

Strategies for Pre-Primary Educators to Early Literacy Development: Case of Selected Private Pre-Schools in Chamwino District-Dodoma Tanzania

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Abstract

Review Article

This study investigated the strategies for private preschool educators to early Literacy development in the context of Tanzanian Pre-primary education. The study used a qualitative research approach within the case study design where Interviews with early school educators, inspectorate officials, heads of early schools and parents, focus group discussions and observation using an observation check list as well as documents obtained concerning early literacy were used to gather data. The major findings of the study indicated that, the pre-school educators conceptualize early literacy as the earliest stage of education to prepare a child to start well in the Early Childhood Education before proceeding to standard one. Different strategies were deployed in this study which includes; involving learners to integrate activities of speaking, listening, reading, writing and mathematics and parents should emphasize children on the mastery of literacy and numeracy skills. This study recommends that, early literacy should be understood as the first stage of education and a prerequisite to standard one then the Pre-school educators are advised to use cardboards or cloth books concerning daily life, family members, animals or food, read interesting and conceptually rich stories to children, create literacy rich environment to teach reading, writing, numeracy, mathematics and outdoor plays also the government of Tanzania should educate more teachers of early literacy and employ them.

Keywords: Pre-Primary, Pre-primary Educators, Early Literacy Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing, reading and arithmetic are the common problem that affects pre-primary education in Tanzania. This may be the results from the parents who are not able to take their children to school at early age. Ranea and Nell [1] argue that, children prepare to read long before they enter school. Early literacy is everything children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. Early literacy is a baby who chews on a book, a toddler who wants his favorite book read over and over, and a preschooler who "reads" the story to you from memory [1]. When literacy is an integral part of their daily activities, children actively construct their own literacy knowledge and strategies, and learn to read and write naturally and playfully [2]. These can be learned prior to starting school. A pre-school is a school for children who are too young, typically starting at age 2 or 3. The preschool experience teaches the child to socialize with peers and gives early exposure to oral language, letters, phonemes, words, math concepts, science and other important building blocks for early education [3].

Early literacy skills begin to develop in the first five years of life [4]. While it was believed that children's success at reading depended on getting the "right" first grade teacher, it is now accepted that the child's likelihood for success in the first grade depends on how much she's learned about reading before entering school. Strickland [5] argues that, the child's early experiences with books and language laid the foundation for success in learning to read. When children are encouraged to learn independently, and when teachers, parents, and communities work together to build optimal environments for that learning, children's success in reading and writing can be expected [6, 7, 4]. Learning to read and write is a critical achievement in life. Research reveals conclusively the link between early literacy and later academic and career success [8]. To ensure that every child becomes a competent reader and writer is a responsibility shared by teachers, families and communities [8].

The Education and Training Policy (ETP) [9] stipulated that, the Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (3Rs) are the basic literacy skills that everyone should master in order to progress in life. It has been noted that primary school teachers have not been well versed in facilitating pupils to develop these core basic skills. As a result some pupils have been reported to complete the primary education cycle without appropriate mastery of the 3Rs. [10]. According to Roskos [11] the essential early literacy teaching strategies provide an effective early literacy instruction to pre-school children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support that encourage early forms of reading and writing to flourish and develop into conventional literacy. Some strategies and rich teacher talk; story book reading; phonological awareness activities; alphabet activities; support for emergent reading; support emergent writing; shared book experience and into graded, content, focused activities to mention a few are of paramount importance to enable early literacy to prosper well [11].

Development of early literacy has recently received much attention in the literature in Tanzania. The realization that a substantial number of primary school leavers complete the primary circle of education while lacking the reading and writing skills has heightened interest in early literacy development [12]. The cumulative and growing research on literacy development in young children is rapidly becoming a body of knowledge that can serve as the basis for everyday practice of early literacy education [13]. Children begin learning the moment they are born; words are the building blocks of literacy Chediell [13] this shows that development of early literacy begins the moment children are born. Children respond to breast feeding and learn to hold properly the mother's breasts while breast feeding.

Early childhood policy development in both developed and developing countries seeks to ensure that young children have the best start in their lives [15, 16]. Teachers' work has a critical role on teachers' performance [17]. The first three years of exploring and playing with books, singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, recognizing words, and scribbling are truly the building blocks for language and literacy development [4]. Many states are working to improve teacher and program quality by establishing or revising state early learning standards, including credentialing qualifications and benchmarks or goals. Early literacy is an essential part of setting standards for many public or private school curriculum [6].

In Tanzania, the teacher training for literary development, show that, "many of our children enter primary school without the basic language skills they need to learn to read" [18]. Research shows that young children who are exposed to a lot of language through books and conversations tend to do better in school

[19]. Strategies for increasing literacy development focus not only on improving reading skills, but also on developing the higher-order thinking skills that enable students to comprehend, analyze, and communicate about ideas [18]. Generally, "there is lack of knowledge of what literacy instruction and assessment is its process, approaches and strategies for improving literacy achievement [18]". The study therefore seeks to explore this issue with specific focus on examining the preschool teachers' strategies for development of early literacy.

Pre-Primary Education in Tanzania

In Tanzania, education is largely divided into formal and non-formal components. The formal education component has a system of 2-7-4-2 -3+ structure. This system begins with 2 years of pre-primary education, this covers children aged 5-6 years old. Pre-Primary and Early Childhood Development are intended to promote the overall personality development of a child and fostering his or her physical, mental, moral and social characteristics and capabilities, and thus building through well-directed play and enjoyable activities a willingness to begin Primary Education. Pre-primary is followed by 7 years of Primary Education (Standard I-VII), which is 'free, universal and compulsory' for all children aged 7-13 years.

Conceptualizing Literacy Development

Literacy development is the realistic expectations of children's abilities to read and write based on their ages and stages of development. They differ in the way they acquire the skills of reading and writing, the styles and strategies they use for dealing with texts and the rate at which they progress as emerging readers and writers. Assessment of where children are in the process of becoming literate must take these variations into account. Such assessment can be documented through observation and performance sampling. Literacy Development Understanding Literacy Development Understanding Literacy Development Understanding Literacy Development Understanding Literacy Development Understanding Literacy learner's development is needed in order to provide appropriate support to enhance this development. Contemporary research on how children learn to read and write examines literacy development from the child's perspective. Teale and Sulzby [20] revealed that the Learning to read and write begins very early in life that is for almost all children in a literate society.

Literacy Development is the child's ability to understand and use language as an integral part of learning in all areas; talking and listening, reading, writing and counting. <http://ceea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/area>. The workforce Investment Act of 1998 defines literacy as competence in ability to read, write and speak, to "compute and solve problems at levels of

proficiency necessary to function in the job “and to do so in personal and professional situation. According to Hilda L. Jackman [21] literacy is the ability to read and write, it gives one of the commands of the native language for the purpose of communicating. This involves skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Early literacy generally refers to the language arts components of curricula that promote early forms of reading and writing by young children such listening to stories and drawing pictures McGraw [10].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global perspectives on Preschool teacher’s strategies for development of early literacy

The political and social significance of early literacy teaching is shown by high levels of government and school system intervention Laden *et al.* [22] phonetically explicit reading programs, for example are mandated for beginning readers in some parts of the United States of America (USA) Laden *et al.* (2005). In the United Kingdom, the widely implemented national literacy strategy contains explicit guidelines for beginning (as well as more advanced) literacy learners. Within the Australian context, there is also intense activity in terms of the development and implementation of particular methods of teaching literacy in the early years of school, as evidenced for example by the Victorian Early Years Literacy program (VEYLP) under the Education Victoria [23] and the New South Wales State Literacy Plan (NSWSLP) department of education and training [13].

Up to date, there continues to be diversity of opinion sometimes characterized as the ‘reading wars’ between advocates of a whole language meaning - oriented approach to teaching beginning reading and advocates of a phonics or word level approach. In addition to the controversy surrounding the teaching of early literacy, the definition of ‘literacy’ itself is also open to debate, in some contexts it is seen as being confined to reading, in some as confined to reading and writing and in other contexts it has a much broader definition. The Australian Government has defined literacy broadly as: “the ability to read and use written information, to write appropriately, in a wide range of contexts, for many different purposes, and to communicate with variety of audiences. Literacy is integrally related to learning in all areas of the curriculum, and enables all individuals to develop knowledge and understanding. Reading and writing, when integrated with speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking, constitute the valued aspects of literacy in modern life [24]”.

Evolution of pre-school teaching strategies for development of early literacy

The evolution of who in western societies was allowed to learn to read has a long history [25]. In Roman times only boys were taught to read [26].

Access to print was limited to scarce, handwritten manuscripts owned by wealthy [27]. The invention of printing press made universal literacy a realistic possibility [11]. In colonial America reading and writing were considered quite separate skills Keller and Cohen [28] while the British philosopher John Locke argued that reading instruction should begin as soon as a child could talk and should be like play Beatty [29] and that all education should take place in the home [30].

In colonial America in the 1600s and 1700s the goal of reading instruction was to read the Bible scriptures, reading started at young age and took place at home [31, 32] used formal didactic approaches and had the Bible as the primary text of instruction [33]. The job of teaching rested with mothers Wells [34] who were considered the best teachers for children from birth to age 5 [33]. To date the cumulative and growing research on literacy development in young children is rapidly becoming a body of knowledge that can serve as the basis for every day practice of early literacy education [6]. Early literacy refers to learn to read and write [11].

Effective early literacy instruction provides pre-school children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support that encourage early forms of reading to flourish, develop into conventional literacy Raskos *et al.* [11] the basics can be broken into eight specific strategies with strong research links which are rich teacher talk, strong book reading, phonological awareness activities, alphabet activities, support for emergent reading, support for emergent writing [17].

Strategies for development of early literacy in developing countries

In developing countries, the International Reading Association (IRA) in cooperation with the American Institute for Research (AIR) had created a toolkit for education stakeholders to use to improve early grade reading, literacy indicators and program in developing countries [7]. First principle is intended for national policy makers and global education project developers and implementers as a guide to incorporating reading and literacy into new projects UNESCO [35] and developing effective early grades reading programs. It describes a principled approach to observing core dimensions of effective early grades reading program, including active teaching and learning in supportive learning environments. Strategies and tools are provided to record evidence of first principles at work in local communities, schools and classrooms [11].

Basic education program activities in Ghana EDC [36] an innovative initiative to improve reading comprehension by teaching grade 1 children to read in their local language before making a transition in

English, to sustain a program, a cadre of trainers has been established to provide district level training to leaders.

In Malawi, the primary school support program (PSSP) USAID/MALAWI [37] is developing a literacy program that takes a balanced literacy approach: one that combines direct instruction with opportunities for pupils to engage in a variety of print-rich learning experiences. PSSP is conducting focused trainings for standards one and two teachers designed to help them develop improved skills for teaching reading. PSSP is working with teachers, students and community members to develop supplementary reading materials and reading clubs.

In South Africa the learning for living project, directed by the READ Educational Trust, Fleisch [26] demonstrates the effectiveness of book based intervention on student achievement in more than 1,000 rural South African primary schools. The READ approach to teacher training emphasizes on site, school - level support for implementation [38].

In Indonesia, a new Indonesian co - production of the renewed Sesame street television show provides 21st century programming for young children Gordian [39] an Indonesian Sesame Street or “Jalan sesame” is one of the largest partnerships between USAID and the Sesame workshop. Millions of Indonesian children can experience first steps in learning to read.

The Latin American and Caribbean region has Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) Culver *et al.* [40] has introduced a more child centered, interactive approach to the teaching of literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean. To date 15,000 teachers in 15 countries have received CETT training. Additionally through important alliance Scholastic books, CETT has made libraries of children’s books available in classrooms [41]. However, learning to read is a fundamental right of children Smith [42] in a changing world, but no project has been designed for preschool teachers’ strategies for development of early literacy.

Local perspectives on Preschool Teachers’ strategies for development of early literacy

In Tanzania, although the future plan objectives were to make sure that every day care centre, kindergarten, nursery and other pre schools has access to a teaching/learning kit, such activities are not being done by the MOEVT to date; they are left to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labor, Youth and Social welfare. However, it is not mentioned that, it is the responsibility of the MOEVT to deal with education matters of all levels in Tanzania.

Other future plan objectives of improving the quality of Pre School teachers through in service training in teacher resource centers (TRCS), community

based resource centers (CBRCS), and established private institutions in participatory and practical child centered methodologies: ensure orphan children access to preschool. The MOEVT have only promised to collaborate with the Ministry of Health on child health indicators (immunization, prevalence and treatment of diarrhea and other diseases) among children under age 5. However education matters concerning early literacy are not mentioned to be dealt with the MOEVT. Also the point of collaborating with the Ministry of Labor, Youth and Social Welfare in locating the environment suitable for establishment of day care centers is not clear. However the education policy has talked nothing concerning teachers’ strategies for development of early literacy.

In preparation of preschool personnel, some nursery school teachers receive two years training for example those who undergo Montessori type of training at Lushoto, Msimbazi, Mtwara, Wino and few other colleges. Trained grade IIIA teachers receive an orientation course of 3months. Preschool teachers, especially in private nursery schools, are generally untrained. The academic level of most preschool teachers is secondary O’level Kweka *et al.* [35] they are never trained the strategies for development of early literacy in Tanzania.

In Tanzania the education and training policy [43] paragraph 2.1 the expansion of early childhood care and activities are elaborated, that the health of the mother before the child is born is just as important as the care of the child after birth as well as its mental stimulation before she or he is enrolled for basic education. However, nothing has been said concerning early literacy in Tanzania. There are only policy directions for the future of the expansion of Early Childhood Care Development (ECCD) activities. Policy directions for the future of ECCD, as it is well reflected in ED-SDP, will involve and co-operate with parents, local communities, NGOS/CBOS and other private institutions in strengthening expansionary measures to meet pre-school and primary enrolments while at the same time ensuring that quality is maintained [35]. However currently nothing has been said by the policy concerning teachers’ strategies in the development of early literacy. The education policy emphasizes that the GoT will take an active lead in the delivery of pre-primary education and not early literacy [35].

On the policy level, the pre-primary education (5-6years) is under the control of the Ministry of Education and Culture ETP [43] whereas day care centers (years 2-4) fall under the authority of the Ministry of Labor, Youth and Social Welfare Kweka *et al.* [44] bases on the Act regulating the establishment of day care centers, government Gazette no 17 of 1981. The Ministry of health is responsible for the provision of health services to preschool centers. It is the MOEC’S intention to attach one pre primary class to

each primary school and involve NGOS/CBOS in the pre primary education. Up to date the Education and Training Policy (ETP) have not involved the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT) to deal with teachers' strategies in development of early literacy in Tanzania.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Discussion: Meaning of early literacy

Many of the Heads, educators of the private pre-primary schools and parents had the concept of early literacy as the earliest education, a pre-requisite for standard *one and* an important stage of which every child must undergo to improve quality of education in Tanzania. However, other respondents could not differentiate early literacy and early childhood education. Out of 69 respondents ten respondents saw that early literacy is the same as ECE. The main problem and perhaps frustrating all these efforts, was lack of teacher qualification. Of the four pre-primary schools, only two had fully trained teachers in preprimary education. Of the two pre-primary schools with trained teachers, one had 2 trained teachers but only one teacher had been assigned to teach a pre-primary class. The other school had a teacher who had the Montessori Certificate obtained after undergoing 2-year training in Montessori Approach at Lushoto. This meant that even coming together at the school level to share teaching experiences would be less productive. The entire teaching force at the school had no knowledge about pre-primary education. For the school having two teachers, this would somehow be possible but they were both untrained. So, collaborative learning at the school level was problematic. Secondly the heads of the two government primary schools where a pre-primary class was annexed had no knowledge about pre-primary education. There was less good to expect than bad in the process. One of the heads told the researcher that he had this strategy for quality monitoring; a strategy which appeared to be less successful due to lack of qualification: There is one primary school teacher from the Academic Committee who has been asked to monitor the quality of pre-primary education. He is a Grade 'A' teacher and he teaches Standard Three. The main strategy that seemed plausible under such constraints could be the use of Teacher Resource Centres. The fact that these served several schools meant that teachers within the field from different schools would meet together for collaborative learning and inquiry. In these gatherings, productive inquiry would be possible. The approach of Teacher Resource Centres is similar to the sub-cluster approach used in Bangladesh [45, 17]. Pre-primary educators have special training organized by the government in order to help educators to be more competent in teaching young children and cope the real teaching and learning environment.

To be more effective, the training rotates among the schools according to sub-cluster areas. During the training sessions refreshments are provided to participants and there could be small money for training expenses. It offers an excellent opportunity for reflective practice in a community of professionals.

The tendency of merging pre-primary information with primary school information had a high possibility for equating pre-primary education with primary education Mtahabwa[17] it reflected the policy-makers' scepticism about the inspectors effectiveness for quality monitoring. Thidly schools are not regularly inspected; these schools were supposed to be inspected using different criteria and recorded separately instead of mixing this inspection with the primary school inspection because they differed significantly. Use of separate sections within the same forms or separate forms altogether would suggest that the inspectors were aware of the differences between the two types of schools. Else, the reports suggested that pre-primary education in Tanzania was an extension of primary education [17].

Strategies deployed by Preschool Teachers to Facilitate Development of Early Literacy

Early literacy in Tanzanian early schools concerns, "learning by doing" (B2); to make sure that learners are involved in learning fully. It involves learning activities to make sure that, "children are involved in learning fully" (C3). The study found that various comprehensive strategies used in development of early literacy include self-monitoring, re-reading and using information from pictures, from world knowledge, from general familiarity and from syntactic analysis.

Creating literacy-rich environment

Analysis of the interviews revealed that educators from Chamwino District and kindergartens and high quality independent childcare centers and private early schools create a literacy rich environment to educate children. 80 percent of the respondents taught children by creating teaching aids found within, the environment. They used word and language games, songs, poems, nursery local rhymes and finger plays to improve the dexterity of the hands to be ready to start writing. For example, respondent from school A filled beans in a cup, children were supposed to pick only one seed of a bean and put it to another cup. When the pupils did this exercise hardened their fingers to start using a pencil or a pen. Interview with respondent from school C revealed that, cards and soda top covers are used in writing and mathematics, respectively. She stated "To make sure we work according to the environment, use teaching aids found within our locality".

The researcher found that 60 percent of the respondents included singing in their teachings, use of

pictures of animals to show letters, for example “Ee” for Elephant”. “Ff” for Fox while the drawing of the respective animals is there. Preaching the Gospel to children was included to build children spiritually, they also used tags to make letters by joining those tags. Children were motivated by being given motivation like sweets, biscuits, pencils and clapping hands to learners who answered the questions correctly. One parent responded that:- “I saw them singing, using pictures, preaching the Gospel to build our children spiritually well, they used tags to join the tags to make letters, pupils who did well were motivated by being given sweets, biscuits, pencils and clapping hands.

Use of small groups

Analysis of sitting arrangements revealed that educators grouped children in small groups of five pupils in one short table which was hexagonal and the teacher used the same table which was shorter than the normal tables, even the chairs were very small but the teacher set on a very short stool mixed with learners. This attracted the attention of pupils in the presence of the teacher. “This use of small groups of direct teaching about early literacy concepts such as sounds of language, makes pupils pay attention more and they understand what is being taught. There were three teachers in the same class rounding from one table to another. The fourth teacher was sited at the front of the class alerting wrong doers to stop doing activities which did not involve the learning and teaching process.

Early preparation of entry qualifications; Age of 2 years

Analysis of yearly plans revealed that educators had an early preparation of entry qualifications of 2 years. “We make sure that entry qualification is two years, this age enables learners to understand the proper way of teaching practically in order to make the child love to learn because there is learning, Teaching aids and in-door plays”.

Use of literacy centres

Analysis of observation check lists revealed that 20 percent of the early schools in Chamwino District had literacy centre rooms with pens, pencils, makers, papers, envelopes, greeting cards, stationary, stamps, list of teachers, children names, photos and mail boxes. However, these were private early schools but community early schools did not have such a thing.

Modeling

The researcher found that 1% of the educators in early literacy schools showed good role models; they wrote notes, wore name tags, kept a calendar and daily planner, post lists of children responsibilities, had weekly activities plans with parents and had a proper way of introducing new vocabulary word. “I am involving learners, I make them see and observe what I am doing, and they are involved in the learning process

by imitating the making of teaching aids and reading enable learners to read by themselves”.

Early literacy involves learning to integrate the four interrelated activities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. By developing these skills, young children can understand what is said and communicate their thoughts, wants and needs. Understanding stories and conversations depends on recognizing the words used. Telling stories, retelling events, and expressing needs, depends on knowing what words to use. The study found that in homes, children’s efforts at storytelling, reading, and writing are accepted with interest and enthusiasm and enhanced by adult questions and encouragement. Songs, nursery rhymes, and other forms of wordplay build phonemic awareness (the ability to hear the separate sounds in words), while encouraging the creative use of language. When adults and older siblings read to themselves and out loud to infants and children, they demonstrate the importance, and enjoyment of literacy.

Parents Participation in the Development of Early Literacy

Under this aspect the researcher aimed at establishing means and extent at which parents participate in the development of early literacy to their respective children. The study found that parents like teachers in the study area emphasize the early mastery of literacy and numeracy skills during the pre-primary years as they regard pre-primary education merely as a preparation for formal primary education. Parents’ perceptions reflect their awareness of the necessity of literacy and numeracy skills as a means of fighting poverty in Tanzania context. In the study area, parents help in construction of school buildings and donate food but they typically do not provide assistance in the classroom.

The evidence about the benefits of parents being involved in their children’s education in general, and their children’s literacy activities in particular, is overwhelming. The study found that parental involvement in their children’s learning positively affects the child’s performance at school in both primary and secondary schools, leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems at school.

Early reading experiences with their parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Indeed, parental involvement in their child’s reading was found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy. Furthermore, parents who introduce their babies to books give them a head start in school and an advantage over their peers throughout primary school. Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not

only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills, but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom. Parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education, while reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status.

The study also found that the earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer-lasting the effects. Although parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children's educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years. For example, parental interest in their child's education was the single greatest predictor of achievement at age 16.

The study found that children whose parents are involved show greater social and emotional development, including more resilience to stress, greater life satisfaction, greater self-direction and self-control, greater social adjustment, greater mental health, more supportive relationships, greater social competence, more positive peer relations, more tolerance, more successful marriages, and fewer delinquent behaviors. It is therefore important that parents and carers are aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading and writing as well as supporting at home the school's literacy agenda, both during the early years as well as the primary and secondary years of schooling.

CONCLUSION

Early literacy involves learning to integrate the four interrelated activities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. By developing these skills, young children can understand what is said and communicate their thoughts, wants and needs. Children's efforts at storytelling, reading, and writing are accepted with interest and enthusiasm and enhanced by adult questions and encouragement. Songs, nursery rhymes, and other forms of wordplay build phonemic awareness (the ability to hear the separate sounds in words), while encouraging the creative use of language. When adults and older siblings read to themselves and out loud to infants and children, they demonstrate the importance, and enjoyment of literacy.

Various comprehensive strategies used by pre-school teachers in development of early literacy include self-monitoring, re-reading and using information from pictures, from world knowledge, from general familiarity and from syntactic analysis. All of the domains of a child are development-physical, social-

emotional, and cognitive, language and literacy are interrelated and interdependent. Key early literacy predictors of reading and school success include oral language, Alphabetic Code, and print knowledge. Well-conceived standards for child outcomes, curriculum content, and teacher preparation help establish clarity of purpose and a shared vision for early literacy education.

It is important that parents and carers are aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading and writing as well as supporting at home the school's literacy agenda, both during the early years as well as the primary and secondary years of schooling. By reading to infants, parents can help their children develop an understanding about print at an early age as infants learn to make connections between words and meaning. By engaging children at an early age in reading and allowing children to observe those around them engaged in reading activities, parents can help foster a lifelong passion for reading that leads to benefits in all areas of development as the children grow older. Highly capable pre-school teachers are required to implement today's more challenging early literacy curriculum. Teacher knowledge, respect and support for the diversity of children's families, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds are important in early literacy development. Early literacy curricula and teaching practices should be evidence-based, integrated with all domains of learning, and understandable to staff members. Parent involvement programs should have a strong early literacy component that guides parents and caregivers in providing early literacy experiences at home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the research on literacy development continues to emerge, it is important to translate the findings into practical suggestions for supporting early literacy development. The following is a list of suggestions which can promote early literacy development for newborns to preschoolers:

- Pre-school teachers should introduce cardboard or cloth books with brightly colored pictures. Try to select books that reflect the child's own experiences such as books about daily life, family members, animals, or food.
- Pre-school teachers should frequently read interesting and conceptually rich stories to children; provide daily opportunities for children to write and help children build a sight vocabulary.
- Parents and family members can daily read and reread narrative stories at home and informational stories.
- The government and schools should provide a rich literacy environment by purchasing books for children; taking the children to the library; subscribing to newspapers and magazines; and

providing such materials as checks, menus, or greeting cards for play at reading.

- The government and schools should create an environment that is supportive of early writing by making sure paper, crayons, pens, pencils, and markers are available.

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