

Parent-Teacher Empowerment and Early Years Quality Literacy Development for Lifelong Learning

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ABSTRACT

Children's literacy development starts very early in life through participation and experience in the home well before school. It grows more consistently during pre-school and school years as children explore their socio-cultural world more and more. Early years represent children's important formative stages of growth when they learn the language and the world that they will grow to establish a life-long relationship with. When children learn and develop their Mother tongue or primary language therefore, they are learning the foundation of learning itself, a process of language and meaning making that is a continuous process from birth, through infancy and childhood to adolescence and adult life.

The majority of young children in Sub-Saharan Africa are unable to readily access sustainable early literacy development and childhood care and education and their educational achievement trajectories are hugely compromised. Lack of viable parental participation in their literacy development, encouragement and support from teachers and availability of learning materials at school are some of environmental factors that make up their early social world. Meanwhile, rural homes and communities are well endowed with cultural resources and a stock of practices, knowledge, and skills relevant to the promotion of literacy development waiting to be tapped into.

This paper uses analysis of data from two qualitative and one mixed methods studies in three different countries to discuss the factors that influence literacy development based on the interplay of language (learning), literacy (development) and school education outcomes in low resource communities and how best they could be overcome. The paper concludes that low performance in general is a result of a combination factors that require concerted efforts at all levels if the situation can be reversed.

Keywords: *Language, literacy, education at home and school for life-long learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the notions of literacy development and conditions of learning in low resource communities using empirical experiences from Southern and East Africa to show the significance of their interplay. What the paper focuses on is what happens if socio-cultural conditions are not supportive – if learning a language and developing literacy are not supported by the physical and human environment. This is where learning to read is not supported to become part of learning the foundation of learning and literacy, the process and content of learning to read and write to the preparation for work and vocational training.

Conducive conditions of literacy development ensure that the child or individual for that matter is able to utilize the written and spoken word (stories included) in their environment to cope better with their aspirations. For this to happen, certain conditions must prevail. A social example from a Berlin bottle collector for recycling (<http://www.pfandgeben.de>), can illustrate this harmony between literacy and lifelong learning.

Many pensioners and unemployed people in Berlin are turning to an unusual means of supplementing their meager incomes: collecting discarded deposit bottles. They can return them to stores or supermarkets for a few cents per bottle. Amid such stories of desperation, one young Berliner decided to do something to make life easier for Berlin's bottle collectors. That turned into the website Pfandgeben.de, which was launched in July 2011.

A 61 year bottle collector now uses this website to access discarded bottles because he is computer literate and therefore copes better with his own life using appropriate literacy (he has learnt to learn). The point of departure here is that while this occupation is otherwise very common even in undeveloped countries, the collector's literacy levels consistent with his society enable him to transform this pastime to a more effective enterprise.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Three studies inform the reflections in this paper: *Home and school literacy practices interface in rural Zimbabwe* (Ngwaru 2010); *East Africa Quality in Early Learning* (EAQEL) (Ngwaru & Njoroge 2011), *Early Literacy development for sustainable schooling in Southern Tanzania* (Ngwaru, Oluga & Mwingi, 2013).

2.1 Home and School Literacy Practices Interface In Rural Zimbabwe

This study used a qualitative research design involving home and school observations, interviews, focus group discussions and analysis of professional documents in the school.



Parents and teachers were interviewed and participated in focus group discussions and documents analysis was used on teacher scheme and plan books, pupil exercise books, class story and text books, and any other relevant records. For this study, interviews and focus group discussions created unique opportunities to listen to teachers and parents and children voicing their own interpretations and thoughts as well as their frustrations regarding literacy development and education instead of relying solely on ‘outsider’ interpretations. In other words, participants were encouraged to tell their own stories about the extent to which language learning and literacy development were parents’ priority at home before children went to pre-school?

The study looked at literacy practices at home and school in a more homogeneous rural setting with a particular focus on ten parents within different family headships from six families and their combined total of 25 primary school-going children. (Two families were grandmother led, one was single mother led, two had both parents and the last was a polygamous union with a husband and his two wives.) From the school, all seven teachers, including student teachers, participated with the focus to establish the proactivity in teachers’ pedagogies and the level of home school interplay they promoted.

The critical component of the ethnography design entailed the setting up of sensitization meetings between researcher and teachers as well as parents separately. These were held with parents and teachers around effective parenting, including increased dialogue between parents and children and constructivist pedagogies, and the recognition of children’s socio-cultural funds of knowledge. At a joint teacher, parent and children meeting organized as part of advocacy, both teachers and parents admitted lost opportunities from lack of awareness of the vast amount of capital homes and schools shared and pledged to work more closely.

Among the findings, as discussed in some detail below, were the following: parents were not aware of the roles they could play in the literacy development of their children; teachers were under the mistaken perception that parents did not know anything about children’s literacy development and therefore could not participate in its development at home or school; and both parents and teachers perceived literacy development from the Western schooling Perspective of reading books and writing for school purposes only. Furthermore, teachers’ pedagogies completely excluded children’s socio-cultural funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg 1990) and if anything disparaged them.

2.2 East Africa Quality in Early Learning Study

The EAQEL study was an evaluation of a pedagogical intervention project based on David Rose’s (2006) instructional approach to scaffolding literacy instruction – “*Reading to Learn*” (RtL). This is a systematic approach to the teaching of reading and Mathematics developed and first used in Australia but adapted to different educational contexts around the world to recognize local pedagogical rhythms. The RtL provides a systematic and explicit approach to the teaching of reading and maths to enable all children to succeed by breaking complex tasks down to manageable components.

In Kenya and Uganda the intervention was introduced in 115 schools – 64 and 51 respectively. It involved three strands: first, training and supporting 115 head teachers (and their deputies) and 345 lower primary school teachers (standard one to three), 60 per cent of whom were female, to teach literacy and numeracy using the RtL; second, introducing classroom libraries in each of the intervention schools; and thirdly introducing, in half of the intervention schools, the Reading for Children (RfC) component where village libraries were initiated to encourage parental involvement in support of their children’s education.

The evaluation focused on the assessment of the effectiveness of each of the strands, with specific emphasis on factors that seemed to influence children’s literacy development and acquisition of reading skills. Again the interplay of the learning environment, language learning, literacy development and educational outcomes including, availability and utilization of teaching and learning materials and parental involvement at home and school were focused upon. Classroom observations were employed to obtain data on the use of the RtL and the classroom libraries, while interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of teachers’ professional records were important sources of data on effectiveness of the intervention especially transforming teachers’ pedagogies and parental participation.

The main finding from the study was that although pedagogical interventions were introduced to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and Maths, there were significant barriers to the attainment of its goals. Most significant among the challenges were teachers’ inability to use constructivist pedagogies and to develop and use effective teaching learning materials even though these were abundantly provided by the project. Teachers were inevitably left as the only source of knowledge in the classroom as parents did not participate or engage. However these communities still were endowed with resilience, skills and knowledge based on their cultural ways of knowing that enabled them to make the best of their situations.

The RtR intervention project in Kenya successfully trained some parents to run community libraries and Reading for Children programmes. These programmes made parents so much more aware of the importance of early literacy development that they asked their older, secondary school children to teach them to read so they, in turn could teach children in pre-school and the early grades to read. This demonstrated that with systematic empowerment, these families were ready and capable to embrace effective school-type literacy practices.

3. PARENT-TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT STUDY

This was a baseline study of literacy development in Lindi Rural District of Southern Tanzania based on a sequential mixed method research design to harness the



generalizability of surveys and the detailed nature of interpretive data from qualitative methodology. It used a questionnaire survey accompanied by rapid ethnographic observations and interviews, followed by detailed vertical case studies of schools and communities. It was carried out in 86 of 113 primary schools representing all schools with pre-school sections in the one rural district selected for the study. This involved 276 pre-school and lower primary school teachers and 288 parents of children from the same level. The study focused on understanding factors that determined literacy development in low-resource communities in order to empower parents and teachers for children's sustainable schooling and learning outcomes in Southern Tanzania.

The study was informed primarily by the need to document through survey and ethnographical procedures, the factors that influenced early literacy development among the 3 – 8 year olds in rural low-resource communities in Lindi Rural District of Southern Tanzania. The literacy development perspectives that informed the study blended Africentricism (Nsamenang, 2011, Pence and Nsamenang, 2008) and Eurocentric socio-cultural approaches to learning and development (Vygotsky 1987).

This study contributes towards the knowledge about how socio-economic and cultural status of parents influence children's literacy development in general and school literacy in particular. This was in order to determine possible pedagogical approaches and practices that would speak adequately to the experiences of rural parents and their 3 to 8 year olds to repudiate marginalization (Ada, 1988a, Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2005). It was again as much informed by the need to target parents currently unable to support their children and unaware of the potency of their involvement in children's literacy development (Ngwaru 2010; 2011) and to sensitize pre-school and early grade teachers requiring support in constructive developmental pedagogy (Magolda, 1999).

The study recognized that knowledge was co-constructed by the child and others within the family and the school (McNaughton, 2001) and that much literacy learning took place in families, homes, and neighbourhoods. It very much underlined the imperative for schools to harness the power of out- of-school learning, especially for children who are at-risk of missing appropriate literacy targets due to factors of social deprivation (Nickse & Speicher, 1988). The over-arching goals were to envisage ways of interfacing the home and school to close the gaps between pedagogies influenced by dominant relations of power (that instill the deficit feeling among target learners) as opposed to affirming the value of socio-cultural funds of knowledge.

4. RESULTS

Results from the questionnaire survey indicated that socio-economic well-being, in particular the level of parents' education and income, were major factors influencing the lack of literacy development for children. The parents' education profiles

confirmed this factor further by indicating that the majority (81 percent) had primary school as the highest level of education and generated income primarily from subsistent farming (88 percent) with the vast majority living on about a dollar a day. It was still the case, however, that their homes were endowed with socio-cultural funds of knowledge that would enable them promote their children's learning if they, as parents had been empowered in that regard. The homes were furnished with basic but appropriate items including locally-made furniture – beds, chairs, tables and stools as well as other paraphernalia for household uses. Some of the rich furniture gadgetry included coconut flesh extracting devices (mbuzi), spice miniature mortars and pestles, mixers and special charcoal stoves as well as decorations and cultural and religious artifacts significant in the lives of the villagers.

Vertical case study data indicated that the target institutions – the schools and communities, had historical, economic and socio-cultural conditions that did not reinforce the link between activities of reading and writing and social structures. Early Language and learning at home did not enhance literacy development at school as the home language did not continue or remain the language of education straight from pre-school. The process of learning to learn that started with the Mother language and all the socio-cultural capital it represented was disrupted immediately children went to school.

To compound the situation communities cared very little about school education since they were pre-occupied with different levels of livelihood challenges including lack of development, intergenerational poverty and lack of gainful employment opportunities for their women and youths all of which could not be solved by the school education offered to the children. They perceived their socio-cultural economies as more reliable for their livelihoods than school education because at least they had relied on these economies for generations. This left parents less motivated to encourage their children to pursue school educational goals. Parents openly disparaged school education in its current form as having failed to change their fortunes since even the few whose children had completed 'O' Level had nothing to show for it, they said. It was to no surprise that they had become cynical about school education because it did not appear to have delivered anybody they knew from the cycle of poverty. This made them further lose trust in civic institutions which they said had proved over the years to be partisan and partial.

At one of the case schools teachers reported and the education officers confirmed that parents were known to be openly hostile to the school agenda because it burdened them to look for secondary school fees and other requirements without any known benefit. These parents were echoing Nsameng, (2011, p. 7) that school education was not automatically bringing economic growth and societal development in Africa, contrary to what was predicted by human capital theory (Dasen and Akkari, 2008). If anything it was just an inconvenience – taking away children from home and depriving them of meaningful farming and fishing economic activities (these were coastal communities on the Indian Ocean). It was with little surprise that schools on the other hand were perennially grappling with a range of systemic challenges such as the lack of resources



including inadequate number of teachers, lack of timely response to their needs by responsible authorities, lack of support from parents and communities and lack of children motivation.

It is in the light of the above constructs that experiences from studies across the region are being interpreted in this paper. The objective was to examine the general cultural ways in which communities utilized literacy practices that could promote lifelong learning. The studies particularly wanted to establish the factors embedded within the school, the family and community structures that could vindicate or repudiate the extent to which literacy and learning were dependent on them. All these were in the context that the socio-cultural environment including the Mother Tongue (MT) was expected to offer the best support to children's foundation of learning and literacy development.

The question was then how much literacy development and language learning were made to reinforce each other for life-long learning? In Tanzania, more than in other countries, the situation was grim as early life experiences were not easily transmitted to later stages as the first language stopped to play any role in children's school life. According to the national language policy, straight from pre-school, MT became a forbidden language in favour of the national language Kiswahili which in turn was also abandoned after the seven years of primary education in favour of English for secondary and tertiary education.

The established baselines of literacy were to indicate the measures educational stakeholders needed to consider to promote early literacy development in low-resource communities. The discussion of the overarching notions in the research experiences are discussed under four sub-headings – investing in parents' empowerment, recognizing family funds of knowledge, parents creating literacy-rich environments and utilizing local environment to promote literacy practices.

4.1 The Need to Invest in Parents' Empowerment

In most African countries, children from low income families grow up in environments where parental involvement in their education is either minimal or absent. Low income parents often do not see beyond their economic circumstances. The three studies informing the reflections in this paper highlighted some of the contextual reasons why parents cannot participate in the literacy development of their children and why their homes can be described as lacking in intellectual motivation and reading opportunities (Ngwaru 2010).

It must be noted that intellectual motivation and even reading opportunities should not necessarily be viewed from a Western perspective. Socio-cultural resources such as family stories and cultural artifacts are a source of literacy development that offers intellectual motivation and reading opportunities as viable as any other. This is why empowerment of stakeholders was important so that parents and teachers could

recognize the environmental endowments they could exploit in that regards. One of the biggest challenges was however parents' preoccupation with the mundane everyday survival needs leaving no space for prioritizing literacy development. This is what Barton & Hamilton, (1998, p. 83) called parents' ruling passions that is, their immediate priorities – that made them appear not to place a high value on the educational and intellectual achievements of their children, as if they believed that education was not for them.

In Zimbabwe parents were more often than not preoccupied with poverty, socio-economic insecurity, morbidity (usually arising from the scourge of HIV/AIDS) and a lack of understanding of the potency of their involvement in children's literacy development. In Kenya it was the same preoccupation with poverty and lack of education which left some parents thinking that since they could not read themselves, they could not help their children. At a practical level, however, they were doing everything in their power to help their children do well at school by their ensuring that school fees were paid and the children actually went to school. Parents reported perhaps in a manner evoking Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs that direct participation or involvement in school activities was likely to occur only after their families' physiological needs of hunger, thirst and bodily discomfort had been satisfied.

In the Zimbabwean community, as in others throughout Africa, disease, poverty and the resultant mortality were everyday realities and it was an illusion to believe that, left on their own, parents in these circumstances could prioritize their children's literacy development. What made the need for critical pedagogy and advocacy for empowerment particularly poignant was that families often did not have the means to escape their difficult situations – left alone they could not break the poverty cycle. They needed to secure their future by improving their children's success chances. These parents needed to be sensitized about the potency of their involvement in children's literacy development and if possible helped to find ways of augmenting their meager incomes in order to escape the poverty cycle. Supporting their children to access sustainable schooling would be the most significant step to secure these communities' future.

These communities required intervention to mitigate the literacy development challenges that they faced especially with regards to school pedagogies and provision of teaching leaning materials. This apparently will require the acknowledgement and utilization of families' funds of knowledge – those historically developed and accumulated strategies, skills, abilities, ideas, practices and bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and wellbeing (Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd- Tenery, Rivera Rendon, Gonzalez & Amandi (1993). Most villagers in the Zimbabwe and Tanzania communities, for instance, had skills which allowed them to provide piecemeal labour and earn income locally. In both countries communities drew upon a wide variety of practical skills and relationships relevant to their context, such as crop and animal husbandry, treating cattle diseases with traditional herbs and methods, sinking deep wells, basketry and reed mat-weaving as well as carving tools and implements



such as mortars and pestles. In Tanzania communities had further skills related to their contexts as they depended on growing cashew and coconuts as well as fishing. The income from these activities however required some quality intervention to go beyond subsistence.

Although teachers in both countries seldom mentioned any of these examples in their classrooms, it was very clear that culturally appropriate literacy development materials could be developed from such knowledge, skills, experiences and relationships. The view of this paper is that stakeholders of literacy should hold this positive and realistic view of low income households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources and funds of knowledge with great potential utility for classroom instruction (Moll & Greenberg 1990; Moll, Velez-Ibanez, Greenberg, Whitmore, Saavedra, Dworin & Andrade 1990). Unfortunately this view contrasted sharply with the study families' prevailing perceptions (and those of working class and rural families in general) of local cultural resources as socially disorganized and intellectually deficient. Sadly, these perceptions, rather than being challenged, are reinforced by the dominant forces of power behind schooling and other social programs. This is the reason why parents think the way they do and need to be made aware of the efficacy of the abundant socio-cultural funds of knowledge in their contexts. They need to embrace this to groom their children and develop them emotionally in preparation for life-long literacy development.

It was not by coincidence that the clearest consistent phenomenon across the three studies was parents' lack of awareness about how they could contribute towards their children's literacy development. Even though they and the contexts in which they were raising their children possessed abundant socio-cultural funds of knowledge, those remained untapped in the absence of empowerment sensitization. In Kenya, at the onset of a pedagogical intervention parents refused to volunteer to take part in the running of village libraries, saying they had no skills to offer and in some cases could not read themselves (Ngwaru & Njoroge, 2011, p. 28).

After being empowered through project training, however, they were surprised by their own effectiveness when many children became inspired by having parents taking charge of their reading. The process was simple but effective and strategic – parents were successfully trained to support children's reading by leading community libraries in the RfC component. Children who had not previously associated their parents with direct literacy activities such as reading became excited and assured and a transformation was noticed in the way children changed their reading habits and behaviours.

The community libraries and the Reading for Children programme made parents so much more aware of the importance of early literacy development that they asked their older, secondary school children to teach them to read so they in turn, could teach children in pre-school and the early grades to read. The following testimony by one community librarian underscores this point:

I discovered that learning to read was such an important skill

[that] I could not trust anyone to do it for my children. I am satisfied with the progress my Standard Two and Four children are making in reading because when they come from school they come here to the community library and I continue with them (Ngwaru & Njoroge 2011, p. 45).

What was even more significant about this study was that reading with children supported children's social-emotional development, with children expressing feelings of satisfaction and encouragement after realizing that home and school were on the same continuum. Both parents and children said that their relationships had improved tremendously through the close cooperation arising from the Reading for Children programme. Similar findings emerged from the Zimbabwe study:

At the outset, parents perceived that they had no role to play in the formal schooling of their children, believing that this was the sole responsibility of the school. Similarly, the teachers saw parents as having no part to play. The only engagement with parents was through the PTC whose main purpose was purely administrative rather than academic. (Ngwaru, 2010, p. 218)

4.2 Parents Creating Literacy-rich Environments

Parents, as caring adults, need empowerment to create literacy-rich environments, foster social- emotional stability and self -regulation, and promote other skills to prepare their children for sustainable access to schooling. Based on current research, literacy development begins long before children begin formal instruction in elementary school. Children acquire literacy skills in a variety of ways and at different ages. Early behaviours such as "reading" from pictures and "writing" scribbles are an important part of children's literacy development. Social interactions with caring adults, including shared story-telling with consistent exposure to literacy materials, such as storybooks, where they are available, will nourish literacy development. Literacy-rich environments offer daily, extended conversations with adults about topics that are meaningful and of interest to children.

However, even in the literate Western society, research with kindergarten teachers suggests that about 20 per cent of children entering kindergarten do not yet have the necessary social and emotional skills to be "ready" for school. The American National Scientific Council (2005) estimates that as many as 30 per cent of very low-income children may not have the necessary social and emotional skills. In Africa these percentages are three or fourfold. Yet, early social and emotional development is important both in its own right and in supporting cognitive development.

Bloch, (2002) highlights the fact that when children are young, the adults around them (parents, other adult caregivers and preschool teachers) are the most important influences on their social and emotional development. For example children will have



lasting impressions about literacy when they see adults following instructions about how to operate a new cell phone or sharing a familiar story from a community newspaper than when they just see forms of print lying in their environment. As the National Scientific Council (2005) points out, improved parenting methods that promote literacy development, coupled with high-quality preschool education, can support early development in ways that yield long-term social and emotional benefits. In the African context therefore, literacy-rich environments need not necessarily be created from Western conventional books and school-based activities but from the vast socio-cultural resources embedded in daily activities in a variety of settings.

4.3 Utilizing local environment to promote literacy practices

It has become clear that when planning interventions in low-resource communities, such as in rural Zimbabwe and Tanzania, literacy-rich environments do not necessarily have to be based on Western examples of abundant books and parents reading to children. Instead, local knowledge resources including stories and artifacts should form the basis of literacy practices in order to avoid a deficit approach to literacy. It is useful that children be surrounded by oral language including stories emanating from family experiences and interactions through time. This will obviously create opportunities for children to ask questions and debunk the notion that they should not. It is important for adults to share their ideas and feelings, encouraging children to express themselves and ask questions and if some parents might still be influenced by hierarchical societal norms of power where children are not supposed to ask questions, they need to be sensitized to change.

These studies viewed even the notion of no participation in children's school work as part of societal norms that required to be changed. The studies' motivation was to empower parents and teachers. Where children see adults using print materials for a variety of everyday purposes in their context such as purchasing mobile phone credit vouchers, merchandizing, or learning about the news, this should be viewed as similar to other activities. Although very few, books and print materials can be available and families are encouraged to consider children's reading levels and even encourage them just to play with the print materials since reading habits are developmental. The key is for families to utilize every opportunity that presents itself to talk about literacy as: "a sign by which we know the world we live in . . . and not simply the skills of reading and writing but the way we think about ourselves as working and thinking beings" Street 1997, p. 138. Families need to talk with children about the print they see around them and explain how it provides information e.g., signs on buses, labels on food and commodity packaging, and others).

Below: Children surrounded by oral language emanating from family experiences:



Vibrant contexts full of cultural knowledge

This photo shows children pounding cassava for a staple carbohydrate diet called (mada/matamba). In the spirit of empowering parents and teachers, two copies of this photo were printed and framed then handed over to the family and school as a good example of local funds of knowledge and literacy capital.

It is clear that parents should not have any reason not to engage in literacy development except for lack of awareness and it was sad that teachers did not refer to these knowledges in their teaching. As has been noted, without appropriate awareness parents in low-resource contexts will often think they are unable to nurture their children's literacy and social-emotional development, believing it is the responsibility of school teachers or other parents in better financial circumstances.

This paper calls for the sensitization of parents in these contexts to increase children's chances of being the catalysis of development in the future of communities. Parents will start to realize that they can play a big role in their children's education if they understand that reading with children could also just mean opening any print materials that might be available, telling stories around pictures and encouraging them to read, play and feel relaxed with print materials. The research-based knowledge acquired from these studies shows that as educationalists and ECCE proponents, it is no longer defensible to leave children without carefully planned literacy development programs connecting home and school.

Governments in SSA should prioritize policy on Early Childhood Care and Education going forward. Barnett, Leong, Gomby, Robin and Hustedt (2005, p.13) emphasize that policymakers must invest in programs that support development of the whole child, including academic, social, and emotional skills, because these skills reinforce each other. Emphasis should start at the home and school levels, with teachers encouraging parental participation in the form of storytelling, interest in children's play and reading at school and at home. This paper recommends that policy makers ensure a new era leading to the possible breaking of the poverty cycle in the foreseeable future through some of the measures suggested.

One of the most cost-effective measures is the school-based sensitization of parents and teachers about the importance of parental involvement and the utilization of children's socio-cultural funds of knowledge for life-long literacy development. This can capitalize on the fact that parents already attend meetings at school which do not yet address children's learning. The other steps to be taken will include:

- Aligning school curriculum materials and pedagogy to children's family and home funds of knowledge and literacy practices as the basis for life-long learning;
- Prioritizing contextually relevant literacy development materials for both home and school for three to eight year olds from the beginning;
- Advocating as necessary, home and family literacy development practices as preparation for pre-school entry; and
- Expanding into low-resource communities, pre-school education access that is contextually relevant to support children's social- emotional development for equitable opportunities for all children.

This paper can mention that teachers and parents developed ten story books (seven in Kiswahili the language of education in the primary school and three in English with a further three translated to braille for inclusive education in a workshop. The story books have just been approved by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) that watches over the quality of materials that are used in all schools and 300 copies each are going to be donated to all schools in the region (close to 200 schools) – strengthening the education systems in East Africa.

5. CONCLUSION

The UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report (2008) indicates that Sub Saharan Africa has the most negative statistics on indicators ranging from poverty, school dropout rates, gender inequalities in school, incidence of HIV and AIDS etc. All these are not likely to go away soon but working towards their reduction and complete reversal can begin now. One cost-effective area to start from is ECCE.

Children are not only the future of the world, but educated children are indeed the

guarantors of a future that can ensure that the sub-region will compare favourably to other regions of the world. Children's ability to learn and to function as contributing members of society rests heavily on their development of social competency and emotional health. Clearly home and family early literacy development, together with pre-school programmes that pursue contextually relevant standards of quality will contribute substantially to this development. The research informing this paper points to an urgent need to promote better home and family literacy development programmes that will lead to equitable pre-school access and a fair chance to sustained participation in schooling.

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