



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND OUTCOMES OF NAL'IBALI READING CLUBS

March 2020



RESEARCH

IMPLEMENTATION

MONITORING & EVALUATION

# Introduction

From June to November 2019, JET Education Services (JET) conducted an evaluation of Nal'ibali reading clubs (RCs). The evaluation surveyed and visited selected reading club leaders (RCLs) of clubs that are still operating, and also surveyed and interviewed RCLs of clubs that are no longer running.

RCs are a core component of the Nal'ibali Reading for Enjoyment (RFE) campaign. They offer opportunities for children to meet and enjoy reading in safe, relaxed and inclusive spaces that promote reading for pleasure through provision of diverse reading materials, some of them in the children's home languages.

Ideally, RCs should be run by skilled adults who are passionate about books and reading, who respect children and enjoy spending time with them, and who plan activities to take place at RC sessions. Children should attend RC sessions because they want to be there.

The theory of change (ToC) for RCs is as follows:

**IF** adults who love reading and working with children are trained and they register RCs, recruit children and meet in a safe and nurturing environment at least once a week<sup>1</sup>, where they read aloud to children, provide opportunities for children to handle text and take books home to read, play games and sing, and guide children in talking and writing about books that have been read, using the children's home languages and multilingual reading resources, **THEN** children will become lifelong readers with increased confidence in reading, writing and speaking in their mother tongue and in English, and reading for enjoyment will become part of everyday life. Because they are readers, children will enjoy engaging with any text, and be more equipped and confident to engage with schoolbooks, which is likely to increase their chances of success in school.

## Approach and methodology

The overarching question for the evaluation was: What are the most effective and cost-effective things Nal'ibali can do to support quality and sustainability of reading clubs?

To answer this key question, the following sub-questions were posed:

1. What are the factors that lead to the formation of reading clubs and influence their membership?
2. What are the factors that motivate children's and adults' participation in reading clubs?
3. What are the characteristics, conditions and practices that determine and differentiate the quality of reading clubs?

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<sup>1</sup> Gardner and Rebar (2019) draw from the field of psychology to explain that habit reinforces behavior, therefore clubs that meet at least once a week can reinforce children's reading habits.



4. What are the factors, characteristics, conditions and practices that support or inhibit reading club longevity and sustainability?
5. To what extent are reading clubs improving access to reading materials for children and adults participating in the reading clubs?
6. How, if at all, are reading clubs influencing literacy habits, motivation to read and self-efficacy and confidence of children and adults participating in the reading clubs?

The evaluation was **formative, learning oriented and utilisation focused** as it was intended to inform planning and budgeting for 2020 and beyond to support implementation of effective and long running RCs. The evaluation was collaborative, and JET and Nal'ibali worked closely to agree on the design of the evaluation and the instruments to be used for collecting data. There was also critical engagement with preliminary findings before the final report was written to improve interpretation of results.

A sequential, explanatory, mixed method design comprising telephonic surveys, site visits and qualitative telephonic interviews was adopted to enrich our understanding of RCs and how they are run. A random sample of 1 029 RCs with a lower margin of error of 2.406% was drawn from a population of 2 706 active RCs to achieve a representative sample of 343 surveys. The following table summarises the research methods and target respondents as well as achieved samples:

Research method and target respondents	Achieved sample
Telephonic survey of active <sup>2</sup> RCLs	349
Telephonic survey of inactive RCL	50
RC site visits	25
Qualitative telephone interview of inactive RCLs	10

Survey data was collected using structured questionnaires with mostly closed ended questions which were translated into Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho, all of the languages spoken by 3% or more of the survey population. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interview and focus group guides as well as a RC session observation tool.

Quantitative data was analysed using Stata version 14.2 to conduct descriptive analysis, and a quality framework developed for this evaluation was utilised to analyse quantitative data to determine the quality of RCs. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic content analysis.

A cost analysis was conducted using the ingredients method to determine the cost of interventions to improve quality and promote sustainability.

Nal'ibali supports three types of RCs that vary according to how they are recruited and supported by Nal'ibali:

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<sup>2</sup> Active RCs are RCs that are still running while inactive RCs are reading clubs that were once registered and were running but stopped running for various reasons.



1. **Core campaign RCs** are recruited through a partnership approach which includes partner recruitment, training, and support and mentoring to establish the RC. Some of the RCs, but not all, receive Nal'ibali reading supplements<sup>3</sup> and infrequent visits from Nal'ibali staff.
2. **Special projects RCs** are established with dedicated staff and funding. They receive training and mentoring, weekly visits from Nal'ibali Story Sparkers<sup>4</sup> (SSs), Nal'ibali reading supplements, and hanging libraries with books.
3. **Online registration RCs** register via the Nal'ibali website or contact centre. The clubs generally have not received any training and are less likely to receive reading materials from Nal'ibali.

Evaluation results are presented for the entire sample as well as by type of RC. Because the sample is random and representative the results for the full sample are generalisable to the broader population of RCs. However, results disaggregated by the types of RCs are not generalisable.

## Key findings and discussion

The findings presented in this section are based on the following samples:

- 349 active RCL surveys,
- 50 inactive RCL surveys,
- 25 RC site visits, and
- 10 interviews with inactive RCLs.

## Establishment of RCs

### How are reading clubs formed?

- Nal'ibali training is a key catalytic factor in the formation of RCs – reported by 53% of active reading club leaders (RCLs) and 64% of inactive RCLs.
- Many RCLs were already working with children
- Most RCs are teacher run and meet in schools (49%) and preschools/crèches (18%). Special projects RCs are mostly run in schools.

### Who leads reading clubs?

- 90% of reading club leaders (RCLs) in active clubs are women.
- 80% of the RCLs are between the ages of 30 and 59, and only 3% are younger than 20.
- 89% of RCLs are black African who are linguistically diverse; 8% are coloured, 2% are white, and 1% are Indian. The linguistic diversity of RCLs enables the use of 11 languages in RCs –

<sup>3</sup> A bilingual newspaper with stories literacy activities, reading and reading club tips and support produced by Nal'ibali and distributed to reading clubs. 15 editions are produced annually.

<sup>4</sup> Nal'ibali staff members who supported special projects through weekly visits and worked with children to spark a love of RFE



English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Setswana, Sepedi, Sesotho, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Siswati and isiNdebele.

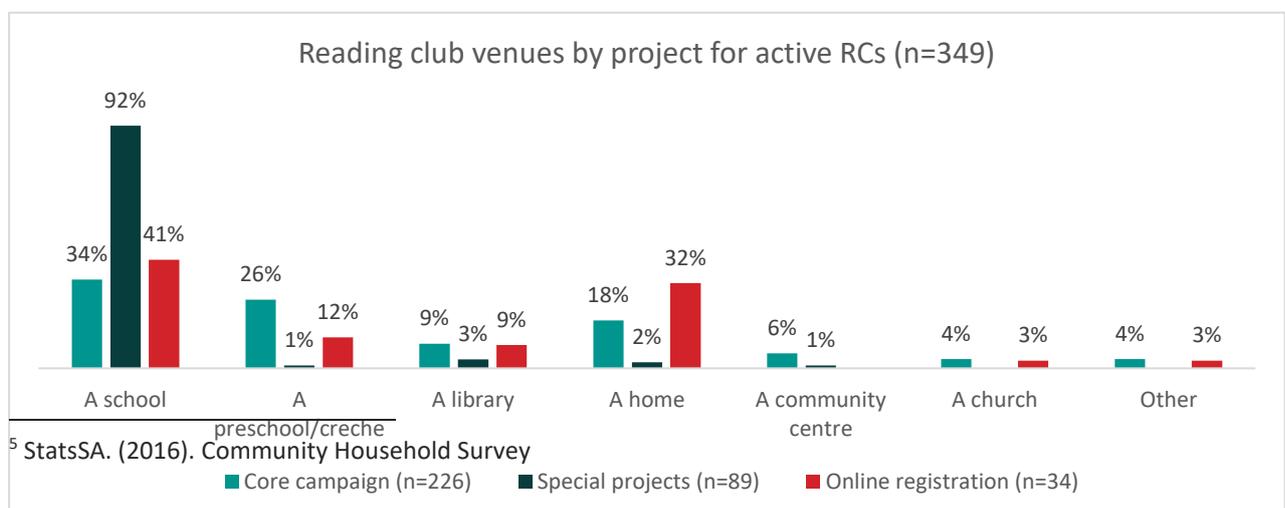
- 27% of RCLs have a certificate and 55% have postsecondary qualifications (diploma, higher certificate, undergraduate degree and postgraduate degree) as their highest qualification. In this regard, RCLs are better qualified than the South African public in general as only 12% of South African Adults have post-secondary qualifications<sup>5</sup>.
- The most common profession among RCLs is primary school teacher (33%)
- A minority of RCLs are parents of children under 15, between 24% and 30% of RCLs in each club type.
- Adult volunteers assist in RCs with literacy support and development activities and help lower the adult: child ratio in overcrowded classrooms. This assistance helps as the quality threshold for the adult: child ratio in RCs of 1:15 is met by 63% of RCs.
- Relying on volunteers to run RCs in communities where there is high unemployment is challenging and this could help explain why only 36% of volunteers never or sometimes help. Child volunteers are not helping at all, yet their presence in classrooms in school based RCs would enable them to assist the RCLs with activities.
- Parental involvement in RCs is limited and reasons for this provided by some parents at focus groups and RCLs in interviews are parents' lack of awareness about RC activities and the fact that parents are at work when RCs are run.

## Where are reading clubs meeting?

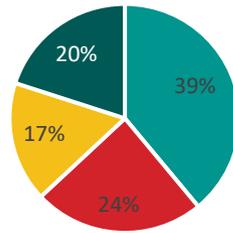
Reading clubs are meeting mostly in schools and a variety of other venues as reflected in the figure below.

## How are children recruited to RCs?

Although children in 39% of active RCs and 42% of inactive RCs were recruited by an adult. RCLs from 72% of active RCs said that children attended RC sessions consistently with few absences, while 19% indicated that children attend mostly with more frequent absences.



How are children recruited to the RCs? (n=349 Active RCs)



- Someone else like a teacher, parent or reading club leader signed the children up for the reading club/decided for the children
- Some children were signed up by adults, and some children joined on their own
- Only children who want to be members joined the reading club
- Other

At the site visit observations, all children seemed to be enjoying the RC sessions and those who participated in focus groups confirmed this.

### How often and for how long do reading clubs meet?

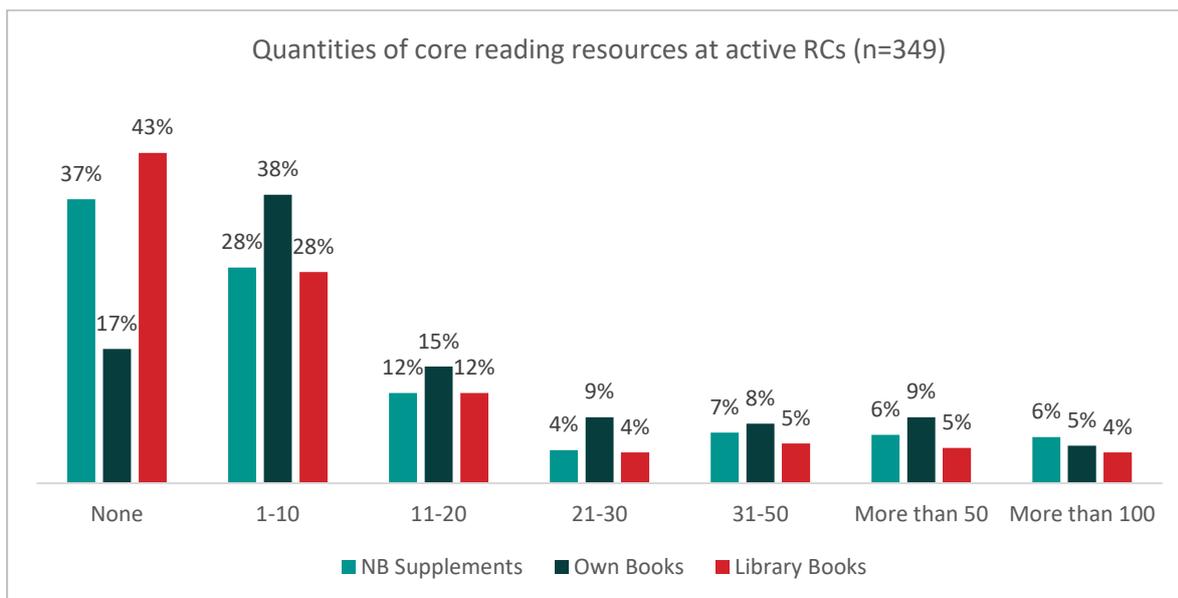
97 % of RCs meet at least once a week, which is positive for reinforcing the effects of RCs and potentially influencing children’s reading habits. However, only 66% of RCs meet for at least 45 minutes each time. Only 52% of the special projects RCs that meet in schools meet for at least 45 minutes, and the rest meet for much shorter periods, suggesting that there are constraints for school-based RCs working in a structured school day with its curriculum demands to meeting the minimum threshold for duration.

## Access to resources

### What kind of resources and reading materials are available?

An intended outcome of the Nal’ibali RCs is for adults and children to have access to a wide variety of relevant, engaging reading materials in all South African languages. RCs reported that they had a variety of reading resources including story cards, posters, website stories, read aloud collections, magazines and newspapers. The core resources that every RC should ideally have are Nal’ibali (NB) reading supplements, own books and library books. The quantities of these resources in RCs are reflected in the following figure.





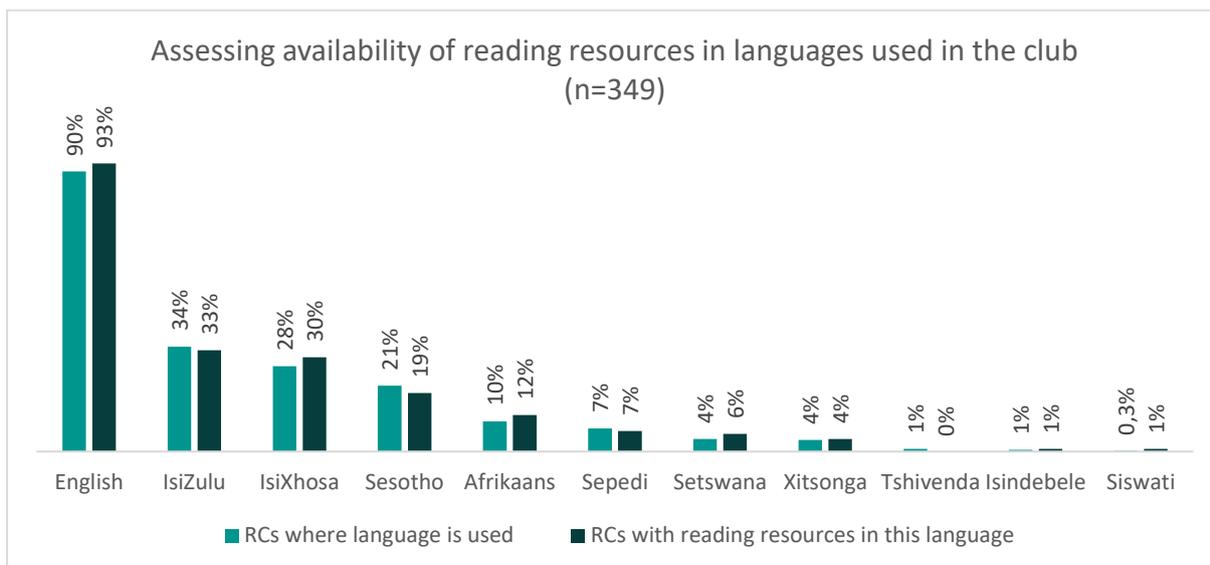
Generally, there are diverse reading materials available but, quantities are not optimal, given research evidence that 20 books in the home can predict future academic success<sup>6</sup>. Children in Nal’ibali RCs are less likely to have access to books at home, which RCs can mitigate, yet only 31% of the RCs have more than 20 of their own books and only 18% have more than 20 library books.

### Are the materials in the languages spoken at the reading club?

Resources are predominantly in English, and inroads are being made in the provision of reading materials in the home languages spoken in the RCs, as highlighted in the figure below. The supplement is the most accessible bilingual resource that can be accessed bi-weekly. All clubs that use English have reading materials in English and there is a high congruence of home language reading materials in clubs where these languages are used, with the exception of Tshivenda.

<sup>6</sup> Evans et al. (2010) Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations



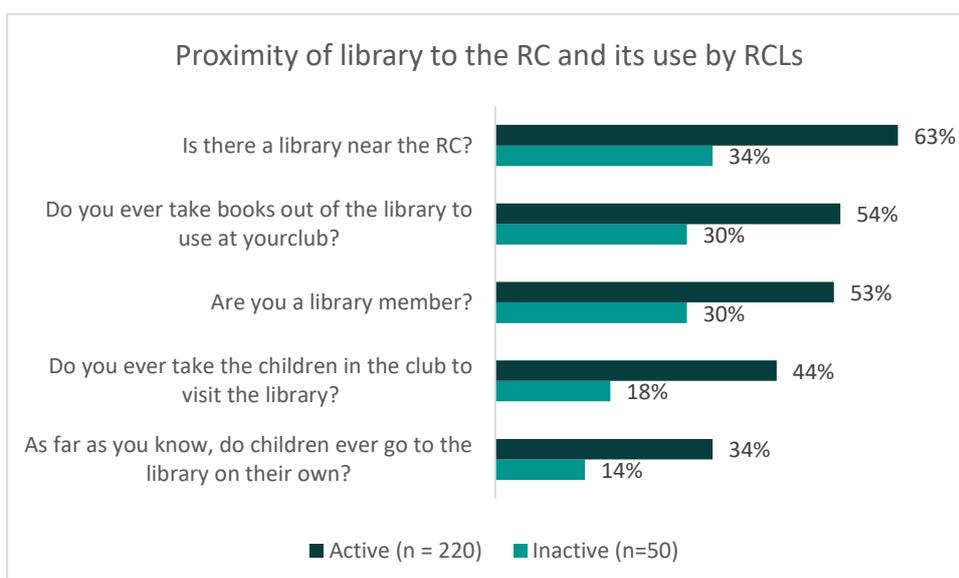


Access to reading materials in children’s home languages and using children’s home languages in clubs potentially have positive effects. Having reading materials in children’s languages could encourage more club activities in those languages, in the same way that using children’s home languages in clubs could promote active sourcing of home language reading materials in clubs.

### Where is the material sourced?

Nal’ibali and libraries are the biggest sources of reading resources. As observed at site visits, schools with well stocked libraries also contribute significantly to increasing quantities and diversifying reading resources.

A proportionally higher percentage of active RCs have a library near them than had inactive RCs and utilisation of the library by active RCLs is proportionally higher than it was for inactive RCLs. Utilisation of libraries by both active and inactive RCLs provides children with alternative access to reading materials other than the RCs.



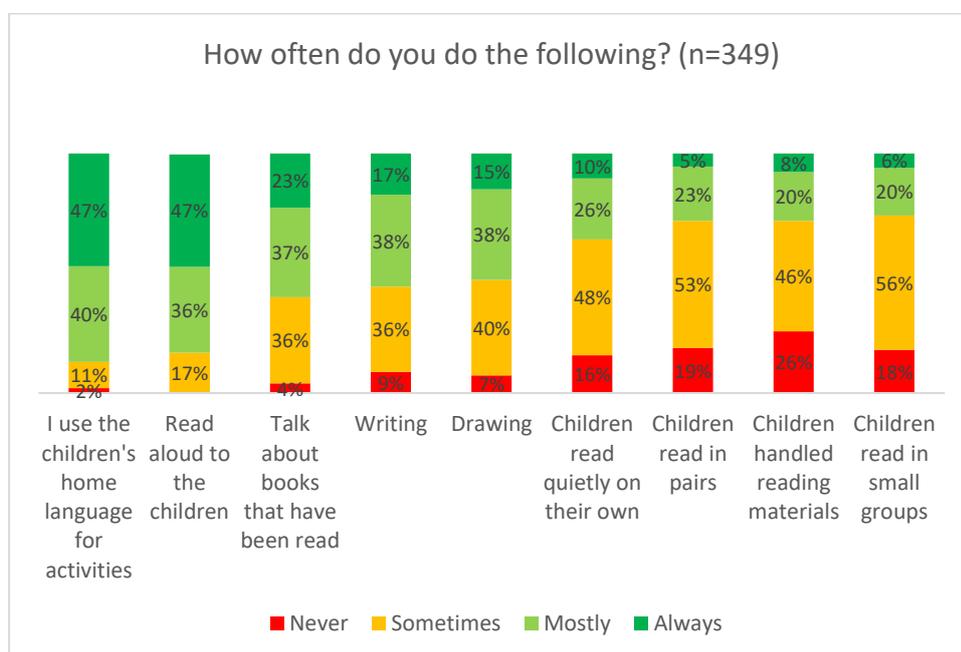
## How often is material refreshed?

While 72% of all RCLs reported that they refresh their own or library books at least twice a year, 21% of RCLs who indicated they have their own books never refresh their own books, and 38% of those who mentioned they have library books indicated that they never refresh library books<sup>7</sup>. The high percentage of RCs that refresh their books is positive as this can help provide a variety of reading materials that children use and eventually also increase the low volumes of reading materials at clubs.

## Practice

For the purpose of analysis of reading club practice, a distinction was made between essential practice (reading aloud, children handling reading materials, children reading in pairs, in small groups and quietly on their own) and supporting practice (talking about books that have been read, writing and drawing).

RC practice is significantly aligned with what is promoted by Nal'ibali for the essential practice of reading aloud to children, using the children's home languages, and the supporting practice of talking about books that have been read, writing and drawing. There are challenges however, particularly with promoting children's independent engagement with text which is happening mostly and always to a limited extent, as shown in the figure.



<sup>7</sup> This question may have been misunderstood to mean school library books, and the response here may be referring to restocking of the school library. The 'never' response could be signaling that the school library never restocks.



The most likely reason why RCLs are not letting children engage with text is that they are not aware that they ought to be prioritizing this practice:

- Only two (0,6%) RCs indicated that they do not have any of the three core resources. However, these two clubs, with 20 and 11 children respectively, have enough story cards, story power guides and newspapers to enable all activities where children can engage independently with text.
- Independent engagement with text by children mostly or always is limited even though 91% RCLs plan for RC sessions, which means they are not planning for these activities.
- Duration of RC meetings does not reflect a marked difference in children engaging independently with text. Even RCLs who indicated they meet for longer than 2 hours are not meeting thresholds for ideal practice for children engaging independently with text.

This strongly suggests that the requirements for ideal practice in children’s independent engagement with text are not explicit to RCLs.

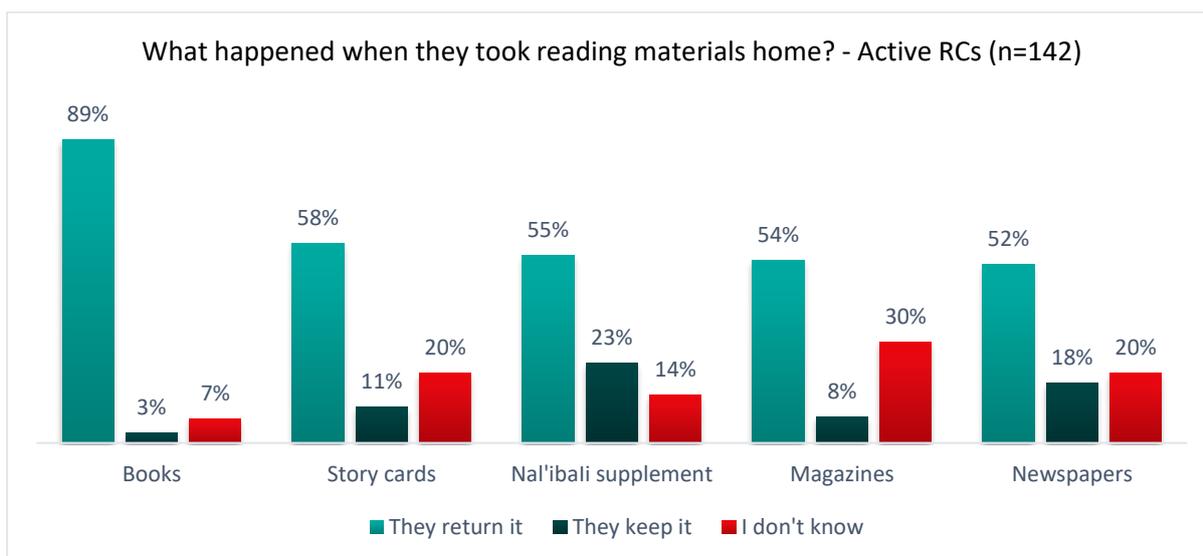
The lending of books to children seems to be affected by the limited availability of resources – only 41% of the RCLs lend children books, and this varies significantly by type of project, with core campaign and online registration RCs lending the least (32% of core campaign RCs are lending books, and 47% of online registration RCLs are lending books). As shown in the following table, RCs with more than 20 supplements and more than 30 own books are more likely to let children take reading resources home, suggesting that greater quantities of RCs may promote lending.

Quantity	Supplements		Own books	
	Take home	Do not take home	Take home	Do not take home
1-10	27(28%)	71(72%)	36(27%)	95(73%)
11-20	16(39%)	25(61%)	18(34%)	35(66%)
21-30	12(80%)	3(20%)	11(37%)	19(63%)
31-50	16(70%)	7(30%)	16(59%)	11(41%)
51-100	14(64%)	8(36%)	17(57%)	13(43%)
More than 100	15(71%)	6(29%)	10(59%)	7(41%)

Remarkably, in the clubs where RCLs are lending children books, 89% of the children return the books, which is positive and should be used for advocacy to encourage more lending of books.

The high return rate of books borrowed by children is reflected in the figure overleaf.





## Quality of RCs

In order to understand the quality of RCs, a matrix considering membership of RCs, dosage, access to resources and essential and supporting practice was developed, and minimum quality thresholds were defined for each focus area. Quality RCs:

- Have an adult:child ratio of 1:15 or lower (membership),
- Meet weekly for at least 45 minutes each meeting (dosage),
- Have two types of reading resources: supplements, own or library books; get new books of their own or library books at least twice a year and have at least one writing or drawing paper and writing tool (access to resources).
- Use the children's home language, read aloud, let children engage with text independently mostly and always (essential practice), and
- Let children take books home, talk about books read, let children write and draw mostly or always (supporting practice).

Clubs can be weak, developing, struggling, good or excellent depending on the extent to which they meet the threshold for the different dimensions of quality listed above. There are no weak clubs and a minority of struggling and developing clubs – 65% of the clubs are good or excellent as shown in the following table.

Quality of RCs	# RCs
Weak club	0
Struggling Club	25 (7%)
Developing Club	95 (27%)
Good Club	148 (42%)
Excellent Club	81 (23%)
Total	349 (100%)



Online registration clubs have a higher proportion of struggling and developing clubs compared to core campaign and special projects RCs, which could signal that training and resourcing make a quality difference.

## Outcomes

Most RCLs (73% active) believe that the RFE approach is effective, and 71% active and 64% inactive RCLs indicated they would encourage other people to start RCs. Forty five percent of active RCLs indicated they had encouraged someone to start a RC, and they knew of 38 RCs that had been established because of this.

In interviews, RCLs highlighted the effects of RCs on children, including motivation to read; improved confidence levels; improved discipline; enjoying reading for pleasure; improved creativity; and improved reading/writing skills. The RCLs also reported effects for themselves, including reading for enjoyment; better relationships with children; better understanding of children; and improved confidence levels.

## Sustainability

- 62% of the inactive clubs surveyed stopped running within a year and a further 30% within 24 months, suggesting that RCs are most vulnerable to closing within the first two years.
- Special projects RCs become inactive when the SS withdraws from the school after the Nal'ibali programme comes to an end.

## Cost of implementing interventions to improve quality and sustainability

Based on the findings, some activities to improve the quality and sustainability are costed and prioritised in the table overleaf.



Component	Activity/Resource	Cost per club/year	Prioritisation	Assumptions	Motivation from findings
Training	Training potential RCL	R1 654.00	1	Full training cost incurred by Nal'ibali at cost of training in Nal'ibali cost data	Training is associated with good and excellent clubs. This training will capacitate committed RCLs to run RCs effectively and improve sustainability. The training can draw on experiences of RC in the two months they have been running a club to give concrete guidance.
Resources	Supplements for startup kit for RC	R90.00	1	Assuming that 30 are given per course participant and each supplement costs R3.00 Quantities can be adjusted to 15 or 20	Home language resource that has stories that can be used to start RCs. Children can have a resource to handle and enjoy at the new club.
	Read Aloud Collections for startup kit for RC	R120.00	1	Assuming that 30 are given per course participant and each supplement costs R4.00. Quantities can be adjusted to 15 or 20	New resource with stories to increase diversity and quantity of reading resources at the newly established club.
Communication	Communication	R3.42	1	The total annual budget for SMSs based on 4 800 Nal'ibali clubs is R16 412. If this is divided by 4 800 clubs it gives us R3.42 per reading club	For ongoing support to RCLs that have indicated they are feeling neglected and gathering information from RCs on whether they have supplements so they can be included on the distribution list if they do not have supplements.
Reading resources	Supplements for registered clubs	R1 350.00	1	Assuming 30 supplements per club for 15 editions @ R3.00/supplement	Critical resource in children's home languages which is being taken home and being read to parents by some children. Supplements help with providing access to reading resources in homes.
	Story books	R600.00	1	10 story books per club per year@ R60.00/story book	Provides additional and diverse resources to RCs. There are very low quantities of story books according to RCLs.
	Bilingual dictionaries	R232.00	3	A basic bilingual dictionary costs R116.00 and 2 will be supplied to each RC	Useful to have, but can be sourced elsewhere. A high proportion of RCs do not have them.
Other literacy development materials	Paper, crayons, and other writing materials	R200.00	1	Fixed amount of R200.00/club, based on Nal'ibali's calculations	Lack of this material limits implementation of interpretive actions which support practice - 30% RCs do not meet the threshold. Having these materials will help promote quality in this dimension.



Component	Activity/Resource	Cost per club/year	Prioritisation	Assumptions	Motivation from findings
Knowledge support to RCLs	Online training	R6.15	1	Based on the premise that a moderator/facilitator is needed for online training so that discussions are guided into learning sessions; It will also provide an opportunity for RCLs who have urgent queries to engage with a Nal'ibali staff member for guidance. This has been costed @R554.00/day for 12 months for ongoing support for 2 160 clubs	There is a demand for training mentioned in requests for Nal'ibali support, and online training reduces training costs. It can also provide ongoing knowledge support to RCLs who need to refresh their knowledge.
RCL session support RCLs	Child volunteers	R350.00	1	Assuming each club has a maximum of 5 children helping, and t-shirts cost R70.00 each	43 (78%) child volunteers in the 55 RCs with child volunteers never assist. T-shirts would acknowledge them as assistants and make them assist more. This is critical as 32 (39%) RCs do not meet the adult:child threshold.
Monitoring and support	Stipends for SSs	R894.00	1	Full cost of a SS per year per club divided by 52 weeks x2 is R144.00 plus the cost of transport @ R750.00/RC/year	Currently, SS run RCs become inactive when SS contracts end and a third to two thirds of school run RCs also become inactive when SSs leave. Having SSs provide continuous limited support after programme exit may help ensure sustainability.
<b>Total cost of activities to improve quality and sustainability</b>		<b>R5 499,57</b>			



South African Sign Language (SASL) RCs can be piloted at the costs in the table below based on the assumption that 10 RCs will be piloted.

Cost component	Total cost per annum per RC	Assumptions
Training	R2 854.00	We assume that the normal cost of Nal'ibali training of R1 654 is applicable and have added the cost of 2 interpreters @R3 000.00/day each x 2 days of training divided by 10 clubs which is R1 200 each to make R6 000.00
Reading resources	R2 500.00	10 SASL DVD book @ R250.00 each based on price sourced from a sign language development organisation that has developed DVDs.
	R600.00	10 picture books estimated at R60.00/book
<b>Total</b>	<b>R5 954.00</b>	

## Conclusion and recommendations

Relative to the national content as evidenced in the National Reading Survey (SABDC, 2016), the impact of the Nal'ibali RFE campaign and RCs in developing mostly African and female role models who promote reading among children from low socio-economic contexts cannot be underestimated and improvements to the quality and sustainability of RCs will only increase the impact. The results from the evaluation have given rise to the following recommendations, grouped by the relevant evaluation criteria:

### Recommendations for establishment of RCs

1. Continue to focus recruitment strategy towards people who work with children and in places like libraries that have resources, given the scarcity of reading resources among clubs.
2. To reduce high costs of materials at initial training, offer starter kits of up to 30 supplements and read out collections to each trainee who wants to go and start a RC.
3. Given the high inactivity of clubs in the first year, establish buddy system that links up RCLs in geographic clusters to enable easy collaboration between RCLs in a way that will enable children and RCLs awareness of RCs within a specific radius so that children can join another RC in their community if their RC shuts down.
4. Given that some RCLs have indicated that they have successfully embedded the RFE approach into their classrooms, engage providers of initial teacher education and in-service



training to discuss the mainstreaming of the RFE approach to teaching reading. If this gets any traction the approach will be used in many schools and crèches.

5. Consider piloting RCs with 10 organisations working with deaf children or with schools for the deaf to extend the reach of RFE and RCs. This would both introduce a new language and address the needs of marginalised, poor deaf children.

### Recommendations for access to reading materials

1. Given the large proportions of RCs without supplements, improve targeting and delivery of supplements to RCs.
2. Based on the limited quantities of reading resources in RCs, continue the practice of sending a pack of 10 story books to new reading clubs and extend it as a once off to all active clubs. Aim for diverse packs that can be swapped, while considering economies of scale.
3. Because website stories are being underutilised, and there are very few reading resources enabling children to independently engage with text, negotiate partnerships with city libraries to provide printing tokens to RCLs to print website stories from the library.
4. To pilot SASL RCs, provide a set of 10 different SASL DVD and story books to each pilot SASL site, providing different sets that will enable swapping that leads to refreshment of resources at agreed times.

### Recommendations for practice

1. Update the Module 3 manual *Run a reading club* in line with the quality matrix to specify quality dimensions and thresholds.
2. To provide ongoing training support, investigate blended learning to try and address the knowledge needs of RCLs in a core, sustainable way.
3. Align the RC theory of change with the quality matrix.
4. Appoint a moderator/facilitator for online training or reskill internal capacity to moderate discussions on the online module platform. A SS may be best placed to do this.

### Recommendations for quality

1. Given that writing and drawing now form part of the quality matrix, and Nal'ibali does not provide drawing and writing resources, consider providing writing and drawing materials for supporting practice.
2. Promote active involvement of RCLs in the established buddy system so that they can also swap books as a way of refreshing their reading resources.
3. Emphasise and be explicit about ideal practice in training.
4. Arrange bi-annual monitoring and support visits by SSs to special projects RCs that have graduated from the project.
5. Continue using various forms of communication like SMS, phone, email, WhatsApp and newsletters to reach out to clubs and support them – all clubs.



## Recommendations for sustainability

1. To help raise the quality of struggling and developing clubs, consider twinning RCLs from good and excellent clubs with those from struggling and developing clubs for tip sharing, encouragement and where possible distance and resources permitting, modelling of ideal practice.
2. Build on past experience on this to negotiate possibilities for volunteer stipends with Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Community Works Programme (CWP) and the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) Sector Education Training Authority (SETA).

## Recommendations for monitoring and evaluation

1. Because adult volunteers do not assist always at RCs, Nal'ibali should include a question on the frequency of adult volunteers' assistance at clubs in their monitoring tools or surveys to improve understanding of the actual adult:child ratios at clubs.
2. The high variance between survey and monitoring data on clubs that meet weekly or 2-3 times a week warrants closer attention to monitoring data for these options to establish causes of variance.
3. In future research, a clear distinction needs to be made on what is referred by library as school libraries and community libraries can be conflated in responses as seemed to be the case in the survey.

