

Perceptions on the Level of Influence of Parental Involvement on Acquisition of Literacy Skills among Pupils in Primary Schools in Akithi Division, Tigania West District, Kenya

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Abstract

Literacy is the basis for most school learning, and one of the surest predictors of academic achievement. Studies indicate that parents in Kenya are not actively involved in their children's literacy acquisition process. This study sought to explore parents', teachers', and pupils' perceptions on the influence of parental involvement on acquisition of literacy skills. The study was carried out in Akithi Division, Tigania West District, Kenya. Descriptive survey research design was used to carry out this study. Data collection was done using questionnaires and interview schedules. The study suggests that schools administrators need to formulate clear policy guidelines on the involvement of parents in the literacy development of their children.

Keywords: "influence", "Parental improvement", "Acquisition", "Literacy skills"

Background Information

Studies indicate that children in Kenya are lagging behind in literacy skills. Uwezo (2011) in the Annual Learning Assessment-Kenya 2010, found that children in Kenyan primary schools are poorly grounded in literacy skills. Literacy is conceptualized as composed of multiple dimensions that cross the boundaries between oral and written language, that affect each other reciprocally and that are greatly influenced by the learning opportunities provided to children at home and school (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998).

The area of the brain that learns the rules of language remains open to stimulus until around age six (Hildebrand, 2000). The area for learning vocabulary, Hildebrand (2000) further explains, stays open a lifetime but is most receptive in early childhood between the ages of two to the age of six years. Strickland (2004) notes that learning to read and write is an ongoing process and contrary to popular belief, it does not suddenly begin in the kindergarten or first grade. What children learn from listening and talking contributes to the ability to read and write (Juel, 1988). Young children learn the uses of print in their lives as they observe adults read, make lists, and make use of literacy as they go about everyday lives (Strickland, 2004). Children who come from richer home literacy environments show high level of reading knowledge and skills at the start of kindergarten and throughout primary school (Hildebrand, 2000).

Parents and teachers therefore, share the responsibility for helping children become readers. Hildebrand (2000) noted that when parents set the stage for reading during the early years of life, children are better prepared to learn the reading skills taught at school. The home learning environment and the parenting children receive influence their language and literacy development and the skills they bring to school (Hart & Risley, 1995). Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influence not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills, but also on pupil's interest in reading, attitude towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 1991). This stage of child development coincides with the time when parents are the main teaching agents. Very few studies have been carried out in Kenya on parent', teachers or pupils' perceptions on the influence of parental involvement on acquisition of literacy skills by children. This gave impetus to the current study.

Statement of the Problem

Literacy is critical to a child's academic development. However, UNESCO and *Uwezo-Kenya* reports have questioned the level of literacy skills among pupils in Kenyan primary schools. This study sought to establish the perceptions of parents, teachers and pupils on the level of influence of parental involvement in the acquisition of literacy skills among pupils in primary schools in Akithi Division, Tigania West District, Kenya.

Research Objective

This study sought to achieve the following objective:

To explore the perceptions of parents, teachers, and pupils on the influence of parental involvement in the acquisition of literacy skills among pupils in primary schools.

Methodology of the study

Using the descriptive survey, this study intends to explore parents', teachers' and pupils' perceptions on the influence of parental involvement on acquisition of literacy skills by their children in Kenya. The study was

conducted in eight public primary schools in Akithi Division, Tigania West District, Kenya. The accessible population was 1581 subjects made up of 1031 standard eight pupils, 144 lower primary school class teachers and 406 parents in the School Management Committees (SMC) in 29 public primary schools in Akithi Division. Eight schools were selected through simple random sampling to participate in the study. All the standard eight pupils, a class teacher and the parents' representative in the SMC from each lower primary level in the sampled schools were purposively selected to participate in the study. Standard eight pupils were selected since they possess language skills that would enable them to understand and respond to items on the questionnaire. The pupils also have knowledge about parental involvement from their own experiences. Lower primary school class teachers were considered because they handle pupils at a time when they acquire basic literacy skills while SMC's were interviewed because they form an important linkage between parents and schools. Questionnaires and an interview schedule were used for data collection. The researcher ensured content validity through the expert judgment of the supervisors as advanced by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). Data was analyzed using percentages and frequencies and presented using tables and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Information

Section one of the pupils' questionnaire required respondents to state their gender, the type of family they lived in and the highest level of education attained by their parents. The teachers' questionnaire required respondents to state their gender, academic qualification and their teaching experience. The researcher sought to establish the gender of the pupils, teachers and parents who participated in the study and the results are reflected on Table 1.

Table 1

Respondents' Gender

Respondents	Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Teachers	Males	6	25
	Females	18	75
Pupils	Males	154	53.7
	Females	133	46.3
Parents	Males	9	37.5
	Females	15	62.5

Among the teachers, female respondents made up 75% while males made up 25% of the respondents. The pupils surveyed comprised 53.7% males and 46.3% females. Among the parents, female respondents made up 62.5% while the males made up 37.5% of the respondents. This shows that the number of female parents who participated in the study was higher than that of the males.

Family Status

The researcher collected data concerning the kind of family in which the respondents were brought up in terms of who they lived with. The results are revealed in Table 2.

Table 2

Family Status

Pupil lives with	Frequency	Percentage
Father and Mother	196	68.3
Father only	12	4.2
Mother only	54	18.8
Guardian	25	8.7
Total	287	100

The study found that respondents who lived with both their parents were the majority at 68.3 % followed by those who lived with their mothers only at 18.8%. Respondents who lived with their guardians comprised 8.7 % of the respondents while those who lived with their fathers only were the least at 4.2 %. This shows that majority of the respondents lived with at least one parent while others (8.7%) lived with their guardians and therefore had an opportunity to receive assistance in acquiring foundational literacy skills at home.

4.5 Perceptions on the Level of Influence of Parental Involvement on Literacy Acquisition

This study aimed at exploring perceptions on the level of influence of parental involvement on acquisition of literacy skills among pupils in primary schools in Akithi division, Tigania west district, Kenya. The study sought to determine parents', teachers' and pupils', opinion on the level of influence that parental activities such as reading to children, listening to children reading and checking of homework had on acquisition of literacy skills by children. The influence of other activities such as parents buying books, teaching children how to read and write, providing a literacy rich environment and consulting with teachers was also considered.

Teachers and pupils were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that parental involvement influences acquisition of literacy skills by their children. Table 3 shows the responses of teachers and parents on the level of their agreement with the statement.

Table 3

Parental Involvement Influences Acquisition of Literacy Skills

Respondents	Strongly agree %	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Teachers	52.2	25.0	12.5	0	8.3
Pupils	58.9	35.9	2.1	1.7	1.4

The study established that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement at 52.2% for the teachers and 58.9 % for the pupils. 25 % of the teachers and 35.9 % of the pupils agreed with the statement. 8.3 % of the teachers strongly disagreed with statement while 1.4 % of pupils strongly disagreed with the statement. 1.7 % of the pupils disagreed with the statement.

Parents were asked to rate the level of influence that parental involvement has on acquisition of literacy skills. The parents' responses are recorded on Table 4

Table 4

Parents' Opinion on the Influence of Parental Involvement on Literacy Acquisition

Level of influence	Frequency	Percentage %
Highly influential	14	58.3
Moderately influential	6	25.0
Has little influence	3	12.5
Not influential	1	4.2
Total	24	100

58.3% of the respondents indicated that parental involvement was highly influential while 25 % of the parents indicated that it was moderately influential on literacy acquisition. 12.5% of the respondents rated parental involvement as of little influence while 4.2 % of the parents rated it as of no influence on acquisition of literacy skills.

Information on Table 3 and Table 4 shows that majority of the teachers, pupils and parents agree with the view that parental involvement influences acquisition of literacy skills by their children. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Senechal and LeFevre (2002) who observed that of all school subjects, reading has been found to be most sensitive to parental influences.

Teachers were given eight (8) statements which describe activities that indicate parental involvement. They were asked to indicate their opinion on the level of influence that each activity has on acquisition of literacy skills by children. Table 5 presents the teachers responses

Table 5

Teachers' Opinion on the Level of Influence of Parental Involvement on Acquisition of Literacy Skills

Activity	Highly influential %	Moderately influential %	Undecided %	Has little influence %	Not influential %
Reading to children at home	41.7	29.2	0.0	25.0	4.2
Listening to children reading	45.8	45.8	0.0	4.2	4.2
Teaching children how to read and write at home	66.7	12.5	8.3	4.2	8.3
Providing a literacy rich environment	75.0	12.5	4.2	8.3	0.0
Rewarding children.	62.5	25.0	0.0	4.2	8.3
Meeting with teachers	66.7	25.0	0.0	4.2	4.2
Checking children's homework	62.5	20.8	4.2	12.5	0.0
Buying books	58.3	29.2	4.2	0.0	8.3

On parents reading to children at home, 41.7% of the respondents indicated that it was highly influential while 29.2% rated it as moderately influential. 25% of the teachers rated parents reading to children as of little influence while 4.2 % of the respondents indicated that it had no influence on literacy acquisition. 45.8% of the teachers indicated that parents listening to children reading to them was highly influential while another 45.8% of the teachers rated it as moderately influential on acquisition of literacy skills. 4.2 % indicated that it had little influence while another 4.2 % rated it as of no influence on literacy acquisition. Parents teaching children how to read and write at home was rated as highly influential on literacy acquisition by 66.7% of the teachers.12.5% of

the teachers rated it as moderately influential while 8.3 % of the respondents indicated that it was not influential. An additional 8.3% of the respondents held no opinion on the influence of parents teaching children how to read and write at home on literacy acquisition while 4.2 % of the teachers viewed it as of little influence.

‘Parents providing a good environment for learning how to read and write at home’ was rated as highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills by 75% of the teachers while 12.5 % of the teachers rated it as moderately influential. 8.3 % Of the respondents rated it as of little influence on acquisition of literacy skills while 4.2 % of the teachers held no opinion on the same. On parents rewarding children for reading and writing well, 62.5% of the teachers opined that it was highly influential while 25% of the teachers were of the opinion that it was moderately influential on literacy acquisition. 8.3 % of the teachers indicated that parents rewarding children for reading and writing well was not influential while 4.2 % of the teachers rated it as of little influence on acquisition of literacy skills. ‘Parents meeting with teachers to discuss their children’s progress in reading and writing’ was rated by 66.7 % of the teachers as having high influence on acquisition of literacy skills while 25 % of the teachers rated it as moderately influential. 4.2 % of the teachers rated parents meeting with teachers as of little influence while another 4.2 % of the teachers indicated that it was not influential on acquisition of literacy skills. On ‘parents checking their children’s homework’, 62.5.% of the teachers opined that it was highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills while 20.8 % of the teachers indicated that it was of moderate influence. 12.5% of the respondents indicated that it had little influence on acquisition of literacy skills while 4.2 % had no opinion about the influence of parents checking of their children’s homework on acquisition of literacy skills. Parents buying books for a child to read was rated as highly influential by 58.3 % of the teachers while 29.2 % of the respondents rated it as moderately influential. 8.3 % of the teachers rated parents buying books for children to read as not influential on literacy acquisition while 4.2 % of the teachers held no opinion on the same.

A similar item was included on the pupils’ questionnaire that sought information on the level of influence of eight (8) selected parental activities on acquisition of literacy skills by their children. Table 6 presents the pupils’ responses.

Table 6

Pupils’ Opinion on the Level of Influence of Parental Involvement on Literacy Acquisition

Activity	Highly Influential %	Moderately Influential %	Undecided %	Has little Influence %	Not Influential %
Reading to children at home	66.6	25.1	1.7	4.5	2.1
Listening to children reading	67.6	24.7	2.8	3.8	1.0
Teaching children how to read and write at home	76.6	17.1	1.0	2.8	2.4
Providing a good environment for learning how to read and write at home	77.4	19.9	0.3	1.0	1.4
Rewarding children for reading and writing well.	64.5	25.4	2.1	2.1	5.9
Meeting with teachers to discuss their children’s progress in literacy	67.6	22.6	1.7	2.8	5.2
Checking of children’s homework	74.9	16.7	2.1	3.5	2.8
Buying books for children.	75.3	19.9	1.0	1.4	2.4

‘Parents reading to children at home’ was rated as of high influence by 66.6% of the pupils while 25.1% of the pupils rated it as of moderate influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 4.5 % of the pupils indicated that parents’ reading to children at home was of little influence while 2.1 % of the pupils indicated that it had no influence on literacy acquisition. 67.6 % of the respondents rated ‘parents listening to children reading to them’ as of high influence on acquisition of literacy skills while 24.7% of the respondents rated it as of moderate influence. 3.8 % of the pupils indicated that parents listening to children reading was of little influence while 1 % of the pupils rated it as of no influence on acquisition of literacy skills.

Parents teaching children how to read and write at home was rated as highly influential by 76.6 % of the respondents while 17.1 % of the respondents rated it as of moderate influence on literacy acquisition. 2.8 % of the parents rated parents teaching children how to read at home as of little influence while 2.4 % indicated that it had no influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 77.4 % of the pupils indicated that ‘parents providing a good environment for learning how to read and write at home’ was highly influential while 19.9 % of the respondents rated it as of moderate influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 1.4 % of the pupils indicated that providing a

good environment for learning how to read and write at home was not influential on acquisition of literacy skills while 1 % indicated that it had little influence.

Parents rewarding children for reading and writing well was indicated as highly influential by 64.5 % of the respondents while 25.4 % of the respondents considered it as of moderate influence on acquisition of literacy. 5.9 % of the respondents considered it not useful while 2.1 % of the pupils viewed it as of little influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 67.6% of the pupils rated 'parents meeting with teachers to discuss children's progress in reading and writing' as highly influential on literacy acquisition while 22.6% of the pupils rated it as of moderate influence. 5.2 % of the pupils rated parents meetings with teachers as of no influence while 2.8 % of the pupils indicated that it was of little influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 'Parents checking of their children's homework' was rated as highly influential by 74.9% of the pupils while 16.7 % of the pupils rated it as of moderate influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 3.5 % of the pupils rated 'parents checking of their children' homework as of little influence while 2.8 % indicated that it had no influence on literacy acquisition. On 'parents buying books for their children to read', 75.3% of the pupils opined that it was of high influence while 19.9 % of the pupils were of the opinion that it has moderate influence on acquisition of literacy skills. 2.4 % of the respondents indicated that parents buying books for children was not influential while 1.4 % of the respondents rated it as of little influence on literacy acquisition.

Analysis of the information on both Table 5 and Table 6 indicates that all the eight (8) selected indicators of parental involvement were rated as highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills by the majority of the respondents. Majority of both teachers and pupils rated 'parents reading to children' as highly influential on literacy acquisition at 41.7 % and 66.6 % respectively. This concurs with the finding by Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1992) who observed that children who are read to at an early age tend to display greater interest in reading at a later stage. Cullinan and Bagert (2008) found that by reading stories that are on the interest level, but beyond their reading level, a parent can stretch young readers understanding and motivate them to improve their understanding.

The majority of teachers and pupils indicated that 'parents listening to children reading at home' was highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills at 45.8 % and 67.6 % respectively. This view is in line with the finding by Browne (2004) that practice in reading given to children at home enhances their competence at reading. In addition, this finding is further supported by Close (2001) that children, including weak readers and additional language learners may benefit from 'parent listening to children read'.

Information on Table 5 and Table 6 illustrate that majority of the teachers and pupils were of the opinion that parents teaching children how to read and write at home was highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills at 66.7 % and 76.6 % respectively. This view agrees zynkosky (2011) finding that teaching children to read and write outside the school not only gives them more practice, but also teaches them writing's practical uses and increases the likelihood that they'll reap it's indirect benefits. This is important even before children start schooling as is observed by Close (2001) that lack of exposure to letters of the alphabet by school entry among low socio-economic status children delays their ability to acquire foundation-level literacy.

'Parents providing a good environment for learning how to read and write at home' was also rated as highly influential on literacy acquisition by the majority of teachers and pupils at 75 % and 77.4 % respectively as is shown on Table 3 and Table 4. This view is also shared by Johnson (2007) in studies carried out in Pretoria, South Africa which revealed that the nature of home reading environment influenced the reading ability of children and contributed to the development of children's language and literacy skills. In addition, Hornby (2000) found that parents can make a significant contribution to the development of their children's literacy by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading and writing. This finding is also in agreement with the view of Anderson (2000) that the home environment plays an important role in the development of children's language and literacy skills during pre-school and early years of schooling.

On parents rewarding children for reading and writing well, majority of teachers (62.5%) and pupils (64.5 %) expressed the opinion that it was highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills by children. This finding is in line with the view by Hornby (2000) that when parents reward children for good performance in school tasks, they have a chance of getting the impression that what they are learning is important and that knowledge is valued in society.

Information on Table 5 and Table 6 reveal that majority of teachers (66.7 %) and pupils (67.6 %) indicated that 'parents meeting with teachers to discuss their children's progress in reading and writing' was highly influential on acquisition of literacy skills. This view is in agreement with assertion by Clay (1991) that parents connect with children in personal ways across time and can play a special role in helping teachers understand how their children relate to print outside classroom. In addition, it concurs with the view by Gestwicki (1996) that parents and teachers who can comfortably share personal observations and insights, general knowledge and ideas, and specific incidents and reactions expose each other to a wealth of information that may help provide the most appropriate response for each child.

Majority of teachers and pupils were of the opinion that parents checking their children's homework was

highly influential on literacy acquisition at 62.5 % and 74.9 % respectively as is shown on Table 5 and Table 6. This view is in agreement with that of Brown (2004) that it is what parents do at home with respect to homework monitoring that appears to have the greatest impact on students' outcomes.

Parents buying books for children was also rated as highly influential on literacy acquisition by a majority of teachers (58.3 %) and pupils (75.3%) as is indicated on Table 5 and Table 6. The teachers' and pupils' opinion on the influence of books in the home reinforces the view by Snow (1991) that reading comprehension is related to provision of books in the home and to conversation between adults and children about the content of books and articles they have read.

Teachers were asked to suggest additional parental activities that may influence acquisition of literacy skills by their children. Table 7 presents the analysis of the teachers' suggestions of additional parental activities that may influence literacy acquisition.

Table 7

Additional Parental Activities that may Influence Acquisition of Literacy Skills

Activity	Frequency	Percent %
Parents acting as good role models and mentors for their children	16	66.7
Parents providing proper medical care and a healthy diet	15	62.5
Parents motivating teachers	4	16.7
Parents instilling discipline in their children	10	41.7
Parents promoting a reading culture at home	2	8.3

'Parents acting as good role models and mentors for their children' was suggested by 66.7 % of the respondents. Another 65.2 % of the teachers suggested that parents providing proper medical care and a healthy diet could influence the acquisition of literacy skills by their children. Parents instilling discipline among their children was suggested by 41.7 % of the respondents as an activity which may influence acquisition of literacy skills. 16.7 % of the teachers suggested that acquisition of literacy skills could further be influenced by parents motivating teachers. Parents' promoting a reading culture at home was suggested by 8.3 % of the respondents as an activity which may influence acquisition of literacy skills.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions are drawn:

- i. This study established that parents, teachers and pupils believe that parental involvement enhances acquisition of literacy skills by their children
- ii. It was found in this study that respondents rated parental activities such as reading to children, listening to children read, provision of a literacy-rich environment, buying of books, checking of children's homework, consulting with teachers and rewarding of pupils for good performance in literacy as influential on literacy acquisition.
- iii. This study revealed that a significant number of respondents do not consider parental involvement as having much influence on acquisition of literacy skills by their children.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are necessary in light of the responses from the respondents and in view of the research findings:

- i. The government should enhance community sensitization on the value of parental involvement in literacy acquisition. This could be done through the mainstream media, community radio services as well as through religious organizations.
- ii. School managers should put in place clear policies on the involvement of parents in their children's acquisition of literacy skills. This could be done through the introduction of open days for parents with children in public primary schools dedicated to parents/teachers individual consultation over children's progress in literacy as well as other academic areas. This is especially vital since parents in Kenya have been rated lowly on involvement in literacy acquisition in other studies.
- iii. Schools should conduct regular workshops for parents to guide them on how to assist their children acquire literacy skills. This is especially vital since related studies found that parents consider themselves inadequately skilled to assist their children to acquire literacy. Hindrances to involvement like poverty and illiteracy can be overcome through training of parents since a lot of parental interventions to children's literacy do not require financial inputs. These include reading to children, listening to children read, consulting with teachers as well as checking of children's

homework. Other interventions, such as parents listening to children read, showing interest in a child's academic work and provision of a literacy rich environment do not necessarily require parental literacy.

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