

Connecting with the Kenya Connect Library By Librarian Esther Muinde

Alexander Den Heijer once said, “*When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.*” In 2018, School Library Days was launched. On School Library Days, books are taken to schools on our Magic School Bus and Reading Rover Truck for borrowing for a two week period. Students are encouraged to become a Kenya Connect library member by signing up and paying \$1.00 for lifetime membership.

The Kenya Connect library provides students with a wide variety of books including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, biography, science, early readers, easy readers, and other reading materials that are relevant to the course curriculum. Through the Kenya Connect library, children have access to books with rich content that they would not have due to the high cost of books and the scarcity of materials at schools.

Currently, we have 5145 Kenya Connect library members. With vibrant library programs such as the Kenya Connect Reading Challenge, Fun Book Days, School Library Days and Saturday Story Time, Kenya Connect is striving to become “*the village that reads*” by making reading fun.

The Reading Challenge runs for a period of three months. Students engage in a healthy reading competition by reading as many books as possible. This exposes students to many reading materials which exposes them to a world beyond their locality. The Reading Challenge has activated the love for books among many learners. The students that read the most books in the reading challenge are crowned the King and Queen readers of that particular year. Last year, the Reading Challenge had the Queen reader read 254 books and the King reader 168 books. The challenge has proven to be a motivating factor among students to read as many books. This year, we anticipate another record breaking one in the number of books read by the king and queen reader.

The launch of the Saturday Story Time showed us that students yearn to hear stories read aloud. We are building a community of read aloud enthusiasts who enjoy the story and the culminating art activity that helps them internalize the content of the book.



Teachers have attested that the library program has contributed to improved literacy levels and an improvement in communication skills and test scores especially in English. Teacher Purity from Wakaela Primary School was so happy to have her school enroll with the Kenya Connect Mobile library program, she remarked, *“We do not even have a single book in our school but we*



are grateful that our learners will be getting many readers, revision books and other reading materials from the Kenya Connect library. We strongly believe that the overall performance of our school will improve immensely moving forward!”

One parent shared that her son’s creativity and writing skills have improved tremendously after enrolling him in the Kenya Connect library. *“I am happy to*

see my son writing good compositions.”

According to the statistics on the performance of schools on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, most of the schools that are enrolled in the School Library Program perform slightly better as compared to the rest of schools.

As a librarian, I have witnessed the literacy levels of the community we serve improve tremendously. When we visit schools for parents’ awareness meetings, parents are always delighted to register their children in the library program as they are impressed by the idea even though they are illiterate. Sometimes, they visit the Kenya Connect Learning Resource Center to check out books, something that delights me so much. It is so inspiring to see parents engaging and supporting their children in improving their literacy and learning.

As part of empowering the parents to support their children in their learning, we also run a program dubbed the LitMoms! Most of the LitMom members have enrolled their children for the library membership. Every Friday, after an income empowerment session, we hold a Read Aloud story with the LitMoms. Afterwards, I have seen most of the LitMoms check out books, especially those we have read aloud so that their children can read what they also read.

At the library, community members have been able to get reliable information. For instance, Mr. Ndambuki visited the library and came across the book, *Old Mikamba had Farm* by Rachael Isadora which got his attention as he perused page after page. He recognized the art work in the

book and said, 'Wow, I love how the animals are beautifully done, I think I will go and make carvings of what I have seen.' It was so enriching to see this old man gain an idea from just looking at the book.



I love the School Library Days at school. It is sensational to see children getting excited about books. Purity from Kaliambeu Primary School has been an enthusiastic reader requesting for different books to read and I have had the privilege to recommend good books for her to read like *I am Malala* and the *Harry Potter series*. During one Library Day at her school, I had a conversation with her about the library and this is what she said, *“I love reading and I am always excited about library days because I get the opportunity to check out storybooks that I have not read before. Today I am very happy because I have checked out two books. Reading books from Kenya Connect library has enabled me to improve in my English language and composition writing. Before becoming a library member, I used to score 50% in English but after joining the library, I score 60% and above. Do you know that I also get the desire to write from reading story books? Through reading I have been able to discover new things and learn new words.”*

Recently Kenya Connect built the first modern community library in over 100 kilometers which will house more books, a Makers Space, a kiddie corner and a study area. The library also received over 20,000 books from [Books for Africa](#). We are literally empowering a community of readers! In Albert Einstein’s words, “The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library.” We welcome you to our Kenya Connect Library and Learning Centre in Wamunyu Kenya. Come Connect with your Library!