in school (Heath, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; McLane & McNamee, 1990; Anderson, 1995; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Stainthorp &Hughes, 2000). Clearly, there is no better place for children to begin their literacy journey than at home. However, children record success when their families, schools, and communities work in partnership to support their learning (Epstein, 2001).

Methods
This study conducted in 2009 involved 24 teachers from 3 nursery and 3 primary schools in rural and urban settings in Rwanda. The choice of the settings was motivated by the socio-economic and educational conditions associated with both the rural and urban settings which affect literacy development. The study population consisted of 13 nursery and 11 primary teachers, including 15 females and 9 males. The choice of this category of teachers was motivated by the fact that they are heavily involved in the early childhood education, and indeed play a vital role in the building of children’s literacy pathways during their foundational pre-school and early school years. An open-ended questionnaire written in both Kinyarwanda and English included questions to reveal the teacher's reflections on the
children’s literacy skills when they come to school, whose responsibility it is to develop the children’s literacy skills and reading habits, the socio-linguistic environment in literacy education in Rwanda, and the kind of help that parents could provide to support their children. A follow-up in-depth interview was also conducted with eight teachers to know their expectations on literacy knowledge from children coming to start nursery and primary education as well as literacy skills they would recommend to these children. A thematic analysis was done afterwards.

**Findings and discussion**

Three themes emerged from the inductive analysis, i.e. children’s emergent literacy skills, shared responsibilities in children’s emergent literacy development, and the socio-linguistic environment in literacy education. The study has identified similar positive perceptions and some concerns among the teachers from nursery and primary schools in both urban and rural settings towards children’s emergent literacy development. The teachers expressed the need to enhance emergent literacy in Rwandan families by providing information and opportunities with a stimulating literacy environment and a strengthened and concerted partnership between schools, teachers and parents. The participants recommended more parents’ engagement in their children’s reading activities, storytelling, playing games, acquaintance with print, in brief, all activities involving language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing at home. Tracey and Morrow (2006), Purcell-Gates (2000), and Morrow (1995, 1997) have also indicated that these activities are facilitative of later literacy achievement in school.

Finally, the provision of a strengthened and concerted partnership between schools, teachers and parents is highly valued by all the participants for its potential stimulus for accelerated growth of children’s early and later literacy development. Research indicates that parents and community participation in the education of children greatly enhances the impact of schooling and improves its quality (Epstein, 2001; Smit, Driessen, Sleeegers & Teelken, 2008). Moreover, close collaboration between parents, teachers and schools is credited for its presumed positive impacts on children’s literacy development. However, this school-family-community partnership is not at all easy to create and maintain. There are indeed structural and psychological barriers (Christenson, 2004) on both parents and teachers which impede the family-school connections. In Rwanda for example, many parents distance themselves from their children’s education as long as they pay school fees for them. Hence, the teachers have the feeling that, with improved communication between parents and teachers, they can get more support from the parents. In brief, families, communities, and teachers need to be
energized to create links and work collaboratively in order to promote, foster, and enhance the much needed emergent literacy for children both at home and at school.

**Study 4**

**Children’s Reflections on Gender Equality in Fairy Tales: A Rwanda Case Study**


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**Background**

This study derives from the much cherished literacy mode by most Rwandans, i.e. the oral tradition. Theories pertinent to this study are found in the functions of children’s literature in general and fairy tales in particular (see for example, Bettelheim, 1976; Hunt, 1990, 1991; Geoff, 1995; Zipes, 1997). The importance of children’s literature lies in the development of children’s moral, intellectual, and linguistic abilities as most stories ‘seek to inculcate in the child reader an appreciation for certain cultural values and disapprobation of undesirable behaviour’ (Yitah & Komasi, 2009: 244). Children’s literature also enhances children’s motivation to read. With regard to fairy tales, they are said to work consciously or unconsciously to free and support the child since they make good literary fiction and deal with a struggle between good and evil at some level (Geoff, 1995).

Gender inequality is a theme encountered in most popular fairy tales (Tsao, 2008). In relation to this theme, the study wants to contribute with a new shift in reading, narrating, and understanding fairy tales in Rwandan education system. As reflected in its oral literature, the patriarchal structure in Rwanda has influenced the life of women and men in traditional society by assigning them different roles and identities. Most narratives reveal that there has been gender inequality since time immemorial whereby female characters have played important but not prominent roles in society. These narratives have been instrumental in spreading a gender bias ideology since literature is often said to be a home for gender stereotypes (Tsao, 2008). However, in the post-genocide era, traditional beliefs and conceptions of what a woman is, should be, and should do have been contested. As a result of these contests, gender equality has been made one of the major goals of development that the Government of Rwanda has identified. The latter is committed to building a new society based on principles of equal opportunities for all, women and men.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how educational use of Rwandan children’s literature, mainly fairy tales, can challenge traditional gender roles in Rwandan education.
Indeed, researchers in and authors of children’s literature argue that the manner in which gender is represented in children’s literature impacts children’s attitudes and perceptions of gender-appropriate behaviour in society. In this respect, contents with gender stereotypes can offer children a privileged opportunity, given appropriate educational intervention to re-examine their gender belief and assumptions, leading them to adopt more egalitarian attitudes. Based on the aim of the study, the following questions guided this study: (1) how do children reflect on gender in Rwandan fairy tales and (2) what can they learn from reading and discussing them?

**Methods**

This qualitative study was conducted in two primary schools in Rwanda, in urban and rural settings, in August 2007. In both research sites, I attended three classes at each school. These classes were the sixth grade (final), the fourth grade, and the second grade. The time spent in each classroom was approximately one-and-a-half hours. The children’s age varied between 8 and 12 years. After a warm up session, I asked children to tell Kinyarwanda stories or tales focusing mainly on plots with human characters and involving both sexes. Children’s discussions of the stories were held in gendered groups in order to maximize the freedom of expression in their discussion and create confidence and an opportunity for experience sharing. I also wanted to find out whether girls and boys discussed in different ways in their constructions and understanding of gender. They were asked to say lessons drawn from stories, their reflections on female and male characters in the stories, if they want things to change, and to contextualise the story with regard to today’s situation of gender relations in Rwanda. These sessions were audio taped for later transcription, translation into English, and analysis. After the storytelling, children’s reflections on gender in a fairy tale of Ndabaga, a female protagonist portrayed in non-traditional gender roles are analysed.

**Findings and discussion**

This section illustrates and analyses children’s reflections on traditional gender roles in a fairy tale vis-à-vis modern gender roles within the context of post-genocide Rwanda. *The fairy tale of Ndabaga* was selected among twenty-four stories collected because it is very popular among children (and grown-ups) and it is about women’s emancipation. Children were unanimous on the egalitarian view of gender. They emphasized that there should not be any distinction as to what girls (can) do and what boys do. They stated that girls’ potentialities should not be underestimated or underrated. The findings in this study on children’s reflections on gender in a fairy tale of Ndabaga, a female protagonist portrayed in non-
traditional gender roles, show that the tale made children of both sexes, rural and urban, see
previous gender and social inequalities females were victims of. Moreover, children reacted
positively to the female character, portrayed in male roles, which was traditionally
unacceptable. They expressed positive attitudes towards a change of traditional gender roles
as the latter obstructs the full realization of females’ rights. Ndabaga’s heroism inspires the
youth, especially girls, as they can follow her steps. Heroism is no longer the realm of men.
This can be another opportunity, for example, towards encouraging and motivating girls to
take on scientific and technological subjects in schools (believed to be hard and difficult by
many females). In addition, this fairy tale can have an educational effect on both men and
women with regard to their gender perceptions and related injustices vis-à-vis their children’s
education.

Finally, this study contributes to the reinforcement of the gender equality discourse
from the government agenda. Women stand as representatives of the people. They have been
given a platform to showcase their ability, a move that has worked as a stepping stone towards
the economic development and social welfare of the nation. This has made them acquire
confidence of leadership. No stone should be left unturned in its effort to empower women as
they have potentials that should not be under-used or underestimated to contribute to the
development of Rwanda. However, based on the findings of the study, it is imperative for
adults to live up to these young children’s ideals of a gender-free bias society.
5. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Introduction
Throughout the different papers making up the thesis, the investigations have provided insight into issues of the status of a reading culture, family literacy practices, print literacy, and oral literacy in Rwanda. According to MINEDUC (2009), illiteracy among the population from both urban and rural areas stood at 34.7 per cent in 2006. Hence, a sizeable number of the Rwandan population do not live in conditions conducive to the practice of reading. Yet, Vygotsky (1987) contends that children imitate, internalize, and even externalize all that they see, hear, and do with peers and other more competent members of their culture in their developmental processes. In general, the studies in this thesis revealed that the family and community literacy is predominantly oral while the print literacy leaves a lot to be desired. The most common form of literacy practice in most homes and the community at large that children are exposed to during their childhood days in Rwanda is storytelling. Rwandans in their families and communities are mostly involved in and depend on oral communication for their day-to-day information and interaction. As a consequence, the participants agree that the culture of reading is not nurtured in Rwanda. This corroborates statements from various media, academic and political authorities who unanimously speak out about the lack of a reading culture among Rwandans in general. Taking Vygotsky’s claim that children ‘grow into the intellectual life of those around them’ (1978: 88), it becomes particularly important to act on this issue in the present time of globalization where all members of society are requested to meet the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). In this concluding discussion, I will firstly revisit critically the findings from the studies in relation to the overarching aim and research questions of the thesis. Secondly, I will reflect on the limitations of this thesis, and finally on some possible suggestions for further research.

Written versus oral traditions
Studies 1, 2, and 3 offer insights into developing and enhancing print literacy and a reading culture which appear to be uncontroversial assets that should be disseminated and enhanced in order to succeed in education. Research on education in developing countries (Altbach, 1995; Dike, 1995; Brock-Utne, 2000; Torres, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2001; Brock-Utne, Zubeida & Qorro, 2004; Parry, 2005) holds that there is often a poor reading culture in most agrarian societies arguably due to the lack of access to education, the foreign language of education, and lack of reading materials in general. Therefore, people mostly rely on verbal
communication. This oral tradition is certainly a valuable aspect of functional literacy skills but reading is an important part of modern education. The first study argues that oral traditions should not be seen as an obstacle to a reading culture but as a potential resource which relates to the experience and life of the people. The richness of oral traditions could be successfully used to foster a reading culture if only the languages used in Rwanda were equally valued (Study 1). Indeed, through the use of traditional oral materials in reading at home and school, the reading and writing cultures could even reinforce the oral tradition because these materials are often familiar to readers.

The simple reason why these rich oral traditions produced in Kinyarwanda are not taken as a good basis to promote reading is that the official language in schools is English (French has been used from the colonial time till 2008). And for this matter, most available books and papers are in these languages, by far spoken and used fluently by the minority. In my opinion, the question of which language literacy and a reading culture should be in, which is indeed a crosscutting issue across all the studies, is actually the basic and most fundamental factor determining the creation and development of literacy and a reading culture. I argue that the native language which seems to be kept marginal as it appears to be outside the official reading and writing culture would be most likely to provide assistance in the children’s zone of proximal development. In short, the present language policy that only promotes reading and writing in foreign languages at school seems to hamper the development of a reading culture.

Moreover, at the socio-cultural level, there might be a conflict between the oral and reading/writing traditions. The reality is that books are not well integrated into the Rwandan society which is firmly steeped in the oral tradition. It is also customary for Rwandans not to bear silence in their daily activities while reading is a form of intimate and solitary communication between the text and the reader. The oral culture is considered as a socializing agent while reading is a private and solitary activity. Rwandans like to tease one another and to tell stories, and jokes to enliven their soul (Kagame, 1969, 1978). That can discourage reading.

**The making of a reading society**

The persistent lack of a reading culture has been reported in many developing countries whereas being part of it is reported to go hand in hand with success in school and overall national development. This thesis adds to the existing literature and knowledge on the lack of a reading culture in other western, eastern, and southern African nations, notably Nigeria,
Uganda, South Africa, Malawi and Botswana (Rosenberg, 2003; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Kachala, 2007; Kelechi, 2010; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011). They concur that a reading culture becomes well established in a society that values and has interest in books and reading. For the case of Rwanda, the study with students in tertiary education (Study 1) argues that many people did not and still do not find interest in reading because they are not aware of the advantages and the value associated with it. From a socio-educational background rooted in the colonial and post-colonial education system in schools of Rwanda, the findings show that reading has rather been equated with a memory exercise to pass school examinations, not for a lifelong learning activity. This has culminated into lack of interest in and less value of books as well as lack of motivation in reading beyond the school context. It is indeed very frequent to hear people referring to less literate ones in Rwanda as ‘inkandagitrabitabo’ (the one who walks over books or book treader).

One of the ensuing consequences is the presence of aliterates. These are unmotivated, uncommitted and reluctant readers who lack enthusiasm for reading and always have reasons why they do not read (Beers, 1996). Yet, in her ‘what no bedtime story means: narrative skills at home and school’, Heath (1986) holds that mainstream parents link school success for their children to “learning to love books, learning what books can do for you, and learning to entertain yourself and to work independently” (p.101). Literacy practices including reading to, singing for, and telling stories to children, access to books and printed materials, etc. are credited to nurture and stimulate children’s love for books and reading from infancy. Moreover, Heath (1983), Cochran-Smith (1984), and others claim that the single most important activity for building a foundation for reading is reading aloud to children. According to Teale and Sulzby (1986) these literacy practices also constitute literate behaviours that are essential parts of the language development process. For this matter, children need to access books and role models who read and tell stories to them from infancy. In addition, in the light of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1997, 1978), cultural tools like languages, reading and writing materials, oral materials, and institutions like libraries and bookshops are important conditions for mediating and enhancing the acquisition of literacy and a culture of reading, thus making Rwanda a reading society.

**Responsibility for developing a reading culture**

**Parents’ responsibility**

Many partners are involved in developing a reading culture. In order to develop and maintain a reading culture in a society, the theoretical overview emphasizes a strong collaboration and
partnership among parents, teachers, government, private sector, and civil society organizations. If parents do not read to their children, the latter, in turn, will not read to their children because you cannot give what you do not have. Findings from the studies with students in tertiary education and parents respectively show little support from the parents and little awareness with regard to their role and responsibility for inculcating reading habits into their children at an early age (Studies 1 and 2). This cycle goes on and on. In fact, this agrees with the English saying that readers beget readers and that a reading parent gets a reading child! This is why parents stand the best chance when it comes to nurturing a reading culture. Most of the adults who love reading will point to their parents as the source for that love. Therefore, with positive attitude towards reading at an early age, chances are that children grow up reading for fun and entertainment, and for gaining knowledge and information to solve everyday problems that directly affect their livelihoods.

However, there are important challenges related to parental responsibility for developing early literacy and a culture of reading in Rwanda. Drawing on the findings of the study on home literacy practices (Study 2), I argue that many parents who indeed are the most suitable to inculcate reading habits into their children either do not have it themselves, lack information or do not have necessary skills to support them. On top of that, the Rwandan culture that generally regards a child as someone who should not engage in any discussion with adults also deprives them the parent-child interaction, which is an important foundation for early literacy development. There are parents who neither know the importance of home literacy practices nor realise that they are role models to their children. There are also problems of illiterate and poor parents who cannot read and access books; there are others who are informed but do not have time to support their children, and many more excuses. The lack or insufficiency of print literacy culture in the homes and school environments of the participants reported in the study with students in tertiary education (Study 1) raises the question of home and school emergent literacy experiences and knowledge. Yet, the emergent literacy theory claims that young children learn critical early literacy concepts by observing and participating in many literacy events in their homes and communities (Purcell-Gates, 2000, 1996; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Also, according to Lancy (1994), literacy growth and development is influenced by conversations and other literacy opportunities a child has participated in.
Teachers’ responsibility

The findings of the study with teachers (Study 3) show the need to sensitize parents and the community, and provide information on and awareness of their role in creating a rich emergent literacy environment for their children’s literacy growth at home. In addition, the participants advocate that links and collaboration between parents, families, and teachers need to be strengthened so as to promote, foster, and enhance the much needed emergent literacy for children both at home and at school. This indeed holds as research provides for a strengthened and concerted partnership between schools, teachers and parents for its potential stimulus for accelerated growth of children’s early and later literacy development (Paratore, Cassano, & Schickedanz, 2011; Smit et al. 2008; Epstein 2001). Teachers also play a pivotal role in helping children to develop and maintain a positive attitude towards literacy learning and reading. To motivate children to read, teachers should demonstrate a passion for reading and act as model readers for their students. Finally, by providing opportunities for discussion, teamwork, and other social interactions that make reading interesting and fun (Paratore, Cassano, & Schickedanz, 2011; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Coladarci, 1992), children can learn to reflect on texts, read between the lines and challenge their own and others’ thinking.

Societal responsibility

The promotion of a reading culture goes hand in hand with access to books and other reading materials. Yet, public libraries are almost unknown in rural areas in Rwanda, whereas these institutions are vital and constitute important cultural tools to germinate the seed for reading. The students who participated in Study 1, like myself, claimed that they saw libraries and bookshops for the first time when they went to secondary school. The only libraries available are indeed to be found in high schools and universities for study purposes, and they are by far poorly and ill furnished. For the rest of the general public, a library is an unfamiliar milieu (Studies 1 and 2). Research has provided evidence of the importance that the availability of and access to books have on the reading ability of children (Heath, 1983; Andersson, 1997; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) even if the ability to read and the availability of reading materials do not always translate into a habit of reading.

Some non-profit organisations and the private sector can also intervene to complement government efforts towards establishing school and community libraries, donating books as part of their corporate social responsibility. In the joint review with education development partners on April 11th, 2011, the Ministry of Education acknowledges stakeholders’ contributions and shares their concerns that ‘developing a reading culture is critical and we
should put books in the hands of children’. In this respect, a campaign dubbed ‘Rwanda Reads’ to encourage public-private partnership and investment in books and encourage reading at the community level and in schools was launched by some NGO’s and the private sector. These partners include Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), UNICEF, USAID and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and publishers already working in Rwanda, including Bakame Editions, Macmillan, Longman and Collins, Isaro Foundation, and Rwanda Book Development Initiative (RWABODI). Their aim is to empower the young generation by improving their reading and writing skills with the publication of short stories and essays and donation of books. The ‘Rwanda Reads’ initiative was officially launched on July 19, 2012.

New tools for developing a reading culture
Information and Communication Technology tools also constitute viable instruments to foster a reading culture. However, with the current technological advances in communication (internet, iPod, iPad, iPhone, vcd, dvd, video games, etc.) which drive many readers into modern hobbies and spare no time for book reading, the culture of reading might be hindered. Rather than reading a book or newspaper for example, many potential readers (ICT users) may prefer surfing the net, playing cards and computer games, or indulging in some other hobbies. Indeed, more and more potential readers spend hours and hours on social networks and internet which are the hip places to find information, reading materials and other sources of information which are not necessarily credible to spearhead a reading culture. From the Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, tools or artefacts are created to satisfy human needs or to achieve certain purposes (Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, ICT may indeed be used profitably to affect and spearhead literacy and a culture of reading when the users read for information or recreation (Marsh and Thompson, 2001; Robinson, 1997). In Rwanda for example, with the One Laptop Per Child project (OLPC) which aims to equip every child at primary school level with a laptop and make them computer literate, traditional stories could be collected, written and translated, and children’s books made more joyful and interesting, and then be incorporated into children’s computers. This could also be one means of alleviating the problem of the lack of printed reading materials. However, that would not cater for the early contact with children’s books before school age.

Some sociolinguistic considerations in education
Historically, during the colonial era and post-independence period up to 1994, French enjoyed high status in education in Rwanda at the expense of Kinyarwanda while English was a
subject taught only in secondary schools (Erny, 2005, 2002). Soon after the 1994 genocide, English was also given the same weight as French, still at the expense of Kinyarwanda. In 2008, the Government of Rwanda declared that education at all levels should be conducted in English in a bid to equip the citizens with a language to cope with various demands of the Anglo-Saxon market. The latter was the East African Community and Commonwealth whose member states speak and use English. In this regard, since January 2009, English has become the sole language of instruction. This linguistic situation is likely to deprive Rwandan children a good foundation in Kinyarwanda which is essential for them to build their understanding and develop literacy and a culture of reading. Indeed, according to UNESCO (1975), it is through one’s mother tongue that every human being first learns to formulate and express their ideas about themselves and about the world they live in. The mother tongue plays an important role in moulding the child’s early concepts, henceforth it is difficult to grasp new concepts alien to its cultural environment that cannot be readily found in its mother tongue. Moreover, the language of instruction issue has placed a burden on teachers, children and parents. The blunt fact that neither the teachers nor the children are fluent in the language used in class has serious implications for literacy development. There is indeed plenty of evidence from countries around the world that children who have a solid foundation in their mother tongue learn other languages such as English much better than those who have to struggle as soon as they start school with an unfamiliar language (Yates, 1995; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001; Brock-Utne, Zubeida & Qorro, 2004).

Research in literacy studies has shown that mother tongue literacy should be established first since children at an earlier age grasp the concepts taught to them better in their mother tongue (Altbach, 1995; Dike, 1995; Barton, 2001; UNESCO, 2011). The best entry into literacy is a child’s native language (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). In addition, Cummins (2000) claims that literacy in a child’s native language establishes a knowledge, concept and skills base that transfers from native language reading to reading in a second language. The ensuing consequence is that when children go to school and encounter a new environment like learning in a language they are not used to, they obviously experience shock. Hence, research acknowledges that literacy teaching in a language already known to the learners, especially their mother tongue, is more likely to succeed than teaching in a language children use for the first time when they enter school. Similarly, children get more motivated and interested in reading if the books they read reflect their culture, language and values (Williams, 2006).

There is also a problem of disproportionate supplies of reading materials and resources
among languages used in Rwanda. In general, there are less newspapers, books, magazines, and other reading materials written in Kinyarwanda compared to foreign languages that are sold on the Rwandan market (Study 1). Very little has been and is being produced in Kinyarwanda, the mother tongue and national language of Rwanda’s population. The vast majority of books and reading materials are available in French and English, languages that are spoken and understood by a minority of the population. We are faced with a situation of a language policy that devalues the status of Kinyarwanda in literacy education while promoting the value of English (today) and French (during the last century). As a consequence, if there are almost only reading materials available in English and French on the book market which are by far culturally irrelevant, it becomes much more difficult for many Rwandans to develop a reading culture and retain literacy.

**Urban–rural divide**

The findings in Studies 2 and 3 show an urban and rural divide towards literacy and reading culture development among the parents and children. This divide is explained by the fact that people from the urban by far well-off groups have more access and resources than the rural and poor groups with little means! Indeed, daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers in Kinyarwanda rarely reach readers who live in the rural areas, representing 84% of the population. If they reach them, it is usually several days later when they are no longer current. Hence, I would argue that, from the findings of Study 1, the availability of reading materials in a language read, used and understood by the rural masses would be a viable instrument for sustaining literacy and creating a reading culture. In addition, poverty in many households (both urban and rural) does not allow easy access to books, newspapers or any other reading materials (Study 2). There is also lack of electricity in the countryside.

To conclude, as earlier said, from the new literacies perspective, literacy is understood in terms of how people actively and creatively apply literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs (Street, 1993) including knowledge, pleasure, entertainment, and problem solving. These social uses of literacy give an opportunity to read critically. What does it take to become a critical reader? A critical reader develops critical consciousness which empowers him/her to become actively engaged in identifying their problems, asking questions, analysing, and developing strategies for transformation. The findings from the study with child participants (Study 4) highlight this character whereby children in a literacy event in class speak out eloquently about pertinent societal issues, such as gender. It is an example where children through interaction with an adult can voice their understanding of gender.
equality. In that study, the interaction was oral which is a first step to develop a written argumentative text. Also, according to Freire & Macedo (1987), during the process of developing a critical consciousness, the learner can identify, interpret, criticise, and finally transform the world and read the world by reading the word. The ideal approach, if people want to develop a reading habit, is that they do it with enthusiasm, make it voluntary like a hobby which later turns into a reading culture. In this respect, we can challenge the notion that if you want to hide anything from a Rwandan, and an African at large, you will simply ‘put it in a book’.

Limitations
The thesis addresses a valid and felt problem concerning the development of emergent literacy and a reading culture in the developing world in general, but with the focus on Rwanda. The different studies presented in this thesis are limited in a number of ways, especially with regard to the number of participants, the choice of methods, and my data interpretation as a member of the researched community. All the studies are built and based on the views on the researched problem collected from four key groups of participants involving small samples. The use of more participants would give more weight to the arguments made and contribute to more inclusive conclusions. In this respect, Study 1 for example drew only on accounts of higher education students from one institution of higher learning to investigate the general failure of building a reading culture among students and the existence of low levels of literacy in Rwanda. Secondly, the data collection technique was decided upon in accordance with the participants’ will (open questionnaire rather than interview or observation in studies 1 and 2 respectively). Study 2, for example, could be best studied through observations of literacy activities in family life. I believe that interviews and observations would help me get more insight into family practices and what role different literacy practices play in both parents’ and children’s lives. Thirdly, my descriptions, reflections and interpretations as a fully-fledged member of this oral tradition community which I want to take to another mode of literacy, reading and writing tradition did influence my discussions in one way or another. My early childhood literacy and reading experience at home, at primary and secondary schools as a pupil, my experience at university both as a student, lecturer and researcher have undoubtedly played a big role in this dissertation. Despite these limitations, the different studies catch the perspectives of many important stakeholders and have demonstrated that the participants are conscious of the problems of
literacy and reading culture development they are faced. Besides, they are looking forward to being empowered to overcome them.

**Implications and future research perspectives**

The intended use of this thesis is to promote emergent literacy and a reading culture in Rwanda by engaging the whole nation in a national effort to build a sustainable culture of reading. We have seen that enhancing the culture of reading can contribute to a positive transformation of developing countries. This rhymes with Kelechi’s (2010) investigation on the impact of a reading culture in Nigeria. He states that a poor reading culture stunts a country’s national growth. He notes that the cultivation of a reading culture especially among the youth in tertiary institutions will boost their academic excellence and ultimately their countries’ growth prospects. This is also what Pretorius (2002: 194) alludes to in her article on reading ability and academic performance in South African students. She states that if educational systems in developing countries aim to produce independent learners, then serious attention will need to be given to improving the reading skills of students and to creating a culture of reading.

Given today’s rapid progress registered in all walks of life in Rwanda, various government policy and planning documents put forward literacy and the use of ICT as the base for sustainable socio-political and economic development resulting in poverty reduction, development and good governance. A culture of reading seems to offer adequate means to cope with this change through its aspect of lifelong learning. A culture of reading will contribute to transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for socio-economic development of the country thanks to critical reading and thinking, reader’s autonomy of thought, and global awareness. These functions and uses of literacy correlate well with the sociocultural approach in the sense that they are closely linked to the people’s everyday life (Street, 1993; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Barton, 2001). All these attributes of a reading culture fall within the scope of the MINEDUC’s vision of a literate society that reads widely and thinks critically (MINEDUC, 2011) and constitute important pillars to spearhead policies and strategies of EDPRS and VISION 2020 to contribute to Rwanda’s knowledge based economy (MINECOFIN, 2000, 2007). The implementation of these government policies related to development needs critical reading.

The major finding in this thesis is that there is little or no family support for emergent literacy in Rwandan families. But the participants expressed their eagerness to acquire some more skills and knowledge to help their children on the road to the schooled-literacy. Hence,
there is a need of establishing family literacy programmes to this end. The latter are indeed hailed to constitute meaningful and viable means of providing stimulating contexts in which literacy practices can be nurtured and developed. Moreover, attention needs to be given to improving reading skills of the students and to creating a culture of reading in order to produce independent, critical, and lifelong learners (Study 1).

The study with child participants (Study 4) offers insights into one genre of the Rwandan children’s literature, namely fairy tales, and children’s reflections on gender, which is a pertinent issue in Rwanda today. This study is placed within an analysis of the current policy context in Rwanda and draws on literature relating to gender construction in fairy tales. It is a contribution to the reinforcement of the gender equality discourse from the government agenda. The research design is linked to the request for children to retell traditional stories and reflect on gendered identities and discourses within them. In so doing, children are building life world connections, bringing texts (stories) to real life experiences (Eriksson & Aronsson, 2004). In this respect, in the light of the sociocultural perspective to literacy, through the interpretation and contextualization of the story, children gain some critical consciousness and thereby act in a manner that would help them protect and defend their rights. This is indeed one of the social uses of literacy (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). On their side, teachers request more involvement from the parents in the preparation of their children for early schooling in terms of emergent literacy and active partnership in helping their children become lifelong readers (Study 3). Lifelong reading interest is indeed a habit that rises early from home and gets nurtured by both school and environment.

Also, the findings in Study 4 show that during literacy events (storytelling, discussion of the fairy tale), the fairy tale made children of both sexes, rural and urban, see previous gender and social inequalities females were victims of. They reacted positively to the female character, portrayed in male roles, which was traditionally unacceptable and expressed positive attitudes towards a change of traditional gender roles as the latter obstructs full realization of females’ rights. In a nutshell, I believe that the findings in this thesis can be of interesting a broader context especially in the developing world. The thesis will hopefully contribute to the change of the Rwandan mind-set towards early literacy and reading culture development. It calls for more sensitisation to be done at the family, community and national level to promote and develop a culture of reading.

From the limitations outlined in the studies above, future research would continue to investigate and shed light upon issues of developing a reading culture among the population in a society rooted in its traditionally cherished oral literacy. Rwandans’ perceptions of print
literacy can also be investigated. In addition, from an ethnographic perspective, a study on the kinds and use of literacy materials available in the homes as well as literacy practices which both parents and children are engaged in would be conducted in order to fully explore all aspects of the children’s home environment and their family culture. Finally, from the emergent literacy perspective, there is a need to explore how teachers understand and explore texts in their classrooms to enhance literacy development and nurture a reading culture at school.

Finally, to paraphrase the old African saying ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, I want to conclude by saying that it takes a nation to develop a culture of reading.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for university students

RESEARCH THEME: Literacy and reading habits development in Rwanda.

A. Personal identification
1. Gender
2. Faculty, Department, Class attended

B. The culture of reading
1. Could you tell me about your reading trajectory? (How, when, where, with whom did your interest in books start?
2. Did someone tell stories to you when you were a child? Were you ever read to?
3. Did you see your parents reading at home? What did they read?
4. Have you ever been trained to love reading? If yes, how?
5. Which children’s stories/narratives/ fairy tales/ books have you read? Where did you get them?
6. Have they helped you in your literacy development and love for reading?
7. What have you learnt from reading children’s literature?
8. What do you think of using fairy tales in Kinyarwanda to impart the culture of reading in children?
9. What was the reading culture like in school and family environments while you were in high school?
10. What kind of literature do university students like to read?
11. What do you think of the culture of reading within the university community in particular and in Rwanda in general?
12. Any other comment?

Thank you very much.
Ibibazo bigenewe abanyeshuri bo muri Kaminuza

A. Umwirondoro
Igitsina
Ishami /umwaka wigamo
Ibyo wiga.

B. Kugira umuco wo gusoma
1. Ushobora kumbwira inzira wanyacemo mu kumenya gusoma? (Ni gute/ ryari/ hehe/ wari kumwe nande gukunda ibitabo byatangiye?
2. Ukiri muto, hari amuntu waba warigeze kukabarira inkuru? Hari ubwo bigeze bagusomera se? Bagusomeye ibiki?
3. Waba warigeze ubona ababyeyi bawe basoma? Basomaga iki?
4. Wigeze ukundishwa gusoma? Yego: gute?
5. Inkuru z’abana/ ibitabo by’abana/ imigani/ inkuru wasomye wibuka ni izihe/ ibihe? Wabivanaga he?
6. Izo nkuru, ibyo bitabo, iyo migani, etc. byaba byaragufashije iki mu kujijuka/ kumenya cyangwa gukunda gusoma?
7. Niba warakunze/ warakundishijwe inkuru z’abana (ubuvanganzo nyabana), wumva waba warizemo iki?
8. Ubona imigani ya Kinyarwanda yafasha gute mu gushimangira umuco wo gusoma?
9. Umuco wo gusoma mu mashuri no mu miryango wawubonaga ute igihe wari ukiri mu mashuri yisumbuye?
10. Ubona abanyeshuri bo muri NUR bakunda gusoma iki?
11. Ubona ute umuco wo gusoma mu banyeshuri ba Kaminuza by’umwihariko no mu banyarwanda muri rusange?
12. Hari ikindi wakongeraho?

Murakoze.
Appendix 2: Questionnaire & interview guide for parents
RESEARCH THEME: Literacy and reading habits development in Rwanda

A. Personal identification
1. Place of residence
2. Education
3. Gender

B. Home literacy practices to develop the child’s literacy skills and reading habits.
1. Do you or somebody else in the household tell or teach stories/ puns/ riddles/ tongue twisters, etc. to the children?
2. Do you or your children listen to stories on the radio? Which stories do you listen to?
   Do you discuss the stories (the meaning)? Do you encourage the children to listen? Do you like the stories?
3. Which language do the children most often use to communicate at home (interacting, telling stories, listening to the radio, reading)?
4. Do your children watch TV programmes for kids? Do you talk about the programmes?
5. What kind of books/ movies that your child can read/ watch are there at home?
6. Do you ever read for the children to listen? If yes, what do you read and how often? If not, why?
7. Do they ever read for you to listen? If yes, how often? If not, why?
8. Do you reflect on the content of your or their reading? How?
9. What other writing/ speaking/ listening/ reading activities do you involve your children in to help them to learn to read, speak, listen and write?) (for literacy acquisition? )
10. Do you ever take your children to the library/ bookshop? If yes, how often? If not, why?
11. Do you ever buy or borrow books of children’s stories for reading?
12. Do you ever read while your children are watching you?
13. Is it important for you as a parent to develop your child’s literacy skills and reading habits?
14. What do you think of the reading culture in Rwanda?
15. Any other comment?

Thank you very much.
Ibibazo bigenewe ababyeyi

A. Umwirondoro
Aho utuye:
Amashuri wize:
Igitsina:
Ibyiciro abana bigamo (inshuke, amashuri abanza)

B. Gufasha umwana kujijuka no gukunda gusoma mu muryango
1. Uija cyangwa hari undi muntu uija wigisha/ ubarira abana bwawe udakuru tw’abana/ imigani/ ibisakuzo/ udakurina, n’ibindi?
4. Ni ibihe bikorwa wakorerera umwana wowe mu kumukundisha gusoma? Wamva ari ingirakamaro ku mubuye kumukorera gatwa?
5. Hari ibitabo cyangwa ibintu byo gusoma utunze hano iwawe? Yego: Ubuhe bwoko?
6. Uija usomera abana bakagatiga amati?
7. Uija ubareka nabo bakagusomera ukabamutega amati?
8. Mujya mubikora ku byo wabasomeye cyangwa bagusomeye? Mubikora mute?
9. Hari ibindi bikorwa uija ukreshamo abana mu rwego rwo kubafasha kumena gusoma, kuviga, kwandika no kumva?(kagira ngo babimenye hakiri kare)
11. Hari udatabo tw’inkuru z’abana/ amafilimu y’abana uija umugurira/ umutirira ngo asome/ arebe?
12. Uija usoma muri kumwe abana bakureba?
13. Abana bagira abo basomera/ bandikira mu rugo?
14. Waba azi akamaro ko gusomera abana kumena gusoma neza hakiri kare?
15. Ubona ule umucyo wo gusoma abana mbirinya?
16. Hari icyo wakongera ku byo umaze kwandika/ tumaze kuganira?
Murakoze.

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Appendix 3: Questionnaire & Interview guide for teachers (nursery & primary schools)

RESEARCH THEME: Literacy and reading habits development in Rwanda

A. Teacher identification
1. Place of residence
2. Nursery/ Primary
3. Gender
4. Teaching experience

B. Developing the child’s literacy skills and reading habits.
1. How are the literacy skills in children when they come to school? What are your expectations?
2. Whose duty is to develop the child’s literacy skills and reading habits? Why?
3. What do you think of the socio-linguistic environment in literacy education (learning and teaching) in Rwanda?
4. Does the school have materials/ facilities to help children develop literacy skills and reading habits? What kind of materials are there?
5. How do you use these materials to stir love for reading, writing, speaking and listening?
6. Are there children’s materials you can recommend to a child readership?
7. How could parents help teachers to foster literacy and reading habits in children?
8. What do you think of the reading culture in Rwanda?
9. Any other comment?

Thank you very much.
Ibibazo bigenewe abarimu (amashuri y’ inshuke/ abanza)

A. Umwirondoro

Aho utuye
Ishuri wigishamo
Umwaka
Igitsina
Uburambe ku kazi

B. Gufasha umwana kujijuka no gukunda gusoma mu ishuri

1. Wambwira uko abana baba bajiijutse iyo baje gutangira ishuri? Muba mwifuza abana basite ubahe bumenyi icyo gihe?
2. Wumva ari nde wakora umurimo wo kujijura abana no kubakundisha gusoma? Kubera iki?
3. Ubona ute ikibazo cy’ururimi mu myigishirize no mu myigire yo mu Rwanda?
4. Mufite ibihe bikoresho/ bushobozi ku kigo cyanyu mu kujijura no gushishikariza abana kugira umuco wo gusoma?
5. Ukoresha ute ibyo bikoresho ufite mu ishuri mu gufasha abana gukunda gusoma, kwandika, kumva no kuvuga?
6. Hari ibitabo by’inkuru z’abana ujya ubashishikariza gusoma?
7. Ubona ababyeyi bakunganira bate abarimu mu gucengeza mu bana umuco wo gukunda gusoma?
8. Ubona gute umuco wo gukunda gusoma mu banyarwanda?
9. Hari icyo wakongera ku byo umaze kwandika/ tumaze kuganira?

Murakoze.


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