The role of parental involvements in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study explored the role of parental involvements in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills in Tanzania. Specifically, it compared rural public high performing schools and low performing schools. Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling were used to obtain 350 participants. Data were collected through questionnaire-based-interview, semi-structured interview, focus group discussion, and tests administration methods. An independent sample t-test and thematic analyses were employed. Results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in involvements between parents from high performing schools (M= 33.39, SD = 9.79), and those from low performing schools (M= 31.74, SD = 9.93); t (152) = 1.040, p >.05 in learning activities. This implies that parental involvements in learning activities were less associated with children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Findings from interviews and FGDs revealed that parental involvements were hindered by lack of parents' knowledge about pre-primary education, limited parental support, and effects of home learning environment. To maximize children's pre-reading skills, the study recommends that parents should be informed about their involvement in learning activities.

Keywords

Parental Involvement, early reading, reading acquisition, Kiswahili, Early childhood education

Introduction 1.1

Low reading abilities including low acquisition of pre-reading skills (PRS) among children constitutes one of the serious challenges facing the education sector in many developing countries (Ndijuye & Rao, 2019; Piper, 2010; Uwezo, 2014). The inability to read among children remains a cross-cutting challenge regardless of one's race, socio-economic background, and cognitive abilities (Anney & Mmasa, 2016; Jamaludin et al., 2016; Piper et al., 2016). In sub-Saharan region, about one-third of the school children in lower grades experience such reading difficulties, suggesting that they have not yet developed reading abilities (SACQMEC, 2018). Even in developed countries, there are children facing challenges in developing pre-reading abilities (National Centre for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013; Wright et al., 2011). Findings of the American National Assessment of Educational Progress report indicate that 32 percent of 4th graders and 22 percent of 8th graders in the United States scored below the basic reading levels in 2013 (NCES, 2013). Similar findings revealed that children from some parts of South America

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had persistent lower scores in reading test (Reardon et al., 2012).

Despite efforts made to improve quality of education in Malaysia, reading remains a grave source of concern as many children still exhibit weak reading skills (Jamaludin et al., 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, inability to develop reading skills among children is even more critical (Piper, 2010; Uwezo, 2015). Dowd, Weiner and Mabeti (2010), for example, revealed that in Malawi more than half of the children tested in English at the beginning of 4th grade were unable to read a single word. Similarly, findings from Kenya's rural primary schools found large gaps to exist between English and non-English reading comprehension scores (Piper et al., 2016). In other words, children could readily and easily read English words than Kiswahili or their mother-tongues—Dholuo and Gikuyu. In fact, empirical evidence suggests that many countries in the sub-Saharan Africa still experience low children's academic achievement in the formal education system even in subjects taught in indigenous languages including Kiswahili language (Anney & Mmasa, 2016; Pipe et al., 2016), the lingua franca of eastern, and some parts of central Africa. Children's inability to read may be linked to both colonial and post-colonial education system (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019), with the latter continuing the legacy of the former in some of the countries. The legacy of such education system made formal education teachers learning to overpower the role of a parent as a child's first teacher.

In Tanzania, the reported disparities in reading skills exist among and between regions and districts (Ngorosho, 2011; Rawle, 2015) and urbanicity (Kafle & Jollife, 2015; Ndijuye & Rao, 2019). For instance, the national reading assessment conducted in Tanzania using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) revealed that pre-primary and primary school children were failing to master basic reading skills (Ndijuye, 2020; Research Triangle Institute [RTI] International, 2014). Moreover, it was established that only 12 percent of 2nd Grade pupils reached the oral reading fluency benchmark of 50 correct words per minute in Kiswahili (RTI International, 2017). Similarly, Marwa (2014) found that eight percent of 2nd Graders could not read with comprehension in Kiswahili. Anney and Mmasa (2016) also found that the primary school pupils had serious Kiswahili literacy skills problems. Specifically, about 39 percent were unable to read letters, 37.9 percent could not read simple words, 42.3 percent were unable to read a sentence, and 59.8 percent could not read or do comprehension tasks.

Extant literature informs that enhancing children's academic performance, including gains in reading skills, relies on parents' involvement (Ndijuye, 2020; Topor et al., 2010). In other words, parental involvement in children's learning activities is one of the significant social factors in children's school life, especially in building the foundation of reading skills at pre-primary level (Ndijuye, 2020). As children are influenced by their parents in their early learning years, the current study acknowledges that parental involvement should continue serving as a form of social capital by which parents can affect their children's learning outcomes (Dufur et al., 2013; Joeng & Acock, 2014).

Several types and forms of parental involvement in children's learning exist (Epstein, 2001; Ndijuye & Rao, 2019; Ubale et al., 2016). Epstein (2001) identified six types of parental involvements: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. These components facilitate

academic achievement as they often contribute to parents, teachers and learners to achieve learning goals (Ubale et al., 2016). Parental involvement, therefore, entails all the activities and practices that parents undertake to support their children's schooling. These activities can occur in diverse settings making up a child's home, school, or community (Ndijuye & Rao, 2019; Ubale et al., 2016). Similarly, Porumbu and Necşoi (2013) combined parenting style, parental expectations and aspirations, home rules and parental supervision, parents-children communication, children's home activities, parental attitude towards school (checking children's homework, parents' communication with teachers, and parental involvement in children's school activities) as variables defining parental involvement.

Parental involvement in learning activities may be done at home by focusing on parents helping children with homework and curricular-related decisions and activities (Mutodi & Ngirande, 2014); and discussing school-related aspects with the child and playing games (Kandasamy et al., 2016). It may also include reading with the child (Han, 2017), checking homework completion, monitoring the child's academic progress (Rain & William, 2011), together with going to the library, and sharing day-to-day events (Porumbu & Necşoi, 2013; Tornblad & Widell, 2013).

1.2. Theoretical foundations of parental involvement in **children's learning**

The current study is framed within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory that ties together contexts that facilitate learning and the development of a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Mligo, 2015). The theory explains the roles the surrounding contexts play, including children's home learning environments supporting their learning. Available empirical studies show that parents' socio-economic conditions, culture, and education levels relates to their children's learning in the acquisition of reading skills (Chen et al., 2018; Dolean et al., 2019; Vanderauwera, 2019). Abbasian et al. (2020) found statistically significant correlations between the learners' socio-economic status and parental education background, on the one hand, and their reading and listening comprehension scores, on the other. Likewise, Vygotsky (1978) established that children learn well when they interact with a more knowledgeable person. In fact, children do not benefit in homes with limited educational resources (Ndijuye & Rao, 2019). Thus, parents are key stakeholders in education including matters of adequate early stimulation and preparation of children for primary school (MoEST, 2016; Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022; Ubale et al., 2016). In these contexts, parental involvement is crucial particularly for preparing teaching and learning materials, buying teaching and learning materials, storytelling, setting supportive home learning environments up, and evaluating the learning progress (Mwirichia, 2013; MoEST, 2016). Similarly, studies have established that parental involvement in their children's education contribute to their learning outcomes (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016; Ligembe, 2014)—favourable or otherwise. In other words, the involvement of parents in their children's acquisition of foundational skills in the early years needs significant attention. This suggests that parents in rural contexts should preserve and promote their children's learning regardless of the long-term effects of rural marginalisation such settings tend to suffer from particularly in a developing country's context such as the one obtained in Tanzania. Overall, the preservation of the role of parental involvement in learning can sustain and restore their children's self-independence and self-respect to engender their academic success.

1.3 Historical context of parental involvement and children's learning in Tanzania

In pre-colonial social organisations people of various parts of Tanzania acquired fishing, hunting and gathering, domestication of animals and plants through socialisation and informal educational arrangements (Matogwa & Sambaiga, 2020; Mwalongo & Mwalongo, 2018). The education used to accumulate useful knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the environment and development of man was essential for their socio-economic survival (Mwalongo & Mwalongo, 2018). Indeed, indigenous people produced, disseminated and articulated knowledge which they shared with their offspring through socialisation. During this period, parents were the primary knowledge creators with their children and the wilder society the secondary creators under a collective environment. Children learned by observing elders, and learning was by doing. Consequently, children learned from their immediate environment (natural and social) and the knowledge had practical use in their communities. Overtime, particularly during colonial era, roles of parents and children started changing due to introduction of new lifestyle (Matogwa & Sambaiga, 2020).

The colonial education trained African people in manual work than in reading and writing to work for their colonisers (Swartz & Kallaway, 2018). Education opportunities in colonial period based on racial segregation, and teachers in the formal education system played a key role in training some Africans to work for the benefits of the colonisers. The presence of education inequalities during the colonial period raised questions pertaining to how parents could get involved in their children's early learning in denial of such an opportunity. It shows that the nature of colonial education in Tanzania, like in other African countries, severely curtailed the degree of parents' involvement in their children's learning.

Similarly, in the existing globalised world many parents have limited time to play their role in their children's learning. They ought to devote their time mostly in formal or informal employment activities to earn for a living. In other words, parents end up deprived of their roles to participate actively as primary caregivers and children's first teachers by the existing conditions of neo-liberalism. Similarly, since many parents are busy, they tend to believe that other people would take care of their children's academic welfare.

1.3.2 Parental involvement and children's acquisition of reading skills

In Tanzania, children aged five to six years are expected to participate in compulsory one or two years of pre-primary education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2014). Ideally, pre-primary children are expected to acquire and master pronunciation of vowels and consonants (phonemic awareness); recognition of shapes of vowels and consonants (phonics/letter-sound knowledge); and reading of pictures (vocabulary knowledge) (MoEST, 2016; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). In other words, at the pre-primary level, children learn to recognise, match and analyse different sounds, letters, and pictures found in their learning environments including home learning context. Similarly, studies inform that Tanzanian parents emphasise on the early mastery of literacy skills especially pre-reading

skills during the pre-primary years (Tandika, 2020). Furthermore, they treat pre-primary education as merely a preparation for formal primary education, which needs less classroom attention (Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). This necessitates empirical observation of how home-based parental involvement support children's acquisition of pre-reading skills.

Studies in the fields of education and psychology demonstrate that parents play a significant role in children's learning and development (Kandasamy et al., 2016; Karıbayeva & Boğar, 2014). A parent is the child's first teacher in life, and s/he can play an active role in its pre-primary journey exclusively mutual and rewarding experiences (Mwirichia, 2013). Similarly, studies have established that parental involvement contributes to the children's learning outcomes (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman & Al-Maamari, 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ligembe, 2014; Mligo, 2015). Relating to other studies, Mahuro and Hungi (2016) found that parental involvement significantly boosted the students' numeracy and literacy scores. Shukia (2014) found that teachers in Tanzania believed that parents play significant role in making children develop pre-reading skills by complementing teachers' efforts, especially when they engage in reading activities with their children at home. In Kenya, Abuya et al. (2015) established that children whose parents were involved in their learning process had improved attendance rates, became more self-confident, and had open communication with their parents. Han (2017) establishes that parental involvements in children's education have positive implications on learning, school and later in life's success.

Some extant literature informs that there are barriers, which are more likely to hinder parental involvements in children's learning (Ligembe, 2014; Meoli, 2016). Lynch (2010) argues that a child coming from low socio-economic background would enjoy limited parental involvements and receive little learning support. The support may include limited access to learning resources such as story books, videos, pictures which limits the child's learning outcomes (Meoli, 2016; Ndijuye, 2020). Limited or lack of parental involvements does hinder children's learning opportunities and academic achievement including acquisition of pre-reading skills. Studies show that parents with low educational level and unemployed, do potentially negatively impact on their children's school attendance and learning outcomes (Ehrlich et al., 2013; Hamukwaya, 2009). In Kenya, Kimu (2012) revealed that parental involvement in education was mainly limited to financial contributions and teachers-parents meetings based on the high monetary value of training and the need to improve the quality of education. The study specifically found that lack of other forms of parental home-based involvement led to poor academic performance among children.

Wambiri and Ndani (2015) indicated that parents' perceptions of their role in children's reading development was the most important predictor of their involvement in terms of direct and indirect behaviours and strategies with children around print. These studies inform that, the effectiveness of learning outcomes depends on comprehensive parental involvement in schools. However, little is known about whether in a context with limited educational resources as it is in Tanzania, parents differ in their involvement in relation to children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills between high and low performing schools. And whether there are any parental involvement hindrances associated with children's low acquisition of these skills in Tanzania. Therefore,

the current research paper examined the role of parental involvements in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills in Tanzania's rural schools. Specifically, it intended to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any difference(s) in parental involvement in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills between high and low performing rural schools?
2. Which parental involvement hindrances are associated with children's low acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills in high and low performing rural schools?

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Design

The study used concurrent triangulation mixed methods design, which enabled the collection and analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single-phase (Creswell, 2013; Johnson, 2014). Quantitative part focused on descriptive survey to measure children's learning of Kiswahili pre-reading skills and parental involvements. Qualitative data helped to explore diverse opinions and views on hindrances to parental involvement in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills.

2.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Stratified random sampling was employed in the selection of children whereas parents, teachers and school principals were purposively sampled for the virtue of their positions. Children's biological parents or guardians were included. These informants were purposively sampled because we assumed that they possessed rich information related to children's learning and development. In all, there were 350 participants categorized as 155 children, 155 parents, 20 teachers, and 20 school principals. Participants' various demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=350)

Participants	Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Children	Gender	Male	77	49.7
		Female	78	50.3
	Age (years)	Below 5	5	3.2
		5	75	46.5
		5 and above	78	50.3
Parents	Gender	Male	42	27.1
		Female	113	72.9
	Age (years)	Below 25	13	8.5
		25-29	38	24.5
		30-34	31	20.0
		35-39	21	13.5
		40 and Above	52	33.5
	Education level	Primary school	129	83.5
		Lower secondary school	11	7.0
		No formal education	15	9.5
	Occupation	Peasants	145	93.5
		Public employees	4	3.0
		Private employee/business	3	2.0
Teachers	Gender	Male	4	20.0
		Female	16	80.0
	Age (years)	20-29	8	40.0
		30-39	1	5.0
		40-49	4	20.0
		50-59	7	35.0
	Education level	Teaching certificate	1	5.0
		Teaching diploma	19	95.0
	Pre-primary teaching qualification (PPTQ)	With PPTQ	1	5.0
		Without PPTQ	19	95.0
	In-service training attendance	Once	16	80.0
		Twice	1	5.0
		Non	3	15.0
School principals	Gender	Male	11	55.0
		Female	9	45.0
	Age (years)	26-35	8	40.0
		36-45	10	50.0
		46 and Above	2	10.0
	Education level	Teaching certificate	17	85.0
		Teaching diploma	2	10.0
		Bachelor's degree	1	5.0
	Job experience (years)	1-4	1	5.0
		5-9	7	35.0
		10-14	4	20.0
		15 and Above	8	40.0

2.3 Data Collection Tools

2.3.1. Children's Kiswahili pre-reading skills assessment tests

This tool had two main sections: Children demographic characteristics such as age and gender, and testing items. The testing items were further subdivided into three sub-tests: Phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and vocabulary knowledge. The number of items were 24, and were scored as: *correct*, *incorrect* and *I don't know*. The test was administered by the first author in a quiet place around the school premises. The instrument's Cronbach's reliability was .970 which was excellent.

2.3.2. Questionnaire-based interview

This instrument helped to examine parents' level of involvement in children's learning of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. The first part sought to explore the parents' demographic information such as their age, sex, education and occupation. The second part was in a form of four-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly agree) with 19 items examining parental activities associated with the children's acquisition of these skills. The instrument's Cronbach's reliability was .945, which was considered excellent. Parents were asked to report their involvement in children's learning of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Parents were independently interviewed and asked similar questions in an orderly manner for consistence purposes. Answers were recorded and note-taking was done to document the evidence of the interview and later to help the interviewer in making ratings as more objective as possible. Interviews were conducted in a quiet place free from physical barriers in the schools' contexts. The interview for each participant lasted for 15-20 minutes.

2.3.3. Focus group discussions

This tool was administered with the parents to gain their views about issues which hindered their involvement in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. They were invited and interviewed in a quiet and comfortable place at school. Each focus group discussion had between 5 and 10 parents per session and lasted for about one hour.

2.3.4. Semi-structured interviews

This tool was applied with teachers and school principals to gain insights into their views and meanings related to the phenomena under the study. Each participant was individually interviewed in a quiet place within school premises for about 20 minutes. The consent to record the interview was sought from the participants prior to recording the interview upon their acceptance the researcher switched on the tape-recorder.

2.4 Data Analyses

Statistical Package and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 21 software facilitated descriptive and multivariate analyses. The parental involvements of each school were calculated to compare their scores with the children's mean scores and standard deviations of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. To determine whether there was any significant difference in parental involvement in learning activities between high and low performing schools, the study used an independent T-test measure. Qualitative analysis started with preparing and organising data collected from the field. Verbatim translation produced transcripts that were imported into the project folder, which was created in NVivo, version 12. Nodes were deductively created from the study questions, insights from the theoretical framework of the study and previous literature related to the subject investigated but the data

were approached inductively. Coding entailed identifying text elements such as words, sentence (s), and or paragraph (s) from each transcript and dragging-and dropping them into respective nodes. Subsequently, a list of nodes from each transcript was created. The findings have been presented and interpreted in a simple and straightforward way with rich descriptions supported by representative verbatim quotations from semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions.

2.5 Ethical issues and parental consent

The study observed all the research protocols pertaining to the University of Dar es salaam postgraduate studies. To begin with, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Dar es Salaam. To reach to the selected schools, the study obtained research permits from Mwanza and Mara regional administrative secretaries and Misungwi and Musoma district administrative secretaries. Finally, the first author consulted school authorities to obtain parental consent to include their under-18 children in the study. Confidentiality was also observed by assigning pseudonyms to participants, with unauthorised access to the collected data precluded systematically.

3.1 Findings

This segment presents the findings of the study, presented largely by looking at the research objectives of the study and their attendant questions.

3.1.1 Differences in parental involvement **in children's Kiswahili pre**-reading learning activities

Findings in Table 2 present scores of parental involvement in Kiswahili pre-reading learning activities and children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills from high and low performing rural public pre-primary schools.

Table 2: Parental involvement in learning activities and children's pre-reading scores

School	Category	Performance of Parents' Involvement in Learning Activities		Children's pre-reading scores in HPS and LPS	
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
School A	HPS	37.25	9.88	43.40	8.29
School B	LPS	35.33	6.86	57.66	14.24
School C	HPS	35.90	10.58	52.90	14.29
School D	LPS	35.00	8.43	46.10	20.04
School E	LPS	35.30	10.40	62.50	6.22
School F	HPS	35.60	13.43	53.80	10.99
School G	LPS	36.40	8.58	43.30	13.38
School H	HPS	36.70	6.70	42.20	14.66
School I	HPS	31.70	11.35	37.20	4.80
School J	HPS	29.33	5.50	43.78	10.97
School K	LPS	30.29	8.62	43.57	9.537
School L	LPS	23.67	1.21	49.17	10.44
School M	HPS	39.13	11.42	45.75	12.69
School N	HPS	39.50	13.88	35.83	12.21
School O	LPS	23.57	2.57	56.14	6.641
School P	LPS	30.00	11.55	46.43	11.96
School Q	HPS	24.43	5.97	47.00	10.03
School R	LPS	26.67	8.64	54.67	13.03
School S	HPS	30.67	6.62	41.33	16.18
School T	LPS	25.00	3.74	57.20	13.10

NOTE: HPS –High Performing Schools, LPS – Low Performing Schools

The results in Table 2 indicate that parental involvement in learning activities was higher in school N, one of the HPS (M=39.5), whose children's performance in Kiswahili pre-reading skills was (M=35.8); followed by school M, one of the HPS (M=39.1) with good children's performance in Kiswahili pre-reading skills (M=45.8). On the other hand, the lowest mean score for parental involvement in learning activities was recorded in school O, one of the LPS (M=23.6), with children's performance in Kiswahili pre-reading skills (M= 56.1) followed by school L, one of the HPS (M=23.8) with children's performance in Kiswahili pre-reading skills (M=49.2). These performances signal low parental involvement in learning activities

associated with children's low performance in Kiswahili pre-reading skills. This result imply that the performance of parental involvement in Kiswahili pre-reading skills learning activities was too minimal to support children's performance in Kiswahili pre-reading skills.

3.1.2 Parental involvement and children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills

An independent sample T-test results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference for parents from HPS (M= 33.39, SD = 9.79) and parents from LPS (M= 31.74, SD = 9.93); t (152) = 1.040, p < .05 (two tailed) in their involvement in children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills, implying that parental involvement in their children's pre-reading skills learning activities played a minimal role in their children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills.

3.2 Hindrances to parental involvement

The findings indicate that there were various factors which hindered the involvement of parents in their children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills which in turn were associated with children's low acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills.

3.2.1 Parents' limited understanding of importance of pre-primary education

The findings indicate that more than 95 percent of parents did not know whether they had to buy books for their pre-primary children. Likewise, more than 88 percent of parents wondered whether learning materials for children at this level can be prepared and given to children to use while at home. Furthermore, parents did not know that pre-primary children had to daily attend school and learn. They thought that these children had to attend occasionally school for play purposes. They held views that pre-primary children were still young to begin formal schooling just as those in 1st Grade. In addition, more than 90 percent of them considered children's learning and acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills to be the sole responsibility of teachers alone rather than parents. One teacher explained:

What I have been thinking is that many parents in this village are not knowledgeable on how children can be helped to learn Kiswahili pre-reading skills because they do not have motivation to education. Most of them know that teaching responsibility is only a teacher's work. Many parents believe that pre-primary school children are not learning when they come to school; rather, they are just playing. To them, official learning starts from grade one. In this situation, they do not have even time to stay with their children, they do not buy books and other school needs to their children (Interview, Teacher, School M-HPS).

The findings indicate that for most of the parents, pre-primary education was not their priority and found it to be economically unviable. They reasoned that after completing basic education cycle, even older children ended up being simply jobless. As a result, more than 50 percent of the parents did not see the benefits of investing in their children's education. From a socio-economic standpoint, parents did not see any need of investing much in this low level of education. One of the participants explained:

> Parents have little knowledge on the importance of education because they did not study it that well. They also do not see the fruits of education from the people or youth around them. So, they do not see the significance of education. ...Poverty contributes to children's low learning of pre-reading skills. It means

> that because of family poverty a child fails to get the basic needs such as school uniforms, food, exercise-books, health services hence a child can't reach his or plans (Interview, Teacher, School N-HPS).

Parents devoted most of their time working in farms, mining companies and fishing rather than helping their children to acquire pre-reading skills. While at work, some parents assigned older children to take care of homes and look after their young siblings. Though pre-primary education is free and compulsory in Tanzania, it was found that children of parents working with mining companies were neither enrolled nor attending any form of regular schooling. Perhaps this was because these parents were not permanent residents of those areas. One of the participants admittedly said:

> I admit that parents are not knowledgeable. Imagine a parent leaving a pre-primary child to take care of young children. One day, one pre-primary school child came to school with two young children, when we asked him why he decided to come with such young children to school, he said that his mother stopped him to come to school so that he remains at home to take care of his young children. However, the child was not ready to miss school, so he came with them to school. Imagine, Madam, the way some children like school but their parents [do not]! (Interview, Teacher, School D-LPS).

Moreover, it emerged that most of the parents failed to take care of their children's psychological, social and physical wellbeing. When children fell sick, they attributed the illness to witchcraft instead of a scientific medical condition so that they could take them to the hospital for medical check-ups. This practice negatively affected the school attendance and learning. Furthermore, the study established that some parents used their children as sources of family income particularly as cheap child labour; sometimes they married young to obtain dowry. In this regard, one of the participants explained:

> ...parents don't have knowledge of taking their children to hospitals for medical check-up, they end-up attributing their children's sicknesses to witchcraft beliefs. In this situation, you can't find a parent taking a child to hospital when he or she gets sick, at the end of the day they make children remain sick for long time at the same time missing lessons (Interview, Teacher, School O-LPS).

3. 2.2. Limited parental support

Results associated lack of parental support with children's low level of acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. It emerged that more than 80 percent of the parents did not regularly support their children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Additionally, they failed to provide them with school uniforms, exercise-books, pencils and school bags. They also did not regularly check children's homework, let alone and make any reasonable follow-up on their academic progress. This may result in children's early limited motivation to learn. One of the teachers said:

> Many parents here are not ensuring that their children attend school and learn as required primarily because they do not know about teaching children. They do

> not make follow-ups on children's school progress as they do not come to school and ask about their children's school progress. They do not check their children's work as you can see currently children have started writing. They do not ask what their children learn at school. Worse enough, they do not buy their children's school materials such as pencils and exercise-books, which results in children's failure to write what they read. This makes children fail to cope with their peers in the class (Interview, Teacher, School K-LPS).

3.2.3 Unsupportive home learning environment

Study findings indicate that an unfriendly home learning environment experienced by children was one of the reasons associated with their low acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. For example, more than 70 percent of the parents did not set aside time to read, teach and encourage children acquire Kiswahili pre-reading skills. In fact, no specific time was set for children's personal reading or reading with a parent or sibling, instead, most of the time, children were assigned to perform home chores such as taking care of young children and house cleaning. Commenting on this, one of the participants said:

> Here, there are many challenges lowering and preventing children's [effective] acquisition of different skills including Kiswahili pre-reading skills…Parents do not encourage their children to attend in school because they leave them with home responsibilities like taking care of their young children. The condition indicates that parents are making children home keepers and maids for young children. It has caused some children to move to the next class without reading skills (Interview, Teacher, School Q-HPS).

The study findings, in this regard, indicate that children experienced difficulties related with irresponsible parental behaviours. Some parents were reportedly drunkards, and as such did not know and plan to help their children to acquire necessary pre-reading skills. In some families, children lived with their grandparents and stepparents. Unfortunately, most of the grandparents, had little or no formal education; as a result, they were less supportive educationally. Likewise, stepparents were less supportive in terms of nutritious food, love and school related learning materials.

4.0 Discussion

This segment discusses the study's findings in accordance with the research objectives of the research.

4.1. Differences in parental involvements between high and low performing schools

Findings revealed that there was no significant differences in parental involvements in children's learning of Kiswahili pre-reading skills in high and low performing schools. In fact, the parents did not buy Kiswahili pre-reading skills books for their children. Children's low acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills was associated with limited availability of learning resources such as books particularly at home. Carroll (2013) found that the parents' exposing of their children to books predicted children's oral language development. Parents also rarely prepared Kiswahili pre-reading skills

learning materials and provided them for their children use. Nevertheless, both high and low performing schools reported limited parental provision of materials for Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Mwirichia (2013) argues that when parents provide instructional materials and demonstrations assist children play, build concepts, promote innovation and creativity as well as enhancing interaction with others. On the other hand, when parents devote much of their time to income generating activities just to earn a living, their children's education tended to suffer (Matogwa & Sambaiga, 2020; Swartz & Kallaway, 2018) due to limited funding from external forces.

Parents from both school categories did not directly participate in learning activities which potentially could enhance the development of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Activities such as children's naming of letters, pictures and objects and pronouncing of various Kiswahili sounds have been found to promote children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022; Ndijuye, 2020). Parent-initiated and home-based pre-reading activities such as singing alphabetic songs, reading aloud and correcting children promotes children development of pre-reading skills (Chansa-Kabali, 2014; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). Chansa-Kabali (2014) found that children who experienced more literacy interactions in the home produced significantly higher scores than their peers. The process can be more successful if it is accompanied with parental reinforcements (Malmberg et al., 2011). Wang et al. (2014) and Melhuish et al. (2008) suggested that parental warmth, among other factors, had positive implications on children's acquisition of pre-reading and later reading skills.

Yet, limited parent-child reciprocal interactions lowered the children's learning. By not setting aside planned time for their children to either read or listened to them while reading, suggests that there were limited parent-child reading related interactions. In this regard, Patnaik and Moyo (2011) support the idea that in neo-liberal era parents are too occupied to support their children's academic affairs. Available evidence associates limited parent-child interaction with children's low acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills (Malmberg et al., 2011; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). Furthermore, parents' regular checking and rendering of assistance to their children's homework promoted parent-child interaction and encouraged positive engagement in school-based learning activities (Brown, 2019; Han, 2017). To improve interactions, Mwirichia (2013) suggested that parents should adopt modern ways to communicate with children and teachers.

4.2. Reported hindrances of parental involvement across schools

Most of the parents in this study had limited or no formal education, which had influenced their views, understanding and value of pre-primary education. This state resulted in their failure to create a supportive home learning environment including buying learning materials. These findings align with those by Mligo (2015) who had found that parents in rural Tanzania lowly regarded pre-primary education and placed much blame on the government for not supporting pre-school education. This made most of them believe that contributing for pre-primary education was a heavy burden to bear. However, in the sub-Saharan African region, such findings are neither new nor surprising (Matafwali & Nunsaka, 2011; Marphatia et al., 2010). For instance, Marphatia et al. (2010) found that few parents in Burundi understood the importance of aiding their children in learning and participating in school activities. Similarly,

Hamukwaya (2009) found that San parents in South Africa did not value the importance and quality pre-primary education. As a result, their children found it increasingly difficult to learn because parents attached less value to pre-primary education. Yet, as children's first teachers, parents should value all aspects of their children's learning.

Study findings further indicate that many parents did not provide much support to their children's learning of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. The support children needed included buying them school uniforms, exercise-books, pencils, school bags, and their involvement in homework and other related activities. In a resource-poor context with limited educational resources, the activities that could have added value to their children's development of pre-reading skills (Malmberg et al., 2011). A report by Hanover Research (2016) established that in communities where parents supported and engaged in reading-related activities, children were most likely to learn and master the skills. In this regard, Matogwa and Sambaiga (2020) suggested that parents' support was essential in their children's learning regardless of the pre-existing historical, socio-economic barriers to parental involvement. These findings indicate that regardless of the learning environment, the parental role entailed supporting their children's learning of Kiswahili pre-reading skills remained significant in this study.

Also, most of the children experienced a hostile home learning environments in most families, which limited their opportunities to develop Kiswahili pre-reading skills. After all, a supportive home learning environment ought to compliment children's development and learning (Ndijuye, Mligo & Machumu, 2020). Thus, it was more critical in a context with limited educational resources of Tanzania (Malmberg et al., 2011; Ndijuye, Mligo & Machumu, 2020; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). In this regard, Shukia (2014) found that children's experienced learning to read difficulties because of difficulty home situation, hence their failure to benefit from home support. Consequently, parents might find it increasingly difficult to support their children's learning when they were busy working to earn out a living hand-to-mouth (Matogwa & Sambaiga, 2020; Swartz & Kallaway, 2018). In this regard, children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills was hindered by multiple factors pertaining to the home involvement.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, parents were not highly involved in supporting the children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills due to the parents' limited knowledge on the importance of pre-primary education, unsupportive home environment and limited parents' support. The findings suggest that educating parents on the importance of pre-primary education is critical in the children's acquisition of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Thus, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should design a programme that would increase parents' understanding of how to support their children to acquire Kiswahili pre-reading skills. Furthermore, there is a need to build and strengthen parents' knowledge and practices on early childhood education learning activities. The study, therefore, calls for further longitudinal studies that could assess the trajectories of parental involvement in their children's early learning of reading skills to establish the long-term effects of parental involvement in their children's early learning. Furthermore, the study recommends that parental involvement should serve as an affluent resource and useful tool because it could provide rich information on the children's individualised learning needs and positively help children

teachers to improve their pre-reading instructional skills.

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