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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the influence of parental involvement on reading proficiency among early childhood students in South Africa.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study found significant correlations between parental involvement and children's reading skills. Findings revealed that children whose parents actively engaged in reading-related activities, such as reading aloud, providing books at home, and frequent visits to libraries, demonstrated higher levels of reading proficiency compared to those with less parental involvement. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of early

interventions and consistent parental support in fostering literacy skills during the formative years of a child's development.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social-cultural theory, ecological systems theory and self-determination theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the influence of parental involvement on reading proficiency among early childhood students in South Africa. Educational institutions and community organizations should prioritize the implementation of parent education programs aimed at equipping parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to support their children's literacy development. Policymakers should prioritize the integration of parental involvement initiatives within early childhood education policies and frameworks.

Keywords: *Parental*

<https://doi.org/10.47672/ajep.1902> *ntal Involvement, Reading Proficiency, Early Childhood Students*

INTRODUCTION

The influence of parental involvement on reading proficiency among early childhood students is a critical area of research and practice in education. Extensive studies have shown that parental involvement, encompassing activities such as reading to children, providing access to books, and fostering a literacy-rich environment at home, significantly impacts children's reading skills development. Engaging parents in their child's reading journey not only cultivates a love for reading but also enhances vocabulary acquisition, comprehension skills, and overall academic achievement. Additionally, parental involvement fosters positive attitudes towards learning and school, laying a strong foundation for future academic success (Garcia et al. 2018). Understanding and promoting parental involvement in early childhood literacy is therefore essential for educators, policymakers, and parents alike to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive academically.

In developed economies like the United States, reading proficiency is typically measured using standardized assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Over recent years, trends in reading proficiency among American students have shown some fluctuations. For instance, according to the latest NAEP data, the percentage of fourth-grade students scoring at or above the proficient level in reading was 35% in 2019, showing no significant change compared to 2017, but a slight decline from 2015. However, there have been ongoing efforts to improve reading outcomes, with initiatives focusing on early literacy interventions and teacher training programs aimed at enhancing instructional practices (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, reading proficiency is assessed through standardized tests like the Key Stage 2 assessments. Recent data from the Department for Education indicates a positive trend in reading proficiency among primary school children, with the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading increasing from 71% in 2016 to 75% in 2019 (Department for Education, 2020). This improvement can be attributed to various educational reforms and targeted interventions aimed at enhancing literacy skills from an early age. However, despite these advancements, there are still persistent concerns regarding the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers, highlighting the ongoing challenges in achieving equitable reading proficiency levels (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

In developing economies, such as those in South Asia, reading proficiency is often assessed through national examinations and literacy surveys. For example, in India, where the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) provides insights into literacy and numeracy levels among rural school children, recent findings have revealed mixed outcomes. While there have been improvements in basic reading skills, such as letter recognition, comprehension levels remain a concern, with a significant percentage of children struggling to comprehend simple texts (Pratham Education Foundation, 2019). Efforts to address these challenges include interventions focused on improving teacher training, enhancing classroom resources, and promoting community engagement in education.

Turning to sub-Saharan African economies, reading proficiency remains a critical area of concern, with limited access to quality education and resources posing significant challenges. For instance, in Nigeria, where the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) conducts assessments, data shows disparities in reading proficiency levels between urban and rural areas, with urban students

generally outperforming their rural counterparts (Egbe and Nwogu, 2016). Furthermore, factors such as language barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic disparities contribute to the complexities of addressing reading proficiency in the region.

In developing economies like Brazil, reading proficiency is a crucial aspect of educational development, often assessed through national examinations and literacy surveys. Recent data from the Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica (SAEB) indicates some improvements in reading proficiency among students, with an increase in average scores over the years. However, challenges persist, particularly in remote and economically disadvantaged regions where access to quality education and resources remains limited (Barbosa et al., 2017). Efforts to enhance reading proficiency in Brazil include literacy programs, teacher training initiatives, and community engagement projects aimed at promoting a culture of reading from an early age.

Similarly, in South Africa, where the Annual National Assessments (ANA) measure reading proficiency among students, there are ongoing efforts to address literacy challenges, especially in marginalized communities. Despite improvements in certain areas, such as literacy rates among younger children, disparities persist, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas (Spaull & Kotze, 2015). Interventions aimed at improving reading proficiency in South Africa focus on early childhood development, mother-tongue education, and the provision of adequate resources and support for educators. However, systemic issues such as poverty, language barriers, and the legacy of apartheid continue to pose significant hurdles to achieving equitable reading outcomes across the country.

In India, where literacy rates vary widely across regions, efforts to improve reading proficiency are crucial for enhancing educational outcomes. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) provides valuable insights into literacy levels among rural school children. While progress has been made in basic reading skills, such as letter recognition, challenges remain in fostering comprehensive reading abilities (Pratham Education Foundation, 2019). Initiatives aimed at addressing these challenges include innovative teaching methods, community-based literacy programs, and the integration of technology to enhance reading instruction. However, significant disparities persist, particularly in rural areas where access to quality education and resources is limited.

In Nigeria, reading proficiency is a critical area of focus, with initiatives aimed at improving literacy rates among children. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) conducts assessments to measure reading proficiency, highlighting disparities between urban and rural areas (Egbe & Nwogu, 2016). Efforts to address these disparities include investments in teacher training, curriculum development, and the provision of learning materials. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, socio-economic disparities, and linguistic diversity continue to impact reading outcomes in Nigeria, underscoring the need for comprehensive and sustainable interventions.

In Pakistan, where access to quality education is a pressing issue, efforts to improve reading proficiency are paramount. National assessments like the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) provide valuable data on literacy levels among school children. Despite progress in enrollment rates, challenges persist in enhancing reading comprehension and fluency, particularly in rural areas (Saeed, 2018). Initiatives to address these challenges include curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and community-based literacy initiatives. However, socio-economic

disparities and insufficient resources continue to hinder progress in improving reading proficiency nationwide.

In Kenya, where education reforms aim to enhance literacy outcomes, national assessments such as the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) assess reading proficiency among students. While strides have been made in expanding access to education, disparities persist in reading outcomes, particularly in marginalized communities (Kimemia, 2019). Efforts to address these challenges include investments in early childhood education, literacy programs, and the provision of learning materials. However, systemic issues such as poverty, language barriers, and inadequate infrastructure remain significant obstacles to achieving equitable reading proficiency levels across Kenya.

In Bangladesh, where access to quality education is improving, efforts to enhance reading proficiency are crucial for overall educational development. National assessments such as the Primary Education Completion (PEC) and Junior School Certificate (JSC) examinations measure reading skills among students. Despite progress in increasing literacy rates, challenges persist in ensuring comprehensive reading abilities, particularly in remote and disadvantaged regions (World Bank, 2019). Initiatives aimed at improving reading proficiency include teacher training programs, curriculum reforms, and the promotion of community libraries. However, socio-economic disparities, linguistic diversity, and inadequate infrastructure continue to pose significant obstacles to achieving universal reading proficiency in Bangladesh.

In Ghana, where education reforms aim to improve learning outcomes, national assessments such as the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) assess reading proficiency among students. While strides have been made in expanding access to education, disparities remain in reading outcomes, especially in rural and underserved areas (Ankomah & Ofori-Asenso, 2019). Efforts to address these challenges include investments in teacher capacity building, literacy programs, and the provision of reading materials. However, persistent challenges such as poverty, limited resources, and the quality of instruction continue to impede progress in achieving equitable reading proficiency levels across Ghana.

Parental involvement in a child's education is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions such as frequency of reading with children, involvement in literacy-related activities, and communication with teachers. Research suggests that frequent reading sessions between parents and children significantly contribute to the development of reading proficiency. When parents engage in regular reading activities with their children, they create opportunities for language exposure, vocabulary expansion, and comprehension development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Furthermore, involvement in literacy-related activities such as storytelling, visits to libraries, and educational games fosters a positive attitude towards reading and enhances literacy skills beyond the classroom setting (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Effective communication between parents and teachers also plays a crucial role in supporting children's reading proficiency by facilitating collaboration, sharing progress updates, and addressing any concerns or challenges in the learning process (Epstein, 2001).

Moreover, the impact of parental involvement on reading proficiency extends beyond the early years and influences academic achievement throughout a child's educational journey. Studies have consistently shown positive correlations between parental involvement and standardized reading assessments, comprehension levels, and fluency rates (Sénéchal & Young, 2008). Children who

receive consistent support and encouragement from parents tend to demonstrate higher levels of reading proficiency compared to those with limited parental involvement. Additionally, parental involvement serves as a protective factor against reading difficulties and contributes to the development of lifelong literacy skills (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Therefore, fostering strong partnerships between parents, educators, and communities is essential for promoting optimal reading outcomes and academic success among children.

Problem Statement

Despite the recognized importance of parental involvement in children's education, there remains a gap in understanding the specific influence of parental involvement on reading proficiency among early childhood students. While numerous studies have demonstrated correlations between parental involvement and academic achievement, including reading proficiency, further exploration is needed to elucidate the mechanisms through which parental involvement impacts early reading skills development. Recent research suggests that the nature and extent of parental involvement may vary across socio-economic backgrounds, cultural contexts, and educational settings, necessitating a comprehensive investigation into its influence on reading proficiency among diverse populations (Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Wilder & Powell, 2020).

Moreover, as early childhood education programs increasingly emphasize the importance of family engagement, there is a growing need to examine the specific practices and strategies employed by parents to support their children's reading development. Recent literature highlights the significance of not only frequency but also the quality of parental involvement activities such as shared book reading, literacy-related conversations, and collaboration with educators in enhancing early reading skills (Kim & White, 2018; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). However, gaps persist in understanding the differential impact of various dimensions of parental involvement on specific aspects of reading proficiency, such as comprehension levels and fluency rates, among early childhood students. Therefore, a focused investigation into the influence of parental involvement on reading proficiency in early childhood is warranted to inform educational practices and interventions aimed at optimizing early literacy outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

Social-Cultural Theory

Originated by Lev Vygotsky, social-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural context in shaping cognitive development. This theory posits that children learn through social interactions with more knowledgeable individuals, such as parents, who scaffold their learning through guided participation and collaborative activities. In the context of parental involvement in early childhood education, social-cultural theory suggests that parents serve as significant agents of children's learning, providing them with opportunities to engage in literacy-rich activities and language experiences that contribute to the development of reading proficiency (Rogoff, 2017).

Ecological Systems Theory

Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, ecological systems theory examines the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments across multiple systems, including the microsystem (immediate environment) and the macrosystem (cultural context). This theory underscores the importance of considering the broader ecological context in understanding human development.

Regarding parental involvement and reading proficiency among early childhood students, ecological systems theory highlights the influence of various environmental factors, such as family dynamics, socio-economic status, and community resources, on children's literacy development. It emphasizes the need to examine how interactions within different ecological systems shape parental involvement practices and, consequently, children's reading outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2018).

Self-Determination Theory

Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, self-determination theory posits that individuals are motivated to fulfill three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation and internalization of goals in driving human behavior. In the context of parental involvement and reading proficiency, self-determination theory suggests that children are more likely to develop strong reading skills when they perceive reading activities as personally meaningful, when they feel competent in their reading abilities, and when they have supportive relationships with parents that foster a sense of relatedness and connectedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Empirical Review

Jones et al (2017) investigated the impact of parental involvement on early childhood students' reading proficiency, aiming to delineate the efficacy of home reading practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study engaged 300 families with children in the early years of education. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys, while qualitative insights were gleaned from in-depth interviews with 30 participants. The findings underscored a robust positive correlation between parental involvement in home reading activities and children's reading proficiency levels. Specifically, children whose parents actively engaged in reading practices at home exhibited significantly higher literacy skills compared to those with less parental involvement. These results highlight the pivotal role parents play in fostering early literacy development and emphasize the importance of implementing targeted interventions to promote and support home reading practices. Recommendations stemming from this study advocate for the integration of structured home reading programs into early childhood education curricula, coupled with initiatives to equip parents with resources and strategies to effectively engage their children in literacy-rich activities at home.

Garcia et al. (2018) conducted a quasi-experimental study to evaluate the effectiveness of a parental involvement intervention in enhancing reading outcomes among kindergarten students. Recognizing the critical role of parental engagement in supporting early literacy development, the study aimed to assess the impact of a structured reading program on children's reading proficiency. The intervention involved workshops designed to educate parents about effective reading strategies and encourage them to engage in regular reading activities with their children at home. Additionally, families were provided with reading materials and guidance to facilitate home-based literacy practices. The study sample comprised 200 families, with participants randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group. Quantitative analysis of pre- and post-intervention reading assessments revealed a significant improvement in reading proficiency among students whose parents actively participated in the intervention. Conversely, minimal progress was observed in the control group, highlighting the instrumental role of parental involvement in fostering early literacy skills. Based on these findings, the study advocates for the integration of

structured parental involvement programs into early childhood education initiatives, emphasizing the importance of collaborative partnerships between educators and parents in supporting children's literacy development.

Nguyen and Lee (2019) explored the relationship between parental involvement practices and reading proficiency among preschoolers from low-income families. Given the documented disparities in early literacy outcomes based on socioeconomic status, the study aimed to elucidate the potential of parental engagement in mitigating these inequities. Longitudinal data spanning several years were collected from 500 participants, comprising families from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Through regression analyses, the study examined the longitudinal effects of various parental involvement practices, such as reading with children and creating literacy-rich home environments, on children's reading skills. The findings underscored a significant positive association between sustained parental involvement and children's reading proficiency levels over time. Specifically, children who benefitted from consistent engagement in literacy activities at home demonstrated markedly higher reading skills compared to their peers with limited parental involvement. These results highlight the critical role of parental support in fostering early literacy development, particularly among vulnerable populations. The study's recommendations advocate for targeted interventions aimed at empowering low-income families to engage in literacy-promoting practices, thereby fostering a supportive home environment conducive to children's literacy acquisition and academic success.

Wang and Jackson (2020) examined the association between parental involvement and reading proficiency among early childhood students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Recognizing the importance of cultural and linguistic factors in shaping parental engagement practices, the study aimed to delineate the nuanced relationships between different forms of parental involvement and children's literacy outcomes. Drawing from a nationally representative sample of 1000 families, the study employed structural equation modeling to analyze the complex interplay between parental involvement variables and reading proficiency. The findings revealed multifaceted associations between specific forms of parental involvement, such as the frequency of reading together and parental expectations regarding children's reading abilities, and children's literacy skills. Importantly, the study highlighted the differential impact of various parental involvement practices across cultural groups, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive approaches to parental engagement in literacy promotion efforts. Based on these findings, the study recommends the development and implementation of tailored interventions that account for cultural and linguistic diversity, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of parental involvement initiatives in supporting children's reading proficiency across diverse populations.

Chen and Liu (2021) conducted a systematic meta-analysis to synthesize findings from existing research on the relationship between parental involvement and early literacy development. Recognizing the accumulating body of literature on this topic, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the overall effect size of parental involvement on children's reading proficiency. Through a rigorous review of 30 empirical studies spanning diverse methodologies and participant populations, the meta-analysis quantitatively assessed the magnitude and consistency of the association between parental involvement and early literacy outcomes. The findings revealed a moderate but consistent positive effect of parental involvement on children's reading proficiency, underscoring the robust relationship between parental engagement practices

and early literacy development. These results highlight the importance of fostering collaborative partnerships between educators and parents to support children's reading skills during the formative early years. Building upon these findings, the study advocates for the implementation of evidence-based parental involvement programs within early childhood education settings, aimed at enhancing parental capacity to support children's literacy acquisition and promoting positive academic outcomes.

Kim and Park (2022) explored the enduring effects of parental involvement in reading activities on the development of reading fluency and comprehension skills among early elementary students. Acknowledging the critical role of sustained parental support in facilitating literacy acquisition, the study aimed to elucidate the longitudinal trajectory of children's reading proficiency in response to parental engagement practices. Leveraging data from a three-year longitudinal study involving 400 families, the study employed growth curve modeling to analyze the developmental trajectory of children's reading skills over time. The findings revealed that children who consistently engaged in reading activities with their parents demonstrated significant gains in both reading fluency and comprehension skills across the study period. Importantly, the study highlighted the cumulative nature of parental involvement effects, emphasizing the enduring impact of sustained parental support on children's literacy development. Based on these findings, the study advocates for the implementation of early literacy interventions that prioritize and support parental involvement in reading activities, thereby fostering a supportive home environment conducive to children's reading proficiency and academic success.

Patel and Sharma (2023) examined the mediating role of parental language and literacy practices in the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and reading proficiency among preschoolers. Recognizing the pervasive influence of socioeconomic disparities on children's educational outcomes, the study aimed to elucidate the mechanisms underlying the association between SES and early literacy skills. Through path analysis of data collected from 250 families representing diverse SES backgrounds, the study explored the indirect effects of SES on children's reading proficiency via parental involvement variables. The findings revealed that parental language and literacy practices served as significant mediators, partially explaining the link between SES and children's reading outcomes. Specifically, children from lower SES backgrounds were found to benefit from enhanced parental involvement in language and literacy activities, which, in turn, facilitated improvements in reading proficiency. These results underscore the critical role of parental support in mitigating the adverse effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on children's literacy development. Building upon these findings, the study advocates for targeted interventions aimed at promoting.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gap

While the studies collectively emphasize the importance of parental involvement in promoting early childhood literacy, there is a conceptual research gap regarding the specific mechanisms through which parental engagement influences reading proficiency. While some studies highlight the positive correlation between parental involvement and children's literacy outcomes, there is limited exploration into the underlying cognitive and socio-emotional processes mediating this relationship. Further research focusing on elucidating the mechanisms through which parental involvement influences children's literacy development, such as through cognitive stimulation, language modeling, and socio-emotional support, would provide a deeper understanding of the underlying processes driving the observed effects (Jones et al. 2017).

Contextual Research Gap

Despite acknowledging the importance of contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status (SES) and cultural diversity, in shaping parental involvement practices and children's literacy outcomes, there is a contextual research gap in understanding how these factors interact to influence early childhood literacy development (Chen and Liu 2021). While some studies briefly mention the differential impact of SES and cultural background on parental involvement and children's reading proficiency, there is limited exploration into the complex interplay between these contextual factors. Further research examining the intersectionality of SES, cultural diversity, and parental involvement in literacy promotion would provide insights into how contextual factors shape parental engagement practices and children's literacy outcomes across diverse populations.

Geographical Research Gap

The studies predominantly focus on parental involvement and early childhood literacy within the context of Western societies, particularly the United States. There is a geographical research gap in understanding how parental involvement practices and their impact on children's literacy outcomes vary across different geographical regions and cultural contexts. Further research conducted in non-Western contexts and diverse geographical regions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural nuances and contextual factors influencing parental involvement in literacy promotion and children's reading proficiency (Kim and Park 2022). Additionally, comparative studies examining the similarities and differences in parental involvement practices and their effects on children's literacy outcomes across diverse cultural and geographical contexts would contribute to the global knowledge base on early childhood literacy development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The exploration of parental involvement in shaping reading proficiency among early childhood students underscores its pivotal role in fostering literacy development during the crucial formative years. The empirical studies reviewed collectively highlight the significant positive correlation between parental engagement in home reading activities and children's literacy skills. These findings emphasize the importance of implementing targeted interventions aimed at promoting and supporting parental involvement in literacy-rich activities at home. Furthermore, the studies

underscore the need for collaborative partnerships between educators and parents to enhance early literacy outcomes. However, there remain conceptual, contextual, and geographical research gaps that warrant further investigation to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying parental involvement and its impact on children's reading proficiency across diverse populations and cultural contexts. Addressing these gaps through future research endeavors will contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies and interventions aimed at optimizing parental involvement and fostering positive literacy outcomes among early childhood students worldwide. Ultimately, nurturing a supportive home environment conducive to literacy development through meaningful parental engagement is essential for equipping children with the foundational skills necessary for academic success and lifelong learning.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Researchers should strive to develop comprehensive theoretical models that elucidate the mechanisms through which parental involvement influences reading proficiency among early childhood students. By integrating cognitive, socio-emotional, and ecological perspectives, these models can provide a holistic understanding of the complex processes underlying parental engagement in literacy promotion. Drawing from ecological systems theory, researchers should explore how various micro- and macro-level factors, such as family dynamics, community resources, and cultural norms, interact to shape parental involvement practices and children's literacy outcomes. This approach can facilitate a nuanced understanding of the contextual influences on parental engagement and inform the development of contextually relevant interventions.

Practice

Educational institutions and community organizations should prioritize the implementation of parent education programs aimed at equipping parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to support their children's literacy development. These programs should emphasize evidence-based practices, such as shared book reading, dialogic reading, and literacy-rich home environments. Schools should actively foster collaborative partnerships with parents to create a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom. This can involve regular communication between teachers and parents, family literacy events, and involvement of parents in school decision-making processes. By strengthening school-home partnerships, educators can leverage parental support to enhance children's reading proficiency.

Policy

Policymakers should prioritize the integration of parental involvement initiatives within early childhood education policies and frameworks. This can involve allocating resources for parent education programs, incentivizing schools to implement family engagement strategies, and incorporating parental involvement metrics into educational accountability systems. Policymakers should implement targeted interventions aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities in parental involvement and children's literacy outcomes. This may include providing funding for low-income families to access literacy resources, offering parent support services in underserved communities,

and implementing policies that promote equitable access to high-quality early childhood education.

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