



## Learning to Talk and Write: Developing Early Childhood Literacies in the 21st-Century Classroom

### Konuşmayı ve Yazmayı Öğrenmek: 21. Yüzyıl Sınıflarında Erken Çocukluk Okuryazarlığını Geliştirmek

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#### Abstract

This study employed a literature review to explore the development of early childhood literacy skills in the 21st-century Classroom, focusing on the roles of parents, teachers, and guardians in children's well-being. The paper emphasizes the importance of devoting time, guidance, and teaching to children's passions and talents, highlighting the impact of these factors on children's intellectual abilities and character development. Moreover, this paper examines how literacy is facilitated and learned in diverse cultural contexts, including the influence of family, community, peers, mental wellness, family therapists, and institutions. Furthermore, the paper discusses the significance of creating learning-rich environments, the impact of technology on literacy development, and the interaction between nature and nurture in children's language learning. It also explores the actions and behaviours of teachers and parents that can support literacy development. Generally, the study underlines the crucial role of early guidance and support in fostering children's literacy skills and character development. In conclusion, supporting children's literacy development is essential for their academic success and prospects. Teachers can empower children to become proficient communicators, readers, and writers through a comprehensive strategy combining nature and nurture elements. By raising awareness among educators, parents and policymakers about the value of creating language-rich environments, collaborating with family therapists, involving family members in raising children, integrating technology in literacy education, and involving the community, the children will be proficient and thrive in their literacy skills.

**Keywords:** Early childhood literacy, 21st-century classroom, Parental guidance, Character development, Technology

#### Öz

Bu çalışmada ebeveynlerin, öğretmenlerin ve velilerin çocukların refahı konusundaki rollerine odaklanarak 21. yüzyıl sınıflarında erken çocukluk okuryazarlığı becerilerinin gelişimini araştırmak için literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Makalede çocukların tutku ve yeteneklerine zaman ayırmanın, rehberliğin ve öğretmenin önemi vurgulanmakta ve bu faktörlerin çocukların entelektüel yetenekleri ve karakter gelişimi üzerindeki etkisi dile getirilmektedir. Bunların yanı sıra, makale, ailenin, topluluğun, akranların, zihinsel sağlığın, aile terapistlerinin ve kurumların etkisi de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli kültürel bağlamlarda okuryazarlığın nasıl kolaylaştırıldığını ve öğrenildiğini incelemektedir. Ayrıca makalede, öğrenme açısından zengin ortamlar yaratmanın önemini, teknolojinin okuryazarlık gelişimi üzerindeki etkisini ve çocukların dil öğreniminde doğa ile beslenme arasındaki etkileşimi tartışılmaktadır. Tüm bunların yanı sıra, öğretmenlerin ve ebeveynlerin okuryazarlık gelişimini destekleyebilecek eylem ve davranışları da ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma, genel anlamda, çocukların okuryazarlık becerilerinin ve karakter gelişiminin desteklenmesinde erken rehberlik ve desteğin önemli rolünün altını çizmektedir. Sonuç olarak, çocukların okuryazarlık gelişiminin desteklenmesi, onların akademik başarıları ve geleceğe yönelik beklentileri açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır. Öğretmenler, doğa ve yetiştirme unsurlarını birleştiren kapsamlı bir strateji aracılığıyla çocukların yetkin iletişimciler, okuyucular ve yazarlar olmalarını sağlayabilir. Dil açısından zengin ortamlar yaratmanın, aile terapistleriyle işbirliği yapmanın, aile üyelerini çocuk yetiştirmeye dahil etmenin, teknolojiyi okuryazarlık eğitimine entegre etmenin ve toplumu dahil etmenin değeri konusunda eğitimciler, ebeveynler ve politika yapıcılar arasında farkındalık yaratarak, çocuklar kendi dillerinde yetkin olacak ve başarılı olacaklardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erken çocukluk okuryazarlığı, 21. yüzyıl sınıfları, Ebeveyn rehberliği, Karakter gelişimi, Teknoloji



## Introduction

Raising self-confident, well-educated, and self-disciplined children is the most challenging responsibility every parent, educator, and guardian faces today (Kissee, 2013; Leman, 2008). While it's acknowledged that parents, guardians, and educators are struggling to build the characters and intellectual abilities of their children, devoting time to their passions and talents is one of the greatest gifts parents, educators, and guardians can ever give to their children as they grow up towards the pursuit of excellence. As educators working with children for many years, the authors acknowledge that acquiring literacy skills and developing children into children of character can be painful and complex without adult guidance, teaching and supervision. Although it is a complex and challenging job to raise and develop literacy skills in children, literature reminds us that persistence in devoting time, teaching and guiding the children is the most essential way of developing their literacy skills and characters.

Kissee (2013) noted, "Worry not about the high cost of building men but be concerned about the high cost of failing to do so." -Texas Prison Museum Wall Poster. Although this quote seems figurative, the message to parents, educators, and guardians emphasizes that to develop children's intellectual abilities and characters, devoting time to communicating, teaching, and motivating children should be considered a top priority. Parental involvement and support are critical in developing children's character and intellectual literacy from an early age.

Admittedly, the ability to read and write is a vital talent that influences a child's educational success and prospects in the future. Nevertheless, regarding cultural background, educators and parents must create environments supporting literacy development.

## Methods

In preparing this study, the authors share their intimate knowledge of the Tanzanian Classroom as two authors are teachers and citizens of the country and, therefore, can discuss the classification of children in Tanzanian classrooms. The third author, a family therapist based in Kenya, examines the children's mental wellness perspective. The authors also relied on internet research using search engines, notably Google Scholar, using key terms like 'childhood literacy in Tanzania' to explore how literacy is mediated and learned in various cultural contexts, as well as the roles of family, community, peers, mental wellness, family therapists, and institutions in enhancing childhood literacy as children grow to be independent. In addition, the authors extensively used the books to explore how important it is to create environments rich in learning, how technology affects literacy development, and how children's language learning incorporates both nature and nurture. Finally, this study considers how a teacher's or parent's actions and behaviors might create circumstances that support literacy development.

Teaching children to read and write is one of the jobs parents and educators must do. Fostering basic skills in children is the cornerstone of other skills acquisition. The process of a child learning a language includes how nature and nurture play a part in this process (Dobson, 1997; Robin, 1980). A child learning to speak a language is challenging and involves both nature and nurture. Children have the innate ability to acquire a language from birth, but research shows that their environment significantly impacts this process. For instance, a study by Houen et al. (2022) discovered that early language exposure, both in quantity and quality, is a significant predictor of later language development. This emphasizes encouraging language development through interactions with caregivers and language-rich environments. Studies of genes associated with language show that heredity can also influence how people learn languages (James, 1970; Hollingdale et al. (2020). In this light, a complex interaction between nature and nurture plays a role in language acquisition.

As experienced teachers in the Tanzanian Classroom, the authors of this study have observed hand in hand that children differ significantly in learning and language acquisition. The authors captured several physical, heredity and environmental factors in the Classroom that contribute to children's intellectual development. Based on this point of view, the authors have classified children into three classifications based on their characteristics. The goal of categorising children into categories is to promote awareness among teachers, guardians, and parents so that they understand how important it is to invest their time and resources in developing their children's intellect. The authors of this study noticed that if parents and guardians want to build their children intellectually, they should create a habit of guiding, teaching, and talking with their children at an early age. Moreover, this study is intended to encourage parents, guardians, and educators to understand the difference between stimulation, guidance, and pressure when helping their children learn. For instance, the study of Gougou & Paschal (2023) noted that providing learning materials to children like books, pencils, and toys and helping them to read and write stimulates them to be able to read themselves. But strictly punishing children because they don't read or write is pressurizing them, affecting their learning abilities.

### **Categories of children in the Tanzanian Classroom.**

The authors of this study made a categorization of the children based on the analysis of Thomas and Chess (1977) as follows:

**Easy children:** These children possess high esteem and a positive approach to the situation people, and they are always characterized by openness, freedom of expression, and eagerness to accept, grow and adapt to the new learning context. These children are easy to control. At the same time, they inspire their teachers and can acquire language skills quickly. Generally, these children are characterized by high academic performance because they cultivate an intellectual relationship with their teachers. The study conducted by Paschal & Mkulu (2020) pointed out that children who are appreciated and loved by their guardians, parents and teachers have high esteem and can develop intellectual abilities faster than children who are not loved and liked by their teachers and parents. The authors observed that easy children are being provided daily guidance and training by their parents and guardians. Interestingly, the children are given learning materials such as books and puzzles and are exposed to some fantastic places such as the zoo, airports, and museums

**Slow-learners or shy children:** Children in this category are slow to warm up and adapt to new situations. This group of learners respond negatively to learning situations, but their reactions are less potent than those of difficult children. The insufficiency of intellectual stimulation, growing up in deprived environments, and insecurity are the factors that contribute to their slow learning. Furthermore, in Tanzanian Classroom, the authors observed daily that slow – learners have not been given guidance by their parents and guardians. The lack of daily training, stimulation and guidance from adults seems to have slowed down the children's ability to talk and write (Thomas, Chess, & Birch, 1968)

**Difficult children:** These children are characterized by complicated behaviors, violence, mood swings and harmful reaction to people and learning. These kinds of children experience difficulties acquiring language and other academic abilities. Their challenges in developing skills like language learning are because they respond negatively to interactions and new situations (Thomas, Chess, Birch, Hertzog, & Korn, 1963). Some parents and educators give up on these children, failing to develop their talents and intellectual skills. In the view of the authors of this study, it's advantageous for teachers, parents and educators to teach and motivate children with guidance learning resources and read with them every day, as well as respond to the children's questions (James, 1970).

## Disciplining children in the classroom

In this most globalized world, discipline has been largely misinterpreted. Yet, it has become the downfall of many educators because most school owners no longer act as educators but as parent pleasers who mainly support the guardians, parents and students against the educators or teachers. From this point of view, educators are very limited and can only work within the rules and regulations of the school. In most private schools in Africa, if a child or student complains about their teacher or educators, the teacher can quickly lose their job. In line with other observations, some educators have even lost their lives just because they were trying to correct the child portraying bad conduct in school. In this study, the authors draw an example from a scenario of how parents sometimes make discipline difficult for educators:

*'The child comes to the exam hall at school with a phone even when it has been announced that phones are not allowed. The phone is seized, and the parent harasses the school to return an expensive phone immediately. The school owner was present and said, 'I have cameras in my school. Let me check how the phone disappeared. Then, the school owner saw from the CCTIV that the boy had snatched the phone. He later confessed to them that he gave the phone to the mother, who hid it at home and came to school to harass the teachers.'*

This is just one example. There are several other examples. It is too bad that the parent was only after the phone and not after the exam malpractice carried out by the child. From this noted scenario, it should be acknowledged that disciplining children who lack discipline at home can be challenging, but it is an essential aspect of teaching.

### Strategies that can help educators as they model children who lack discipline

This study gives the following strategies to help educators model children who lack discipline.

***Establish clear expectations:*** Teachers or educators should set clear rules and expectations for behavior in school and the Classroom by ensuring children understand the consequences of not following the school rules and regulations.

***Recognize and praise good behavior:*** Positive reinforcement can encourage children in school to continue making positive choices that can lead to better academic performance

***Provide unique educational service.*** As a teacher/educator, consider whether there must be underlying reasons for children's behaviors. Some may require additional support, such as counselling or special educational services

***Develop strong relationships with the children, which*** goes a long way in modelling children who lack discipline. This is because when the children feel valued and respected, they are more likely to respond positively to teachers' guidance and counselling. Aultman, Williams-Jonson, & Schutz (2009) noted that the strong relationships between educators and learners are crucial to discipline development and successful teaching and learning processes. Thus, children with supportive relationships with their teachers attain higher levels of academic achievement than those with more conflicting relationships with their teachers. Moreover, Dianat & Abedin (2016) portrayed that teachers and educators must be motivated and encouraged to engage pupils in learning to make a disciplined child and effective learning happen.

## **The role of family, community, peers and institutions**

In examining the role of family, community, peers, and institutions, as well as how literacy is mediated and learnt in various cultural contexts, Compton-Lilly et al. (2019) showed that ways in which literacy is mediated and learnt vary among cultural contexts and that functions of family, community, peers, and institutions may also shift. For instance, in the United States of America (USA), literacy growth was significantly influenced by suggested activities like storytelling and the use of written language in daily life. These studies stress the importance of a thorough approach to literacy training and understanding cultural contexts when examining literacy learning.

Storytelling is a powerful tool for engaging young children and promoting language development, literacy skills, and imagination. In this light, early childhood educators are encouraged to become skilled storytellers who can fully utilize this tool and provide enriching experiences for children in school organisations. There are several techniques educators can use to improve storytelling abilities. In this study, the authors suggest the following methods to help parents and educators enhance storytelling abilities.

***Preparation is key.*** Take time to read and thoroughly plan the story you want to share. Think about how to bring it to life through expressive voices, gestures, and facial expressions. Visual aids like props or pictures can also capture children's attention.

***Select the age of the children:*** In the home and school context, children's learning abilities differ. Educators and parents are encouraged to choose stories related to the age of the children they teach so that they can understand and pay attention to the developed lesson. The authors recommend selecting and developing simple stories with relatable themes and characters suitable for young learners.

***Engage:*** Children have different perceptions and imaginations about a story they have listened to. From this point of view, parents and educators, both in school and at home, must encourage children to use their perceptions by asking closed and open-ended questions about the story. This can help them develop communication skills and other creativity

***Introduce dialogues:*** Dialogues have been recognized to be an essential technique for developing creativity. Developing and telling stories that involve dialogue helps learners pay attention and be participative during storytelling time and in their future lives.

***Then, make the story interactive:*** Get children involved by asking questions, assigning character roles, or having them perform drama actions. This helps keep them engaged and builds comprehension.

***Focus on storyline clarity:*** Use precise sequencing and repetition so children can easily follow the narrative.

***Maintain enthusiasm and energy in your delivery:*** This models expressiveness for children. Monitor their reactions so you can adjust the tone or pacing of the story as needed. In addition to how we tell stories, the types of stories we select matter, too. Select stories that relate to preschoolers' interests and experiences. Predictable, repetitive stories are great for early literacy development. Open-ended stories that allow for imagination and interpretation encourage abstract thinking skills. Multicultural stories foster social-emotional growth by building empathy and perspectives. Across all domains, children need both fiction and nonfiction selections. Teachers and children can become exceptional storytellers with thoughtful

planning and dynamic delivery. Our story times become rich, meaningful experiences where children's language flourishes, creativity ignites, and knowledge expands. Teachers have an invaluable opportunity to instil a lifelong love of stories in their children. Focusing on improving their storytelling abilities allows them to grasp this opportunity fully.

### **Environments that support literacy acquisition**

The following are reflections on the deeds and practices of educators and parents and how they can be used to create environments that support literacy acquisition.

Creating language-rich environments is one of the most critical aspects of supporting children's literacy acquisition. This involves exposing children to diverse language experiences, such as reading aloud, storytelling, and conversation. Mol et al. (2008) claimed that fostering language-rich surroundings benefits children's language growth and literacy development. Reading aloud and storytelling are two language-rich activities teachers should include in their lessons. As a parent, one should engage in conversation with their children and should read books together. Also, singing some educational songs enables children to sharpen their language and understanding abilities. Parents should decorate their children's rooms with bright colors and age-appropriate games. Songs like "BINGO," "Number Counting," "Hide and Seek," and "Cards" are some examples of activities children and parents can do together.

The role of family and community in supporting children's literacy acquisition cannot be overplayed. Family and community members are crucial in creating environments that promote literacy development. Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) and LeFevre and Sénéchal (2002) emphasize that parental involvement in their children's literacy development has a positive impact and enhances their acquisition of literacy skills. Parents can participate in their children's literacy development by reading aloud, giving them access to books, and promoting writing. Parents need to get involved in their children's school sports, games, and classroom activities to better understand their literacy needs and find time to communicate with their teachers. According to a study by van der Pluijijm et al. (2019), community-based interventions can successfully foster children's oral language development from low-income families. In their evaluation, these authors of empirical treatments stress the value of including peers and community leaders in initiatives designed to help parents with less Education assist their children's language development. They also emphasize the significance of building supportive local communities, which include opportunities for parents to interact with their children in language-rich activities and safe and exciting areas for children to interact with others. Working with community-based organizations to create literacy-focused programs that support children's literacy development is crucial for an educator. Parents need to be encouraged to join community-based literacy programs with their children and to be actively involved in literacy activities such as community libraries, storytelling and singing

### **Positive home-school connection to ensure children's well-being**

In today's rapidly changing world, building strong connections between home and school is more essential than ever for setting children's health and success. Positive home-school collaboration helps provide consistency across a child's two primary spheres of influence. This creates an integrated support that allows children to bloom socially, emotionally, and academically. Paschal & Mkulu (2020 a) noted that active parental involvement in Education boosts student achievement and motivation. When families show interest in school activities, events, and curriculum, children take more ownership of their learning. Parents who

communicate openly with teachers stay current on their child's progress. They can then provide adequate at-home support aligned to the Classroom. This continuity between home and school enables students to maximize their learning potential.

Beyond academic performance, positive home-school connections help children develop crucial life skills for the 21st century, such as problem-solving, responsibility, and teamwork. With parents and teachers working together, consistent expectations are set and reinforced. This provides stability while allowing children to practice adaptability across different environments. Such fluidity will prove valuable in our fast-changing world.

Home-school collaboration also models community engagement for impressionable young minds. When children see their primary role models—parents and teachers—working together toward a common goal, they learn the value of building relationships, sharing knowledge, and contributing to a larger purpose (Paschal, Nyoni, & Mkulu, 2020). This instills civic awareness and other prosocial behaviors that are beneficial for success.

Schools tap into one of their most valuable resources by keeping parents actively engaged in Education. And by welcoming school involvement, parents show the utmost investment in their child's future. This reciprocal relationship leads to optimal growth. In these complex times, a solid home-school connection provides children with the cooperative foundation to reach their full potential.

### **The role of technology**

Technology has become an integral part of modern society, and its impact on children's literacy acquisition cannot be ignored (Paschal & Ismael, 2023). Technology can provide a range of opportunities for children to engage in literacy activities, such as reading e-books and writing on digital platforms (López-Escribano et al. 2021; Kanja, & Paschal, 2023). However, the impact of technology on literacy development is still a topic of debate. Eutsler et al. (2020) found that technology in literacy instruction had a small, positive effect on children's literacy skills. Teachers incorporate digital platforms and e-books to integrate technology literacy instruction (Owino & Paschal, 2023; Opondo & Paschal, 2023)). Children are also given access to online tools that help improve their literacy. Parents must monitor how children use technology to ensure they participate in a healthy mix of non-digital and digital literacy activities.

According to Biggs et al. (2023), creating environments that support literacy acquisition requires a multifaceted approach that involves the family, community, technology, and educators. Some parents and educators acknowledge the value of developing language-rich environments, family involvement, participating in community programs, and incorporating technology into literacy teaching. These tactics can be used in real-world situations to enhance children's literacy development, emphasizing including children with various impairments. This implies that parents can help their children learn to read by engaging in language-rich activities like reading aloud or by using braille and sign language, making books accessible to them, and promoting writing. In addition, they can converse with their children and participate in community-based reading programs. Educators can support literacy acquisition by fostering language-rich environments, including technology in literacy lessons, and involving parents in their children's literacy development.

## **Mental health**

Mental health permeates every aspect of human growth, including literacy development. This means that the mental well-being of each child impacts literacy development. For example, the slow learners described above can experience low self-esteem because of a lack of parental involvement in their literacy development. Low self-esteem affects children's capacity to learn literacy skills such as writing (Guban-Caisido & D. A. D., 2020). As such, parents and educators need to remember that children experience literacy acquisition challenges because of how they view themselves. Helping children feel better about themselves may help them acquire talking and writing skills more quickly. If not, such children and their parents can work with professional child therapists to address the root cause of low self-esteem. In the course of life, parents and educators can also experience mental health challenges. Diverse situations trigger mental health challenges. For instance, some parents and educators can blame themselves when children lag in literacy development. Yet, it may simply be that particular children experience delayed milestones. Thus, parents and educators need to be aware of their own, as well as their children's mental health status, and where to seek help. Children who are mentally well will likely achieve literacy development milestones, all other life circumstances notwithstanding. Professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and family therapists should work to improve children, parents, and educators' mental well-being.

## **Neurodevelopmental disorders**

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013), some children experience neurodevelopmental disorders such as intellectual disabilities, communication disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, among others. Such children experience literacy acquisition challenges and may require the services of specially trained educators. Additionally, children with dyslexia experience writing challenges (Hebert et al., 2018). In other words, delayed literacy development may indicate the presence of neurodevelopmental disorders, among other factors. Therefore, relevant professionals must screen children experiencing literacy development challenges for neurodevelopmental disorders and other conditions. Sometimes, children experiencing neurodevelopmental challenges are put on medications and may miss school from time to time. Missing school frequently may further delay children's literacy acquisition. Therefore, parents and educators need to know about the symptoms of diverse disorders in children so they can refer them for prompt evaluation and treatment. Delayed interventions may further slow down literacy acquisition in some children. These kinds of children require not only professional services but also extra parental and educator time and assistance if they are to achieve their literacy development milestones.

## **The attachment theory and literacy development**

Research-based on attachment theory shows that children respond to perceived parents' behaviors differently (Ainsworth, 1979). Children who are allowed free expression in the presence of their parents are likely to fall in the category of easy children. In contrast, those who are afraid to express themselves may fall into the problematic children category. Children feel secure or insecure while interacting with their parents. Insecurity affects language competence (Dagan et al., 2022). For this reason, parental awareness of how attachment impacts literacy development would go a long way in promoting appropriate parent-child interactions. Secure children tend to achieve literacy development more quickly. Therefore, parental and educators' knowledge regarding attachment theory would enhance their skills in how to be with children.



## **The role of parents**

Long before they go to school, parents facilitate their children's literacy development by talking to them and teaching them how to write. According to Bigozzi et al. (2023), children's ability to develop literacy skills is impacted by the hostile or friendly environments their parents create. Therefore, parents need to know that friendliness towards their children improves literacy acquisition, while hostility does the opposite. Although parents take their children to school and pay fees for them to learn, literacy development begins at home. One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children during their formative years is spending quality time talking and teaching them how to write. In other words, parental intentional involvement enhances children's literacy development beyond the home. However, not all children have the privilege of having parents. Some children's parents may have died, separated, divorced, or may work in far places where they cannot be at home every day. Children of absent parents may be disadvantaged in one way or the other as far as literacy development is concerned. Nonetheless, parents or guardians can arrange for someone else to step in their shoes to teach their children how to talk and write. To say it differently, parents need to be purposeful in teaching their children how to speak and write. Still, nothing is lost for children whose parents are absent because educators help them during classroom lessons.

Additionally, some parents may not be aware that they need to intentionally spend quality time teaching their children how to talk and write. This is because some parents think that literacy development is the work of educators alone, while others come home from work too tired to do anything else. In matters of literacy development, parents need to know that it is a collaborative effort and their role complements that of educators. However, the parental capacity to teach literacy development skills to their children should not be taken for granted. This is because, in some Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), not everyone learns how to read and write (Crawford et al., 2023). When parents don't know how to write, family therapists or community social workers can be sought to equip them with parent-child communication skills. Towards this end, governments should avail literacy development classes for such parents. Attending adult literacy development classes would boost parents' capacity and confidence to teach their children how to talk and write.

## **The role of educators**

Educators in classroom settings do a commendable job of developing children's literacy capacity. Educators are trained to help children excel in talking and writing. Educators advance the work of parents in the Classroom. Educators are also expected to identify and assist children who experience difficulty in literacy development (Paschal, 2022). However, a recent study found that some educators were ill-equipped to help children who struggle with literacy acquisition (Weadman et al., 2023). This finding suggests that educators' training needs to include a course on how to identify and help children who are not achieving their literacy development milestones as expected. Such knowledge would boost educators' confidence and collaboration with parents on children's literacy development issues (Paschal, 2022). Knowledgeable educators could call parents for a planning meeting on how to support struggling children. Educators would also be equipped on how to create and conduct parental support groups for parents whose children experience literacy development challenges. Sharing experiences in support groups regularly helps parents learn from each other and encourages them to keep helping their children (Paschal & Gougou, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that each child is unique, and several factors may affect their capacity to excel in literacy acquisition. For example, a struggling child may be experiencing speech problems, physical and/or emotional abuse, or may have been born deaf and dumb. As such, educators need to know

when and where to refer parents for hearing and speech assessments, mental health evaluations, and child and family therapy. Parents need to be encouraged to accept reality and to allow their dumb and/or deaf children to learn sign language.

Additionally, not all parents and educators are physically or mentally healthy. This means that teachers and parents must be alert to their mental and physical health status. Ailing parents and educators must be willing to seek treatment if they expect to help children attain literacy development optimally. Parents and educators must also embrace other professionals when working with literacy-challenged children (Paschal, 2023). This is because life's challenges psychologically impact children and all human beings. As such, the services of family therapists, child psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, and policymakers should be incorporated as the need arises.

### **The best interest of the child**

From a legal perspective, a child's best interest requires that the views of parents, educators, and children's rights be incorporated during decision-making (Salminen, 2018). Parents and educators must adhere to the above principles to aid children's literacy development. Children who experience challenges in literacy development have the right to all the assistance they can get. For example, children who cannot talk, hear, or write. Some parents may live in denial of the fact that their mute or deaf child may never speak, hear, or write. Such parents may hope, in vain, that their child will talk, hear, or write someday. Denying such a child the opportunity to learn sign language is not in the child's best interest. Struggling children have a right to be acknowledged for how they are and included in learning. According to Ranta (2023), such children have a right to voice how they feel and what they can do. However, some parents and educators may be ignorant of children's rights and need to be taught about them because they may not be aware that denying a struggling child the right to be heard and the right to literacy development is abusive (Murray et al., 2020).

In children's best interest, parents and educators need to be open to an interdisciplinary approach when working with children (Paschal, 2023). This is because parents and educators cannot know everything. Besides, the services of other professionals can enhance children's literacy development in one way or another. For example, family therapists can support children's parent therapeutically. Seeking the services of a family therapist can make a difference in the life of a child experiencing literacy development challenges. When a parent is frustrated because their child is lagging in literacy development, a family therapist can calm their fears by normalizing their experience and collaboratively exploring the child's needs. In therapeutic relationships, parents are reassured and/or referred to other professionals who help assess children's capacity to achieve their literacy development milestones. Together, parents, educators, family therapists, and other professionals can collaboratively help children surmount literacy development challenges in the best interest of children. Policymakers in LMICs can develop national guidelines on where and what services are available to literacy-challenged children, their parents, and educators.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, supporting children's literacy development is essential for their academic success and prospects. Teachers can empower children to become proficient communicators, readers and writers through a comprehensive strategy that combines elements of nature and nurture. By raising awareness among

educators, parents and policymakers about the value of creating language-rich environments, collaborating with family therapists, involving family members in raising children, integrating technology in literacy education, and involving the community, the children will be proficient and thrive in their literacy skills.

This study recommends encouraging parents to actively participate in their children's literacy development by reading and writing, discussing books with them and creating a healthy and supportive home environment for learning and well-being. Teachers and educators should participate in professional development to develop their literacy instruction skills and include the best teaching strategies. Teachers and parents should never cease to apply technology as they teach their children. It is also encouraged that educators and parents should conduct regular assessments of children's development.

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