



The Holiday Reading Adventure (HRA) Programme in Namibia

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Abstract

The paper explores how the Holiday Reading Adventure (HRA) has grown from a regional initiative of the Oshana to all the regions in Namibia. The first event of the Holiday Reading Adventure took place in 2003 with two clusters participating out of 22 clusters in the Oshana region of Namibia. Since then four new clusters were included yearly, with four clusters remaining. It is envisaged that by 2008 all clusters would be covered. A training workshop for the remaining twelve regions was held in October 2007. Since then two regions, the Oshikoto and the Khomas implemented the HRA in two clusters in November 2007 and March 2008. By the end of this year all the thirteen regions would be implementing the Holiday Reading Adventure Programme.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF NAMIBIA

The Republic of Namibia, situated on the south west coast of Africa attained national independence from former apartheid South African government on 21 March 1990. After many years of political, diplomatic and armed, national liberation struggle. Namibia is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the west, republics of Angola and Zambia to the north and northeast respectively and the republics of Botswana and South Africa to the east and south respectively.

The country spreads over an area of about 824.292 square kilometers marked by big contrasts consisting of the Namib desert along the entire west coast and the Kalahari desert along the central eastern border with Botswana, making it the driest country south of the equator characterized by frequent droughts.

The population was 2, 000, 000 in 2005, as observed by Medelson [et...el],” this population is relatively small in relation to the size of the country”. For instance Zambia (one of Namibia’s neighbor’s) whose size is 752,614 square kilometers had a population of 11 000 000 in 2005; the United Kingdom, comprising of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland has an area of 242,514 square kilometers and its population was 60 200 000 in 2006. In Namibia, approximately 40% of the people live in urban areas, while the remaining 60% live in the rural areas.

Namibian economic drivers are mining, agriculture and fisheries.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

A single Ministry of Education was created at independence by unifying the previous racial and ethnically based education authorities. The single Ministry of Education has its head quarters in Windhoek. The Secretary is the administrative head of the ministry assisted by a Deputy Permanent Secretary and two Under Secretaries. The Ministry of Education was divided into 5 Departments: Subdivision Internal Audit, Department: Schools/Formal Education, Department: Policy & Administration, Department: Lifelong Learning and thirteen Educational Regions of which the Regional Director of Education is the head of each region. The department Life long learning is made up of the Directorates of Adult Education (DAE), Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS) and Vocational Education.

The Directorate: Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS) whose head office is in Windhoek administer five divisions: the National Library, the Community Library Services, the Education Library Services, the National Archives and the ministerial libraries. There is one National Library, one National Archive, and 57 Community Libraries, 1740 School Libraries (in the form of book boxes, a book cabinet, a classroom or a library building) and 15 Ministerial Libraries. Like in many countries the various types of libraries mentioned above are found in urban areas in Namibia. The annual budget of NLAS provision is made to purchase books for each of the divisions. Libraries in rural areas are mainly public/community libraries and school libraries, under the Community Library Services and the Education Library Services. In some areas, members of the local authorities have also established a few community libraries and quite a good number of school libraries are in private schools. However, many areas still do not have a library in their vicinities especially in the townships and rural areas.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE HOLIDAY READING ADVENTURE (HRA)

Namibia is a member of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) which is a regional grouping of 14 Ministries of Education (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Uganda, Seychelles, South-Africa, Swaziland Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Namibia participated in the first and second SACMEQ, which was conducted in 1995 and 2000 respectively. According to the results of SACMEQ II (2000:145) Namibian grade six learners performed poorly in reading compared to other countries in the region. They had about the same level of achievement as Lesotho learners and were slightly better than the learners from Zambia and Malawi.

The Holiday Reading Adventure (HRA) originated as a result of the SACMEQ report. The Oshana Region, which consists of 22 clusters centers, organized the first event that took place in two clusters in 2003. Since then four new clusters were added on each year, with four clusters remaining. In 2008 all clusters would be covered. .

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES OF THE HRA BEFORE THE EVENT

The Regional Training Team Planning

There is a two-day planning session for the 10 members of the Regional Training Team. The team consists of 1 Inspector of Education, 4 Advisory Teachers (AT'S), 1 Basic Information Science (BIS) Facilitator, 1 Regional Librarian (RL), 1 District Literacy Officer (DLO) and two Parents from the Family Literacy Programme. The team plans the activities that will take place during the teacher and parent training. During these two days all teaching aids are developed. The training teams also draw up guidelines of their expectations from the cluster principals and prepare all the stationery to be used during the training sessions.

Cluster center principals meeting

There is a one-day meeting for all the cluster (consists of 7 or 8 schools) center principals to discuss what is expected from each cluster. They are informed about the number of teachers and parents to attend the training session from each cluster and the preparation for the actual event.

Teachers/Parents training workshop

There is a 4-day training session. Teachers and parents (+- 70) work together to design suitable and motivational activities for children in grade 1-7. The activities include songs, drama, poems, puppet shows, storytelling (traditional stories by leaders from local communities) and story readings. The parents are trained to educate learners' cultural rituals. Teaching materials are developed to enhance and arouse learner's interest to visit the school library to read more.

Follow up visits after the training

Ten officials per cluster are assigned from the Regional Training Team to do follow-up visits to check on the preparations (invitations to schools and activities for the event) done.

THE ACTUAL HRA EVENT

The event takes place during the first week (4 week days) of the December (Christmas) Holidays. The event is held for two days at each cluster. The classes are divided according to the number of activities planned. There are activities for day one and day two respectively.

Programme

Day one

The first day starts with the official opening, book education followed by classroom activities, which include (story reading and telling, drama, recitations, puppet shows and book making). The last activity for the first day is to visit the school library to borrow books to take home to read.

Day two

The second day starts with classroom activities and ends with the returning of the books to the library.

CHALLENGES OF THE HRA

The HRA has been faced by a number of challenges. One major challenge has been in the area of the provision of reading books. Not all the schools have enough reading books in their school libraries for the learners to take part in the HRA. Principals are not willing to implement the programme during the first two school holidays.

FUTURE OF THE HRA

Under the new programme: Education Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) A three-day training workshop for two officials (an Advisory Teacher and a Regional Librarian) for the remaining 12 regions were held in October 2007 to extend the programme to the other twelve regions of our country. Provision was also made to cover the purchasing of reading books that will be used during the training of clusters as well as to cover the catering costs for each region until 2013. Two regions Oshikoto and Khomas implemented the programme in November 2007 and March 2008 respectively. The other ten regions will implement the HRA later in the year (2008).

CONCLUSION

The Oshana regions training team works tirelessly to ensure that community and school libraries are promoted through the HRA to enhance reading and to develop a reading culture in schools and the communities in all the regions of our country.

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