

# Access to Literacy Resources in Tanzanian Homes and Schools

George N. Shumbusho

Languages and Communication Studies Department, P.O. Box 5, Mzumbe University, Morogoro  
United Republic of Tanzania

E – mail: [gnshumbusho@mzumbe.ac.tz](mailto:gnshumbusho@mzumbe.ac.tz)

## Abstract

The issue of scarcity of resources that aid language and literacy acquisition at home and at school is the focus of this paper. These resources include books, print media such as newspapers, broadcasting media for instance television and radio sets. This paper examines - through an ethnographic lens - the role played by literacy resources in literacy acquisition. This was done through data elicited from interview and observations of interviewees' home to determine the availability of these literacy resources and the way interviewees interact with them. First, the finding indicates, on the one hand, that some homes lack literacy resources, which assist language and literacy acquisition, and on the other, the finding suggests that some home possess these materials and yet they are not used in literate ways. Secondly, with regard to the availability of textbooks at school, the finding shows that books are scarce and where available they are locked away for fear of being lost by pupils. Concerning this issue, the paper exhorts parents to invest in textbooks for their children.

**Keywords:** New literacy studies; literacy resources; literacy acquisition; Kiswahili; Tanzania; ethnography

## 1.0 Introduction

It is widely believed from the social practice perspective that access to TV, radio, newspapers, books at home enables children to acquire a variety of genres and registers –including academic registers. From these literacy materials children can learn how to pronounce words appropriately, they can learn various ways of sentence construction, they can learn reasoning analogies, as well as gaining a great deal of information (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p.75). It is against this backdrop that in this paper, I want specifically to address first the issue of lack of resources that aid literacy at home and secondly at school in Tanzania. This will be done from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective, whereby literacy practices are understood as always taking place in social context in which literacy practices exist in relations rather than in individuals (Gee, 2000). The purpose of using NLS as a theoretical framework is to enable me to put text both reading and writing into ethnographic perspective something that the NLS approach enables me to do better than any other approach.

## 2.0 Tanzanian education system

The Tanzania education system can be described numerically as follows: 2:7:4:2:3/4/5 that two years of pre-primary education; seven years of primary education; four years of ordinary secondary education; two years of advanced secondary education; and three or four or five years of tertiary education depending on the nature of a degree or diploma e.g. engineering or medicine degrees take longer than those in the humanities discipline (MOEC, 1995, p. 11).

Kiswahili is the MOI in public pre-primary and primary school education for all subjects except English, which is taught as a subject. After the initial seven years of primary education, students start six years of secondary education, which comprise two levels. First, form one to four, this is ordinary ('O') level. Secondly, form five to six, this is the advanced ('A') level. The MOI for the entire secondary school education is English. All subjects are taught in English except for the Kiswahili subject and Kiswahili Literature. English continues to be the MOI at tertiary level except for Kiswahili Subject itself (Mohamed & Banda 2008).

## 3.0 Case selection

Since the study (whose this paper is its offshoot) was a qualitative one, which employed an ethnographic design, the sampling procedure was purposive sampling what Le Compte and Preissle (1993, p. 69) cited in Maxwell (1996, p. 70) call criterion – based selection. This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained as well from other choices. In the similar vein, Patton (1987) refers to it as typical case sampling, in other words sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind.

Two primary schools were involved in this study (primary school 'W' in Mvomero District and primary school 'X' in Morogoro Municipality)<sup>1</sup>. The sampling criteria for the schools and interviewees were purposive. I used purposive sampling to identify the schools and respondents who would provide the best information that would

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of protecting respondents' identity and that of the schools, all names of respondents are pseudonyms, while schools are being referred to by alphabetical letters.

achieve the objectives set out in this paper (Kumar, 1999). Thus, purposive sampling made it possible for me to select information rich respondents in particular, enabling me to target and engage specific learners, teachers and schools.

The sample was based on two standard six classes from these schools. Four pupils were chosen from each school thus making a total of eight pupils whose ages ranged from twelve to fourteen years. Two facts guided me in selecting the school sample. First, both schools were above average in terms of performance in national examinations. They are also known for attracting good pupils. Second, they have relatively better qualified teachers and a relatively better pupil-book ratio than other schools in the area. Both schools are also easily accessible to the regional administration and hence they are frequently visited by education inspectors.

### **3.1 Criteria for selection**

The four pupils from each school were picked on the basis of their performance in previous writing tasks. I asked the teacher to provide essays of the two 'best' and two 'poorest' pupils writers; I then independently corroborated this to establish whether the selection reflected the reality. To corroborate the teacher's selection I was guided by two criteria, first the structure of argument – the pupil's ability to argue his/her case and second, the structure of the genre – how these pupils had organized their introductions, body paragraphs and conclusions. The selection procedure produced the following results: at primary school 'W' two pupils, namely; Jackson and Fridah emerged as the 'best' and the other two, that is Pendo and Yusuph were categorized as 'poorest'. Similarly, at primary school 'X' Elizabeth and Pili were the 'best' while Raphael and Samweli were the 'poorest'. The essays of the 'best' pupils were found to be satisfactory at that level, while the essays from the 'poorest' pupils were seriously flawed.

The major study employed three data collection techniques namely: interview, classroom observation and text analysis. For the purpose of this paper, I will only focus on data elicited from interviews and observations at home.

### **4.0 Home visits**

The task of an ethnographer while in the field is to examine the group's observable and learned patterns of behaviour, customs and way of life and to listen to and record the voices of informants (Creswell, 1998, p. 246). It was precisely for this reason that I opted to visit some homes of my pupil respondents to cross-check the information they provided me during the interview. Information such as their home language, their parents socio-economic status (what they do) and if reading materials such as books, magazines, newspaper, radio, TV were available in their homes. Briefly, the decision to visit the pupils' homes was influenced by other studies that investigated the homes of children with the purpose of observing literacy practices in their home settings, and the way their parents mediated those practices so as to provide a springboard for the development of school literacy practices; these studies include the Haringey research project reported by Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, (1982); Heath, (1982b); Cazden, (1988); Mehan, (1988); Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn (1995); Sneddon, (2000); Kirunda, (2006). Out of the eight homes I had planned to visit, I managed to visit only five homes as follows: three homes of the three pupils in Mvomero District and two homes of pupils in Morogoro Municipality. I observed for evidence of literacy practices.

#### **4.1 Home visits – pupils of primary school 'W'**

In Mvomero District, I managed to visit three homes of the pupils schooling at primary school W, the pupils are Jackson, Pendo and Yusuph.

##### **1. Jackson's home – Saturday 25 November 2007 (Changarawe village – Mvomero District)**

I had sought an appointment with Jackson two days before. I suggested that I would like to visit his home when his mother would be at home. He suggested that on Saturday his mother would be at home because she was off duty that day. Jackson lived with his mother and his grandmother. That day the grandmother had gone to another village, 10 kilometres away to visit her relatives. I arrived at Jackson's home at around 3.10 pm. Jackson's home was located at the village called Changarawe. Jackson walked about one and a half kilometres to school every day (School 'W'). When I arrived, I was met by his mother who was expecting me. Jackson was out trying to locate his pigeon, which had flown away, but he was called to join us. Jackson was brought up by the mother alone and he stayed with his mother. His mother was a nurse, she was also attending adult classes, and she was in form two.

##### **Evidence of literacy practices at home and the home appearance**

Their home reflected poverty. Their house could be described as ramshackle. It was constructed with mud bricks as most houses in the neighbourhood. Its corrugated iron roof was rusty and there was evidence that it was leaking. It was a four room-house with a sitting room. The sitting room was small, untidy, and dirty. There were one worn-out sofa set, and a small coffee table. There was no dining room in the conventional sense. I asked Jackson whether he studied at night, and he responded affirmatively. Again, I asked him to show me where he sat to study. He showed me a stool and an old chair at the corner and a small kerosene lamp that he used at night because they had no electricity.

No reading materials (except his own schoolbooks) were observed, no posters, pictures of any kind on the wall. Interestingly, this is the boy who tops his class in every examination. His mother told me that the boy studied hard at night by candle light, and that in the afternoon he attended extra tuition after school. There was no radio; Jackson had told me during the interview that he used to have a small hand radio which had since malfunctioned. Since his mother had no radio, he was not expected to have a TV set; they had no electricity after all. I left at 5.00 pm.

## **2. Yusuph's home – Sunday 26 November 2007 (Mikongeni village – Mvomero District)**

I had sought an appointment with Yusuph on Thursday 23 to visit his home on the following Sunday starting at 10.00 am in the morning. I wanted him to go and find out from his parents whether the choice of the day and time would be convenient to them. On the following day, Friday 24 I met Yusuph at his school for feedback on my request. He told me that any time from 2.00 pm on Sunday would be appropriate. This was so because in the morning, his parents were to go to the next village to mourn the death of their friend. I arrived at Yusuph's place at 2.30 pm. Yusuph lived with both his parents and his elder sister who had a one year baby. I was told by Yusuph's mother that their daughter completed standard seven in 2002 and she was living there with them jobless. Both parents were uneducated and had no paid job except tilling the land.

### **Evidence of literacy practice at home and the home appearance**

No doubt, this family lived in abject poverty. They had a small muddy house, with a dilapidated corrugated iron roof. I could not tell the number of rooms because I was not welcomed in; instead, I was given a chair on the verandah outside the house. This is the place where I found the whole family seated, except Yusuph who was away. Yusuph's home was located about two kilometers away from his school. I was accompanied by his classmate Jackson who volunteered to take me to Yusuph's home. After greeting Yusuph's parents, Jackson excused himself and left to return home.

I did not find Yusuph at home although he knew I was to visit their home that day. His parents told me that he was grazing his neighbour's goats for which he was paid little money (Tanzanian Shillings 2000/=, equivalent to two USD) during Saturday and Sundays. I was told that it was his daily's job after school, so he did not have time to study at home during the day. That is probably the reason that Yusuph was one of the poorest performers in his class. When I asked them whether Yusuph studied at night, they said sometimes if they had enough kerosene for the small tin lamp (it is called 'Koroboi' in Kiswahili), otherwise he did not. Yusuph himself told me during interview that he got time to study at home.

Since I was not welcomed inside the house, and for the sake of decency, I did not insist that we go inside; I did not have an opportunity to observe whether there was any literacy material in their home. Yusuph had told me during the interview that there was no radio at home, let alone a TV set. I left this home with no doubt in my mind that it was one of the many peri-urban homes in Tanzania where literacy is not frequently practiced in a recognizable way. I left at 4.00 pm.

## **3. Pendo's home – Saturday 2 December 2007 (Mzumbe University campus – Mvomero)**

Pendo was living inside the campus of Mzumbe University. I suggested visiting her home on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> from 10.00 am. She agreed. I arrived at 10.30 am, Pendo and her Parents had just finished their breakfast, and Pendo was busy clearing the coffee table where her mother and father were having their breakfast. Pendo had already explained the purpose of my visit to her parents. After welcoming me inside and after greetings, Pendo's mother directed her daughter to prepare breakfast for me, but I declined because I already had breakfast at home before leaving. They however insisted that I eat something; I then opted for a cup of black tea.

This was a family of five people, father, mother, Pendo – their daughter who was in standard six; Pendo's younger brother who was in standard three and Pendo's younger sister who was in standard 1. Pendo was aged 14, her brother 10, and her sister 7. They all attended the same school.

Pendo's father had secondary education and had completed form four. Her mother had primary school education, she completed standard seven. Her mother was not employed she was operating a small food kiosk. This kiosk served some students from Mzumbe University. The money from this kiosk helped to support the family on various issues such as food, children's clothes, and other school requirement such as exercise books, pen and pencils, textbooks etc.

### **Evidence of literacy practice at home and the home appearance**

This family lived in a small University house. It had two bedrooms and a sitting room, which also served as a dining room. The rooms of this house were extremely tiny. These kinds of houses were previously meant for unmarried workers, but due to housing problems, they have since been allocated to married families too.

After an hour conversation with the three of us, the mother had to excuse herself to go to her kiosk to supervise and help with the cooking. While we were talking, Pendo was busy in the kitchen preparing lunch for the family. Her young brother was in their bedroom helping the younger sister with simple arithmetic. Since the bedroom was tiny to have a reading table, they were practicing literacy on their laps or on their beds. The walls in their bedroom had charts pasted on them. There was a number chart from one to a hundred; another chart had printed alphabet – i.e. small and capital letters; there was a wall map of Tanzania. In the sitting room, there were some

photographs on the wall, a calendar, a TV set and a radio.

At 1.30 pm., lunch was ready. Pendo's mother returned to have lunch with us. Pendo was called by her father to say prayers for meal. After the prayers, she joined the younger ones in the kitchen for their lunch. It was during this time when her mother told me that their daughter had to be pushed to study; she preferred playing to studying. This partly explained the reason of being one of the poorest pupils in her class. When I enquired as to whether their children watched TV, they said they were fond of watching sentimental soap opera more often than watching educational programmes. The same applied to radio. They listened to music than educative programmes. It appeared that the newspapers Pendo read most were the tabloids full of sensational news. I saw copies of two such Kiswahili tabloids – 'kiu' and 'Ijumaa' in the sitting room. Pendo had told me in the interview that she usually reads those papers. I left at 4.00 pm.

### **Home visits – primary school X**

I managed to visit only two homes of two pupils of school X. I visited the home for Raphael and Elizabeth. The other two failed to honour my appointment we had agreed in that each one did not turn up at the place where he/she had agreed to pick me.

#### **1. Raphael's home – Friday 17 November 2007 (Morogoro Municipality)**

It was Friday, classes ended at 12.00 am. I had made an appointment with Raphael to visit his home on Friday after school time. I also enquired as to whether there would be any parent or caretaker at home at that time. He told me that his maternal aunt would be there. Raphael's home was located at Madizini, a half kilometre from his school – school 'X'. I picked Raphael up from his school and drove together to his home. We arrived at his home on 12.30 pm.

#### **Evidence of literacy practice at home and the home appearance**

Raphael was living with his maternal aunt. Raphael was brought up by her after the death of his parents; they died when he was still in standard one. The house they lived in had six families. This family occupied three rooms. Raphael's maternal aunt had her bedroom, which was joined to the sitting cum dining room. Raphael had his own room. There was no single book no newspaper, and there was nothing on the wall. There was one greeting card on the dining table, which was sent to his maternal aunt. There was also a small hand radio. In Raphael's room, there were a small catholic book of prayers and a holy rosary hanging on a nail on the wall. There were dilapidated exercise books thrown on his untidy bed. He told me that he normally prays before leaving for school in the morning and he prays in evening before he retired.

Judging by the shabby school uniform and shoes Raphael wore, this family was one of the poorest, just like many others in the neighbourhood. Raphael had a fungal ring on his face, his maternal aunt could not manage to buy a tube of anti-fungal which costs about TAS 1,000/= (equivalent to one USD) I had to part with TAS 3000/= (equivalent to three USD) for Raphael's medicine.

His maternal aunt told me that Raphael preferred playing rather than studying (Raphael was one of the poorest performers in his school). She added that Raphael never studied at home. She said, however, Raphael was a religious boy, while he was not pushed to go to church; he had to be pushed to go to school. She also said that Raphael was a naughty boy; this was confirmed by his teachers who told me that apart from being naughty in class, Raphael also played truant. I left Raphael's home at 3.00 pm.

#### **2. Elizabeth's home – Saturday 18 November 2007 (Morogoro Municipality)**

I had sought an appointment with Elizabeth three days before. I suggested that I would like to visit her home when at least one of her parents would be at home. She suggested Saturday afternoon when her mother would be at home because she returned around mid-day. Both her parents run a private business. Their business dealt with servicing office machines, the mother dealt with offering photocopy services in the same premise, which was located in the Municipal centre. Her mother was an ex – form four, while her father had a diploma from one technical college in the country. I arrived at Elizabeth's home at Kilakala about one and a half kilometres from her school – school 'X'. The time was 2.00 pm.

#### **Evidence of literacy practice at home and the home appearance**

It was in the afternoon 2.00 pm. When Elizabeth saw me, she led me to their sitting room where I found her mother watching a TV. They were living in a three bedroomed house, which they were renting from the Tanzania Housing Corporation. The sitting room was adjoined to a dining room. Both rooms were very small, there was one sofa set in the sitting room and one medium-sized table. In the dining room, there was one dining table with four chairs.

I did not see any book in their sitting room. Their daughter had told me during the interview that there were no books at home other than her schoolbooks. There was a TV set. I did not see any radio. Their daughter had told me during the interview that they used to listen to the radio but it was now defective. There was a family photograph on the wall, religious pictures, and a calendar. While Elizabeth's mother, Elizabeth's mother's young sister, and I were there in the sitting room talking, Elizabeth was in and out, but she did not actively participate in our discussion, other than listening to our conversation and responding to simple questions from her mother. This did not surprise me because in most cultures in Tanzania children were not expected to

participate actively in conversations involving adults as was also observed by Wedin (2004) in her study. Her mother told me that their daughter attended extra tuition in the evening and that they said evening prayers and read the bible before retiring. She did not go for tuition that day because it was Saturday. I did not observe the prayer session because I left before the event. They told me the prayer was after supper, which was normally taken at around 9.00 pm. Elizabeth had her younger sister, 4 years old, and she was most of the time interacting with this younger sister. It is common in many cultures in Tanzania that children would interact actively with siblings by asking questions, making demands, and so forth (see Wedin 2004). I observed a small slate on which Elizabeth used to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to her sister. It was common again, that elder sibling would be responsible for early education of the younger children (cf Heath, 1986; Wedin, 2004). I left at 4.00 pm.

## 5.1 Findings and discussion

### 5.1.1 *Limited resources of exposure to literacy in the homes*

During the interviews, respondents (pupils) were asked to mention the language they normally used for speaking and in writing at home. The reason for this question emanated from the fact that the home domain is the first place where language is acquired and literacy is learned. Since Tanzania is a multilingual country with one lingua franca -Kiswahili, it was for this reason important to establish the main language through which literacy is learned at home. Furthermore, the most important rationale for establishing the ordinary language through which literacy is learned at home was the fact that it is the total home milieu that moulds the child (Heath, 1983, 1986; Wells, 1987; Hall, 1994).

Researchers in NLS have attested to the importance of teachers building on the positive literacy aspects children bring with them to school (Heath, 1983, 1984; Hall, 1994; Banda et al. 1998; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Street, 2000). It is believed that these positive aspects can improve the learning process in that children would already have a frame of reference to build on as they encounter the 'new' world or experiences. I argue that this process of building on is certainly easy if it is done in the same language that the pupils used to acquire their early literacy at home.

Respondents were asked if they had access to the broadcasting media (TV and radio) and print media - newspapers. In addition, they were also asked whether books were available at home. The purpose for this question emanated from the fact that people interact around these artefacts in various literacy practices.

Findings from the home visit above indicate that all five respondents were fully competent users of the Kiswahili language in that they had acquired the common core grammar of Kiswahili and many of the sociolinguistic rules for using it appropriately in familiar social contexts. Kiswahili was their ordinary home and school language.

The findings in relation to accessibility to literacy material resources revealed mixed patterns; for example, some of those respondents who did not have access to broadcasting media such as TVs, radio's and print media such as newspapers, were nevertheless the 'best pupils' (for example Jackson in primary school W). This paradox is in a way explained by Banda (2003) when he argues that the availability of newspapers, TVs, or radio does not necessarily mean that respondents or their guardians actually buy and own these items but they may be accessing them from other members of the community. On the other hand, some of the respondents who had access to these things still were categorized as 'poor pupils' (for example Pendo of primary school W). This is explained by a close examination into these pupils' homes to establish family book reading mediation practices. I want to argue here that even though the broadcasting and print media, TV, radio and newspapers respectively could be available, it does not necessarily mean that the parents or any other caretakers of the children actually use these literacy materials in literate ways. This is what was exactly found in the home of Pendo – school 'W' and Raphael – school 'X'.

In Pendo's home for example, there was a TV, radio and newspapers. When Pendo's mother was asked as to whether her daughter watched televised educational programmes, she said her daughter was only interested in watching sensational programmes. On whether she listened to radio, likewise the answer was that Pendo listened to music on radio than to educational broadcasting. Even the newspapers she read were tabloids that only feature sensational stories than serious news. As a result, Pendo's inability to control school discourse could partly be explained in terms of limited models, which represent the genres and discourses valued in educational institutions such as the school (Martin, Frances & Rothery, 1994). In other words, from the social practice perspective, I reiterate that the presence of these literacy materials alone might not guarantee literacy acquisition unless there is guidance by the parents, siblings, and significant others. This guidance is referred to as scaffolding in the literature. It is a teaching practice, which emphasize interaction with peers and with experienced others in moving learners from their existing level of performance to a level of independent performance (Hyland, 2006; Heath, 1986; Hall, 1994; Mercer, 1994).

### 5.1.2 *Limited resources of exposure to literacy at school*

Exposure to books provides a rich source of linguistic stimulation for the children that may foster literacy development in a unique way. Book reading may stimulate text understanding because it supports children's oral and written language in a contextual framework. Through book reading children may become familiar with

structures and cadences that are to be found in the sustained meaning making that is characteristic of writing (Sulzby 1985; 1986 as cited in Bus, 2001). Structures are more closely packed with meaning than those more typical of conversational speech (Chafe, 1982 in Bus, 2001). Therefore, texts have a range of features that are only rarely employed in speech addressed to young children; these structures include, among others: subordinate clauses, direct speech quoted as it occurs between two or more interlocutors, passive constructions, first person plural, abstraction, unfamiliar expressions, nominalizations etc. (Bus, 2001). In a situation where pupils lack textbooks it creates 'pressure on the teacher to retain a central role, since she appears to be the sole source of knowledge, and therefore, of "input" for her pupils' (Arthur, 1994, p. 74).

From the NLS tradition, acculturation of literacy practices through book reading is not just important in school setting only. It is equally important at home and more so before a child starts schooling. If parents are not educated, it is undoubtedly the case that they will hardly deal with print and the written word. In this case, children do not get the opportunity to watch their caretakers – parents, older siblings, significant others working with books or even just reading newspapers. As a result, children grow up without experiencing any printed materials until they come to interact with them at school. The implication of this is that they start attaching value to print very late in their lives and this stalls the general acculturation process. Children do not get to know much about the academic literacy practices of their community. Thus, they have no emergent theories about what literacy is and about how to learn until they go to school (Heath, 1986; Wells, 1987; Hall, 1994; Barton, 1999; Galda et al., 2002). It is for the importance of books, I sought to establish whether pupils had access to school textbooks. Thus, pupils were asked to list the textbooks they had for various school subjects. In addition, teachers were also asked whether their school owned textbooks and in sufficient number. The following are the findings:

#### **Primary school 'W'**

Jackson had personal textbooks for four subjects namely: English, mathematics, science, and work skills. The rest i.e. Yusuph, Pendo, and Fridah did not have any personal copy for any subject. As for school owned textbooks, the school pupil-book ratio was 1:3.

#### **Primary school 'X'**

Elizabeth had three textbooks for three subjects: English, Mathematics and Kiswahili Raphael had only one book for one subject: social studies. Pili had three for Mathematics, English and Kiswahili. Samweli had two textbooks for English and science. For school owned books, the head teacher put the pupil-book ratio at 1: 2. Ironically, it was in this school where six pupils were observed 'reading' one book. The answer given by the two teachers Ms. Anita – the Kiswahili teacher and Ms. Anna – the science teacher- contradicted that of the head teacher – Mr. Rogers. While the teachers said textbooks were not enough, the head teacher said they were enough. The following are excerpts of their translated responses regarding the issue of availability of textbooks:

**KEY: I: means 'interviewer'**

**R: means 'respondent'**

**Comments in italics are my contextual comments**

#### **Ms. Anita**

**I:** Are the textbooks owned by the school enough?

**R:** They are not enough

**I:** Don't they have their personal copies?

**R:** Very few who have their personal copies

**I:** Now what do you do when others read while others are not?

**R:** Now, what do we do? It is difficult to get money nowadays for most parents, poverty is rife, and that's why we tell them that while one is reading others should be listening.

**I:** Isn't that approach problematic?

**R:** It has problems because someone may hear but after a short while it evaporates, what do we do? Moreover, you can't send a child back home because the parents have not bought a book for their child.

The head teacher of primary school X – Mr. Rogers was asked to comment on whether textbooks were available; the head teacher's translated response was as follows:

#### **Mr. Rogers**

**I:** Are there enough textbooks for every subject?

**R:** For my school, books are available particularly since the PEDEP (Primary Education Development Education Project) programme started in 2002. Before PEDEP the ratio was one book for 14 to 15 pupils. Now, after PEDEP the ratio has reached one book for two pupils, as you can see, here are the books in these boxes, we have nowhere to take them, others are in there (*he is showing me the boxes and cabinets full of books there in his office*). If this programme continues, we will reach a point where the ratio will be one book for one child

**I:** But when I was in classrooms observing, I saw many pupils who had no books. There were many desks that had no books

**R:** Ahaa, books are available. We have books, but we have one problem. PEDEP have their own rules, that when a book goes missing whoever lost it must pay for it, he/she has to replace it. Therefore, this arrangement of telling the pupils that they have to pay for the books they lose, has scared them to borrow books. But we have books.

The arrangement at this school is for the pupils to borrow the books and return them at the end of the term. From my observation in the head teacher's office, it is true that books were indeed piled up in boxes. It therefore startles any conscientious educator that six pupils would crowd around one textbook when textbooks are piled up in the head teacher's office ostensibly for fear of being lost. Here literacy is tied into a discourse of commodity and value, scarcity and access. At the same time pupils are disciplined into the social practice of scarcity as a result books are not something distributed democratically, they are to be guarded by any means. This is the impression given by the head teacher.

What comes out clearly from the data is that the pupil book ratio given by teachers was a theoretical possibility rather than reality on the ground. At primary school 'W' books owned by the school were normally distributed during lesson time and collected at the end of the lesson to be used by another class. At the end of the day, they were stored in the head teacher's office. Thus, pupils were not allowed to take schoolbooks to their home. This means they could not engage in private study at home, if they did not own their personal copies.

## 6.0 Conclusion and recommendations

We have seen that some homes lack materials that facilitate literacy acquisition and development such as the broadcasting media (TV, radio), print media - newspapers and books. The importance of these literacy materials lies in the contribution to the process of acculturation and scaffolding the development of children's literacy practices. These media (TV, radio and newspapers) and books apart from providing information which relate to children's subject content learned at school, they also help to develop their language in terms of increasing their vocabulary and grammar of their language – in this case Kiswahili (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986; Gee, 1996; Banda, 2003). I have nonetheless noted that the mere availability of literacy resources without the help of the parents, older siblings, teachers and significant others in the interaction with these resources does not guarantee the children's literacy practices.

A corollary of this, in relation to textbooks at school, I have shown the curious paradox that while textbooks are source of knowledge and provide a scaffold for inducting learners into academic writing literacy, they are at the same time locked away for fear of being lost and hence not accessed by learners. The perception of value and scarcity has dictated a whole range of behaviour. In this part of the world, books are so scarce and valuable to the extent of being locked away to protect them from being lost.

Regarding the necessity of textbooks, I recommend the need for a new outlook. Textbooks are for reading not for locking them away for fear of being lost. I suggest that books should at least be distributed in classroom during lesson time and collected afterwards. Parents too, should be encouraged to buy personal textbooks for their children. I am aware that in most cases parents are not able to do this unless they are first empowered economically because most of them are too poor to afford textbooks for their children.

Under the circumstances, it is prudent to suggest that before parents can be asked to empower their children, the government should formulate workable and sustainable policies to empower parents educationally and economically. Specifically, the government, in collaboration with various national and international non-governmental organizations can arrange to give micro-credits to these parents so that they will in turn use these credits to invest in small business projects. In this way, profit from these projects would consequently be used to buy textbooks, newspapers, and even television (for those with electricity) and radio sets. Children should then be encouraged to watch educational TV programmes and listen to educational radio programmes. They should also be encouraged to read serious newspapers, which print various articles of different subjects instead of reading papers which print only sensational news.

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