

## ***Understanding How Home Conditions Shape Early Grade Learners Literacy Acquisition***

### ***Skills: A Tanzanian Perspective***

#### **Abstract**

Literacy skills are essential in children's future learning and development. Studies indicate that literacy skills among early grade learners in Tanzania are below the required standards. This study explored the contribution of home factors that hinder acquisition of reading and writing skills among early grades learners in Tanzania. The study was informed by a qualitative methodology which involved a total of 92 participants, including 80 parents and 12 standard one and two teachers from four primary schools in two districts of Morogoro region. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select teachers and convenience sampling technique to obtain parents who were involved in interview and focus group discussion. Data was collected using semi-structured interview, focused group discussion and documentary review. The data were analysed thematically based on themes and sub-themes emerged in the study. The findings revealed that most factors that hinder early grade learners from acquiring reading and writing skills included (poor parents follow up, engaging children in many home activities, low parents' education and parent's income) It was suggested that there should be cooperation between parents and teachers to assist the children in developing their reading and writing skills. The study concludes that parents and teachers should work collaboratively to develop reading and writing in children. Lastly, it is recommended that parents should buy materials like books, and assist their children to practice reading and writing skills at home.

Key word: Literacy Skills, Grades Learners, learning,

#### **Introduction**

Literacy skills derive from the first days of a child's life (Mielonen, 2009). Children's development of literacy skills occurs in multiple contexts; the family setting, the school and the community to mention but a few (Kitta & Kapinga, 2015). Therefore, the interaction between the child and parents, caregivers and others members of the family is the key for developing literacy skills. Parents and caregiver's motivation are also crucial as they lay strong foundation in enhancing reading and writing (UNESCO, 2010). In that regard, Mudziwana (2014) views reading and writing skills as processes that before the elementary grades and continues throughout adulthood. This means the children's home environment plays a great role in building a foundation of reading and writing skills. Goodman (2000) asserts that literacy skills are more than just writing and reading words. It is about

understanding the language that is found in many places such as books, magazines, or website. This language is also found in manual or sign in films or even conversation. Therefore, literacy begins before the child starts schooling where a child experiences 'roots' in his/her social and cultural context (ibid).

One of the major objectives of primary education in Tanzania is to enable every child acquire and develop communication skills including basic reading and writing skills (MoEVT, 2014). Thus, the current pre and primary education curriculum emphasizes on children's acquisition of basic foundation of Kiswahili language literacy skills that will enable children to build foundation of learning in further educational levels. Based on the curriculum emphasis, literacy skills are the most important skills that receive greater attention in pre-primary and primary schools in Tanzania (Mligo, 2018). Despite the government initiatives in eradicating illiteracy in Tanzania, there is an outcry on the low reading and writing literacy levels witnessed among early grade learners in primary schools (UNICEF, 2017). Studies conducted in Tanzania reveals that children in Tanzania fail examination and have poor examination results due to poor reading and writing skills (Juhudi, 2018; Kumburu, 2011; & Mbise et al., 2011). The study by UWEZO (2018) also revealed that, children's performance in lower primary schools in Tanzania is still below the standards. According to UNESCO (2010) this situation led to low efficiency in basic skills that has been limiting children's performance in other levels of education and the society as whole.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study intended to investigate the contribution of home factors that affect children's reading and writing in Tanzania. Knowledge of these factors would help to provide appropriate interventions to address the problem of reading and writing literacy among the primary school's graduates. Additionally, developing a child's reading and writing abilities will help them interact with the world and provide the groundwork for their future social and economic development. To achieve this purpose the study was guided by two research questions:

- i) What are the key home factors affecting acquisition of reading and writing skills among early grades learners in Tanzania?
- ii) What are the initiatives taken by parents to improve reading and writing skills among early grade learners in Tanzania?

### **Review of Related Literatures and Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Home environment and development of reading and writing skills***

Studies demonstrated that children's early development reading and writing plays a major role in determining their future academic achievement (Mwoma, 2017; Edward & Shukia, 2023). Thus, it is crucial to make sure that children learn to read and write at a young age (Antipkina, 2017). According to Dong et al. (2020), a child's home environment plays a vital part in developing their reading and writing skills. In this sense, it is believed that parents' encouragement of their children's reading and writing at home is a virtue that will guarantee their future academic success. Also, research found that children's orientation to the learning materials and their interactions with their parents help them develop their reading and writing skills (Boerma et al., 2017; Kluczniok et al., 2013). In addition, other activities that involve children interacting with home literacy items such as books, role-playing toys, and writing instruments were highlighted as crucial to improving children's literacy abilities. Furthermore, Kluczniok et al. (2013) claimed that, taking children to shopping and to see family friends helps them strengthen their writing and reading skills (Boerma et al. 2017 & Kluczniok et al 2013). However, studies (Antipkina, 2017; Dong et al., 2020; Shukia, 2014) have also shown the effects of home environment to children's writing and reading skills. According to these studies, variety of factors, including parental activities, the children's socioeconomic status, poor parental support, cultural beliefs, and mother tongue-interference, affect the reading and writing abilities of young children in the early grades (Shukia; 2014 Antipkina; 2017; Dong et.al 2020; Ahmed et.al, 2021; Edward & Shukia, 2023). Furthermore, Ahmed et al. (2017) noted that too much screen time which includes playing games on phones and watching dramas and series affects children's reading and writing skills. This is because children utilise them for fun rather than to assist them with their reading and writing. Consequently, a child's development of reading and writing skills is greatly influenced by the assistance of parents and siblings at home.

Based on literatures, early literacy skills are viewed as foundation of the child's future learning. However, the home environment reported by the literatures differs according to the context a child is raised. Therefore, the current study focuses on investigating the home factors which affect children's acquisition of reading and writing to the context of Tanzania.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Social Cultural Theory***

The theory postulates that individuals in their social world engage in complex interrelations that shape their cognitive, social, and physical development (Wozniak, 1993). Core to these theories is Vygotsky (1978) socio-cultural theory which stipulates that knowledge acquisition is rooted in social interactions. In these interactions, children grow into an intellectual life by the help of those around them (Vygotsky, 1978). This growth occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) In the ZPD, the adult monitors the current skills and scaffolds the child's extension of current skill to a higher level of competence (Wertsch, 1985). In this process, adult involvement and contribution gradually decreases as the learner competencies increase. Therefore, the development of reading and writing is determined by the support given by an adult at home environment which creates fruitful learning at school.

### **Methods**

The study involved a total of 92 participants, 80 were parents and 12 primary school teachers from four primary schools in Morogoro region. Parents were conveniently selected to be involved in the interview and focused group discussion (FGD) while teachers were selected purposively to be involved in the interview. The data to answer the research question were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and documentary review. The parents whose pupils were in class one and two were selected to be involved in focus group discussion. Interviews and focus group discussion were conducted in Kiswahili, which is the medium of instruction in public pre-primary schools in Tanzania. The data collection process was done after pre-primary pupils had left the classes to avoid interfering with the teacher's teaching process. Most of the interviews and FGD lasted for about 45 to 60 minutes. The interview proceedings were audio-recorded upon participant's consent for preservation of the participants' actual words.

Documentary review was employed to obtain data from documented sources such as Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 and 2014. Other documents included the syllabi for pre-primary and primary education 2014 which were reviewed to find out the relevance of what learners learnt in pre- primary and primary school level. The schemes of work and lesson plans prepared by teachers in class one and two were reviewed to find out if the strategies used reflect the curriculum. Finally, other documents included children's text books and exercise books. The researcher critically examined and recorded on important information which helped to establish the home factors affecting the acquisition of reading and writing skills to young children.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected using interview, focus group discussion and documentary review were analysed using thematic analysis approach. In this regard, themes were first inductively derived from research questions and insights from the theoretical framework that guided the study, and previous literature related to the subject investigated. This approach allowed unanticipated themes to emerge but also helped to determine whether the deductively derived themes were supported by the data from the field. A list of themes from each participant's verbatim transcript was made. Then, a cross-case analysis was done. Similar themes were clustered together before writing the report.

## **Findings**

### **Home Factors Affecting Children's Acquisition of Reading and Writing Skills**

This part presents and discusses home factors affecting children acquisition of reading and writing skills in Tanzania. During the interview with parents, various factors affecting children acquisition of reading and writing skills were reported. The factors have been categorised in groups namely, parental related factors, pupils related factors, and material related factors as well as teacher related factors. Thus, the findings can be presented as follows:

#### **Parents Related Factors**

The findings revealed that the major factors affecting children's acquisition of reading and writing included poor parent's follow-up and engaging pupils in family chores at home. The findings also indicated that children's reading and writing skills are affected by low parents' supervision, income and education levels of parents. Correspondingly, other two factors that received a minimal attention were poor relationship of parents as well as parents' activities (occupation). The detailed analysis is presented below.

#### ***Poor Parent's Follow-ups***

The findings revealed that most of the parents were not making follows up of their children learning at school and therefore, failed to provide support to their children. During the interview with parents, it was reported that, parents **were not concerned with** what children learned at school. Therefore, they did not know the academic progress of their children at school. This resulted to poor performance in literacy skills because children had no extra support from parents that could enhance their performance in reading and writing. This was revealed when one female parent illustrated that:

Majority of parents are not making follow-up on what children learn at school because they are either occupied with family matters and forget about making follow up on children's progress at school.

According to the quotation above, lack of support and close follow-up by parents as well as other siblings at home makes it difficult for children to actively engage in reading and writing skills.

### ***Engaging Pupils in Many Homes Activities***

The findings revealed other home factors hindering the acquisition of reading and writing to young children included parents' engaging pupils in many home activities. Among the activities mentioned by parents included cooking, farming, keeping cattle and petty business.

It was reported that when pupils arrived from school, their parents assigned them several activities to do therefore, making pupils lack an ample time to do revision of what they had learnt at school. Parents also added that when their children arrived from school, they don't get time to rest because they would be engaged in other home activities that usually made them become more tired thus failing to get time to engage themselves in reading and writing activities at home. For example, one male parent said that:

Children are engaged in income generating activities. When you walk around the streets after school hours, you will find many children selling groundnut, bananas and other fruits. How do they get time for revision? Also, when they are at home, they engage in other home activities and lack time for revision.

The quotation above by the parent reveals that children should also get time at home to make revision and study. However, was not done because they were engaged in home activities which were making them become more tired and thus lack enough time to make revision and engage in other reading and writing activities.

### ***Low Parent Education***

Regarding parent's education, 14 out of 80 parents had a view that, low parental education was another home factor affecting the acquisition of reading and writing skills to young children. It was unveiled that when parents are educated, they have awareness of what is going on and how to help their children at home. On the other side, when parents are not educated, it becomes difficult for them to help their children at home. Therefore, parent's education becomes one of the major factors which have positive or negative impact on children's acquisition of reading and writing skills. Elaborating the situation, one of the parents reported that:

I am facing difficulties to support me in reading and writing skills child because I do not know how to read and write, the activities given to our children needs someone who knows how to read and write. I also fail to know the appropriate books that could help him to learn at home.

In most cases, pupils who seem to have good reading and writing results during documentary review, most of their parents and grandparents were educated and were public servants. During the interview with one parent whose daughter was reported to perform better she had these to state:

My daughter is receiving help at home by her grandmother who is a retired teacher. Her grandmother has prepared a timetable for her and she always engaged in reading and writing accordingly after school hours.

The above parent's statement imply that, children from educated families perform better in reading and writing skills because they are assisted to learn the skills with the relatives. On the other hand, children from the families with low educational background face difficulties in reading and writing skills because their family members are not aware of the basic skills to be emphasized in learning reading and writing skills and therefore, they do not assist them to learn the reading and writing skills.

### *Parents Income*

The findings revealed that the income level of parents is another home factor that affects the acquisition of reading and writingskills of young children. On this regard, parents argued that income is related to buying of relevant materials such as books, pencils and exercise books for children to make them revise what they have learnt. It was reported that, parents whowere economically good had the ability to create conducive environment that could facilitate good reading and writing skills to their children including buying relevant textbooks, and exercise books. Furthermore, parents reported that, parents who are economically successful can also pay teachers to teach their children after school hours.

On this aspect, parents were also of the view that because of poverty, children were forced to engage in different activities after school hours in order to support the economy of the family and as the result lack the opportunity to engage in reading and writing activities.

One of the parents asked:

I always engage in selling my labour to find money for food. The money I get is not enough to fulfil the basic needs for my family. How can I get money to buy books for my children? While I have to buy food for them? I am the only fender for the family therefore; I cannot afford the burden of offering them some reading and writing materials.

From the quotation above, children from low economy families have a great possibility of lagging behind in reading and writing skills because their parents are not able to buy them materials to support their reading and writing skills

### ***Poor Relationship among Parents***

It was reported that the relationship between parents also affects the acquisition of reading and writing skills of young children. The reported relationship among parents is based on the fact that, when parents are in harmony, they can work together to help their children in reading and writing skills. On the other hand, it was reported that if parents are not in good harmony, it is difficult for them to work together and develop young children's reading and writing skills. Additionally, it was also reported that most of the children staying with their grandparents lacked necessary materials such as school uniform, school bags, shoes, exercise books and pencils something which was hindering their learning at school and a thus adversely affecting their reading and writing skills.

### ***Parents' Activities and Occupation***

The findings from six out of 40 parents were of the view that, activities done by some of the parents did not provide opportunity to help their children develop their reading and writing skills at home. Some of the parents reported that they were going to work in the morning and come back late at night when they were tired and their children were already asleep.

Commenting on this, one male parent said:

I am a mechanic; I always wake up early in the morning to attend my job and get back home at late hours already tired. Therefore, it is difficult for me to get time to help my daughter in school matters. I have never passed through my daughter's exercise books, but what I always do, is to ask her sisters and brothers to help her when she fails to read or write.

With this expression, it can be argued that, some parental occupation and activities do not give them chance to interact with their children on the school matters including assisting their children to learn the reading and writing skills. However, those parents who are not very busy with their occupation they can have time to assist their children to learn the reading and writing skills.

Additionally, interview with teachers, revealed that, parents social economic status and lack of parental commitment in assisting children's learning hindered the reading and writing skills among children. Teachers were of the view that, most of parents were busy with other economic activities and forget about assisting children's learning at home. Also, teachers reported that, most of the parents were not able to afford the costs for buying books and other supportive material for practicing children's reading and writing skills at home. During the interview class one teacher reported:

I have been teaching class one for two years. Most of children who perform poor in reading and writing come from families with poor economic status where parents cannot afford to buy them materials like books for practicing the reading and writing skills at home.

### **Pupils' Related Factors**

During the interview with parents, it was highly reported that children themselves were also the cause of poor reading and writing skills as they engage themselves in too much play and forget about school.

#### ***Engaging in Plays and Games***

It was reported by the parents that most of the children liked to engage too much in plays and games when they arrive from school. Thus, they lacked the time to ask help from their parents or siblings what they had learnt at school but did not understand. Despite this fact, most of the parents regarded this factor as a problem related to children themselves.

Among the plays and games that were reported by parents involved playing football for boys and "rede" for girls. Therefore, it was revealed that most children spent much time playing at home rather than studying, the more it resulted into such children's poor acquisition of reading and writing skills. On this issue parent had this to say:

Children play too much after school hours. They cannot take trouble to read by themselves unless they are supervised. Sometimes we parents lack time to supervise them due to poor learning motivation among parents.

The quotation by the parents proves that parents perceived children's plays and games as one of the factors that affect the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Therefore, if supervision is done effectively children can improve their reading and writing skills.

#### ***Other pupils related factors***

Another pupil related factors that were reported by parents involved spending much of the time watching television and child's learning difficulties. Parents reported that children were very much interested in watching television programmes rather than studying. On this aspect parents were of the view that if children could be spending much of their time. On this aspect, other parents reported that they had taken their children to remedial classes known as tuition but still they could not manage reading and writing accordingly. Therefore, from this finding, it can be argued that, some children did not manage to write and read because they had learning difficulties.

### **Materials Related Factors**

Another striking home factor reported by parents involved lack of reading and writing material at home such as books, pencils and exercise books. Parents argued that, poor home environment including lack of supportive materials hindered the reading and writing skills among children. In this aspect parents reported that, they lacked money to buy books and other related materials as a result pupils failed to practice the reading and writing skills at home. On the other hand, parents argued that they lacked awareness of the relevant materials which they could buy to facilitate reading and writing skills for their young children.

For example, one parent said that:

I do not have money to buy books for my child; therefore, the book she receives at school is the one that she uses every day. If I were able to buy other books for making her practise writing and reading, they would assist my child in reading very well unlike she is doing now.

With this response from parents, it can be argued that pupils at home lack materials for improving their reading and writing because their parents do not have money to buy supporting materials for their children. Another, reason is that they are not aware of the relevant materials to support their children's reading and writing skills. Therefore, reading and writing abilities of young children remains at stake.

### **Home Reading Culture**

During the discussion with parents, most of them agreed that home reading culture had impact on acquisition of reading and writing abilities to children. In this aspect parents argued that, many families had poor reading culture and therefore pupils/children were not able to practice how to read and write. With that reason it became difficult for children to acquire reading and writing abilities because they were not modelled by their parents and other members in their societies.

On this regard, one parent said:

If there are no books at home and no one is engaging in reading at home, whether a Bible or Quran how do you expect a child to develop reading or writing interest? They see that this is normal life style and they grow that way.

Such argument from the FGD reveals that pupils learn from the role model and what they see. Therefore, when they see people at home involving themselves in reading and writing activities it is easy for them to engage in reading and writing activities at home. Therefore, if the home environment has good reading and writing culture it is easy for children to acquire reading and writing skills.

### **Parenting Style**

Another home factor that was raised during the FGD was the issue of parenting.

Parents reported that, some children failed to acquire reading and writing abilities because of poor parenting. It was argued that, children who were living with different parents such as stepmothers or fathers were being given more chores to do at home and therefore, they lacked time to engage themselves in reading and writing activities. Thus, parenting style was reported to affected children's acquisition of reading and writing skills. Again, children who were living with their grandparents were reported to have low reading and writing abilities because their grandparents lacked financial abilities or academic abilities to help their grandchildren. In terms of financial matters, it was reported that their grandparents had no money with which to buy materials such as books, exercise books, pens and other materials so as to reading and writing skills for their grandchildren. Therefore, it was argued that most of the grandparents had low or had no formal education and therefore, lacked sufficient skills to help their grandchildren in improving their reading and writing abilities.

### **Teacher related Factors**

During the interview with parents, it was further revealed that another home factor, affecting children's acquisition of reading and writing were the result of teacher's problems at school. Parents reported that they were expecting to help their children at home relying on the directions from school. Therefore, parents reported that teachers were not giving their pupils homework which result to pupil's low acquisition of reading and writing abilities.

The findings imply that children's reading and writing skills was affected by lack of parental commitment in making follow ups, buying materials, poor parenting style, and using most of the times in engaging children in home activities instead of practicing the reading and writing skills. Edward and Shukia (2023) also supported that lack of parental commitment in engaging children in literacy activities hindered children acquisition of Kiswahili pre literacy skill. Thus, the study suggested that parents and teachers should remain committed in order to enable children develop reading and writing skills effectively. Apart from the parental commitment, also this study revealed that, pupils related factors such as plays games, watching television hindered reading and writing skills among children. These findings also concur with Ahmed et. al (2021) that excessive use of screen including watching drama series in television, playing games on phones affected children literacy skills. The study concluded that, screen devises should not be used for entertainment rather they should be used to facilitate literacy skills among children. Thus, based on the findings, parents and teachers should be committed to ensure that children are being supported to acquire reading and writing school at school as well as at home environment.

### **Parents Initiatives Employed by Parent in Improving Children's Reading and**

## **Writing Skills in Tanzania**

During the interview as well as focused group discussion, it was revealed that several initiatives were being employed by parents at home in order to improve their children's reading and writing skills as presented below:

### ***Regular Home Work***

During the interview with parents it was revealed, that 12 parents out of 40 were of the view that they were providing regular home works to their children especially when they were coming from school as one of the means of improving their reading and writing abilities. Parents argued that when children came back from school, they immediately became engaged in writing numbers or writing what they had learnt at school. They were also reading different materials available in the home environment. This was reported to be one of the initiatives they were using in improving pupil's reading and writing at home.

Likewise, during the FGD, parents had the same view that providing works to do at home was one of the initiatives done by parents to improve the acquisition of reading and writing of their children. For example, in improving the acquisition of reading and writing of their children parents said that, without engaging pupils/ children in regular reading and writing activities at home, it became difficult for them to develop their reading and writing skills. During the FGD one parent pointed that:

I make sure that after lunch, my children get time to sleep. When they wake up, I provide them some reading and writing activities to do. They know about this timetable and they always remind me as they wake up. This has helped my children to improve their reading and writing skills (FGD) with standard two parents.

From the explanations given by parents it can be argued that, when children are provided with regular works to do, it is possible that they can improve their reading skills because they revise what they have learnt at school. Furthermore, providing them with home activities helps to keep them busy. Initiative that was addressed by parents involved inspecting pupil's exercise books when they come back home from school. On this particular regard, parents argued that inspecting pupil's exercise books helped parents understand what their children had learnt at school and the challenges such children were encountering in learning thus making them be in a good position to give them assistance where needed. During the FGD, parents argued that, inspecting pupils exercise books had several advantages such as knowing the books used in learning at school so that parents may buy for their children. For example, during the interview one parent reported that:

I always inspect my child's exercise book; I know what she has learnt. I ask her to make corrections on what she has done wrong and teachers are happy with me. But also, my child is improving because she gets assistance from home as well as school.

From the findings, parent's initiatives in inspecting pupil's exercise book led to positive results especially on reading and writing skills. Thus, inspecting children's exercise books also provides opportunity for assisting children who face difficulties in learning reading and writing skills. This is because parents are able to realize the areas of weaknesses and therefore find out the strategies to assist a child improve the skills.

### *Tuition*

During the discussion with parents, it was argued that they use tuition as one of the strategies for improving reading and writing to young children. In this aspect, parents were of the view that because of being busy with daily activities, they looked for the alternative way which was taking their children to tuition centres. Others reported that, they were taking their children to tuition centres because they lacked necessary skills for assisting them to learn how to read and write. Therefore, the tuition centres were regarded as places where they could be helped with developing reading and writing skills. On this aspect, one of the parents had the following views:

I take my children for tuition because I believe there, they can get assistance of developing reading and writing. This is because they receive help from skilled and knowledgeable people than me. Therefore, I believe that they are in the best position to help my children more than I do.

With these explanations by the parent, it is revealed that most of the parents were taking this initiative because they believed that they would get an important person who would shoulder their burden after class hours. In this context, tuition teachers became important personnel to help the development of reading and writing skills among children on behalf of their parents.

Also, during the FGD another parent illuminated that:

It is difficult for me to get time to sit down with children and help them to learn apart from what they get from school. Therefore, I opt to take them to tuition centres so that they may learn. Also get an opportunity to engage in learning activities than playing too much.

As the parent reported, this initiative was being taken in order to help even those parents who were busy in their activities or jobs. Therefore, parents who lacked time of helping their children they sent their children to tuition where they can be assisted to improve their reading and writing. Not only was this the case with parents but also as it was reported that, children

were taking too much time playing, therefore that was the reason why their parents were taking them to tuition centres to reduce the time they spent on playing and make them concentrate on learning how to read and write or do other relevant learning activities.

### ***Close Follow up***

During the interview with parents, it was revealed that one of the other initiatives parents took involved close follow up of their children at home as well as at school.

Parents were of the view that they were following the progress of their children at school in order to know how to help them. Furthermore, parents argued that they were making close follow up of what their children were learning at school in order to help them in areas in which they found their children had failed. Parents were of the view that, when children are supervised effectively it became easy for them to put much energy for themselves also and therefore improving their reading and writing abilities. On this aspect parents argued that, when pupils knew that the parents were not taking time to make follow-up on what they were learning at school they did not bother to put initiatives in learning at school as well as at home. Not only that but also parents argued that close follow-ups helped to stop pupil's absenteeism at school since children knew that when they arrived at home, they would be required to submit what they had learnt at school. **On the other hand, those parents who were closely following up their children's progress, they enabled their children to improve their reading and writing skills.**

### ***Buying Books and Other Reading and Writing Materials***

Another initiative that was reported by parents during the discussion was buying literacy and numeracy books for more practices. Parents reported that they were buying books for their children as an initiative to help them practice and improve their reading and writing skills. Not only books were reported by parents as an initiative, but also other materials such as writing boards, pencils and exercise books for children to practise writing on. These materials helped children develop reading and writing abilities since as they were involved in writing as well as reading. For example, one parent said that:

I buy different materials for my children that support their reading and writing. I am also encouraged with their good performance in reading and writing.

From the claim given by the parents it can be argued that some parents were buying books and other materials as an initiative to enable their children develop reading and writing skills. However, other parents reported that they **failed to buy materials** because they lacked money. On this particular regard, one parent reported that:

Buying books for children is one of the initiatives I could do but they are insufficient because of my economic capacity. I fail to buy sufficient materials like books that my child could use to make revision at home, this makes my child easily forget about what they have been taught at school.

As it was reported by the parent above, regardless of their economic ability, parents pointed out that buying relevant materials for their children is crucial for improving their reading and writing abilities.

### ***Help from Elder Brothers and Sisters***

Another initiative was requesting elder brothers and sisters to help their young brothers and sisters improve their reading and writing abilities. Parents argued that because they were busy with other activities including being tight in their jobs, they were asking the siblings available at home to make sure that they helped their young brothers and sisters studying standard one and two improve their reading and writing. Among the siblings that were reported to help young children with reading and writing involved those who were studying the upper classes such as standard five up to seven and those who studying in secondary schools. Furthermore, those children who reported to do well in class in the reading and writing skills were reported to be helped by their brothers and sisters if not their mothers. Fathers were reported to help their children very rarely on this aspect one parent remarked:

My children help each other in learning. In most cases, when I am tired my daughters who study in secondary schools take an active role of helping their young brother. This is a good substitute of parents who are busy with family matters and fail to get time to help their children in learning.

Based on the aforementioned ideas, it can be argued that parents can help young children develop their reading and writing skills. For instance, The majority of parent-proposed initiatives centre on the family's commitment to fostering children's learning, including that of parents and older brothers and sisters. Vygotsky's (1978) notion of "Scaffolding," which holds that children should receive support from parents and other knowledgeable individuals, also corroborates these findings. Support can be provided by making sure that an environment is favourable and that resources are available to help with writing and reading skills.

### **Discussion**

Overall, the study reveals that, parents are first teachers to children. Therefore, children's acquisition of literacy skills depended on the support provided by parents and other care

givers through by making home environment conducive for children to practice what they learn at school. These findings concur with a study by Boerma et.al.(2017) which revealed that,providing support to children including early literacy activities to children at home enables promoting children's early reading and writing literacy skills. Furthermore, the current study revealed that for children to develop reading and writing skills there should be cooperation between teachers and parents. These findings concur with the findings by Epstein,(2011)whichsuggested that cooperation between teachers and parents was important because parents learnt from teachers and prepared conducive home environment for children to learn including home libraries, museums, and family resources. Ali et al. (2022) made a similar remark, stating that parent-teacher collaboration is essential for enabling parents to be aware of their child's progress and critical needs that support learning and growth. Parents must work with teachers to encourage their children's development of reading and writing skills even while they are preoccupied with other activities. This can be achieved by taking part in parent-teacher meetings, where topics pertaining to children's learning to enhance their writing and reading abilities are discussed (Ali, et. al 2022). Additionally, according to Edward and Shukia (2023), special meetings between teachers and parents allow for the discussion of matters pertaining to the growth of children's writing and reading abilities. Additionally, the current study found that children's reading and writing abilities were hampered by a lack of supportive materials at home. In this regard, parents believed that the majority of parents did not have the funds to purchase educational supplies like books, pencils, and other items that children might use to create writing and reading exercises. In addition to financial constraints, parents claimed that they are unaware of the necessary items to purchase for their children in order to support their development of reading and writing skills. Parents so indicated that there should be enough materials available for practice at home in order to improve children's reading and writing skills. These results corroborate Dewey's (1938) claim that youngsters are active beings who are ready engage with materials and others in their surroundings. Thus, it's essential to promote children's reading and writing skills through material engagement in their home environment Furthermore, Vygosky (1978) claimed that since learning is improved when children engage with their surroundings, children's environments should be supplemented with materials that help them develop their writing and reading abilities. Mwoma (2017) discovered that having reading resources available at home is essential for promoting children's literacy skills, which supports these findings.

The current study further revealed that parents were engaging their children in petty businesses at home. These study findings are also revealed by Chibombo (2000) in his study whereby he reports that, in most of African societies child labour is one of the factors which hinder the acquisition of reading and writing skills in young children. In rural areas boys become cow and goats herders while girls spend their time in child minding their siblings. The current study revealed that children were also being engaged in petty business and domestic activities such as selling vegetables, groundnuts, and herding animals especially cows and goats.

Another home factor which influences young children's reading and writing skills in Tanzania was also shown to be the parents' economic standing. It was discovered that children find it challenging to practise reading and writing since their parents cannot afford to purchase appropriate materials for their young children. These results are consistent with a study conducted by Kluezniok et al., (2013) which found that factors influencing children's reading and writing included their social economic standing, the educational attainment and occupation of their parents. The study also found that children's learning was directly impacted by their family's socioeconomic situation, with negative to little consequences. Additionally, a research by Alsubaie, (2022) on the home factors that affect children's literacy showed that parental economic position impeded children's ability to read and write since parents were unable to purchase learning aids for practicing the reading and writing at home.

Parenting style was another aspect of the household that this study showed. It was noted that some children were living with their grandparents or with just one parent. According to reports, the youngsters residing with their grandparents did not receive adequate academic or material support. They fell behind in writing and reading as a result. Additionally, it was noted that children living with single parents did not receive close supervision at home or at school. This was particularly true for male parents, while female parents were said to be lacking in the supplies needed to care for their children. These outcomes are consistent with Mudziewana's (2014) findings, which stated that, parents of single-parent households might not have the time to devote in helping their children develop their literacy. The study also revealed that, the resources available were consumed by the family to survive. Thus, a single parent was unable to provide the children with the kind of literacy supplies, and interaction that was necessary to develop their literacy skills. Similarly, Ngorosho's (2011) research in Tanzania demonstrates the significance of the socioeconomic status of the family and the support provided by parents in enhancing reading and writing skills. Additionally, Edward

and Shukia's (2023) demonstrated that children's low reading and writing proficiency was the result of parents who are more interested in social economic activities than in their children's education.

From the above discussion it is evident that the current study findings are in line with other studies on the factors affecting reading and writing abilities of young children. Therefore, necessary initiatives/measures are to be taken in order to improve the reading and writing among children.

### **Conclusions**

In the light of the research findings and discussion presented above, the following conclusions are made.

First, parents agreed that they were required to play a key role in facilitating reading and writing of young children at home environment. Therefore, in order to improve reading and writing abilities of young children there is a need for parents, learners and teachers to work jointly in order to make sure that each individual plays his/her active role.

Second, it was revealed that parents were taking different initiatives in improving reading and writing of young children. Among the initiatives that teachers were reported to take in order to improve reading and writing abilities of young children included providing regular home works, inspecting pupils' exercise books, close follow ups, tuition and requesting elder brothers and sisters to help young children with reading and writing abilities

Thus, based on the findings this study recommends that parents should ensure that they provide assistance to their children at home in order that they may develop reading and writing abilities. This should be done by giving them activities to do at home such as reading story books as well as writing as they come from school. In this sense, education to parents is necessary in order to educate them on how they should assist and supervise their children when doing their assignments at home. Furthermore, in order to develop reading and writing abilities of young children, there should be cooperation between parents, and teachers. Cooperation between teachers and parents is necessary as it enables teachers to direct and share with parents on appropriate measures to take in order to improve reading and writing of young children. Furthermore, schools should have enough books in order to help children coming from economically underprivileged families to access the books.

### **Consent**

As per international standards or university standards, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study proposes more studies to be conducted on school factors which hinder children's acquisition of reading and writing abilities. This study focused on the home factors affecting the acquisition of reading and writing among young children in Tanzania. However, the study adopted a qualitative approach. Therefore, another study adopting a quantitative approach is needed for generalization.

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