

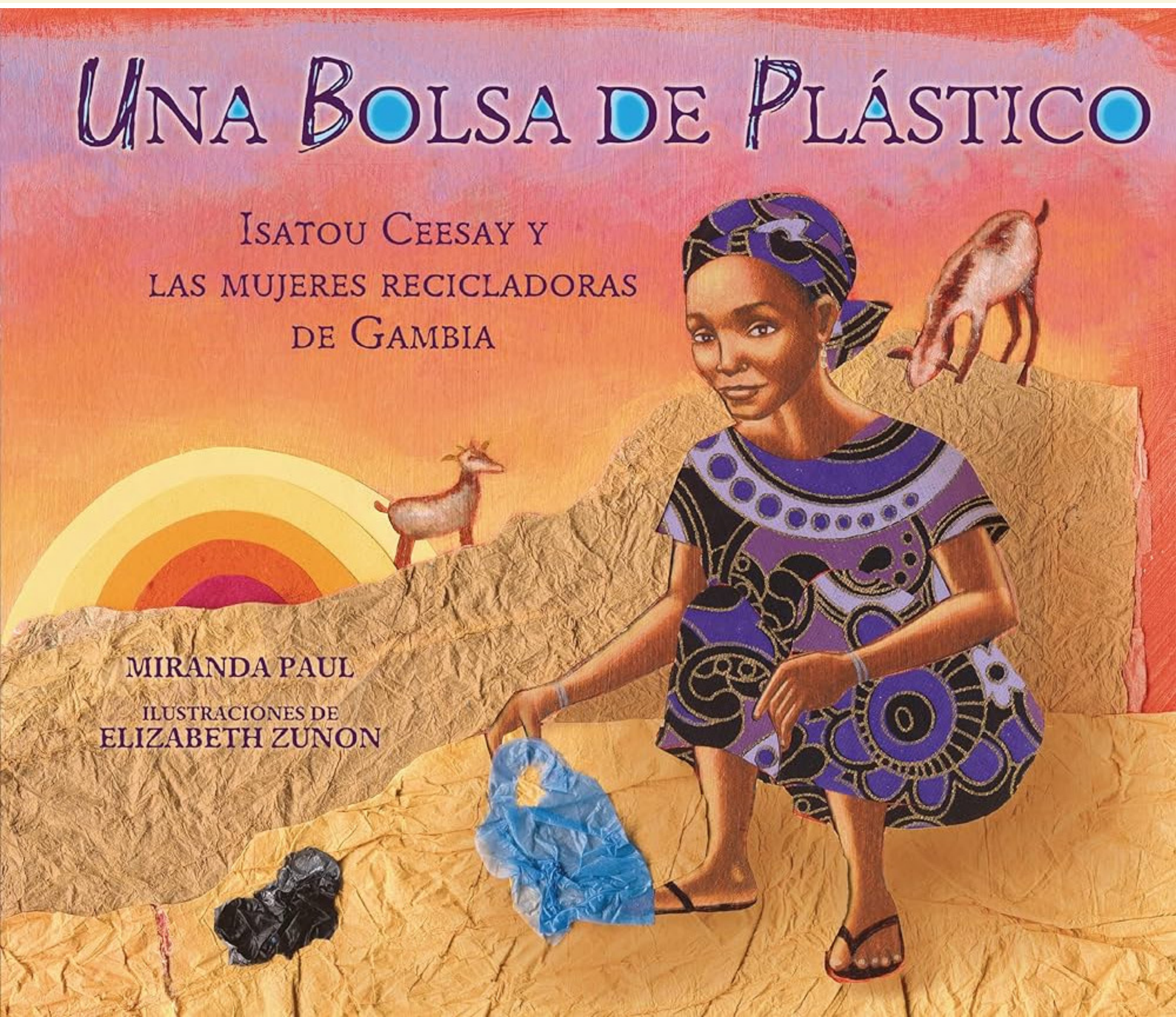
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KALAT 

COUNTRY REPORT ON THE STATE OF CHILDREN BOOK IN THE GAMBIA

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MKRU is Muna Kalati's dedicated research department which undertake research projects on issues related to African children literature and children book publishing in order to inform the strategic direction, policies and programmes of Muna Kalati and its partners, shape global debates on child rights and development, and inform the global research and policy agenda for all children, and particularly for the most vulnerable.

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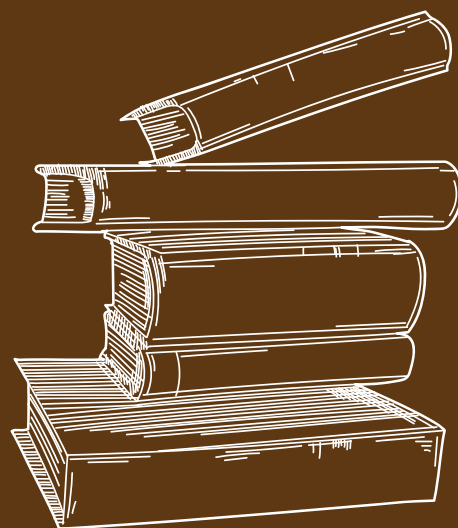
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an in-depth exploration of the evolution of children's literature in The Gambia, from its origins to the present day, with a focus on identifying patterns, challenges, and opportunities within this vibrant literary sector. The historical journey starts with oral storytelling traditions and progresses through to contemporary published works, revealing the cultural, educational, and economic factors that have shaped Gambian children's literature.

Methodological Framework: The study employed a comprehensive methodological framework encompassing data collection through interviews with key stakeholders, a review of historical and contemporary Gambian literary works, and an interpretation of the changing landscape of children's literature in the nation. There was an acknowledgment of limitations within the research, including the availability of historical data and the scope of literature reviewed.

Analytical Overview: In the analysis section, the report examines the frequency, patterns, and trends of children's book publications in Gambia. An in-depth audience analysis reveals demographic insights and reading preferences, while a topical analysis identifies common themes and subjects that resonate with the young Gambian readership. This provides a lens through which to understand how literature is serving the educational and cultural needs of children in The Gambia.

Illustrative Content: Illustrations in children's books are marked as a critical component in both storytelling and reader engagement. This segment provides an overview of the illustration styles, the interplay between text and imagery, and the

impact of visual storytelling in Gambian children's literature.

Publishing Dynamics: The report delves into the mechanics of publishing children's books in The Gambia, addressing challenges such as financial constraints, market reach, and distribution. The analysis also highlights the roles of various publishing entities—from government-supported bodies to private enterprises—and how they contribute to the literary landscape.

Forward - Looking Recommendation:

Concluding with strategic recommendations, the report advocates for initiatives to strengthen the position of children's literature. These include increasing investment in the sector, encouraging local authorship and illustration, improving distribution networks, expanding literacy programs, and enhancing the overall engagement of children with books.

Concluding Reflections: Finally, the report reflects on the significance of preserving and nurturing children's literature as a cornerstone for educational and cultural development in The Gambia. By acknowledging both accomplishments and barriers, it provides a roadmap for future growth.

This executive summary condenses the report's primary findings and proposed actions, offering stakeholders a concise overview of the multi-faceted aspects of children's literature in The Gambia.





INTRODUCTION

The Gambia has a rich cultural heritage and a growing literary scene. The country has produced notable writers and storytellers who have contributed to the field of children's literature. Storytelling formed the major aspect of the Gambian children's literature because it is part of oral tradition. Storytelling socializes individuals into the community's life, teaching them to interact harmoniously with each other according to the people's culture. The stories were classified into origin stories, explanatory stories, trick stories, contest stories and didactic stories. These stories are meshed with values which can be used as a tool for combating social problems or ills in a child. And children's books are powerful tools for encouraging children to fulfill their human potential.

This analysis focuses on the children's book sector in the country, which is part of a broader research initiative aimed at collecting and analyzing data on children's books in eight African countries, amongst which The Gambia. The research is funded by Google News Initiative grant and seeks to increase and diversify information on children's literature in the world.

The report provides insights into the trends and characteristics of children's books in the country, including the target audience and genre of the books. It also provides opportunities for growth and improvement in the publishing industry. Lastly, this report contributes to a better understanding of the state of children's literature in The Gambia and the broader African region and promotes the importance of diverse and inclusive children's books that reflect the lived experiences of children across the continent.

A. METHODOLOGY

The children's book sector in the Gambia is not well-known to the general public and parents, and as at 2022, there was [only one known bookshop in the country](#) with a good collection of children's books. This suggests that the availability of Gambian children's books may be limited. However, there are [initiatives and interventions](#) aimed at improving literacy and numeracy among Gambian children. Some of these initiatives are:

- **After-school programs** : Which significantly improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for Gambian children. [This study](#) found that children in villages with after-school programs scored significantly higher on combined literacy and numeracy measurements compared to those in non-participatory villages.
- **Teacher training and teaching materials** : The Improving Numeracy and Literacy project in the Gambia focused on enhancing the numeracy and literacy abilities of Year 2 pupils. The project included teacher training programs and the [development of accompanying teaching materials](#) and computer games.
- **A comprehensive approach** : to improving literacy and numeracy involves a [whole school and system approach](#), which emphasizes school leadership's focus on improving student literacy and numeracy outcomes from preschool to Year 12.

Below, we present our approach to this project.

1. Data Collection

The data for this analysis was collected from multiple sources, including online databases, local libraries, and publishing houses in the Gambia. Efforts were made to gather comprehensive and diverse data on children's books in Gambia. The collection period spanned from January to March 2023.

2. Literature Review

To provide a broader context and insights into the children's book industry in Gambia, a comprehensive [literature review](#) was conducted. This involved studying relevant academic research, reports, articles, and publications from literary organizations and industry sources. The literature review helped identify existing gaps, challenges, and opportunities in the Gambian children's book landscape.

3. Interpretation

The data and literature were interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions and identify patterns, trends, and potential areas for improvement in the Gambian children's book sector. The analysis highlights the representation of Gambian culture, history, and diverse perspectives in children's books and explores ways to enhance the quality and accessibility of children's literature.

4. Limitations

Despite the efforts made to enhance the analysis, certain limitations should be considered:

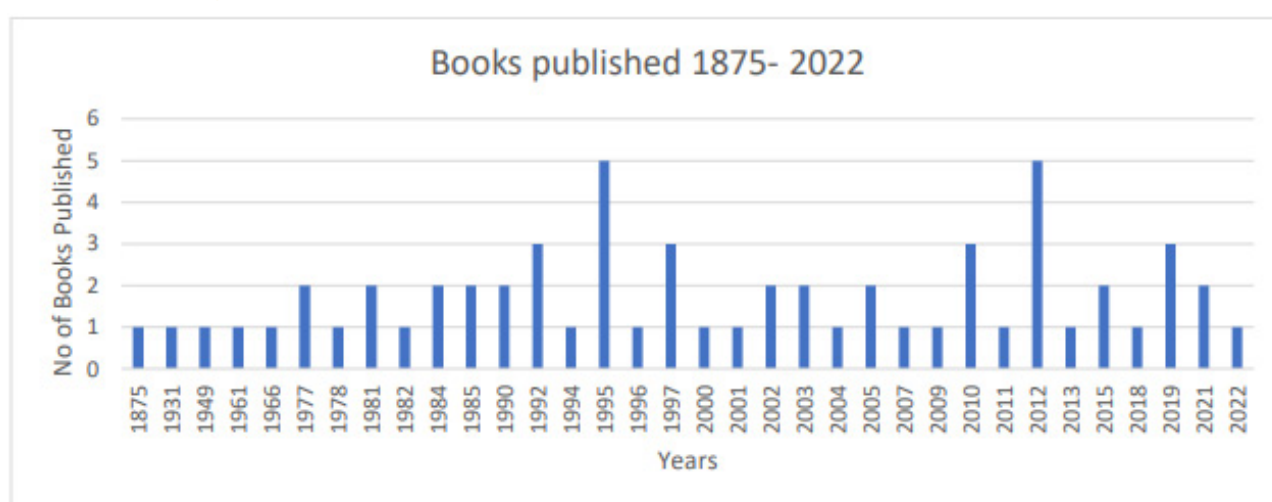
- The accuracy and completeness of the data may vary. Information such as publication years and target audience categorization might be subjective or inconsistent across different sources.
- The analysis is based on a specific dataset and may not fully represent the entire landscape of children's literature in Gambia. The findings should be interpreted within the context of the available data and may not be generalizable to all books and writers in the country.
- The analysis is based on the data available during the research period and is current as of April 2023. New books and developments in the Gambian children's book industry may have occurred after this timeframe.
- The analysis relied on the available data from various sources, but it may not capture the entirety of children's books published in Gambia. Some books and writers might not be included due to limitations in data collection.
- The interpretation of the data and the formulation of recommendations involve subjective judgment and might be influenced by the perspectives and biases of the researchers. Efforts were made to minimize bias through rigorous analysis and stakeholder engagement.
- The lack of a sufficient number of readers with sufficient purchasing powers as well as publishing houses and literary critics in the Gambia have impeded the development of Gambian literature.
- The production of English-language literature in the Gambia has been more limited when compared to other English-speaking countries in Africa. Previous studies on African literature have tended to overlook literature from the Gambia, or outright stated that there is no Gambian literature for children.

B. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The collected data was subjected to a rigorous analysis using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, and averages were used to examine key characteristics of the books, including authors, genres, target audience, publication dates, and themes. Additionally, thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes in the selected books.

The database contains information on **59 unique authors who have written a total of 65 books**. This means that some authors have written multiple books, while others have only written one.

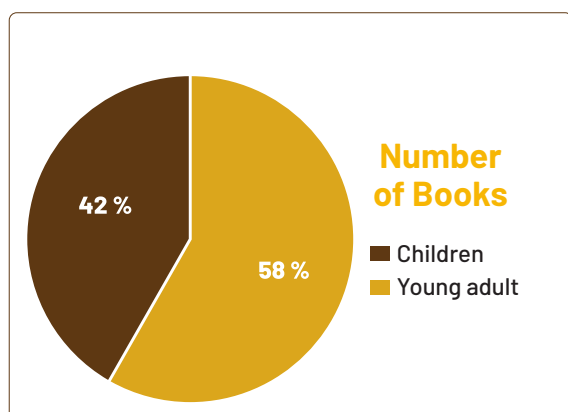
1. Frequency of publication



- The data provided shows the number of books published in the database for each year, spanning from 1875 to 2022. An English-language, written Gambian literature has emerged since the 1960s, spearheaded by **Lenrie Peters**.
- The total number of books published is 65, with the highest number of books published in a single year being 5 in 1995 and 2012.
- The earliest publication in the database is from 1875, with only one book published in that year. Following Yahya Jammeh's coup d'état in 1994 and the subsequent stifling of free expression in the Gambia, literary production within the country was also limited.

In summary, the data suggests that the rate of publication is very low in the country. We do however acknowledge that the existing data may not be the accurate picture of the country since our data was mostly collected through online platforms.

2. Target Audience Analysis

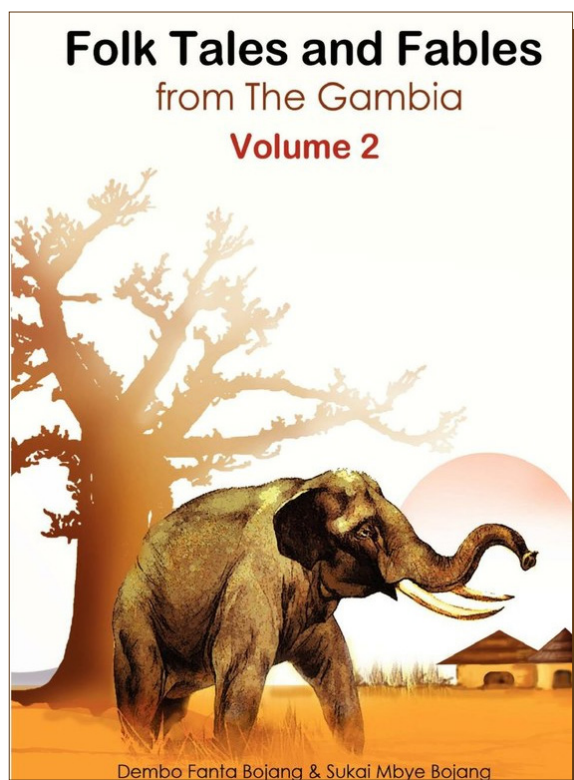


The database contains a total of 65 books, and the target audience for each book is categorized as either «Children» or «Young adults.» Children in this category includes readers between the ages of 0-12 while Young Adults is generally aimed at readers between the ages of 13-18. According to the data provided, 38 books are targeted towards children, while 27 books are targeted towards young adults.

It is worth noting that there are more books targeted towards children in the database than young adults, which suggests that the collection may be more suited towards a younger audience. However, the difference in the number of books between the two categories is not significant, indicating a balanced collection.

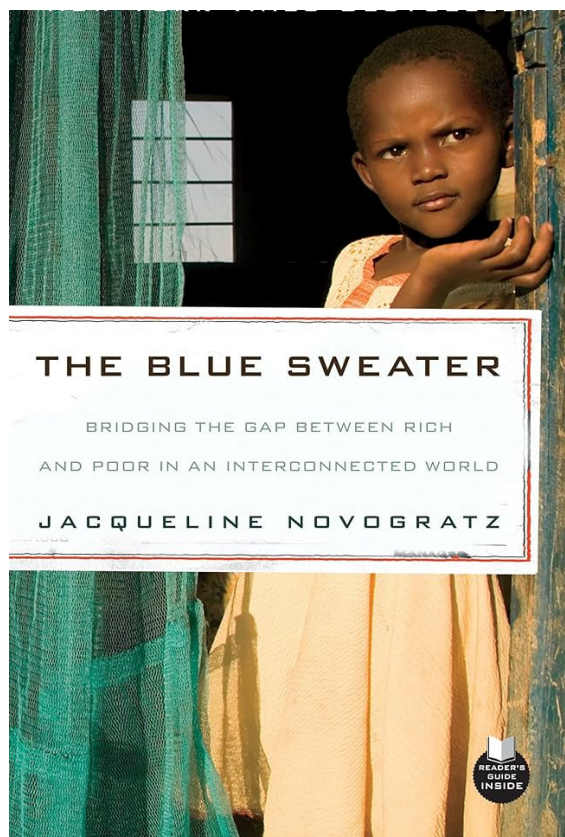
3. Topical Analysis

In the Gambia, a variety of children's books are published, catering to different age groups and interests. These books aim to entertain, educate, and inspire young readers. Here are some types of children's books commonly published in the Gambia:



- **Folktales and Legends:** These stories typically feature local characters, animals, and elements of Gambian culture, imparting moral lessons and cultural values. Example: «*The Spider and the Sun*» by **Bakary Sidibé** is a popular folktale that tells the story of Anansi the Spider and his quest to capture the blazing Sun. Another «*folktale and fable*» worth mentioning is that from **Dembo Fanta** and **Sukai Bojang** which teach moral lessons and our cultural values through the fight between Massaneh Ceesay & Bakary Niuminko for the hand of the beautiful Banjulian girl, Fatou. The two men used marabouts notable in their mystic powers to win the young lady.

- **Educational and Learning Books:** There is a range of educational books available for children in the Gambia, covering subjects such as mathematics, science, language skills, and general knowledge. These books are designed to enhance children's learning and provide them with valuable educational resources. For example, «*My First Science Book*» by **Fatoumatta Ceesay** introduces young readers to basic scientific concepts through engaging illustrations and simple explanations.
- **Picture Books:** Picture books are highly popular among young readers in the Gambia. These books combine vibrant illustrations with simple and engaging narratives, making them accessible to children of various ages. Most Gambian children's books are aimed at younger children and use visual storytelling to convey narratives. They often cover a wide range of themes, including friendship, family, animals, and nature. As an example, we have «*The Adventures of Kaddy and Lulu*» by **Ndeyfatou Ceesay**, who describes the journey of two curious friends as they explore the wonders of nature and learn valuable life lessons. Another example of a Gambian picture book is «*The Blue Sweater*» by **Jacqueline Novogratz** [3].
- **Storybooks:** Storybooks for children in the Gambia encompass a diverse range of genres, including adventure, fantasy, mystery, and historical fiction. These books aim to stimulate children's imagination, foster a love for reading, and encourage storytelling skills. For example, «*The Mystery of the Lost Treasure*» by **Modou Lamin Age-Almusaf Sowe**, which takes young readers on an exciting adventure as a group of friends solves a captivating mystery.
- **Bilingual Books:** Given the linguistic diversity in the Gambia, bilingual books are also published to cater to different language backgrounds. These books may feature text in both English and local languages such as Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, or Jola. Bilingual books help children develop language skills and promote cultural understanding. For example, «*Aji's Garden / Jembe yu Aji*» by **Mariama Jallow**, tells the story of Aji and her beautiful garden, offering bilingual readers the opportunity to engage with the story in multiple languages.



- **Poetry and Rhyme Books:** Poetry and rhyme books are designed to engage children with rhythmic and lyrical language. These books help develop language skills, enhance vocabulary, and introduce children to the beauty of poetry.
- **Cultural and Historical Books:** Some children's books focus on Gambian culture, history, and traditions. These books provide insights into the country's rich heritage, customs, festivals, and significant historical events.

The most popular genre of children's book in the Gambia is difficult to determine definitively, as it can vary based on individual preferences and trends. However, folktales and legends rooted in Gambian culture and storytelling traditions are highly cherished and widely loved by children and adults alike. These stories connect young readers with their cultural heritage and impart important moral lessons. In terms of sales, folktales, educational books, and picture books are well-represented and valued in the Gambian children's book market.



C. ILLUSTRATION OF CHILDREN BOOKS



Illustrators of children's books play a crucial role in bringing stories to life and captivating young readers. Their work involves creating visual elements that complement and enhance the narrative, engaging children through imaginative and appealing illustrations. In the Gambia, illustrators help convey the story's themes, emotions, and characters through their artwork. They use their creativity and artistic skills to translate the written words into visual representations that resonate with young readers. **Cherno Omar Barry** is a well-known Gambian author and illustrator

who has created several children's books, including «*An Interesting Day*,» and «*The Fairy Godmother and the Wicked Witch*.». Barry's works often incorporate elements of Gambian culture and folklore, making his books relatable and captivating for young readers.

Most illustrators in Gambia confirmed collaborating closely with authors and publishers to ensure their illustrations align with the vision of the book. They may receive guidance on specific scenes, characters, or artistic styles, while also adding their unique artistic interpretation to the project. This is the case for **Amadou Sillah** whose works, such as «*The Magic Gourd*» and «*Why Tortoise has a Cracked Shell*,» combine engaging storytelling with valuable lessons and moral teachings. Sillah's books are cherished for their educational content and vibrant illustrations.

Moreover, most local illustrators do not have a deep understanding of the target audience, which is children. Most are not very familiar with children's cognitive and emotional development, ensuring that the illustrations are appropriate, engaging, and accessible to the intended age group. However, since most aren't trained professionally in the field, they usually learn on their own through practice.

While specific information about illustrators in The Gambia is limited, it's important to acknowledge the significant role they play in the local children's literature scene. Their work contributes to fostering a love for reading and imagination among young readers in The Gambia.

D. ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLISHING OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Local publishers play a significant role in shaping the literary experiences of Gambian children through various means:

- They contribute to the proliferation of literature for children by producing and disseminating books that are relevant to Gambian culture, traditions, and languages. This ensures that children have access to stories that reflect their own experiences and perspectives. In Gambia, there are no publishers fully specialized in children's books. **Alpha Book Publisher** and **Fulladu Publishers** however have few books that are relevant for kids and young adults.
- They support the representation of diverse voices and experiences within children's literature. By offering a wide range of stories and characters, publishers contribute to the promotion of inclusivity and understanding among young readers.
- They often collaborate with educators and experts to create educational materials that are aligned with the Gambian curriculum. This support enhances children's learning experiences and helps in the development of literacy skills from an early age.
- Through the publication of imaginative and creative works, publishers inspire children to explore their creativity and imagination. It is worth mentioning [Suba-Kunda Publishing](#), a publishing company with offices in London and the Gambia. Their publications include various genres such as non-fiction religious books, story books, history books, and historical romance. They actively contribute to the promotion of a reading culture among Gambian children by making literature accessible and engaging. By offering captivating and age-appropriate books, they encourage a love for reading from a young age.

As we can see, Gambian publishers play a crucial role in the development of Gambian literature for children by providing access to diverse and culturally relevant content, fostering creativity and imagination, and promoting literacy and learning. Despite the noble role and contribution of publishers to the development of the Gambian literature and culture, we noted a significant scarcity of publishing houses in the country, when compared to neighboring African countries like Senegal or Ivory Coast. This scarcity of publishing houses, especially children book publishers in the Gambia could be attributed to:

- **Limited Market Size:** The Gambia is a small country with a relatively small population compared to larger publishing markets. This limited market size makes it challenging for publishers to sustainably produce and distribute children's books on a larger scale.
- **Economic Constraints:** The Gambia, like many other developing countries, face economic constraints that affect the growth and development of various industries, including publishing. Limited financial resources and infrastructure pose challenges for establishing and maintaining multiple publishers focused on children's books.
- **Educational Priorities:** The Gambia, like many countries, has a competing educational priorities and [limited resources](#) allocated to the publishing industry. As a result, the focus is primarily on educational materials for schools and textbooks rather than children's literature.

To address the situation and promote the establishment of more publishers of children's books in The Gambia, several measures could be considered:

- The government can play a vital role in promoting the publishing industry and supporting the establishment of more publishers focused on children's books. This can be done through initiatives such as providing financial incentives, grants, or tax breaks to encourage investment in the sector.
 - Emphasizing the importance of children's literature in the national education policies can help create a demand for quality children's books. This can encourage publishers to invest in producing and distributing children's books that align with the curriculum and meet the needs of young readers.
 - Encouraging collaboration and networking among existing publishers, authors, and illustrators can foster a supportive ecosystem for children's book publishing. This can include organizing workshops, conferences, and events that bring together stakeholders to share knowledge, resources, and ideas.
 - Highlighting the importance of preserving Gambian culture and folklore in children's literature can create a unique selling point for local publishers. By incorporating Gambian stories, traditions, and values into children's books, publishers can cater to the specific needs and interests of Gambian children.
 - Collaborating with international publishers, organizations, and institutions can provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, mentorship, and access to a wider market. Partnerships can help strengthen the local publishing industry and increase its visibility globally.
- It's important to hold convening or consultation meetings with relevant stakeholders, such as publishers, authors, educators, and policymakers, to develop a comprehensive strategy for promoting children's book publishing in the Gambia.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

To boost the children's book industry and promote reading among young adults in the Gambia, here are some strategies and approaches that can be considered:

01

It is important to support and promote Gambian authors to write children's books and books for young adults. This can be done by providing training, workshops, and mentorship programs to nurture writing talent and storytelling skills within the country.

02

Foster collaborations between authors and local illustrators to create visually appealing and culturally relevant illustrations for children's books. This can enhance the overall reading experience and make the books more engaging for young readers. There is also a need to explore opportunities to illustrate more children's books to increase the representation of illustrated books in the industry.

03

Emphasize the importance of cultural diversity and representation in children's books and books for young adults. Ensure that the stories, characters, and settings reflect the local culture, traditions, and experiences of Gambian children and young adults.

04

Establish partnerships with local publishers or create publishing platforms that specialize in children's books and books for young adults. This can help in producing and distributing high-quality books that cater to the needs and interests of the target audience. Publishers should also publish more children's books from underrepresented groups to increase diversity in the industry. Finally, they should encourage and support the creation of more instructional or educational resources for children.

05

Collaborate with schools, libraries, and community organizations to promote reading habits and literacy among children and young adults. Conduct reading programs, storytelling sessions, and book clubs to create a reading culture and foster a love for books from an early age.

06

Improve access to books by setting up libraries, mobile book units, and book-sharing programs in schools, community centers, and public spaces. This ensures that children and young adults have easy and affordable access to a variety of books. It is equally important to explore audiobooks platforms like [Akoo](https://app.akoobooks.net/) [HYPERLINK «https://app.akoobooks.net/» Books](#) to make books more accessible.

07

Launch reading promotion campaigns that raise awareness about the benefits of reading and the importance of literacy. These campaigns can include book fairs, book festivals, reading challenges, and book donation drives to create enthusiasm and excitement around books.

08

Explore digital platforms and technologies to make books and reading more accessible. Develop digital libraries, e-books, and interactive storytelling apps that engage children and young adults in a digital age.

09

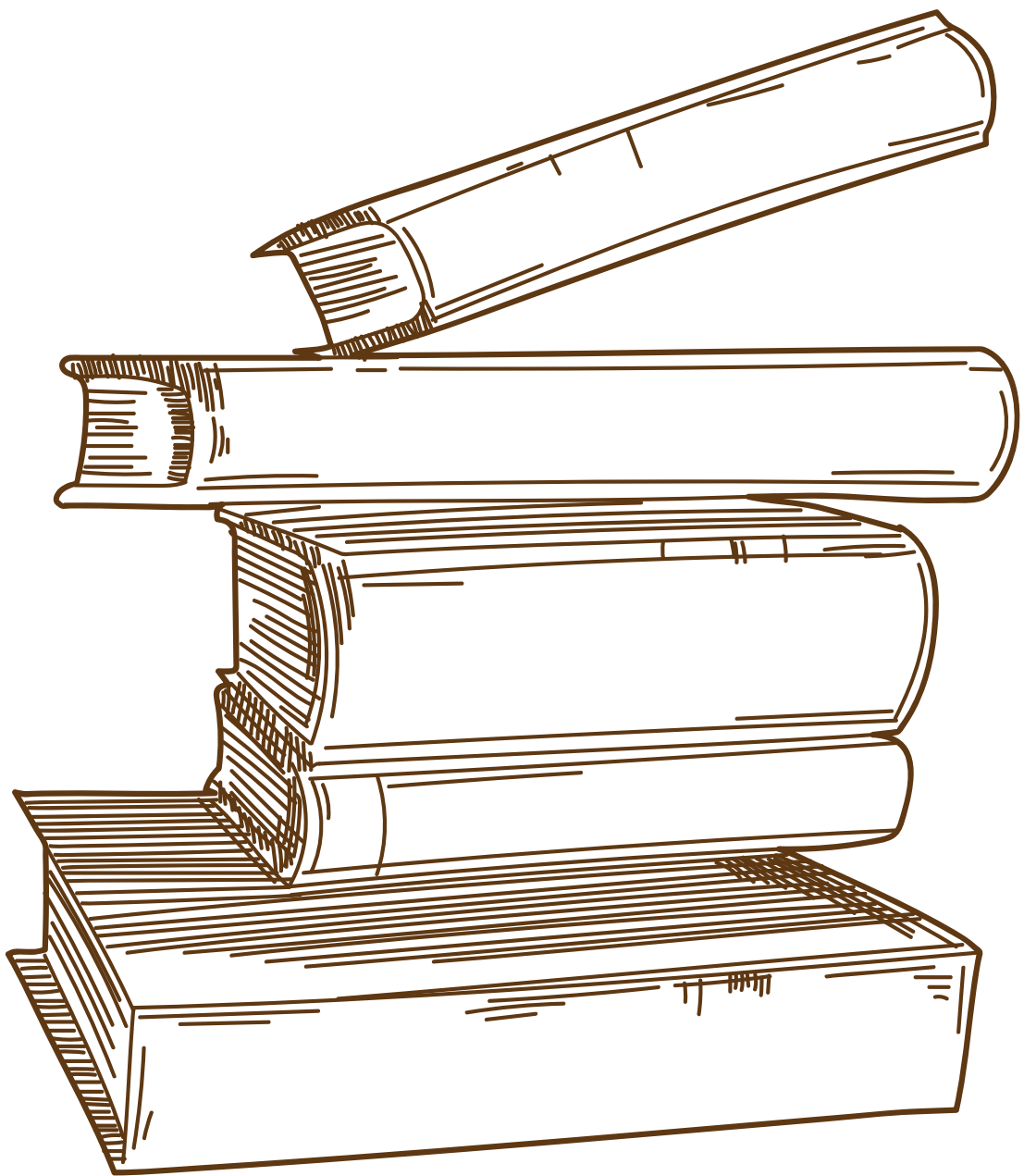
Collaborate with international organizations, NGOs, and literary associations that focus on promoting literacy and children's literature. The global children's publishing market has been growing steadily, and the estimated market size is projected to reach USD 11,100 million by 2027. However, specific data related to the Gambia's children's book market would require more localized research. Finally, it is important to seek support and resources to enhance the children's book industry and reading culture in the Gambia.

10

[Educate parents](#) and caregivers about the importance of reading aloud to children, providing a supportive reading environment at home, and being role models in terms of reading habits. Encourage parental involvement in reading initiatives and organize workshops for parents on how to support their children's reading development. [Research](#) indicates the positive effects parental involvement can have in reinforcing learners' beliefs about their ability to succeed.

CONCLUSION

By implementing these strategies and approaches, the children's book industry and book culture for young adults in the Gambia can be nurtured, leading to an increased interest in reading, improved literacy levels, and the development of a vibrant literary landscape. The data analyzed in this report also suggests that the book database contains a diverse collection of literature, with a balance of books targeted towards children and young adults. However, there may be a bias towards literature from certain regions, and a limited representation of instructional or educational resources. Further analysis is necessary to draw definitive conclusions.



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