

## Parents' Perceptions of their Involvement in their Children's Literacy Development in the Foundation Phase in King Williams Town

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**ABSTRACT** The perspectives of eight parents and four educators on parental involvement in literacy development in the early childhood were explored through a qualitative interpretive case study. Data which were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations were thematically analysed. Results of the study indicate that parents in King William's Town, South Africa are not effectively involved in their children's acquisition of literacy because the parents do not feel appropriately empowered to influence the development of their children's literacy. The paper also found that shortage of literacy material like newspapers, magazines, story books, and computers militated against parental involvement. The findings reveal a need for parental empowerment in terms of knowledge and skills, understanding and allocation of resources. It also recommended a collaborated effort between schools and parents in the formulation of parental involvement policies and programs. Educators' workshops on parental involvement were deemed necessary for continuing teachers' professional development skills.

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of parental participation in the development of literacy of their children has been documented by many researchers, practitioners, and policy makers, among them Kaperu (2004), Harris and Goodall (2008) and Murungi et al. (2014). Research shows that parental involvement consistently improves students' overall learning (Jeynes 2013) and literacy development (Senechal and Young 2008), hence its centrality in the field of education. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2008), OECD (2012) and Urban (2009) commenting on parental involvement say that in a child's education, parental involvement is regarded as a robust predictor of learner accomplishment and is understood as critical to first-rate care and education of young children. This means that parental involvement at a younger age sets the tone of how children learn in the future and their orientation towards success. Thus, the earlier parents get involved in their children's education, the better.

The concept of parental involvement is based on the premise of shared responsibility between educators and parents, whereby the two parties collaborate for the success of children. Adekola (2007) states that good commu-

nication, coordinated partnership and a concerted working relationship between parents and teachers is one of the key aspects that positively contribute towards children's literacy development. In this regard educators and parents have to work hand in hand with teachers in educating children, meaning parents have to be more supportive and participate in the education of their children. In support of parental participation, Oosthuizen (2003b) says that "parents have equal strength and proficiency when compared to teachers... They can contribute and receive services on an equal footing and can even share responsibilities and accountability with the professional staff in schools". This means that parents as co-educators have a strong influence on the literacy development of children and if they devote themselves to helping their children, they can actually make a positive impact in their learning process. With regard to children learning at home, the learning process becomes natural as they are familiar with their parents. Murungi and Muthaa (2015) affirm that the home learning atmosphere and the nurturing children acquire influence from their language, literacy development and the skills they bring to the formal schooling.

The significance of parental participation in the development of their children's literacy has been recognised in many countries, as witnessed by education policy statements and practice guidelines that indicate that parents are the first and most enduring children's educators (OECD

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2012). In line with international trends, South Africa, through the National Education Policy Act of 1996 and the South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 upholds the crucial role played by parents in the literacy development of their children. Section 6.1 of the South African School's Act stipulates that parents should take a dynamic role in their children's schoolwork and ensure that children complete their assigned homework. In other words, parents have a responsibility of assisting their children with learning at home and actively participating in the school life, thus making them co-educators with teachers. The importance of parental involvement in the school life is also entrenched in the School Act Section 6.2 that parents ought to be present at meetings convened by the governing body. School meetings generally give parents, teachers and management a platform to discuss pertinent issues affecting their children and the running of the school. It is also at these meetings that parents have opportunities to participate in various portfolios such as serving in school committees. This also gives them an opportunity to understand and/or learn the challenges faced by educators and learners in certain learning areas.

From the above discussion, it seems parental involvement at home is more beneficial for students' academic achievement (Wilder 2013) which highly depends on parents' role construction and perceived life contexts. However, even though literature shows that engaging parents is paramount to student achievement, challenges are still experienced in involving parents in the education of their children. These challenges consist of feelings of inadequacy by parents, adopting a passive role, language and cultural differences, lack of resources and role models, economic, emotional and time constraints (Christenson and Sheridan 2001; Robes 2011). In addition, the barriers include issues such as mistrust of schools, miscommunication, lack of subject knowledge and understanding on the part of parents on how they can be involved. According to Gibson (2002), the level of education on the part of parents is also a significant factor as parents who are illiterate might not possess the knowledge and skills desirable to act and to respond to the school demands and the amount of work expected by teachers. As such, most illiterate parents perceive that they cannot possibly assist their children and feel ashamed to

contribute and willingly participate in the educational programs offered in schools.

In the South African context, prior research shows that there are many challenges associated with parental involvement in the academic lives of children. For example, parents sometimes are not available to attend school meetings due to working related problems and other domestic commitments (Duku 2006). Parents' attendance to such meetings is very important as their participation is crucial for the success of the schools. Additionally, although plentiful research has been carried out on the significance of parental participation in the education of children; little knowledge exists regarding the role that parents should play in the development of their children's literacy. Grobler and Mestry (2007) explain that parents are frequently uncertain about what to do, how important they are, and often feel intimidated and uncertain of their partnership with the school. Speaking about parents in the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (2006) states that they seem to be facing challenges in assisting their children as most of them are illiterate and they lack confidence to constantly praise and encourage their children. This state of affairs demonstrates that there is need for further research to be carried in different regions so as to offer solutions that are target-based. More so, there is need for research into how parents are involved at the foundation phase because this phase establishes the ground for lifelong learning in children. In response to this gap in research, this study explores the perceptions of parents in relation to their role as co-educators at foundational phase. King William's Town Education District, South Africa was used as a case study. An insight into how parents perceive themselves in the education process will help identify measures that can be used to deal with the identified challenges.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 states that parents must assume an active part in educating their children yet it is silent on how parents can go about performing this role. While literature discloses that parents can make a noteworthy contribution to their children's literacy development (Hornby 2000; Driessen et al. 2005; Jeynes 2012), it also acknowledges and

shows that parents are the most important role players in supporting their children in learning (Harris and Goodall 2008). However, parents in the Eastern Cape in South Africa seem to face challenges in assisting their children as most of them are illiterate (Western Cape Education Department (WCED) 2006) and lack confidence to constantly praise and encourage their children. Thus, parents' primary role is to participate in their children's literacy and therefore fulfil the obligations and responsibilities outlined in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). In as much as literature emphasizes the importance of parental participation in literacy development and South Africa has endorsed the notion through enacting SASA of 1996 parents encounter hitches regarding their contribution in their children's literacy development. This study, therefore, sought to investigate parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development in the Foundation Phase.

### Research Questions

In carrying out this research four questions were posed

- 1) What are the parent's perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development?
- 2) What are the benefits of parental involvement in their children's literacy development?
- 3) Which activities and resources do parents use to promote literacy of their children at home?
- 4) What challenges do parents face in the development of their children's literacy in the Foundation Phase?

### Research Objectives

The research objectives were derived from the above research questions

- 1) To establish the parent's perceptions on their involvement in their children's literacy development.
- 2) To find out the benefits of parental involvement in their children's literacy development.
- 3) To realise the activities and resources parents can use to promote literacy of their children at home.

- 4) To establish the challenges parents face in the development of their children's literacy in the Foundation Phase.

### Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky avails a valuable theoretical framework that assists us better comprehend the social construction of literacy. According to Vygotsky (1978), until children acquire the use mental tools, their learning is mainly controlled by the environment; they attend only to the effects that are brightest or loudest, and they can recall something only if it has been constantly repeated. At the core of this theory (also known as Cultural-Historical theory) is the impression that development is the consequence of interactions between the child and his/her social environment (Vygotsky 1978). The home background and surroundings of well-resourced families and the research on the development of early literacy have lead our focus in the direction of philosophies that are socio-cultural in nature. This viewpoint was carefully chosen because it recognises that social interaction intensely influences cognitive development and that development biologically and culturally does not happen in isolation (Aronstam 2005: 16).

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory has been acknowledged as being relevant to this study as he focused on networks between people and their cultural context in which they partake and interrelate in shared experiences (Wood 2010). The basic assumptions underlying the Vygotskian theory are (a) that children build their knowledge (b) development cannot be detached from its social context, (c) learning can create development and (d) language plays an essential role in the intellectual development. Literacy is a multifaceted social practice which is acquired through dialogue and internship in specific societies where people make sense of their day-to-day literacy experiences in their diverse cultural contexts (Rutgers 2004). This societal cognition learning model proclaims that culture is the leading determining factor of individual developments. Consequently, a child's learning progression is influenced by the family culture and the environment in which he or she is encircled.

The Social Constructive theory of Vygotsky emphasises the influence of the family and the nature of story – book reading on the child's literacy acquisition (Cook–Cottone 2004; Dodi-

ci and Peterson 2003; Rashid et al. 2005). According to constructivists, the child, other individuals (parents), societal systems (family) and values, are significant in the content, processing and organization of new knowledge (Cook-Cottone 2004). The child's brain processes new experiences based on past experiences. Parents are seen as mediators between the child and written language, as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development provide structure, order and the necessary scaffolding to ensure access to new knowledge for the child (Cook-Cottone 2004). Parents of fluent and competent readers use a specific procedure, which includes scaffolding, to help children to understand stories, for example, by teaching them how to make wise guesses about the story (Saracho 2002). Vygotsky's (1978) theory stresses the essential role of societal interaction in the development of reasoning as well as the dominant role that the community plays in the process of making meanings. The theory upholds the impression that a child's home life is important, thus emphasising the interrelatedness and the interdependence in learning and development (Prior and Gerard 2007) in which parental contribution leads to boundless development and academic achievement of a child.

In this paper, there are two central issues that are under discussion, literacy and parental development and these concepts are explained in detail below.

### *What is Literacy?*

Traditionally, literacy has been frequently defined as the capability to read and write at a satisfactory level of expertise that is necessary for communication (Uzomba 2014). It is through literacy that the child is able to express their views, desires and be heard. However, recently literacy has taken on several connotations (Kajinga 2005). According to Magee (2014) the underlying belief of connecting sound to print depends on the established knowledge of spoken language in order to facilitate the reading process. A few examples cited are technical literacy, scientific literacy, and visual literacy. Even though it might be problematic to gauge the degree to which literacy has an impression on a person's overall happiness, one can easily deduce that an increase in literacy will lead to an individual's improved life and the development of societies (Anderson 2000; Roopnarine and Johnson 2012).

Information literacy is an essential tool for empowering persons and societies to improve literacy and develop the abilities of learning how to learn. Information literacy is the understanding of a set of abilities that enable individuals to recognise when information is required and the capacity to detect, evaluate, and effectively use the desired information (Council for Australian University Librarians 2001: 1). Acquiring the technique to learn requires a literate individual to possess the ability to recognise a need for, pinpoint access, assess the quality of, establish and use the information effectively (Barton n.d.).

From the above discussion, it seems there has been a paradigm shift on the views of literacy over the years from a view of literacy as print-based reading and writing, to one that includes social practices which nurture reading and writing such as audio and visual materials that recognise and draw on different social and cultural contexts (Arthur et al. 2011). The shift upholds the rights of children as capable people (Woodhead 2008), and that being 'literate' is much broader in scope. This means that literacy is now available in many more places and not limited to book-based texts (McLachlan et al. 2013). In the light of this discussion, literateness is an indispensable means for effective societal and pecuniary participation, contributing to peace, human development and poverty lessening and is the fundamental goal of Education for All (EFA).

### *What is Parental Involvement?*

Over the years, parental involvement has been defined differently and broadly so much that it may not be easy to measure it consistently. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2012) parental involvement refers to the formal and informal relations that parents have with Early Childhood Education services. This definition is limited in that it focuses on early childhood education yet parental involvement goes beyond this sector as shown by O'Donnell (2008) that parental involvement also refers to parents attending to school programmes or activities such as parent-teacher conferences, parent education programmes, and assisting in the classroom. This means that parental involvement can take place at foundation phase, primary and secondary schooling. As such, Dumont et al. (2014) are correct in saying that parental participation is any collaboration between a parent and child which might contribute to the development of a

child or to direct parent involvement with a child's school in the child's interests.

Parental involvement also refers to the appointment of substantial caregivers into the children's education at home, such as assisting their children with homework, and at school, such as interaction with their child's teacher and giving support to their child in school (Hoagland et al. 2014). This means that parental involvement is not only limited to biological parents, but also guardians and caregivers who have a vested interest in the education of the child. Although parental involvement refers to a broader group inclusive of high schooling, this paper focuses on parental involvement at Foundation phase so as to determine how parents view themselves in relation to the education of their children at this level.

The importance of parental involvement has caught the attention of many scholars whose research indicates a strong association of parental involvement and students' academic success. It demonstrates that students with actively involved parents perform much better in their schooling than peers whose parents are not participative (Chen and Gregory 2009; Phillipson and Phillipson 2010; Hsu et al. 2011). Consequently, parental involvement has been acknowledged as a dynamic force influencing student academic success (Hsu et al. 2011). Parental involvement includes any efforts to collaborate or to get children and other parents involved in the school programmes. Parental involvement in a way can be seen as crucial in upholding the child's right to education as outlined in the Declaration of Children's rights (1990) and all other statutory instruments on the Bill of Rights. Through their involvement parents ensure that children are exposed to literacy development.

### **Parental Involvement in Their Children's Literacy Development in South Africa**

South African School Act (Act 84 of 1996, Section 18) stipulates that governance in education is concerned with relations between people: interest groups, direct shareholders and establishments in the education system. Governance should be seen as co-operation and partnership to bring about positive educational through collaborative leadership and management. Stakeholders' relations are therefore very significant to the task of leading and manage-

ment of schools. Research findings have emphasised the importance of paternal participation (Hakoama and Ready 2011) as active parental involvement improves student's morale, attitudes and academic achievements. This means that when parents assume an active part, they reduce the risk of failure in their children's education.

The education sector's action plan encourages parental involvement in terms of providing financial support to school, and participating in school events and in parent-teacher association (MoE 2010). However, such parental involvement at school has little effect on students' academic performance. Studies have shown that rather than at school, parental involvement at home is more beneficial for students' academic achievement (Wilder 2013) which highly depends on parents' role construction and perceived life contexts. However, in the South African context, parents sometimes are not available to attend school meetings due to working related problems and other domestic commitments (Duku 2006). Whereas parents' attendance to such meetings is very important and their participation is equally crucial.

Studies in developing literacy in the 1970s and 1980s indicate that reading and writing skills will develop, provided that the process is supported by involvement in literacy events in the home environment, the community and the school setting (McLachlan 2007). Similarly, Woodrow et al. (2014), in their '5 Literacy Keys', include play with literacy materials and emphasize the role of families and educators as crucial to the development of early literacy.

### **The Benefits of Parental Involvement in Children's Literacy**

The possible benefits of parental involvement to students, parents and teachers in schools are well supported by documented evidence (Cheung and Pomerantz 2012; Kraft and Rogers 2015). Research indicates that students whose parents actively participate in their education achieve much better in their schooling than their peers whose parents do not participate (Hsu et al. 2011; Phillipson and Phillipson 2010; Chen and Gregory 2009), hence the need to find a way of promoting parental involvement in the academic learning of children. Psychologists also support this view that parents are the

first and most important teachers to the child during the early childhood years that are engrossed with profound chances to advance children's skills in cognitive, language acquisition, and problem resolving (Amoateng et al. 2004; Bartik 2014; Okeke 2014; Wilson 2015).

In relation to home learning, research shows that children are more inspired to learn when learning is associated to what they previously know. Indication by McLachlan (2007) also reveals that participation of children in literacy-related activities beyond the school environment provides them with the traditional, intellectual and linguistic capability and flexibility they need in order to endure in the broader society. With regard to parental involvement, Woodrow et al. (2011) also demonstrate that parents are often willing to share their opinions, understanding and experiences with educators in a tranquil and friendly atmosphere.

Studies in the United States (US) that explored the effects of diverse types of parental participation in homework revealed that different ways of support such as for children's autonomy were related with higher test achievement (Flouri 2006; Duckworth 2008). Research equally indicates that when parents are involved, nurture and play with their children from an infant stage, children present with higher intelligence quotients (IQs), as well as better linguistic and cognitive capacities in school (Rosenberg and Wilcox 2006). It then becomes imperative therefore to stimulate comprehensive partnerships; hence, schools must provide a variety of opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work together (Okeke 2014; Change 2015).

The quality and nature of the connections that children have with educators, neighbours, peers, protracted family, siblings and other parentages contribute in shaping the literacy progressive outcomes of the child. In view of this notion, Morin (2013) advises that, the greatest tip for school achievement is to ensure that teachers and parents team up as partners. In its endeavor to increase parental involvement in schools the Government of South Africa mandated the establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in order to create a healthier and stronger relationship between schools and communities (DoE 2004). Education for sustainable development implies that educators and parents collaborate in making important decisions about

educational alternatives and to ensure improvement in schools (Leithwood and Earl 2000). Because parental involvement includes any efforts to collaborate or to get children and other parents involved in the school programmes, parental involvement therefore can be seen as crucial in upholding children's rights to education as outlined in the Declaration of Children's rights and all other statutory instruments on the Bill of Rights. Through their involvement parents ensure that children are exposed to literacy development.

### **Challenges Parents Face in the Development of Literacy in Their Children**

Even though literature shows that engaging parents is paramount to student achievement, challenges are still experienced in involving parents in the education of their children. Some barriers are perceived by parents while others are perceived by educators. Barriers perceived by parents include feeling of inadequacy, adopting a passive role, language and cultural differences, lack of resources and role models, economic, emotional and time constraints (Christenson and Sheridan 2001; Robes 2011). More barriers include issues such as mistrust of schools, miscommunication, lack of subject knowledge and understanding on the part of parents on how they can be involved. It is a well-known tradition that teachers claim the school premise hence they design and enforce policies, procedures, programs, rules, regulations and plan routine and activities for children and the community (Pushor 2007: 10). Teachers use their professional education and knowledge as a backing to enforce programs without consulting parents who in turn have allowed the situation to prevail without questioning teachers' authority.

The level of education on the part of parents is significant as parents who are illiterate might not possess the skills and knowledge desirable to act and to respond to the school demands and the amount of work expected by teachers (Gibson 2002). The majority of illiterate parents feel disempowered to possibly assist their children and often feel embarrassed to participate and freely contribute to the educational programs offered in schools. On a more positive outlook Hsu et al. (2011) found that even though some parents may not comprehend what their chil-

dren are learning at school; if they devote some quality time with their children on a daily basis they are likely to be the best motivators to their children. Even without formal education parents who show interest, listen to and encourage their children when doing school work make a positive impact on academic achievement. Eggen and Kauchak (2010) postulate that when pupils are motivated, they have more optimistic attitudes regarding school and describe it as satisfying. Even the uneducated people also have the knowledge, skills, ethics and principles that they can give to their children. Because parents' psychological beliefs about how they interact with their children stem from their cultural values that they believe and practice within their home and community (Phillipson and Phillipson 2010).

### METHODOLOGY

The interpretive paradigm which sees the world as constructed, understood and experienced by the people in their collaboration with each other and societal systems (Holloway and Wheeler 2010) was utilised in this study. We used a qualitative case study method for this research which attempts to describe and understand social phenomena through insider perspectives on social action from the actors themselves as it is a true-to-life, interpretive method concerned with exploring phenomena from within (Flick 2009) in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The choice of this research design was influenced by the nature of the problem and by the desire to understand the perceptions and experiences of real life situations of individual educators and parents on parental participation in literacy development of their children. An in-depth, semi-structured interview to the parents in their home language was adopted as it was suitable for extracting the views and perceptions of participants through narration of the experiences of 8 parents and 4 educators purposively selected as participants. The atmosphere enabled the researchers to clarify points and raised fresh questions so as to gain a deeper meaning phenomenon. The usage of a digital voice recorder minimised the risk of recording inaccurate data. Data was analysed in a chronological order, describing the daily life of participants according to their meaning, revealing patterns, regularities and

critical events in terms of its emerging themes and sub-themes (Leedy and Ormrod 2005).

In conducting this study, the researchers took into cognisance the necessary ethical considerations. The participants' rights such as maintaining privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding harm, betrayal and deception including the right to withdraw from participating in the study at any stage of the research (Graham et al. 2007a) were observed. The researchers gained access to research sites and respondents through gatekeepers using the clearance letters from University Ethics committee and King William's Town District office as the research required an in-depth study where a considerable amount of time was spent on this task. Informed consent forms were also signed by all participants as a way for ensuring that they understood what their participation meant in this particular research (Bryman 2012). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality the researchers used pseudonyms for parents and coded the educators. Statements that could be allied to an individual were removed so as to reduce harm.

In this study trustworthiness was ensured through member checking. This meant that the researchers played back the recorded responses to confirm with all participants that their responses were correctly transcribed so as to endorse them as a true reflection of the actual interviews.

### RESULTS

#### Parent's Perspectives

The two variables have much influence on the ability of parents to develop literacy for their children as shown by Mrs. Dika's response that, "*It is difficult to help my child with literacy, because of my education. That is why I always tell my child about the importance of reading and writing.*" Expressing similar sentiments Miss Koliwe lamented that, "*I want to assist my children but I don't know how. I did not go far in learning myself and what they teach is different.*" Mr. and Mrs. Sogwala who preferred to be interviewed together had this to say, "*We want our children to be better than us but we work long hours because of little education so we come home late we both don't have the chance to go to school.*"

From the above statements, it seems that most parents are inhibited from helping their children by lack of literacy, meaning educational background is a strong determinant in how parents contribute to the literacy development of their children. Educational background, not only affects the literacy levels of parents, but also their social and economic standing intimated by Mr. and Mrs. Sogwala who work long hours because of low educational levels leading to their failure to assist their children with school activities. These findings, therefore, prove that educational background which is also a determinant of social and economic status plays a significant role in parental involvement or lack of parental participation in the literateness of their children. The current findings are in line with Shearer's (2006) conclusions that the impediments confronting parental involvement are inflexible work schedules, parental embarrassment of their own failure in education, lack of adequate written literacy skills and inadequate information on home-school partnership. Although the setting for Shearer's study is different, it seems that parents with little education are at a disadvantage when it comes to participating in the education of their children pointing to a need to empower parents with relevant skills on how to actively contribute in their children's education.

The findings of the study also concur with Altiparmak (2010) whose study on parents' perceptions on emergent literacy in the Middle East showed that the level of parental education was a critical factor for the existence of frequency of home literacy activities. This suggests that parents who hold high school diplomas are more likely to participate in literacy activities while those with less or no education find it difficult to be included in learning activities with their children. These findings echo the sentiments expressed by Menheere and Hooge (2010) that parents are frequently uncertain of their role, equally at home and in school, in relation to children's learning.

Responding to the same question, educators highlighted that poor levels of education amongst parents was one of the contributing factors for poor literacy development of their children. Educator 4 said, "*We need to develop the literacy of parents first because it is sometimes difficult to expect them to help whereas they lack knowledge and skills about educa-*

*tion.*" Similarly, Educator 2 advanced that, "*parents who are illiterate themselves cannot help their children hence the cycle continues if nothing is done to stop this failure.*" Educator 5 extended the argument by blaming parents of being reluctant to be involved in the literacy development when she said, "*when you call the parent to discuss the child's progress they do not come.*"

The responses given by the educators show that illiteracy is a cycle that needs to be broken by first helping parents who are hindered from helping their children because of illiteracy on their part. The responses given by educators echo those given by parents that the level of literacy on the part of parents determines the extent to which they can partake in the literacy growth of their children. As a result, there is need for all stakeholders to identify measures that can be used to deal with the problem of parental illiteracy so as to promote parental participation in the schooling of their children.

In order to promote parental involvement, some educators were of the opinion that frequent parent meetings with classroom educators were an important way of motivating parents to partake in the literacy development of their children, however, some educators pointed that parents rarely attended meetings except those called by the School Governing Body (SGB). This scenario points to the fact that education practitioners themselves may require support to make these learning partnerships succeed as building partnerships with parents was something to skillfully created over time as it could not just happen (McNaughton and Hughes 2008). This means that teachers themselves have to be equipped with relevant skills on how to deal with challenges of involving parents in schools so as to create stronger collaborations and partnerships because as Stewart (2007) says, the involvement of parents is vital whether as a part of the academic scenery or an extra-curricular activity.

#### ***Resources that Support Parents in Literacy Development***

The study went on to find out if parents have any support in the literacy development of their children through access to resources that can help them teach their children. It emerged that the resources to support parents varied from



very little to non-existent. Mrs. Mgoqo said, *“I know it is important for children to have books and toys but I don’t have money. We struggle to buy enough food as you can see we don’t even have a television except for this small radio.”* Expressing similar sentiments Miss Khona stated that, *“My child has love for books since she was young, though I don’t have means to buy these books since I’m not employed. I depend on my neighbours who is a domestic worker in town, she usually gives me some story books as well as the magazines that are expensive from her employer. My child cuts some pictures when needed at school from these magazines.”* Concurring with others Mr. Adams mentioned that, *“I don’t buy books but I bring newspapers from work, I don’t read everything in the newspaper for my children; I usually pick up the interesting part of their age, and this part must be understood by them.”*

From the above statements, it seems that many interviewed parents had challenges accessing resources such as books and educational toys due to lack of money. Lack of resources can affect the children negatively as they utilize information that is beyond their age group from newspapers and magazines. This points to a need for a well-resourced library that caters for children at Foundational age so that parents may access these resources.

During interviews, educators confirmed that most of the children came very poor families where finding a book to read in the house was very rare although most of the homes had a Bible and a hymn book. With the limited reading material and their level of education parents said they found it easier to keep their children motivated when watching television. That way they can help children read the subtitles in the programs. Parents also said their children enjoy programs such as Takalane Sesame, Yo TV and Take Five that are attention-grabbing and educational. In the light of this revelation, educators advised that parents could make television viewing a family affair where learning and interactive experience will develop critical thinking skills. However, educators raised a concern that Television could also interfere with children’s valuable learning time. To avoid Television interference, parents were encouraged to read the Television guide to ensure children viewed only the programs within the age limit and were instrumental in enhancing literacy development.

This study proves that it is imperative that educators not only know the learners but also understand their home background so as to adopt innovative strategies to help learners from poor homes. Switzer (2015) suggests four strategies that can be used by educators to help children. Firstly, learners can be allowed to borrow books from the school. Secondly learners can be provided with packets with reading cards, short stories that they take home and encourage parents to help them. Thirdly parents can be encouraged to help learners make shopping lists, duty rosters for chores to be carried out in the home and create inventories in the home. The fourth strategy is that the educator is always available for the learner or the parents when they need assistance with school work. These strategies can be applied fully or partially so as to help both the children and parents in King Williams Town.

## DISCUSSION

This paper revealed that while parents understand their roles in terms of the literacy development of their children, their level of education and socio-economic status proved to be a hindrance to their involvement in the literacy progress of their children. Educators blamed parents for not providing enough support, though there is no clear evidence of the school making any effort to inform them about their roles in the literacy development of their children. Contrary to educators’ beliefs that parents played truant when it comes to their participation in school activities, parents believed that they were fulfilling their roles, but that lack of parent, child and teacher interaction contributed to the underdevelopment children’s literacy. The findings confirm the assertion by Beh (2013) that the learning process is part of an ecosystem which includes parents and the community and is not restricted between the teachers and students. However, parental involvement may appear to be rather limited because a clear line of delineation continues to exist between educators and parents in terms of children’s education.

With regard to the definition of literacy development, McGee and Richgels (2000) defined the term as supporting all children growth, with thoughtful instruction to become reflective and motivated reader. However, parents and educators described literacy development as promot-

ing reading and writing. Literature confirms that the home environment influences early learners' literacy development as families afford children with various literacy enriched environments and activities. The spontaneous and dominant understanding of relations between the children's development and home-rearing environment is that the family setting enhances literacy in children (Olson et al. 2014; de Zeeuw et al. 2015). This finding concurs with van Bergen et al. (2016) who suggest that there is correlation of access to books that promote home literacy and the level of parental education with children's reading development in the foundation phase. That is why they insist on the importance of identifying variables that signify a true environmental consequence, as those are the variables that we can possibly manipulate to enhance the achievement of children's learning (van Bergen et al. 2016).

These literacy environments stimulate the children's awareness of the printed word. Teachers therefore should try to create a classroom environment similar to that, which the children are used to at home, a place where they can lie down or sit comfortably and enjoy reading their favourite books (Saracho 2002; Senechal and LeFevre 2014). This is because a literacy rich home environment can help children develop into successful readers and writers while children coming from poverty stricken homes were at a disadvantage. In these situation the onus remains with the schools to fill the gap children experience because of poverty

Parents who work with their children on a daily basis are helping to create successful readers (Evans et al. 2000; Gillanders and Castro 2011; Hannon and James 2013) although many parents may not realise that they have the skills or lack the skills that are needed to help their children succeed. As a result, educators must become knowledgeable on the skills parents possess in order to set up literacy network in the classroom that would be helpful for all parents.

It emerged in this paper that watching television and listening to the radio were tools used by parents to help children in learning. However, all parents regarded television as a disturbance when children are doing homework. Findings also showed that most children enjoyed watching TV for more than three hours per day. While the amount of time spent by children on TV tells us little about the quality of the programs watched, meaning that it is not known

whether would be passive or active viewing. Furthermore, reports from the parents indicated that their children preferred watching TV to engaging in any form of literacy which is detrimental to literacy and practice in reading and writing is the key to success. On the same note due to lack of reading materials some parents found it easier to help their children by encouraging them to watch TV.

## CONCLUSION

This paper explored the parents' perspectives in the literacy development of their children in the foundation phase. It emerged that the parents' level of education prevented them from being actively involved in the literacy development of their children. Even if parents wanted to be involved, the onus was on the educators to invite them. It also emerged that educators participating in this study felt parents were not always forthcoming when called to the school for any purpose other than SGB meetings.

The findings of this study also affirm that lack of resources prevents parents from helping in the literacy expansion of their children. Working long hours and coming home tired were some factors that hindered parents from helping children with their reading skills. The desire to adequately provide for the family was a priority for most parents. In the study setting, there was no evidence showing educators' effort to help parents improve their literacy skills so as to help their children. While it was not the best practice, it emerged that some parents over relied on TV to assist in the literacy development of their children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings presented above, this study recommends the following:

1. Educators need to plan and prepare parental involvement activities in the schools so that learners may fully benefit in terms of literacy development through parental involvement.
2. There is need to involve parents in areas such as planning, decision making and other activities.
3. Parents could be invited to tell stories, share ideas on cultural issues, read simple story-books and sing songs at school. This would promote trust and ownership of teaching and learning.

4. School libraries should be established to promote a culture of reading, love for books and to develop the literacy skills of the parent, educators and children.
5. Literacy programs need to be revisited.
6. Parents should establish a regular time for literacy homework and encourage their children to read.
7. Educators need to encourage and empower parents to develop literacy for their children

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