

Home Literacy Environment and Development of Early Literacy Abilities of 3-4 year-old Children in Kakamega Central Sub County, Kenya.

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Abstract

Literacy development is a multiplex process that begins at birth, continues throughout life and is fostered through stimulating interactions within two instructional environments. Home is the first primary literacy resource that affords a child the best opportunities for literacy practice. A parent is the first primary educator and a potent force in shaping a child's literacy. By creating literacy-rich homes, parents provide a head start and thrust forward into a child's literacy journey, academic and life success. In Kenya, school related factors contributing to literacy development are well documented. However, how the home context stimulates literacy development has not received sufficient research attention. Guided by the belief that developmental antecedents underlying literacy development are found prior to onset of formal schooling and, that deficiencies become monumental as they accumulate exponentially over time, this study examined the influence of Home Literacy Environment on development of early literacy abilities among 3-4-year-olds in Kakamega Sub-county Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to establish the relationship between Parents' Demographic Characteristics, Parental Literacy Beliefs, Parent Child Literacy Practices and Home Educational Resources on development of early literacy abilities of 3-4-year-old children in Kakamega Central Sub County. Anchored on bio-ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner and the Emergent Literacy theory by Clay, the study employed Mixed Method Research approach. Specifically, cross sectional and correlational research designs. Respondents were 3-4-year-old children (average age=45months) and their caregivers. Based on stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques, 72 children, 72 parents/guardians and 24 preschool teachers from 12 public attached and 12 privately owned preschools within the urban, sub-urban and rural locations of Kakamega Central Sub County were selected and responded to the study. Qualitative data was obtained by means of questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion guides. Quantitative data was generated from indices, scales and checklists of Parent Literacy Beliefs, Parent- Child Literacy Practices and Home Educational Resource. An adapted assessment tool, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills estimated early literacy abilities of 3-4- year-old children. Piloting was done in three preschools and inter-rater reliability of qualitative data was established using Cronbach's alpha statistics. Qualitative data was coded to create thematic categories and presented using descriptive statistics. Pearson's Moment Correlation Coefficient established relationship between variables, ANOVA determined mean differences among study variables and Multiple regression measured the quality of the prediction of the early literacy skills attainment. Results revealed that age, gender, family size, parental education level and income are not only key facilitative factors for parental involvement but also significant predictors of early literacy outcome. Parental belief system, literacy practices and availability of home literacy resources were more powerful

predictors of ELSS of young children. Developmentally appropriate settings, language enriched communication environment that comprised of printed materials and social support from caregivers were identified as special ingredients that encouraged early forms of reading and writing to flourish and develop into conventional literacy. These were provided at varying levels within the three stratified locations of Kakamega Central Sub-county. High SES households provided stimulating home literacy environment than low SES households. Pre-kindergarteners from high SES households had superior early literacy skills. The study recommends that families be incorporated more explicitly within development and educational agenda of young children. Family literacy programs should be designed with adequate attention to PLBs, HERs and PCLAs for a strong literacy foundation before formal literacy instruction in Kenya.

Key words: Home Literacy Environment, Development of Early Literacy Abilities of 3-4 year-old Children, Kakamega Central Sub County, Kenya.

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