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*Family-Child Literacy Practices and Early English Literacy Skills in Pre-Primary Grade One Children in Gasabo District, Rwanda*

# Family-Child Literacy Practices and Early English Literacy Skills in Pre-Primary Grade One Children in Gasabo District, Rwanda

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**Abstract**
Rwandan children come from their homes to nursery schools with oral skills in Kinyarwanda, but most children come without any skills in the English language. Moreover, English is taught in pre-primary schools. This study aimed to examine the impact of family-child literacy practices on Early English Literacy Skills development in pre-primary grade one children in Gasabo district. A descriptive survey design was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The sample size was 380 respondents (teachers, children, and their caregivers). Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed. Close-ended questionnaires, an interview guide, and a tool for children's dynamic indicators of Early English Literacy Skills were used. Secondary data was obtained through document analysis. The qualitative data from the teachers' interview was recorded using a computer tablet, responses were cleaned, different responses were classified by identifying major responses for different themes, the record was transcribed and patterns emerging from major responses were identified. Interviews and narratives were also reported verbatim in the form of extracts. Quantitative analysis began with data entry, cleaning, analysis, and interpretation. Results from teachers showed high participation of caregivers mostly from urban families towards supporting their children in early literacy activities. Still, data from caregivers' involvement in different literacy practices was also more evident in urban families than in rural families. Conclusively, it is clear that the origin of grade one pre-primary children's early literacy development differences originates from their families and hence the need to remove all barriers in the children's family environment that hinder their early literacy development.

## Introduction
The purpose of this study is to examine family-child literacy practices that impact the development of Early English literacy skills in grade one pre-primary children in the Gasabo district, Rwanda.

Rwanda has invested significantly in improving the quality of pre-primary education (Rwanda Education Board [REB], 2019). Rwandan children come from their homes to nursery schools with oral skills in Kinyarwanda (REB, 2019). Kinyarwanda is the first language in the Rwandan context and is acquired or

learnt by children when they start talking in their homes. On the other hand, most of those children come without any skills in the English language. Moreover, English stands as a second language to Kinyarwanda (mother tongue), and in Rwanda, English is taught at all levels of education, including pre-primary schools. Therefore, as explained by REB, most children start grade one of pre-primary school with varying Early English Literacy Skills. The problem identified is likely to be rooted in caregivers' lack of involvement in their children's early literacy practices at home.

These findings are consistent with the work of (Feng, 2018) who argued that family-child literacy practices are not only for the children's literacy skills enhancement of 3 to 6 years attending pre-primary schools but also these practices develop the early literacy skills of young children of 0 to 3 years. Thus, while there is a lot of literature on parent-child literacy practices including reading on the international scene, there is lack of empirical study on family-child literacy in Rwanda.

Then, it is upon this bedrock that I examined the shared-literacy practices that occur in families and their impact on the early English Literacy results of grade one pre-primary children in the Gasabo district, Rwanda.

## Theoretical framework

Since this research explored the family-child literacy practices and the development of Early English literacy skills in grade one pre-primary children in the Gasabo district, it is grounded in the emergent literacy theory of Clay (1966). The strength of the Emergent Literacy Model lies in the explanation of literacy achievement from a view of development instead of a readiness view. The emphasis lies on early interactions with storytelling and book sharing with caregivers. This involves providing reading materials and engaging in various reading activities at a young age. Therefore, this theory and the study underscore the value of caregivers' participation in early literacy practices at home. The combined effort creates a supportive family setting for early literacy development. Furthermore, this study demonstrates how principles of emergent literacy theory can be applied in community literacy programmes to enhance the early literacy skills of children in Rwanda.

## Methodology

### *Research design*

The study used a descriptive survey design. It was helpful to gather information from a variety of participants, including teachers, grade one pre-primary children, and their caregivers. Notably, the design helped share the comprehension and views of respondents on the procedures through which family-child literacy practices impacted the development of English early literacy skills of grade one pre-primary children in the sampled sectors of Gasabo district. Rahi (2017) agrees with the above, stating that the design is typically used to gather information from a specific population or phenomenon at a particular point in time.

### *Study location*

This study was conducted in the Gasabo district, specifically in the Kimironko and Gikomero sectors, within the city of Kigali, Rwanda. 429.2 $km^2$ is Gasabo's surface area, and out of this, a large part is rural (84%), and the smallest part represents the developed urban area (16%) (Rwanda Census, 2012). Therefore,

the Gasabo district was selected for this study due to its diverse urban and rural settings. Its broader geographical and various economic coverage was quite relevant to this study.

***Study population***

Cox (2013) defines a research population as a group of individuals or entities that share the same characteristics. The study population consisted of six pre-primary schools (both privately owned and publicly owned), 187 grade one pre-primary children, six grade one pre-primary teachers of English, and 187 caregivers of the selected children. The above population was obtained from urban and rural settings. Only pre-primary schools that offered opportunities to children in grade one (aged 3) were targeted. In this study, the population of interest consisted of pre-primary children with their first experience in pre-primary education.

***Sampling techniques***

To produce enriching data from diverse geographical and socio-economic settings, this study employed both stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The researcher's decision to utilise the purposive sampling technique was in line with Bowling (2002), who explains that the purposive sampling method is an intentional method of selecting participants for research, allowing individuals to be chosen because they possess practical knowledge relevant to the study.

After obtaining lists of pre-primary schools from education offices, stratified random sampling techniques were employed. Mugenda (2008) supports the choice of this sampling technique by stating that a stratified random sampling strategy is essential when dealing with study populations that are heterogeneous. However, one of the weaknesses of this sampling technique is that selecting appropriate strata for a sample can be difficult (Mugenda, 2008). This weakness was minimised as follows: Pre-primary schools that offered opportunities to grade one pre-primary children were first grouped into two major groups: 3 from public-owned schools and three from private-owned schools. Only pre-primary schools that accepted signing the consent forms were chosen to participate in the study. The aim of selecting stratified random sampling was to get the required representation from different sub-groups in the population (based on diversified socio-economic settings). This technique ensures the involvement of sub-groups that would otherwise be left out entirely by other sampling techniques due to their smaller numbers in the population (Mugenda, 2008).

Grade one pre-primary children, aged 3 years, without previous pre-primary school experience, were purposively included in the study. Caregivers of the children who participated in the study were also involved in this study. Moreover, the pre-primary teachers of English who handled those children were purposively chosen for interviews that were audio-recorded. One weakness of purposive sampling is that the sample taken may not accurately represent the entire population. This may hinder the use of the results beyond the selected group. Another weakness of purposive sampling is that identifying participants who fit the defined criteria can be challenging. These weaknesses were minimised by using critical case sampling and the census method, where 100% of the children were selected. Class registers were also used to ensure that only qualifying children were selected.

***Sample size***

The sample size comprised all six pre-primary schools, 187 sampled children and their respective caregivers and six grade one teachers of English. Glenn (1992) affirms that a researcher uses the entire

population as a sample for small populations. Therefore, for this study, the researcher used 100% of the respondents.

***Data collection***

The study was structured to gather both primary and secondary data. Hence, three research tools were designed and used to collect primary data: an Interview guide for teachers of English, Close-ended questionnaires for caregivers, and a tool for children's dynamic indicators of Early English Literacy Skills. The researcher also examined children's writing samples to assess their Early English Literacy Skills.

The tools were piloted first before their administration. Piloting helped shed clarity on the items that were administered. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explain that researchers should pilot their research tools on a sample of respondents who have the exact attributes of the respondents who would be surveyed in the study. Therefore, the questionnaire designed for this study was pre-tested in two pre-primary schools. These pre-primary schools were not included in the group that would participate in this study. This was intended to ascertain the clarity and accuracy of the tools before they were adopted for administration. Their feedback was instrumental in refining them where it was necessary.

The researcher ensured content validity with the help of experts who reviewed the responses from the administered tools to ensure that these responses accurately addressed the questions asked. What was found to be inadequate in providing the required information was modified or omitted and replaced with accurate information. In agreement with the above, Quintao et al. (2020) said that validity is the level to which a factual measure, or several estimates of a notion, correctly measures the idea. Then, the internal consistency method was used to test reliability during the piloting phase. As recommended by Creswell (2014), to ensure greater internal consistency of the research tools, unclear questions were refined following the pilot study.

***Ethical considerations***

The participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for the study. The researcher ensured a conducive research relationship and trust among respondents. The respondents' autonomy was guaranteed to facilitate accurate and objective feedback. The research tools were reviewed by the supervisors and the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Rwanda-College of Education to ensure conformity to set standards. Written consent was sought from the headteachers of the sampled schools and their teachers. A signed consent was also obtained from the caregivers of children who participated in the study. The intention of the research and their freedom to participate in this study, along with their right to withdraw their children at any time without penalty, was shared. The teachers who participated in the study signed a consent form, allowing for the audio recording of their responses for later use. All the scholarly works were recognised.

***Data analysis***

The qualitative data from the teachers' interview was recorded using a computer tablet, responses cleaned, different responses classified by identifying significant responses for various themes, the record was transcribed, and patterns emerging from significant responses were identified. The above agrees with Vears and Gillam (2022), who state that qualitative research surveys provide individual perspectives that are not easily measured. Interrelationships between identified patterns were studied, and inferences were

drawn from the patterns and their relationships. All-important responses from the interview were consolidated. Interviews and narratives were also reported verbatim in the form of extracts.

Quantitative analysis began with data entry, cleaning, analysis, and interpretation. This was done using a computer software programme (SPSS version 27). This was mainly for statistical scores from family-child literacy practices and children's dynamic indicators of Early English Literacy Skills checklists. The data for this study were analysed using Chi-square to examine the association between family-child literacy practices and children's Early English Literacy Skills.

**Study results**

The thematic categories of teachers' responses generated from recorded interviews on family-child literacy practices that impact children's Early English Literacy performance outcomes were recorded as shown in Table 1. These are the results for the qualitative data.

*Table 1: Thematic categories of teachers' responses on family-child literacy practices on children's Early English Literacy Skills development (N=6)*

| Themes | Descriptions |
|---|---|
| A | Listening to news on television and watching video games for phonemic awareness |
| B | Speaking about books, telling stories and news at home for spoken communication |
| C | Shared reading & reading loudly different posters in the environment for letter recognition |
| D | Visiting libraries together and buying literacy materials together for book understanding |
| E | Doing puzzles like jigsaws for print interest |
| F | Naming objects with different shapes and cutting paper in various shapes and sizes for early writing capacity |

*Source: Primary data, 2025*

Teachers interviewed acknowledged that caregivers of children in their grade one classes played a notable role in supporting their young children's early literacy development at home. However, most teachers indicated that these children joined pre-primary school with varying levels of literacy achievement. They expressed that children from urban settings had better early literacy abilities compared to those from rural settings.

The grouping of the family-child literacy practices in Table 2 was rated on a 4-point Likert scale (Regularly, Sometimes, Hardly and Not at all). As seen in Table 2, practices were paired with the children's Early English Literacy performance outcomes. The children's Early English Literacy outcomes are indicated under "Not at all, Fair, Well and Extremely well." These are the results for the quantitative data.

*Table 2: Results about the association between family-child literacy practices and children's Early English Literacy Skills development (N=187)*

| | | Early English Literacy Skills development levels | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Family-child literacy practices** | **X** | **Not at all** | **%** | **Fair** | **%** | **Well** | **%** | **Extremely well** | **%** | **Total** |
| Listening to news on television and watching video games for phonemic awareness | Regularly | 4 | 8.5 | 8 | 17.0 | 20 | 42.6 | 15 | 32 | 47 |
| | Sometimes | 6 | 12.2 | 15 | 30.6 | 18 | 36.7 | 10 | 20.4 | 49 |
| | Hardly | 10 | 20.4 | 21 | 42.9 | 14 | 28.6 | 4 | 8.2 | 49 |
| | Not at all | 19 | 45.2 | 20 | 47.6 | 3 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 42 |
| Speaking about books, telling stories and news at home for spoken communication | Regularly | 3 | 6 | 6 | 12 | 25 | 50 | 16 | 32 | 50 |
| | Sometimes | 5 | 10.2 | 13 | 26.5 | 21 | 42.9 | 10 | 20.4 | 49 |
| | Hardly | 13 | 26 | 23 | 46 | 10 | 20 | 4 | 8 | 50 |
| | Not at all | 18 | 47.3 | 11 | 28.9 | 8 | 21.1 | 1 | 2.6 | 38 |
| Shared reading & reading loudly different posters in the environment for letter recognition | Regularly | 5 | 8.3 | 8 | 13.3 | 29 | 48.3 | 18 | 30 | 60 |
| | Sometimes | 6 | 12.5 | 9 | 18.8 | 25 | 52.1 | 8 | 16.7 | 48 |
| | Hardly | 11 | 25.6 | 10 | 23.3 | 20 | 46.5 | 2 | 4.7 | 43 |
| | Not at all | 18 | 50 | 12 | 33.3 | 6 | 16.7 | 0 | 0 | 36 |
| Visiting libraries together and buying literacy materials together for book understanding | Regularly | 9 | 14.3 | 11 | 17.5 | 28 | 44.4 | 15 | 23.8 | 63 |
| | Sometimes | 10 | 16.7 | 18 | 30 | 22 | 36.7 | 10 | 16.7 | 60 |
| | Hardly | 6 | 13.6 | 11 | 25 | 19 | 43.2 | 8 | 18.2 | 44 |
| | Not at all | 12 | 60 | 7 | 35 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| Doing puzzles like jigsaws for print interest | Regularly | 7 | 10.9 | 13 | 20.3 | 30 | 46.9 | 14 | 21.9 | 64 |
| | Sometimes | 9 | 15.8 | 16 | 28.1 | 20 | 35.1 | 12 | 21.1 | 57 |
| | Hardly | 8 | 16 | 15 | 30 | 18 | 36 | 9 | 18 | 50 |
| | Not at all | 9 | 56.3 | 6 | 37.5 | 1 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 | 16 |
| Naming objects with different shapes and cutting paper in various shapes and sizes for early writing capacity | Regularly | 4 | 5.9 | 10 | 14.7 | 35 | 51.5 | 19 | 27.9 | 68 |
| | Sometimes | 6 | 10 | 13 | 21.7 | 30 | 50 | 11 | 18.3 | 60 |
| | Hardly | 9 | 19.6 | 10 | 21.7 | 23 | 50 | 4 | 8.7 | 46 |
| | Not at all | 10 | 76.9 | 3 | 23.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 |

*Source: Primary data, 2025*

For phonemic awareness, the highest number, equivalent to 74.6% of all children who participated in the literacy activity, performed well or exceptionally well. These were children whose caregivers regularly engaged in the practice. Additionally, results indicate that caregivers who "sometimes" participated in the same activity followed (57.1% of their children performed well or extremely well). However, caregivers who hardly participated in the activity, 63.3% of their children failed or had less literacy performance

(rated "Not at all" or "Fair.) Surprisingly, caregivers who did not participate in the above activity at all had 92.8% of their children who either failed or had less literacy performance in phonemic awareness.

In the area of spoken communication, regular engagement of caregivers correlated with their children's Early English Literacy development, whereby 82% of their children performed either well or extremely well. Again, caregivers who sometimes participated in the activity, their children followed in Early English Literacy performance (63.3% performed either well or extremely well) compared to "Hardly" and "Not at all" family engagement levels in the practices whereby (72% and 76.2% of their children respectively failed or got less results in spoken communication).

When it comes to letter recognition, 78.3% of children whose caregivers regularly engaged in such practices performed either well or extremely well, the "sometimes" caregivers' engagement in the practice followed closely with 68.8% of their children performing either well or extremely well, and 51.2% of children whose caregivers "hardly" participated in the activity emerged third in performing well or extremely well with a decline in perceived effectiveness of the shared practice. Then, non-participant caregivers had children whose literacy performance was ineffective (83.3% of their children either failed or had low results) in letter recognition.

For book understanding, regular engagement of caregivers and their children showed better Early English Literacy performance, where 68.2% of the children performed well or extremely well in book understanding. However, 61.4% of children whose caregivers hardly participated in the activities followed with better and extremely good results. The "sometimes "caregivers' rating category scored third position, with 53.4% of children performing well and extremely well. In contrast, caregivers who did not participate in the activity had 95% of their children who either failed or performed fairly.

Print interest developed through activities like jigsaw puzzles reveals similar trends. Among caregivers who "regularly" engaged in the practice, had 68.8% of their children doing well and extremely well in having print interest, whereas the "sometimes" caregivers' rating had 56.2% of their children doing either well or extremely well. On the other hand, caregivers who "hardly" participated in the activity had children who performed either well or extremely well in 54% of cases. Notably, caregivers who did not participate in doing puzzles had the highest number (93.8%) of children who either lacked print interest or had low interest.

Finally, for early writing capacity of children, 79.4% of children had better and extremely good early writing capacity at grade one of pre-primary school. These children were from families that participated regularly in the activity. Then, 68.3% of children from families that sometimes participated in the activity showed better and extremely good early writing capacity results compared to 58.7% of children from families that hardly participated in the activity, who also showed better and extremely good early writing capacity. Moreover, caregivers who did not participate in the activity, 100% of their children were either not found with early writing capacity or some had very low abilities.

*Table 3: Chi-square test results about association between how often family early literacy is practiced and children's Early English Literacy development*

| Practices | Chi-square statistics ($\chi^2$) | Degree of freedom | P-value (Sig. at 2-tails) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Listening to news on television and watching video games for phonemic awareness | 52.55 | 9 | $3.55 \times 10^{-8}$ |
| Speaking about books, telling stories & news at home for spoken communication | 55.54 | 9 | $9.60 \times 10^{-9}$ |
| Shared reading & reading loudly different posters in the environment for letter recognition | 50.09 | 9 | $1.03 \times 10^{-7}$ |
| Visiting libraries together & buying literacy materials together for book understanding | 33.03 | 9 | 0.00013 |
| Doing puzzles like jigsaws for print interest | 26.63 | 9 | 0.00161 |
| Naming objects with different shapes & cutting paper in various shapes and sizes for early writing capacity | 53.30 | 9 | $2.57 \times 10^{-8}$ |

*Source: Primary data, 2025*

**Discussion of results**

This section presents a discussion and interpretation of the results from teachers' interviews, as outlined in Table 1 of the qualitative data, and a discussion and interpretation of the Chi-square results from Table 3 of the quantitative data.

***The teacher's response regarding the caregiver-child participation in phonemic awareness activities***

Teacher U remarked, "In the termly meetings I hold with caregivers of my grade one pre-primary children, I find many caregivers, especially from urban settings, taking time to hear news on television, radios and watching video games together. This has helped their children to develop literacy skills earlier than those whose caregivers do not participate in such practices." This agrees with the results from the family-child literacy practices analysed in Table 3 that indicate a gap in rural caregivers' engagement in such practices.

***The teacher's response regarding the caregiver-child participation in spoken communication activities***

Teacher V explained that "Reading and singing for young children at home prepare them to learn a language before starting school. This is common in many families where the children I teach come from, especially rural caregivers who sing to their children during nighttime before going to bed." This agrees with the results from the family-child literacy practices analysed in Table 3, where results show that such activities help children to develop spoken communication, especially children whose caregivers practiced the activities regularly.

***The teacher's response regarding the caregiver-child participation in letter recognition activities***

Teacher W commented, "A good number of children, especially those from well-off families, perform well in these activities in my class. These children easily recognise different letters on charts." Again, this remark from the teacher concurs with the results in Table 3, where caregivers who regularly participated in such activities with their children had higher letter recognition abilities in their children compared to those whose parents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the value of such practices.

***The teacher's response regarding the caregiver-child participation in book understanding***
Teacher X interviewed on "book understanding" of her learners in grade one said that " I have children who come from families with mini libraries and reading corners. These children have very good literacy abilities though these are mostly from families that spare time with their children to interact with the materials." This coincides with the results in Table 3 of this paper where caregivers that regularly participated in "book understanding" literacy activities, their children had very good literacy outcomes at their grade one of pre-primary school compared to their colleagues whose caregivers did not or had less participation.

***The teacher's response regarding the caregiver-child involvement in print activities***
Teacher Y responded that "Most caregivers of children in my class are very supportive at home in having shared-literacy activities with their children. These caregivers participate in jigsaw puzzles with their children. In my class, I have witnessed children from these families having higher "print interest" compared to other children whose caregivers do not participate in such activities." These results highlight the importance of supporting and encouraging caregivers from all family settings to dedicate spare time to participating in literacy activities with their children, thereby promoting early literacy development.

***The teacher's response regarding the caregivers' role in their children's early writing capacity***
Teacher Z said that "Through home visits to discuss with caregivers on literacy matters and other education issues, I have witnessed young children who, through play, draw zigzag lines in sand, on paper at a tender age. I have seen many children joining grade one pre-primary school with early writing potential compared to those who do not participate in those activities. Development of children's early literacy skills begins at home, not at school, as some parents think." The teacher's response concurs with the other results of this study, especially those in Table 3, which show evident positive literacy outcomes in children whose caregivers regularly shared-literacy practices with them at home before starting school.

In Table 3, the Chi-square test results ($\chi^2 \approx 52.55$, df = 9, $p \approx 3.55 \times 10^8$) indicate a highly significant association between children's exposure to news on television and video games and their phonemic awareness development. The extremely low p-value strongly suggests that the relationship is not due to random chance. This implies that varying levels of exposure to such media content may influence how well children develop the ability to recognise and manipulate sounds in spoken words—an essential component of early literacy. These results fit in the work of Atiqah (2022), who explains that "parents' literacy practices are essential in instilling foundational capacities that enhance children's literacy development". Educators and caregivers should be mindful of the type and number of media children consume, as it appears to have a meaningful impact on foundational language skills.

There is a robust and statistically significant relationship between the frequency of children engaging in activities such as discussing books, telling stories, and sharing news at home, and their level of spoken communication development ($\chi^2 \approx 55.54$, df = 9, $p \approx 9.60 \times 10^9$). The extremely low p-value indicates that this association is unlikely to be due to chance. This suggests that frequent verbal interaction and storytelling at home play a crucial role in developing children's spoken communication skills. This supports the importance of family involvement in early literacy practices. In agreement with the above results, Segal (2019) emphasises that "reading aloud to children improves their language skills and instils foundational literacy behaviours that sustain later reading achievement.

The Chi-square test results revealed a highly significant association between shared reading, reading posters, and children's letter recognition abilities ($\chi^2 \approx 50.09$, df = 9, $p \approx 1.03 \times 10^7$). The very low p-value indicates that the observed relationship is not due to random variation but rather points to a meaningful connection between these literacy practices and the development of foundational reading skills. This suggests that engaging children in shared reading activities and exposing them to environmental print, such as posters, substantially supports their ability to recognise letters, an essential early step in learning to read. Therefore, incorporating these practices regularly can have a positive influence on children's emergent literacy. The results above are consistent with the work of Preece (2020), who argues that "shared reading with young children positively impacts literacy development and supports future reading success".

The Chi-square test results indicated a statistically significant association between children visiting libraries and purchasing literacy materials with others and their level of book comprehension ($\chi^2 = 33.03$, df = 9, p = 0.00013). The low p-value suggests that the differences in book comprehension among children across varying levels of caregivers' engagement in these activities are unlikely to be due to chance. This implies that children who regularly participate in shared-literacy experiences tend to demonstrate a better understanding of books. These findings underscore the importance of actively engaging children in literacy-rich environments to foster their comprehension and overall literacy development. Therefore, the variations observed between families in different settings not only confirm previous research but also highlight the urgent need to bridge home-literacy inequalities. As Li (2022) points out, "the home-literacy environment is a central context for fostering young children's early literacy skills, especially where formal resources are scarce". Strengthening parents' capacity in rural areas through targeted early childhood literacy programmes may be pivotal to improving school readiness and mitigating early academic disparities.

The Chi-square test results ($\chi^2 = 26.63$, df = 9, p = 0.00161) indicate a statistically significant relationship between engaging children in puzzle activities and the development of their interest in print. The p-value, being well below the 0.05 threshold, suggests that this association is unlikely to be due to chance. This implies that children who frequently engage in puzzles, such as jigsaws, may exhibit a higher level of curiosity and motivation toward print-related materials. Such activities likely support cognitive and visual recognition skills that are foundational for print awareness, emphasising the value of incorporating puzzles into early literacy development practices. Moreover, the children's results align with the emergent literacy theory advanced by Clay (2001), which views literacy development as a social and developmental process rooted in early home experiences. As Clay (2001) contends, "children are already actively engaged in constructing written language systems before formal instruction begins", making the quality of the home-literacy environment critical.

A highly significant association between engaging children in activities for early writing capacity development was found with a Chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 53.30$, df = 9, $p = 2.57 \times 10^8$). The extremely low p-value indicates that the relationship is not due to chance, strongly suggesting that these activities play a crucial role in supporting the fine motor skills and spatial awareness required for early writing. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating such practical, sensory-rich experiences into children's daily routines to foster foundational writing abilities. "The limited involvement of rural caregivers in such activities resonates with (Tan, 2020) meta-analysis, which showed that "academic

benefits from parental involvement are stratified by socio-economic status," with lower-income families less likely to engage in literacy-rich interactions.

**Research limitation**

This research focused on grade one pre-primary children without any prior experiences of pre-primary school. Therefore, this research did not explore the detailed literacy performance of other children, for example, those who repeated grade one of pre-primary school. This would help determine if those who repeated were performing better in literacy compared to the newly admitted children.

**Research implication**

The results of this study will help the Ministry of Education in Rwanda maintain existing early literacy programmes and initiate other research-based and contextually relevant literacy promotion programmes among caregivers of children. The programmes will empower children caregivers from different socio-economic backgrounds on early literacy matters. More emphasis will be placed on caregivers from rural settings, as they were found to have limited literacy knowledge and skills. The knowledge and skills acquired by caregivers will be beneficial in supporting their young children as they prepare them for entry into pre-primary schools.

**Conclusion**

Results reveal pronounced disparities in family-child literacy practices in the Gasabo district, Rwanda. Urban families demonstrated significantly higher engagement in shared-literacy activities, which were associated with stronger early English outcomes among grade one pre-primary children. In contrast, rural families were less involved in such practices due to limited resources and a lack of awareness about their importance, resulting in early literacy gaps in English at pre-primary entry. Therefore, these gaps need to be bridged to establish a better foundation for children's early literacy development in both urban and rural family settings.

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