



# **Power of Parents: Exploring the potential role of parents and caregivers in strengthening language development and literacy acquisition for children aged 3–12 in Sub-Saharan Africa**

## **Extended Literature Review**

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

ABCD	Asset-Based Community Development
APA	American Psychological Association
CRC	Community Reading Coach
ECCDE	Early childcare development and education
ECD	Early childhood development
ECDI	Early Childhood Development Index
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFAL	English as a First Additional Language
EMERGE	Encouraging Multilingual Early Reading as the Groundwork for Education
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Centre
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLN	Foundational literacy and numeracy
GIF	Global Innovation Fund
IRC	International Rescue Committee
INSET	In-service Education and Training
L1	Home language
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MCEP	Mother and Child Education Programme
NFLP	National Functional Literacy Programme
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPE	National Policy on Education
OU	Open University
POP	Power of Parents
PRESET	Pre-service Education and Training
RQ	Research Questions
SBC	Social Behaviour Change
SSA	Sub-Saharan African
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VMs	Volunteer Mothers

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# Executive summary

## 1.0 Introduction

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of parental and caregiver involvement on the literacy development of children aged 3-12 in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The study aims to evaluate how various practices and interventions involving parents and caregivers contribute to early literacy skills. By reviewing recent research and grey literature, this report offers evidence-based recommendations to enhance literacy outcomes in the region.

## Objective

The primary objective of this review is to assess the effectiveness of parental and caregiver engagement in supporting children's literacy development, with a specific focus on SSA, and particularly West Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria. The review seeks to identify successful strategies, understand existing practices, and provide actionable insights for policymakers and educators.

## 2.0 Methodology

The review encompassed literature from 2013 to 2024 to ensure its relevance to current educational and policy contexts, capturing recent trends and interventions in foundational literacy. The review incorporated a diverse range of sources, including academic journal articles, research reports, grey literature, and policy briefs, accessed through databases and search engines such as ERIC, APA PsycINFO, the OU Library website, Google Scholar and the Journal of Early Childhood Literacy.

The search focused on parental and caregiver involvement in early literacy, utilising terms like 'parents,' 'caregivers,' 'home environment,' and 'literacy development.' Specific search strings included combinations like ('parents'\* OR 'caregivers'\* OR 'home environment'\* OR 'home literacy practices') AND ('children's early literacy' OR 'early child development'\* OR 'child language development'). Exclusions were made for studies centred on school environments.

The literature was categorised into several types. Existing practices were explored through qualitative studies, such as observations and interviews, examining current parental and community practices. Interventions were assessed through experimental or quasi-experimental studies, including randomised controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating the impact of literacy programmes or strategies. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses provided comprehensive overviews of multiple studies, while conceptual papers offered theoretical insights into literacy interventions and research gaps.

Inclusion criteria for the review encompassed studies on programmes aiding parental support for children's literacy, parental-school partnerships and relevant educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, among others. Studies were excluded if they were not in English, fell outside the 2013-2024 timeframe, or did not focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Ghana and Nigeria, or children aged 3-12.

The screening and selection process began with an initial pool of 25,046 sources, which was narrowed to 2,244 through preliminary filtering. After reviewing titles and abstracts, 1,854 items were excluded, leaving 378 for detailed review. The final selection of 57 studies was determined using the PRISMA approach.

Data extraction involved a detailed, three-level process to gather information on each study's country, theoretical framework, methodological approach, data collection methods, sample size, publication date, and peer-review status. The extracted data was thematically organised to address research questions and identify effective literacy strategies.

## Limitations of the review

This extended review only includes studies published in English within a specific timeframe, potentially missing relevant research in other languages or more recent findings. The review's regional focus may limit the applicability of its findings to other contexts due to cultural and economic differences. Furthermore, the variability in study quality and methodologies, including small sample sizes and methodological weaknesses



may impact the reliability of the conclusions. The review may also not fully capture contextual differences related to barriers such as low literacy skills, and socio-economic status, affecting the generalisability of the findings to other contexts or settings.

### 3.0 Review of literature sources

The review examined the quantity and quality of evidence related to parents' and caregivers' involvement in improving children's language and literacy skills outside the school environment. Out of 57 studies, 47% used qualitative data, offering in-depth insights into participants' experiences through observations and interviews. 16% employed quantitative methods to measure programme impacts, while 7% combined both approaches for a comprehensive analysis. The studies were geographically diverse, including 11 countries in West Africa, 15 other SSA countries, and 13 countries from regions like South Asia, Central America, and the Pacific Islands. This geographical spread highlights a mix of local and global perspectives, with some studies involving multiple countries, including SSA nations. For instance, multi-country projects like Read@Home and research by Millora (2023) provided broader insights into effective family literacy practices across different contexts.

#### The evolution of research on parental and caregiver involvement in children's literacy development

- **Early Focus (Pre-2015):** Emphasised the impact of cultural and environmental factors on literacy, with limited direct interventions or practical strategies for parents in Ghana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
- **Mid-Period Focus (2016-2019):** Shifted to practical roles of caregivers, highlighting literacy-rich home environments and activities like dialogic reading. Studies showed positive impacts of such practices but noted caregivers' lack of awareness of their effectiveness.
- **Recent Focus (2020 and beyond):** Focused on structured interventions involving community support. Programmes like Read Liberia and Zambian folktale initiatives demonstrated improved literacy outcomes through community engagement and leveraging oral literacy skills, though challenges remained for parents with low literacy.

#### Quality of literature sources reviewed

The review focused on assessing the generalisability, applicability, and relevance of studies to understand how parents and caregivers support children's foundational literacy development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The literature sources reviewed were categorised into four types:

1. **Existing Practices (66%):** The majority of studies explored how families and communities support children's literacy development through practices such as reading, storytelling, and everyday interactions.
2. **Interventions (28%):** A significant portion of the literature examined intervention programmes aimed at improving parental engagement in children's literacy skills, showcasing a shift toward structured approaches.
3. **Systematic Reviews (4%):** Limited attention was given to systematic reviews, which aggregate research findings to offer generalisable insights into effective literacy practices.
4. **Conceptual Papers (2%):** The literature contained few conceptual frameworks to understand the underlying factors influencing literacy development, indicating a gap in theoretical exploration.

#### Interventions reviewed

Out of 57 resources reviewed, 16 were literacy interventions, though some lacked formal evaluations or details on evidence-based methods. The analysis covers 28% of the sources, highlighting diverse strategies for literacy and language development across different contexts.

#### 1. Parental Involvement in Literacy Development in Tanzania (Kigobe, 2019)

**Location:** Tanzania

**Objective:** Train teachers and parents to improve children's reading through communication and home visits.

**Conclusion:** Parental involvement, like encouragement and modelling, positively affects children's reading development.

## **2. Parent-Child Book-Sharing in Rural Kenya (Knauer et al., 2019)**

**Location:** Kenya

**Objective:** Improve literacy in children (2-6) through dialogic reading and local storybooks.

**Conclusion:** Caregivers' engagement and praise foster children's love for reading and literacy.

## **3. Early Grade Reading in South Africa (Taylor et al., 2019)**

**Location:** South Africa

**Objective:** Engage parents in supporting reading through training and home reinforcement.

**Conclusion:** Positive impact on phonological awareness but limited due to low parent attendance.

## **4. GOLD-4-GOLD COVID-19 Initiative in Ghana (2020)**

**Location:** Ghana

**Objective:** Support literacy during COVID-19 closures using community volunteers.

**Conclusion:** Effectiveness needs further assessment through discussions on volunteer model.

## **5. Lively Minds Initiative in Ghana (Amadu et al., 2018)**

**Location:** Ghana

**Objective:** Train teachers and mothers to implement play-based learning schemes to improve early childhood development.

**Conclusion:** Effective interventions should address both home and formal education environments, enhancing parental engagement for better early childhood outcomes.

## **6. Community Use of Zambian Folktales Book (Kaiser et al., 2023)**

**Location:** Zambia

**Objective:** Use a culturally relevant folktales book to promote shared reading and parent-child interactions.

**Conclusion:** Caregivers with oral literacy skills successfully supported children's language development, though caregivers with low literacy skills benefitted from support from literate family members.

## **7. Read Liberia Initiative (2022)**

**Location:** Liberia

**Objective:** Engage caregivers and community members to support early grade reading through training and community reading spaces.

**Conclusion:** Positive behavioural changes in parents, with improved parental engagement in literacy, led to better educational outcomes for children.

## **8. Enhancing young children's language acquisition through parent-child book sharing (Knauer et al., 2020)**

**Location:** Kenya

**Objective:** Improve children's literacy through storybooks and dialogic reading training.

**Conclusion:** Storybook distribution and dialogic reading boost caregiver-child interactions, closing vocabulary gaps, especially for children of illiterate parents.

## **9. Effects of a parental involvement intervention to promote child literacy in Tanzania (Kigobe et al., 2021)**

**Location:** Tanzania

**Objective:** Enhance literacy through teacher-parent partnerships.

**Conclusion:** Parent-teacher collaboration significantly improves reading, fluency, and comprehension.

## **10. Kitengesa family literacy project (Parry et al., 2014)**

**Location:** Uganda

**Objective:** Translate children's books into Luganda, foster multilingual literacy.

**Conclusion:** Parent participation in literacy activities boosts children's interest and confidence in reading.

## **11. Read@Home (World Bank, 2020)**

**Location:** Senegal

**Objective:** Support parents with resources to promote early reading.

**Conclusion:** Community-based approach improves literacy outcomes by engaging parents in children's learning.

## **12. Ubongo (2018)**

**Location:** East Africa

**Objective:** Use video content to promote social-emotional learning through caregiver engagement.

**Conclusion:** Positive caregiver engagement outcomes in refugee settings, including increased educational interactions.

## **13. Encouraging Multilingual Early Reading (EMERGE) (World Bank, 2018)**

**Location:** Kenya

**Objective:** Improve literacy through dialogic reading and storybook sharing in Luo and English.

**Conclusion:** Significant literacy gains, particularly for children of illiterate caregivers.

## **14. Mishig Reading Camp (Jones, 2016)**

**Location:** Ethiopia

**Objective:** Improve literacy through structured activities and community involvement.

**Conclusion:** Increased reading comprehension among participants.

## **15. Nal'ibali**

**Location:** South Africa

**Objective:** Foster reading culture in local languages through community-driven programmes.

**Conclusion:** Effective community engagement promotes literacy and sustainability.

## **16. Nigeria Reads**

**Location:** Nigeria

**Objective:** Establish literacy centres in remote communities.

**Conclusion:** Ongoing initiative with plans for field visits to assess impact.

### **Evidence from focus countries: Ghana and Nigeria**

In Ghana, the Education Strategic Plan (ESP, 2018-2030) and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Policy outline objectives for family and community engagement in early childhood education. However, these policies lack detailed strategies for effectively involving parents in literacy development at home. The ESP mentions initiatives like the National Functional Literacy Programme targeting rural and disadvantaged groups, but does not address parental engagement explicitly.

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004; 2013) integrates early childhood care but focuses more on institutional aspects rather than direct parental involvement in literacy. While the NPE aims to provide free education and support at various stages of child development, it does not specify strategies for parental engagement in early literacy. Overall, both Ghana and Nigeria have policy frameworks acknowledging early childhood education but lack specific, actionable strategies for promoting parental engagement in literacy. Literature from both countries underscores the need for greater involvement of parents and caregivers in supporting literacy outside the formal education system.

### **4.0 Activities promoting parental and caregiver engagement.**

Parental and caregiver engagement in children's literacy development is significantly enhanced through both conventional practices, such as shared reading and storytelling, and indigenous knowledge systems, including folktales and traditional songs. These activities, often involving extended family members and community networks, have been shown to positively influence literacy outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Community-driven initiatives, alongside the integration of culturally relevant materials, have demonstrated effectiveness in fostering literacy skills, increasing engagement and reinforcing cultural identity. The active involvement of both family and community networks plays a critical role in advancing children's literacy development.

## Categories of literacy engagements reported in literature sources reviewed

The literature identifies four key categories of activities that parents and caregivers use to support children's literacy development: 1) **Traditional book reading**, which involves shared reading and interactive dialogue; 2) **Home literacy activities** such as storytelling, singing and outdoor play, which foster foundational learning in informal, culturally relevant settings; 3) **Community-based literacy programmes**, which engage local organisations and community leaders to provide resources and promote literacy beyond school settings; and 4) **Capacity-building interventions for parents and caregivers**, which offer structured training and resources to enhance family involvement in children's education. These activities highlight the importance of both individual and community engagement in fostering literacy.

## 5.0 Challenges

Our review identifies several challenges to parental involvement in children's literacy development, particularly among families with low socio-economic status or limited literacy skills. These include a lack of resources, time and confidence, which hinder parents from effectively supporting their children's learning.

While these challenges have been framed through deficit narratives for so long, our review shows that parents bring valuable knowledge and skills, which can be harnessed by engaging them in the co-creation of literacy activities. Involving parents in the design of interventions ensures they are more culturally relevant and effective. Furthermore, many parents are unaware of the significant impact they can have on their children's literacy development. Shifting this perception and recognising the value of informal literacy activities, such as storytelling and play, can greatly enhance children's literacy outcomes.

By empowering parents, these perceived barriers can be transformed into opportunities, leading to better literacy outcomes for children and their communities.

## 6.0 Key takeaways

This section highlights the importance of family and community involvement, home languages, and parents' cultural knowledge in supporting literacy development. Community-based initiatives create supportive networks, reinforcing literacy value in disadvantaged settings.

Participatory methods, such as co-designing programmes with parents, ensure cultural relevance and empower families. Home language and culturally relevant materials boost children's interest in reading and language skills.

Methods like community storytelling and peer-led reading promote engagement, while accessible resources like media broadcasts enhance literacy in resource-poor areas. Collaborative parent-teacher partnerships create a strong support system for continuous literacy development.

## 7.0 Case study deep dive: key insights from selected community-based literacy interventions

We reviewed three successful community-based literacy interventions, offering strategies for mc2h's literacy programmes.

1. **Kitengesha Community Library Project:** Engaging local groups like the Lwannunda Women's Group was key to success, strengthening community ownership and intergenerational collaboration with a local school.
  - **Recommendations:** Map key community stakeholders, develop training for Community Learning Centres (CLCs), and implement monitoring to maintain momentum.
  - **Impact:** Strengthened local support for literacy initiatives and tailored solutions for community challenges.
2. **Nal'ibali:** The project's use of locally relevant stories and peer-led reading clubs boosted children's engagement. Storytelling embedded in local culture increased participation and comprehension.
  - **Recommendations:** Develop culturally relevant stories, test methods like acting and group discussions, and monitor engagement and comprehension.

- **Impact:** Increased engagement and improved comprehension through relatable content and interactive learning.
3. **World Bank's Lively Minds Programme:** Empowering mothers with low literacy skills to lead literacy initiatives has sustained community engagement.
- **Recommendations:** Form small mothers' groups, provide leadership training and create mentorship opportunities for peer support.
  - **Impact:** Boosted mothers' confidence, creating a supportive learning environment for children through peer mentoring and leadership.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

There is a growing body of work around parental, community, and familial support interventions to improve children's literacy in developing countries (see for example Spier et al., 2016). However, how parents and caregivers in poor and rural communities in SSA contribute to children's literacy and language skills is still underexplored. This literature review aimed to address this gap. It identified and reviewed published academic work and grey literature that had looked at how the home and familial environment contributes to children's (3-12 years old) ability to develop their foundational literacy skills.

### 1.2 Research questions

The review was guided by four questions:

1. What is the quality and quantity of evidence on parental and caregiver engagement programmes aimed at improving language development and foundational literacy skills of children aged 3-12 outside school?
2. How effective have government policies and other funders' activities been in promoting parental and caregiver engagement in children's literacy programmes?
3. How have parents, caregivers and their community networks worked to support the literacy and language development of children aged 3-12?
4. What activities have parents engaged in with children to generate their interest in reading and develop their language skills?

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Scope of the review

We focused the review on research reports and grey literature published within the last decade, because we were particularly interested in the most recent studies or interventions that had been informed by the latest policy interests linked to improving foundational literacy. The databases and search engines we used included: ERIC; APA Psych INFO; OU Library website; Google Scholar; Journal of Early Childhood Literacy.

### 2.2 Search terms and concepts

We searched for specific keywords in different databases for studies that related to the review focus and addressed the research questions, starting with titles and abstracts of relevant studies which mentioned parental or caregiver involvement in language and literacy skills development for our age group of interest – 3–12-year-olds. Our search strings are exemplified below:

*(‘parents’\* or ‘caregivers’\* OR ‘home environment’\* OR ‘home literacy practices’\* OR ‘home learning’\* OR ‘indigenous literacy practices’\*) AND (‘children’s early literacy’\* OR ‘early child development’\* OR ‘children’s early learning’\* OR ‘child language development’); (‘caregiver’\* OR ‘parent’\* OR ‘family involvement’\* OR ‘home environment’\*) AND (‘literacy skill’\* OR ‘literacy develop’\* OR ‘literacy acquisition’\*) AND (‘child’\* OR ‘preschool’\* OR ‘early grad’\* OR ‘primary education’\* OR ‘early childhood education’\*) NOT (‘school environment’\* OR ‘school programme’\* OR ‘school instruct’\*).*

The literature sources we reviewed fell into the following categories: (i) existing practices, (ii) interventions, (iii) systematic reviews, and (iv) conceptual papers.

- **Existing practices:** These were studies which examined how current activities and practices of parents, families and communities helped children develop their literacy skills. These studies often used qualitative methods such as observations, interviews and case studies to provide insights into what



parents are currently doing to support children's development of literacy and language skills, as well as the challenges they experienced.

- **Interventions:** These studies assessed the impact of specific programmes or strategies on parental and/or caregiver roles. They included experimental or quasi-experimental studies, which use control and experimental groups to compare outcomes. Some studies also measured changes in children’s literacy skills before and after an intervention and often included detailed instructions on how to implement the intervention.
- **Systematic review:** These papers evaluated and summarised findings from multiple studies. They followed a predefined protocol to select and analyse studies, using criteria to assess their quality and relevance. They often included a meta-analysis which combined results from different studies.
- **Conceptual paper:** We also included conceptual papers because they offer theoretical frameworks or models that help us understand concepts and theories. These papers identify gaps or inconsistencies in existing literature and explain approaches used in interventions targeting parental groups.

### 2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We included studies and literature sources that focused on:

1. Programmes helping parents to support their children's literacy skills development.
2. Initiatives where parents worked as partners with schools.
3. Programmes using parents' knowledge and skills.
4. Reports from government bodies and NGOs.
5. Reports on educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Academic dissertations.
7. Website pages with relevant information related to our topic of interest.

This approach allowed us to develop insights into programmes and activities involving parents in their children's education as well supporting their literacy skills development in the home environment. Our eligibility criteria are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Eligibility criteria**

Eligibility criteria	
1.	The article is available in English language: Selecting articles available in English ensured that all included studies could be thoroughly understood, but we acknowledge that it has limitations because there may be sources in other languages that provide insights that our review missed.
2.	The publication includes topics related to "home environment and early literacy development." Here, we were looking for studies that would help us understand how home environments directly or indirectly shape how children's literacy skills develop, including home resources that might be contributing to the development of early literacy skills.
3.	The publication is from 2013 to 2024: We focused on studies within a ten-year old window to ensure our review was based on the latest and most relevant information on responses to the foundational literacy crisis. Within the last decade there have been concerted efforts to tackle the foundational literacy and numeracy learning crisis and we were interested in whether these had included the contribution of home environments and their impact on the development of children’s literacy skills.
4.	We focused on sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and particularly West Africa, and Ghana and Nigeria in particular. We were interested in studies that would help us understand the cultural, economic and educational factors in these regions which shaped how families and local communities supported the development of children's literacy skills, and what role parents played.
5.	Finally, we focused on studies that targeted parents and caregivers with children within the age range of 3 - 12 years.

## 2.4 Screening and selection of literature sources to be included in this report.

For literature sources deemed potentially relevant, we examined the full text so we could focus only on sources that directly addressed our review questions. We reviewed titles, summaries and, in some cases, abstracts to determine if they discussed parents' and caregivers' roles in helping children develop literacy skills including learning to write, and excluded those which didn't have this focus. We also checked relevant website pages for initiatives and projects that matched the focus of our review for additional information. If a literature source passed all our checks, we did a critical review and noted vital information such as the authors, publication date, number of participants in the study, study location, and the type of study (e.g., intervention or exploratory), and the main arguments or findings. The chart below provides an overview of the process used in the review based on the Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach. (See Figure 1.)

As shown in Figure 1, an initial pool of circa 25,046 outputs (journal articles, research reports, academic dissertations, intervention blog posts and grey literature) were gathered from various online databases and search engines, including academic journals and Google Scholar. The list was narrowed down by removing items that did not match specific criteria such as the year of publication, the focus countries and the age group of the children studied. This filtering process led to the selection of 2,244 studies/reports etc.

Next, we checked the titles and abstracts to determine if they closely matched the topics of interest which resulted in the exclusion of 1,854 items. The remaining 378 items underwent a more thorough review to ensure they met all the inclusion criteria, resulting in a final list of 57 items which became the focus of the in-depth study for the review. This step-by-step approach ensured that the final set (**n= 57**) were studies that had relevant information to address our review questions.

From the final set of studies, we identified common themes, intervention strategies and studies which reported the effectiveness or impact of programmes which included parental or caregiver contributions.

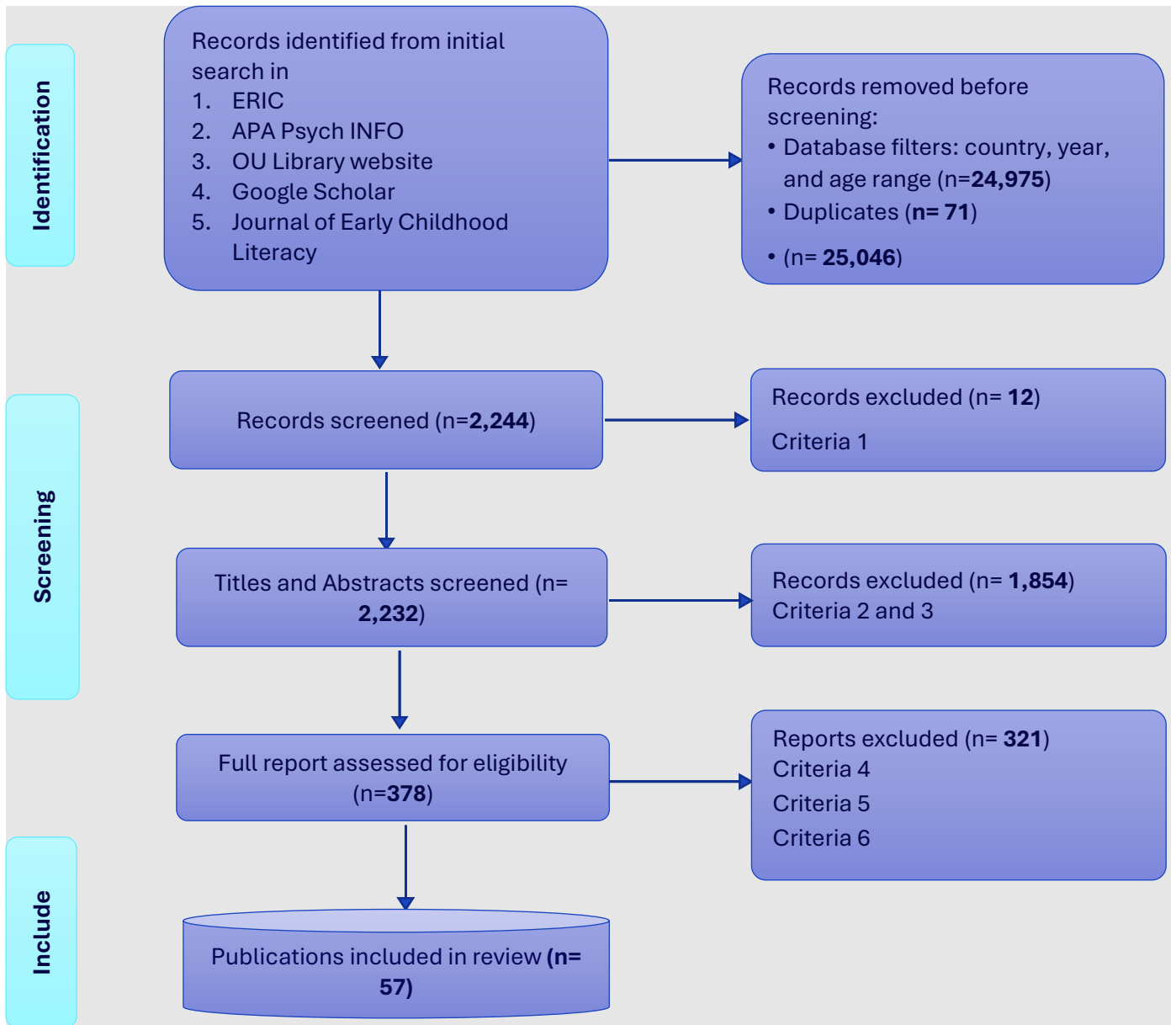
## 2.5 Data extraction

From a three-level data extraction and analysis process we came up with a spreadsheet with all the extracted information. Among the key things we looked for were the following:

- focus country of the study
- conceptual or theoretical framework used in the study
- methodological approach (Qualitative or Quantitative or Mixed method)
- data gathering technique
- sampling size
- date of publication
- name of author(s)
- keywords used in the paper
- abstract
- If the paper was peer reviewed or not

Next, we organised the information into separate documents for the analysis using a thematic approach in response to the four research questions.





**Figure 1: Flow chart of the review selection**

## 2.6 Limitations of the review

While this literature review provides valuable insights into the role of parents and caregivers in children's literacy acquisition and development in the home and familial environment, we acknowledge the following limitations:

- The review was limited to studies and information sources available in English and published within a specific timeframe. This may have excluded relevant research published in other languages or outside the selected period, potentially leading to a less comprehensive understanding of the issue. The field of literacy development is continuously evolving, with new research emerging regularly. This literature review represents a snapshot in time and may not reflect the most current trends, practices or emerging issues in literacy development.
- Many of the literature sources and studies reviewed were conducted in specific regions or countries, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. Cultural, social, and economic differences can significantly impact the applicability of their findings to different populations. However, the focus on SSA was relevant to the objectives of the funder in their quest to understand the field in this geographical region.

- The quality and methodologies of the literature sources and studies reviewed varied, with some studies having small sample sizes, limited data or methodological weaknesses. These variations can affect the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn for this literature review.

The intersection of barriers such as low literacy skills, lack of confidence and socio-economic status varies significantly across different communities and individual circumstances, Therefore, the analysis and conclusions may not fully capture contextual nuances that explain differences in effectiveness of parental and caregiver engagement.

### 3.0 Review of the literature sources

#### 3.1 Quantity and quality of parents and caregiver engagement programmes

We focused on the quantity and quality of evidence that exists on studies that report parents' and caregivers' engagement in programmes to improve language and foundational literacy skills of children aged 3-12 outside the school environment. In this section we discuss the type of evidence, the geographical spread of studies, chronological progression of research and engagement in this area and, finally, the quality of the evidence.

##### 3.1.1 Quantity and types of literature evidence reviewed

The final 57 studies comprising research papers, evaluation reports, doctoral thesis, blog posts and website pages used data from qualitative, quantitative studies, or studies which used both. Of the 57 studies, 27 (47%) used qualitative data gathered through observations, interviews or focus groups. These studies provided deep experiences and perspectives of participants involved in the targeted programmes. Only 9 studies (16%) used mainly quantitative data gathered using structured surveys and experiments. Some studies used analysed statistical data to assess the impact and effectiveness of programmes that had quantitative measurable outcomes. A smaller subset of studies, 4 out of 57 (7%), combined qualitative and quantitative data to provide both statistical and descriptive insights.

##### 3.1.2 Geographical spread of studies

The studies were from three distinct groups of countries reflecting the focus of our literature review:

- West Africa (11 countries) – These are countries located in West Africa. This includes our focus countries, Ghana and Nigeria. In these countries, English or French is the main language used in schools, along with several local languages.
- Rest of SSA (15 countries) – These were countries outside West Africa.
- Rest of the World (13 countries) – These were countries covering South Asia, Central Asia, Central America, the Republic of Marshall Islands (Pacific Islands) and Turkey. The geographical distribution of the final set of studies is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: The geographical distribution of literature and information sources reviewed**

REGION	COUNTRIES
WEST AFRICA (11)	Ghana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Togo, Niger, Senegal and Guinea.
REST OF SSA (15)	Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan, Djibouti and Rwanda.
REST OF THE WORLD	Republic of Marshall Islands, North Macedonia, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Yemen, Tajikistan, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Turkey, Indonesia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We included countries outside SSA if they were part of multi-country projects but had SSA countries as part of their study. For example, twelve countries that participated in the first wave of Read@Home (worldbank.org) initiative, included Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Senegal, Sudan, North Macedonia, El Salvador and Honduras. The programme provided reading, learning and play materials in languages familiar to children, delivered to homes. Additionally, the programme created resources and activities to assist parents and caregivers to read with their children who were aged 3-12 years and had no access to books or other forms of remote learning. Also, the study by [Millora \(2023\)](#) explored ‘social-contextual’ approaches to family literacy programmes in Nigeria, Mexico and Nepal and provided examples on what a situated or social-contextual approach to family literacy programming could look like in practice. By including such studies, we acknowledge the interconnectedness of parental/caregiver practices that extend beyond our primary sub-regional and country focus. This opened up opportunities for cross-learning and identification of best practices in low- and middle-income countries.

### 3.2 The evolution of research on parental and caregiver involvement in children’s literacy development

In the review, we attempted to provide a chronological analysis of parental and caregiver roles in literacy development for a broader understanding of the multifaceted influences on child literacy development and how parental and caregiver engagement has evolved over time. Figure 3 provides a summary of our findings.

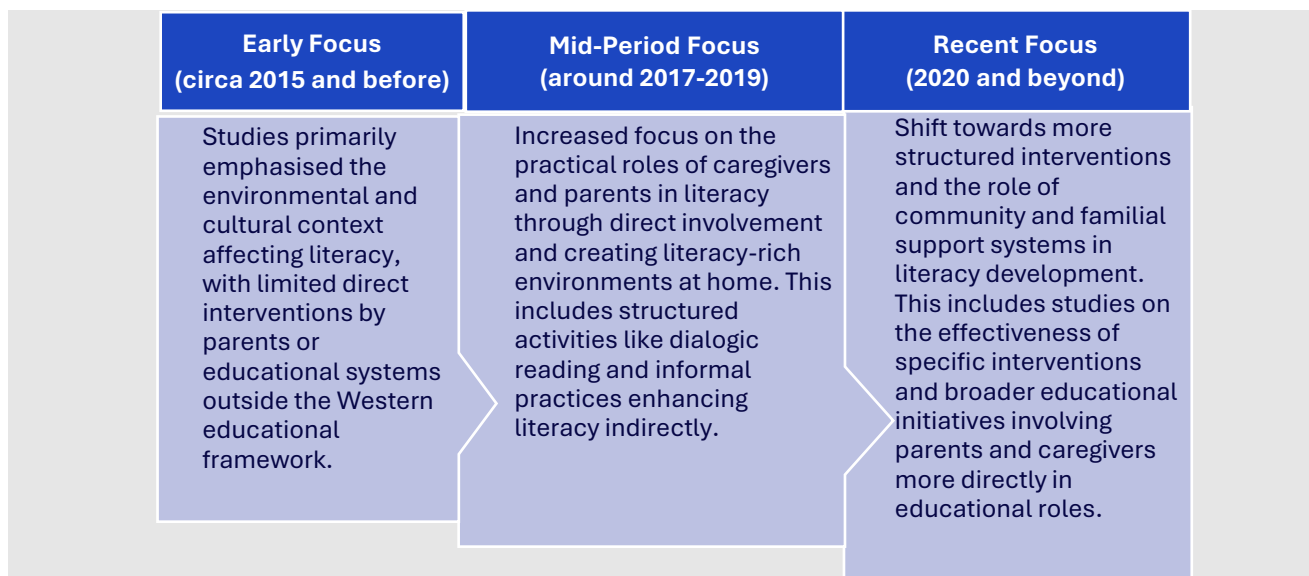


Figure 2: The evolution of research on parental and caregiver involvement in children’s literacy

#### 3.2.1 Early focus (circa 2015 and before)

Studies primarily emphasised the environmental and cultural context affecting literacy, with limited direct interventions by parents or educational systems outside the Western educational context. However, [Ngwaru and Opoku-Amankwa \(2010\)](#), [Chansa-Kabali, Serpell and Lyytinen \(2014\)](#) and [Ngwaru \(2014\)](#) show the importance of parents' roles in influencing children’s reading, literacy development and learning in Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They all stress the importance of focusing on the cultural and environmental factors to maximise parental roles and contributions. Parental attitudes and values toward schooling are also key, as Donkor’s study in Ghana found ([Donkor, 2010](#)). This study did not focus on what parents do or can do to help their children improve their literacy/reading skills, but instead looked at their perceptions, values, and attitudes towards children’s general schooling. Studies around this period tended to use human capital and social capital theories and framings to underscore the vital role of parents in children’s education and focused less on how that role impacted on children’s literacy development.

### **3.2.2 Mid-period focus (around 2016-2019)**

The studies in this period focused on the practical roles of caregivers and parents in developing children's literacy, usually through creating literacy-rich environments at home and in family settings. They included structured activities like dialogic reading and informal home activities and practices that had the potential to enhance children's literacy.

An example is the study by Chansa-Kabali (2017) that focused on helping children learn letters at home. The study found that older siblings, cousins, other relatives and neighbours who can read played a significant role. In African settings, extended family members are especially important for supporting children's literacy development. The study also mentioned factors like context and resources as particularly important in promoting children's literacy outcomes. Oral language abilities in children were also found to predict early literacy skills, such as phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and concepts about print, which are linked to later reading achievement. Using oral language during games and songs can promote children's literacy skills.

A South African study (Tayob and Moonsamy, 2018) also showed how caregivers offer literacy support by engaging in dialogic and shared book reading. Additional practices and inputs, such as bedtime stories, setting up a mini library where books were available and within reach, and establishing a reading time were equally important. Although caregivers could be engaging in practices or creating enabling environments that can contribute to children's literacy skills, they seem unaware that these were activities that nurtured and facilitated children's literacy skills.

### **3.2.3 Recent focus (2020 and beyond)**

From 2020 there has been a shift towards more structured interventions that include the role of community and familial support in developing children's literacy. We examined studies that measured the effectiveness of specific interventions and broader educational initiatives involving parents and caregivers with more direct roles. A good example is the Read Liberia (Vazquez, 2022) USAID-funded programme that established school-community-family collaborations to improve student behaviour and achievement and produced increases in rates of literacy acquisition.

This programme recruited and trained community mobilisers to engage caregivers, teachers, women, and youth groups, traditional leaders and community leaders in supporting children's literacy. Parents were encouraged to collaborate with teachers and community members to create reading spaces in their communities and to set aside 10 minutes daily for children to read. The intervention adopted a three-pronged approach – first targeting parents/caregivers, next teachers and finally community leaders. Vazquez, 2022 reported positive behaviour change among parents and caregivers who participated in the intervention. They developed greater awareness of how to support their children's reading at home, including creating reading spaces and setting aside time for their children to read. This resulted in improvements in children's reading and a reduction in the incidence of children being sent to sell or work on farms.

In Zambia, an intervention that used a Folktales Children's Book to promote caregiver-child interactions through shared reading of contextually relevant content and imagery (Kaiser et al., 2023) produced promising results. The book was designed for early childhood development (ECD) assessment and targeted rural Chitonga-speaking communities. A study of the intervention found that parents with limited reading and writing skills were able to use their strong oral literacy abilities to facilitate engagement with their children to promote their language and social-emotional development. They were, however, unable to fully use the book to foster early reading skills. This was partially mitigated by enlisting literate older children, relatives or neighbours in reading circles (Kaiser et al., 2023). Giving parents and caregivers more roles in teaching children how to read appears promising but clearly this can be hampered if they are unable to read themselves. The Zambian case illustrates the potential of oral literacy when parents are unable to read texts to their children.

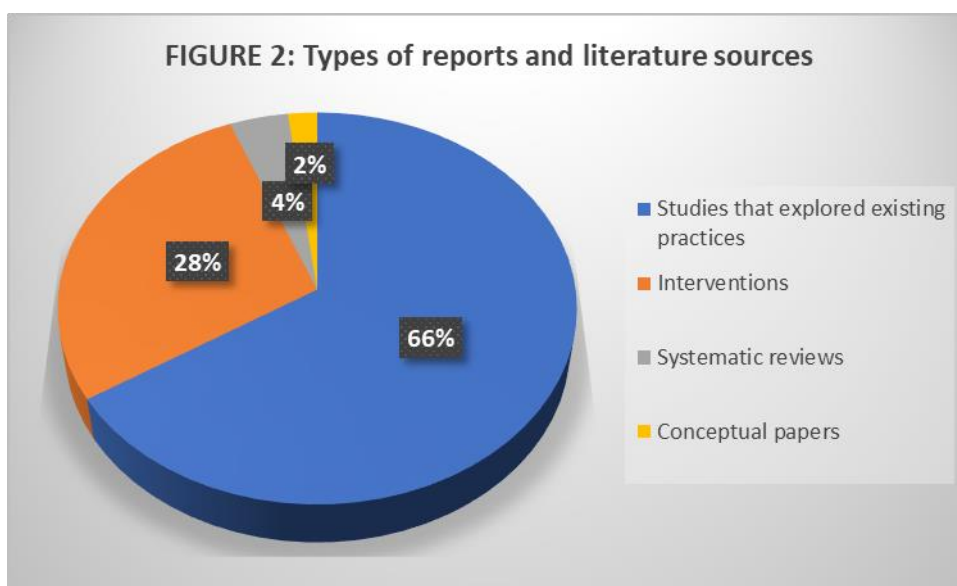
## **3.3 Quality of literature sources reviewed**

To assess the quality of studies, we focused on the generalisability or applicability of results from studies, and the relevance and usefulness of findings in understanding how parents and caregivers can play significant roles

in promoting or supporting the development of children’s foundational literacy within the sub-Saharan Africa context.

Our review covered the following types of literature sources:

1. Studies that explored existing practices (66%) in supporting children's literacy development, such as how families and communities help children learn to read and write.
2. Interventions (28%) that focused on studied and non-studied programmes designed to improve how parents and caregivers support their children's literacy skills.
3. Systematic reviews (4%) that analysed and summarised research on literacy practices and their effects on children's literacy development.
4. Conceptual papers (2%) that provided theoretical and conceptual frameworks to understand how varied factors, such as family involvement, influence children's literacy development.



**Figure 3: Types of reports and literature sources**

Figure 3 reveals that 66% of the reviewed literature sources focused on evaluating existing practices in supporting children’s literacy and language development. This substantial proportion underscores the significance of examining real-world strategies and their effectiveness. Meanwhile, interventions targeting parental and caregiver involvement in literacy comprise 28% of the literature, reflecting a growing emphasis on developing and testing programmes to enhance literacy outcomes. This shift towards practical applications highlights the field's evolution, prioritising structured approaches to address literacy challenges across diverse contexts. However, the relatively lower percentage of intervention studies suggests a need for more scalable and contextually adaptable solutions to address the varied needs of different communities effectively.

The review also identifies notable gaps in the field. Systematic reviews represent only 4% of the literature, indicating a lack of aggregated research findings that could offer generalisable insights into effective literacy practices. This highlights the need for greater synthesis of research outcomes to provide clearer, evidence-based guidance for policymakers and practitioners. Conceptual papers make up just 2% of the reviewed sources, revealing limited exploration of theoretical frameworks and models that underpin literacy development. Addressing this gap could enhance understanding of the mechanisms influencing literacy outcomes and inform the design of targeted interventions for parents and communities.

### Data Collection Methods

The reviewed literature utilised diverse data collection methods tailored to specific research contexts and aims. **Qualitative approaches** were prevalent, including focus groups, interviews, ethnographic methods (e.g. video recordings, photographs, artefacts), documentary analysis and observations (e.g.in Akinrimade et al., 2021).

These methods often involved smaller sample sizes and provided rich, contextualised insights into how parents and caregivers engage children in activities that support language and literacy development. For instance, Nkomo et al.'s (2023) semi-ethnographic study documented the early literacy experiences of two three-year-old children during the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa where parents participated as co-researchers. Using videographic data and pictures, the study highlighted the role of the home environment in fostering literacy through storytelling and everyday activities, even during a crisis. While not broadly generalisable due to its sample size, the study offered valuable context-specific insights into the unique challenges faced by caregivers during an emergency.

**Quantitative studies** focused on larger-scale data collection through surveys, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and standardised tests. For example, Mofu et al. (2023) conducted an exploratory study with 79 children randomly selected from 14 low resourced public primary schools in Lusaka, Zambia. Loye et al. (2022), on the other hand, analysed data from 21,933 children across 14 Sub-Saharan Francophone countries. The contrasting sample sizes between these studies illustrate the trade-off between in-depth localised insights and broader generalisability.

**Mixed-methods approaches** offered comprehensive perspectives by combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study by Scherman and Tsebe (2020), for example, combined survey data with focus group discussions to develop guidelines for parents supporting English language development. Their findings revealed the complex interplay of socio-economic and systemic challenges that parents face, such as limited time and children's reluctance to read.

### **Intervention studies**

Among the 16 interventions reviewed, 12 utilised evidence-based approaches grounded in either quantitative or qualitative methodologies. For example, Amadu et al. (2018) conducted an RCT involving 80 schools in Ghana to enhance caregivers' capabilities through training and empowerment. Similarly, Kigobe (2019) used a cluster randomised trial in Tanzania with 600 second-grade children, examining how teacher-parent partnerships improve literacy outcomes. These studies demonstrated the effectiveness of structured interventions in enhancing children's literacy.

Other examples include Taylor et al. (2019) who evaluated three intervention models (teacher training, coaching, and parental involvement) across 260 schools in South Africa, and Knauer et al. (2019) who conducted an RCT in Kenya with 357 caregivers and 510 children to assess the impact of culturally relevant parent-child book-sharing practices. These interventions underscore the potential of evidence-based strategies to drive measurable improvements in literacy skills and parent-child interactions.

In summary, while quantitative studies provide valuable insights into measurable outcomes, they may overlook the nuanced, contextually rich dynamics often captured by qualitative methods. Techniques such as interviews, observations and focus group discussions provide rich, contextual data that offer a deep understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and behaviours. These thick descriptions allow interventions to capture the complexity of human interactions, especially in relation to how parents and caregivers engage with children in literacy activities whilst creating opportunities to uncover the subtle, often overlooked factors that influence literacy development as reported in the Kitengesa family literacy project (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014).

## **3.4 Interventions reviewed**

Out of the 57 resources reviewed, 16 were identified as literacy interventions, though two of these did not report any formal evaluation of their impact or effectiveness, and four did not specify the evidence-based approaches they used to assess and report their impact. However, valuable insights can still be drawn from their delivery models, particularly their volunteer-driven and community-based approaches. These elements will be further explored during field visits planned for Phase 2 of the research.

The narrative below provides a detailed overview of the interventions studied, representing 28% of the 57 literature sources reviewed. Each intervention is examined to highlight key aspects of the initiative, particularly its strategies for literacy and language development. For each intervention, we outline the geographical context,



scope, objectives and reported outcomes. This analysis aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the diverse approaches used and their implications for advancing literacy in various contexts.

### 1. **Parental Involvement in Literacy Development of Primary School Children in Tanzania** (Kigobe, 2019)

**Location:** Tanzania

**Sample size:** The initiative engaged 580 parents of Grade 2 children across 24 primary schools. Targeted training was given to both teachers and parents.

**Objective:** Teachers received training in a five-day workshop. Parents, on the other hand, participated in six hours of training. This training focused on the vital role of parental involvement in fostering children's reading skills. Key components of the intervention included enhancing teacher-parent communication through children's diaries and facilitating home visits by teachers. These visits allowed teachers to evaluate the home reading environment and offer practical advice to parents on making reading an enjoyable and feasible activity. Parents were encouraged to engage in activities such as supervising homework, reading together and discussing school activities, which helped create a supportive academic environment at home. Baseline, end line, and follow-up data collected to assess the programme's effectiveness revealed that home- and school-based academically focused behaviours among parents are influenced by different motivating factors. Therefore, for teachers and schools to effectively engage parents in their children's learning, it is essential to view the home as a crucial starting point.

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that activities like encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction by parents significantly contribute to children's reading development, illustrating the interconnectedness of home and school environments in supporting student learning.

### 2. **Enhancing young children's language acquisition through parent-child book-sharing: A randomised trial in rural Kenya** (Knauer et al., 2019)

**Location:** Kenya

**Sample size:** 510 children and 357 caregivers

**Objective:** Focus was on how caregivers, including parents and literate family members, could enhance the literacy of children aged 2-6 in rural Kenya via meaningful conversations, creating stories, and collaborating with others. By employing locally appropriate children's storybooks translated into Luo and Swahili, caregivers provided a supportive learning environment. The study utilised a quantitative methodology, collecting baseline and follow-up data through questionnaires and in-home interviews with 510 children and 357 caregivers. Central to the intervention was the training provided to caregivers on dialogic reading techniques, which empowered them to engage in storybook-centred discussions with their children. This approach involved follow-up training sessions and home visits from trainers. This was aimed at helping caregivers understand how to effectively read with their children.

**Conclusion:** The research highlights the importance of caregivers following children's leads during reading, providing praise and reading frequently to foster a love for literacy.

### 3. **Improving early grade reading in South Africa** (Taylor et al., 2019)

**Location:** South Africa

**Sample size:** 230 low-resourced public primary schools.

**Objective:** To improve early reading outcomes in African languages, specifically Setswana, through three intervention models: structured learning with centralised training, structured learning with on-site coaching, and parental involvement. Implemented across 230 schools in the Northwest province, the study followed a cohort of learners from Grade 1 in 2015 to Grade 3 in 2017. For the purposes of this review, we focus on the parental

involvement intervention which aimed to engage parents in supporting their children's literacy through weekly meetings.

Parents were provided with training, materials and tools to reinforce reading skills at home. Parents were taught about the importance of reading, the need for additional support outside of school and practical steps to support their child's literacy development. The training also provided parents with reading materials to practice with their children at home.

However, for the intervention to be effective, several conditions needed to be met. First, the meetings had to be held consistently, with the content delivered effectively. Secondly, parents needed to regularly attend the sessions. Thirdly, attending parents had to absorb and change their attitudes and beliefs regarding their role in supporting literacy. This change in thinking had to be followed by a shift in behaviour, such as actively engaging in literacy games with their children at home. Finally, these changes in behaviour were expected to positively impact children's literacy development.

**Conclusion:** While the intervention had a small overall impact, it did show a significant positive effect on phonological awareness, a key reading skill. This was likely due to the use of sound games taught to parents during the meetings, which they could then apply at home to support their children's literacy development. However, the intervention faced challenges, particularly low attendance. In 2015, just over a third of parents attended at least three sessions, and in 2016, just under a third attended three sessions. Despite this, parents who did attend reported higher participation in school meetings compared to those in the control group. Despite these efforts, there were no substantial changes in other indicators of parental involvement in home reading or educational activities, suggesting that the intervention had limited impact on broader shifts in parental behaviours related to supporting literacy. Additionally, they reference prior research by Taylor and Fintel (2016), which highlights the effectiveness of using home languages as the medium of instruction in the early grades for better acquisition of English in later grades.

#### 4. **GOLD-4 GOLD by Achievers Ghana – COVID-19 initiative (2020)**

**Location:** Ghana

**Sample size:** 200 children in Grades 1 to 3.

**Objective:** This literacy programme in Ghana was designed as a response to the COVID-19 global school closures, aiming to enhance reading skills among 200 children in Grades 1 to 3. The initiative utilised community volunteers who worked with small groups of children attending local schools. These sessions took place twice a week over six weeks. While limited information is available to allow for an extensive review of the programme, it has been identified for follow-up discussions with its implementers during the Phase 2 field visit. These discussions will focus on understanding the community volunteer model and its effectiveness in supporting children's literacy development in a resource-constrained context during the global school closure.

**Conclusion:** Not mentioned

#### 5. **Lively Minds initiative - improving early childhood development in rural Ghana through scalable low-cost community-run play schemes: Baseline report (Amadu et al., 2018)**

**Location:** Ghana

**Sample size:** 2407 target children (aged 3-5), as well as their primary caregiver, household head and older and/or younger sibling if they have one. Observations were also conducted at all 80 schools and surveys administered to the 151 kindergarten teachers in these schools.

**Objective:** The study explored the critical role of primary caregivers in supporting children's literacy in Ghana and Uganda. They engaged children in play-schemes using locally available materials, thereby fostering a conducive learning environment.



The baseline stage of the RCT was carried out through questionnaires and observation surveys. The intervention employed a "train the trainer" approach, where Lively Minds facilitators trained kindergarten teachers on the importance of education and play. Subsequently, these teachers trained mothers in their communities to implement educational play-schemes in kindergartens, using locally-sourced materials for games. Volunteer mothers were organised into four groups, each teaching for an hour on designated days.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that successful interventions should address the home environment alongside formal education. By enhancing parental engagement, supporting investments in children's development, and promoting mental well-being, the study suggests a holistic approach to improving early childhood development outcomes.

#### 6. **A qualitative assessment of community acceptability and use of a locally-developed children's book to increase shared reading and parent-child interactions in rural Zambia (Kaiser et al., 2023)**

**Location:** Zambia

**Sample size:** 15 focus groups with women in four rural districts in Zambia.

**Objective:** The initiative invited mothers of children aged 3 to 9 years to participate in a qualitative intervention that involved the use of a *Zambian Folktales Children's Book*. This book was created to address the lack of access to age-appropriate, culturally relevant reading materials for children, especially in local vernaculars like Chitonga.

Focus group discussions were conducted with mothers who received the folktales book, aimed at fostering shared reading experiences. These interactions allowed children to engage with the material by pointing to pictures and describing them, promoting dialogue rather than merely reading the text. The study found that shared book reading experiences enriched children's vocabulary, language development and listening comprehension skills, even when caregivers had limited formal reading and writing skills.

**Conclusion:** The oral literacy skills of these caregivers proved effective in nurturing their children's language and social-emotional development.

Parents expressed that the *Zambian Folktales Children's Book* served as an important educational tool, introducing vocabulary and aiding early learning. Caregivers appreciated the book's cultural relevance, the moral lessons embedded in the stories and its ability to engage and entertain their children. While the book was successful in encouraging interaction between caregivers and children, its effectiveness in developing early reading skills was limited for caregivers with low literacy levels. However, support from literate family members helped to reduce this limitation.

#### 7. **Increasing caregiver and community support for early grade reading: results from Read Liberia (2022)**

**Location:** Liberia

**Sample size:** Not mentioned

**Objective:** Read Liberia recruited and trained community mobilisers to engage community stakeholders in enhancing children's reading abilities. The initiative encouraged parents to collaborate with teachers regarding their children's progress and promoted the establishment of community reading spaces where children could dedicate ten minutes each day to reading.

The methodology employed was a Social Behaviour Change (SBC) communication plan, which effectively targeted parents, teachers, and community leaders. Parents were encouraged to create conducive reading environments at home and actively participate in their children's literacy journey, with community mobilisers facilitating face-to-face engagement and providing reading materials. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative repurposed its approach by encouraging virtual interactions and home visits to maintain momentum in literacy support.

**Conclusion:** The intervention was reported to yield positive behavioural changes among participating parents and caregivers, who became more aware of how to foster reading habits at home. Notably, as parental engagement improved, fewer children were sent to work or sell goods, indicating a shift towards prioritising education. Teachers also benefitted from the initiative, strengthening their relationships with parents, and enhancing caregivers' understanding of how to support their children's reading.

**8. Enhancing young children's language acquisition through parent-child book sharing: a randomised trial in rural Kenya (Knauer et al., 2020)**

**Location:** Kenya

**Sample size:** 357 caregivers and 510 children aged 24 to 83 months

**Objective:** This project aimed to enhance caregivers' abilities to cognitively stimulate their children and improve their emergent literacy skills through a multi-faceted approach. It involved providing storybooks and training in dialogic reading. Data was collected from 357 caregivers and 510 children aged 24 to 83 months. The intervention included four treatment variants: supplying contextually appropriate storybooks in English and local dialects, offering dialogic reading training to caregivers, providing booster training sessions and conducting home visits to support implementation.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that distributing storybooks fostered positive interactions between caregivers and children, increasing children's knowledge of book content. Importantly, the dialogic reading training significantly improved the quality of these interactions and enhanced children's vocabulary. The study highlights that the intervention is particularly beneficial for children of illiterate parents, effectively closing the vocabulary gap between children of literate and illiterate caregivers.

While the article does not specify activities that spark children's interest in reading, it underscores the significance of age-appropriate, culturally relevant reading materials available in local languages. The programme's effectiveness is further illustrated by its ability to empower illiterate parents to engage in story-centred conversations, leading to improvements in children's language development. The study suggests that family-focused educational programmes in rural areas can be highly impactful in enhancing early literacy skills, potentially even more so than traditional school-based initiatives. This emphasises the critical role of community and home engagement in fostering children's literacy development.

**9. Effects of a parental involvement intervention to promote child literacy in Tanzania: a cluster randomised trial (Kigobe et al., 2021)**

**Location:** Tanzania

**Sample size:** 600 Grade 2 children across 24 primary schools

**Objective:** The intervention focused on enhancing parental involvement in children's literacy development in Tanzania, specifically targeting 600 Grade 2 children across 24 primary schools. Through a quantitative cluster randomised control trial, it evaluated the impact of a parental involvement intervention that leveraged teacher-parent partnerships to improve children's reading abilities. The intervention consisted of four key components: training for both teachers and parents, shared reading between parents and children at home, communication between parents and teachers and parental involvement in children's homework.

**Conclusion:** Findings indicate that children in the intervention group, whose teachers received tools to foster parental involvement, demonstrated greater improvements in reading, decoding, fluency and comprehension compared to those in the control group. While the article does not explicitly detail activities that sparked children's interest in reading, it emphasised the importance of creating parent-teacher partnerships to enhance parental engagement in reading practices.

The study highlights that sustained impact was achieved through ongoing teacher support, including child diaries, parent-teacher conferences, and home visits to guide parents in assisting their children with reading.

10. **Kitengesa family literacy project** (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014).

**Location:** Uganda

**Sample size:** Not mentioned

**Objective:** Kitengesa, a family literacy project in Uganda, translated children's books into Luganda – a Bantu language and one of the major languages spoken in Uganda. The project was structured into weekly sessions that covered a range of topics from discussing families and literacy to practical exercises like drawing community maps and discussing the use of writing in the community. Parents who participated in the project engaged in activities such as selecting and discussing pictures, translating books and creating their own stories and plays. Throughout the project, there was a focus on fostering multilingual literacy, particularly through the translation exercises. Parents took the translated books home and read them with their children. They learned the importance of bringing their children to the library and reading to them and the significance of reading aloud to children. Importantly, children became more interested as they witnessed their parents' active participation in the project and observed them reading the books aloud. It fostered children's confidence and enthusiasm for reading.

**Conclusion:** it was observed that children enjoyed participating in literacy events with their parents or caregivers. Older children particularly liked sharing their experiences and shared the books with their siblings and classmates.

11. **Read@Home** (World Bank, 2020): **delivering reading, learning materials and parental support to hard-to-reach homes**

**Location:** Multi country, (Senegal case)

**Sample size:** 50 percent of children aged 0-6 in seven out of 14 regions with the lowest early childhood development (ECD) outcomes

**Objective:** READ@Home is a multi-country initiative focused on empowering parents with the skills and resources necessary to promote reading at home, particularly in low-resource environments. But for the purposes of this review, we focus on Senegal. In Senegal, Read@Home reported providing early reading activities to 50 percent of children aged 0-6 in seven out of 14 regions with the lowest early childhood development (ECD) outcomes. It builds on the [Senegal Investing in Early Years for Human Development Project](#), which is expanding access to quality learning services and launching a national parental engagement programme to promote early learning.

Central to the initiative is the accessibility of reading materials. READ@Home provides quality books in multiple languages to families, ensuring that even those in disadvantaged areas can cultivate a literacy-rich environment.

Parental involvement and community engagement in children's literacy development is supported by fostering community reading groups. This creates a supportive network where parents can participate in their children's literacy development. The collaborative approach is to ensure that families are collectively invested in the educational outcomes of their children.

According to the report, Read@Home offers country teams and clients three areas of support:

- I. Just-in-time technical assistance to complement country-efforts and operations to source and select quality reading and learning materials for children and accompanying materials for parents/caregivers to support children's learning;
- II. Just-in-time and longer-term technical assistance to complement country efforts and operations to improve efficiency and reduce costs to procure and distribute learning materials; and,
- III. Funding to close gaps at country level and incentivise resource allocations (on a matching basis). For now, funding is available only to cover the costs of the technical assistance described in points I and II.

The report also mentioned the \$75 million Senegal Investing in the Early Years (P161332) will be leveraged to roll-out Read@Home in the seven poorest regions of the country, reaching an estimated 1-2 million families by engaging cross-sectoral community-based platforms, including nutrition programmes, preschools, Koranic schools and the country's social registry and cash transfer programme. The report further notes that the initiative will utilise existing distribution channels and community channels to roll out the programme.

**Conclusion:** By collaborating with local NGOs, educational institutions, and community centres, the programme is tailored to be contextually relevant, thereby maximising its impact. This emphasis on partnerships enhanced the initiative's sustainability and reach, contributing to broader educational reforms aimed at improving quality and equity in learning environments.

## 12. Ubongo (2018)

**Location:** Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in East Africa, which has a long history of hosting refugee populations

**Sample size:** Unspecified

**Objective:** The partnership between Ubongo and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) aimed to improve social and emotional learning (SEL) for children in East African refugee camps, particularly through caregiver engagement. By producing 10 short instructional videos, the project encouraged parents to use games to help children develop social and emotional skills like conflict resolution, emotional regulation and perseverance. Ubongo's approach involved culturally relevant content in Kiswahili, which can be adapted in other languages. The videos were designed to address challenges in parenting, such as the reluctance to engage in play or frustration with children's learning mistakes. To combat this, the videos included repetition and voiceovers to guide parents and emphasise the importance of learning through play.

**Conclusion:** While this was a pilot project, preliminary results showed positive outcomes in caregiver understanding and engagement, potentially providing a scalable model for SEL interventions in refugee settings. The report said that after one year of broadcast of the 'Tunakujenga Learning Through Play' campaign from 2016 to 2017, caregivers in households where children watched Akili and Me on TV or listened to Akili and Me on radio increased in most caregiver engagement indicators. They reduced by 14% instances of beating their children, and increased rates of singing to their children by 12%, checking in with the student's teacher by 8%, teaching counting by 10%, using educational technology by 8%, teaching letters by 8%, encouraging their child to draw by 7%, telling stories to their child by 3%, showing the child affection by 6% and listening to educational radio by 4%.

## 13. Encouraging Multilingual Early Reading as the Groundwork for Education (EMERGE) (World Bank, 2018)

**Location:** Kenya

**Sample size:** 73 communities, all located within two hours of Kisumu Town, in the Luo-speaking rural areas of western Kenya. Thirty-six communities (including 1,016 caregivers and 1,267 children between the ages of 36 and 83 months) were assigned to treatment, and 37 communities (including 997 caregivers and 1,260 eligible children) were assigned to control. Within the treatment communities, 508 caregivers (and their 632 eligible children) were assigned the Luo-language books treatment, while another 508 caregivers (and their 635 eligible children) were assigned to receive the English-language versions of the same children's storybooks.

**Objective:** EMERGE is a cluster-randomised evaluation of an early literacy intervention aimed at reducing educational inequalities through low-cost, scalable support for rural children. The intervention combines dialogic reading training for caregivers, particularly targeting illiterate caregivers, and the distribution of locally appropriate illustrated storybooks to encourage book-sharing at home. They reported that caregivers expressed enthusiasm for having resources that enable them to read to their children in their native language. In 2016 their pilot study in nine villages assessed short-term outcomes. Key findings included a notable increase in reading frequency and comprehension among children, with particularly significant gains for children of illiterate

caregivers, suggesting a positive effect on early vocabulary acquisition and school readiness. Additional booster training and text message reminders to caregivers were reported to have had minimal (marginal) impact on caregiver behaviour and child comprehension.

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that a basic dialogic reading including storybooks intervention is more cost-effective and scalable. The pilot also reported a preference among families for Luo language storybooks. The study also reports that, contrary to common assumptions about literacy interventions being less effective for children of illiterate parents or caregivers. due to the belief that these caregivers may struggle to support reading activities, the EMERGE intervention had the opposite effect. Children of illiterate caregivers showed even greater gains from the intervention than those with literate caregivers. With initially lower exposure to language and reading at home, these children experienced significant developmental boosts, making the intervention especially effective for families with limited literacy resources.

#### 14. Mishig Reading Camp (Jones, 2016)

**Location:** Ethiopia

**Sample size:** 900,000 children across 57 communities.

**Objective:** Mishig Reading Camp in Ethiopia addressed the global learning crisis, particularly the significant literacy gap in rural Ethiopia. The camp provided children with a supportive and engaging learning environment outside of school, focusing on improving literacy through structured, yet fun, activities. Key components included local language storybooks, youth volunteers as facilitators and strong community involvement. The programme encouraged parents and caregivers to support their children's literacy development at home. Parents and caregivers were invited to participate in parental awareness sessions, which helped them understand how to build a literacy-rich environment for their children at home. These sessions taught parents how to create dedicated reading spaces at home, known as "reading corners." Additionally, facilitators provided guidance to parents on how to further support their children's reading outside the camp. Parents were encouraged to use personal journals to track their children's progress and apply suggestions on how to improve reading skills at home. This approach created a family-focused literacy model, making reading a collaborative effort between the child, the community and the family.

After 2012, the Mishig Reading Camp expanded significantly, reaching about 900,000 children across 57 communities. Apart from parental engagement, other success factors included teacher training, engagement of youth volunteers and caregivers, and collaboration with local suppliers to create and distribute books, ensuring children had access to reading materials at home.

**Conclusion:** Two impact assessments of the programme were carried out between 2012 and 2015 (Jones, 2016). The first assessment showed that one year of participating in literacy programmes resulted in a 35% increase in reading comprehension (Jones, 2016). The second impact assessment (Jones, 2016), carried out in 2014 and 2015, found that before the programme began, only 3% of children could read with comprehension. By the end line assessment, 31% of children on the programme were readers compared to 14% of children who had not participated – a significant difference.

#### 15. Nal'ibali

**Location:** South Africa

**Sample size:** 7 provinces, 7 provisional coordinators, 35 schools, 7560 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, 7000 caregivers, 1112 ECD practitioners and 20 educators

**Objective:** Nal'ibali is a current South African initiative focused on fostering a culture of reading and storytelling among children, especially those aged 0-12 years, in their home languages. The initiative stands out for promoting literacy in all 11 official languages of South Africa, thus creating a more inclusive and relatable experience for children across different linguistic backgrounds. This approach empowers children to learn in the languages they understand best, contributing to better comprehension and stronger literacy foundations.



The initiative's core elements include community-driven reading clubs, where storytelling and shared reading activities are central, and resource provision to educators, caregivers and families. By providing reading materials, Nal'ibali helps to address the shortage of accessible and age-appropriate content in local languages. Moreover, the campaign involves a broad range of stakeholders, including parents, teachers and volunteers, fostering a collaborative approach to children's literacy development.

**Conclusion:** Nal'ibali reports that its grant amount is to the tune of 1000000 (DGMT). It also reports that one of its significant strengths is its ability to engage communities at a grassroots level, which not only builds literacy but also creates a sense of ownership among participants. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to play an active role in supporting their children's literacy, a particularly crucial element in areas where literacy levels among adults may be low. Nal'ibali's community-oriented and multilingual strategy not only strengthens literacy but also enhances the sustainability of its efforts by embedding these practices into everyday life.

## 16. Nigeria Reads

**Location:** Nigeria

**Sample size:** Unspecified

**Objective:** This is an ongoing initiative that focuses on improving education in Nigeria's remote communities by creating literacy centres and community libraries where children have limited access to books. The project has not published much about its practices; however, we are particularly interested in how it engages with parents and caregivers in these communities to strengthen children's literacy and language development. This is why we will be following up during the field visit in Phase 2 to gain deeper insights into its approaches and their effectiveness.

**Conclusion:** Unspecified

### Common threads throughout each intervention

The interventions reviewed share a common thread on the importance of context-specific approaches in addressing literacy, with several key factors reported as essential for success. These include the use of home language as a foundation for learning, the engagement of community networks to sustain literacy initiatives and the provision of culturally relevant resources that resonate with local contexts. Additionally, it was noted that literacy extends beyond the acquisition of reading skills alone, with learning through play emerging as a vital component of language development. These multi-faceted approaches, integrating these elements, have been reported as effective across a range of settings and populations.

A key gap identified in most of the interventions is the lack of sustained and systematic co-creation with parents and caregivers. Co-creation, which involves the active participation of parents and caregivers in the design, implementation and ongoing development of literacy initiatives, is vital for fostering long-term literacy growth and ensuring a sense of ownership. While some interventions reported engaging caregivers in reading activities or providing resources, they did not specify how caregivers were involved in the broader process of shaping or adapting these initiatives. The absence of reporting if there was an explicit co-creation with parents and caregivers limits our understanding of the sense of ownership among parents and caregivers, thereby undermining the potential for sustained impact on literacy development. For more details of activities that promote parental and caregiver engagement, please refer to section 4.0.

## 3.5 Evidence from focus countries: Ghana and Nigeria

### 3.5.1 Policies for parental engagement in children's literacy in Ghana and Nigeria

#### Ghana:

Before the 2007 educational reforms, Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Ghana was mainly provided by private individuals and organisations, leading to a rise in private and international schools. This resulted in uneven access, especially in rural areas, where the government had little control over coordination or quality. Most ECE services were concentrated in urban areas, leaving many poor and rural children without access. In 2002, the government established a committee to review the education system, and by 2003, ECE for children aged 4-6 became part of the formal education system through significant reforms.

We reviewed two policy documents in Ghana: The Education Strategic Plan (ESP, 2018-2030) and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Policy. Neither specifically addresses issues of parental involvement or engagement in children's literacy acquisition and development at home.

For example, the ECE policy document outlines its Policy Goal 4 as: Families are actively engaged in their children's early childhood education via the following objectives and strategies:

Objective 1: Develop and implement a systematic guideline for family and community engagement.

- Strategy: Gather evidence on family and community engagement to develop a comprehensive community engagement strategy.
- Strategy: Implement family and community engagement guidelines.

Objective 2: Strengthen the capacity of early childhood education practitioners to implement the family and community engagement strategy.

- Strategy: Integrate family and community engagement strategies into training (basic, PRESET and INSET).

Objective 3: Promote emerging issues in family and community engagement in early childhood education.

- Strategy: Sensitise families and communities on their roles in providing ECE and the relevance of enrolling their children in KG at the right age.

Objective 4: Integrate and scale evidence-based best practices that build the capacity of families and communities to provide quality ECE at home and school.

- Strategy: Integrate and scale the Lively Minds methodology (Ghana Ministry of Education, p.16).

Additionally, the Education Strategic Plan (ESP, 2018-2030) also mentions the National Functional Literacy Programme (NFLP). The programme aims to address inequalities in access to literacy and life skills by targeting specific groups: rural communities, the northern regions and women. It focuses on non-literate adults, especially the rural poor and women.

In Nigeria, the formal establishment of early childhood education goes back to the early 20th century, which was initially driven by missionary efforts and later by governmental initiatives. Over the years, the Nigerian government has recognised the importance of early childcare development and education (ECCDE) through various policies and programmes.

We reviewed the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004; 2013). The NPE (2004) marked a significant milestone by formally incorporating pre-primary education into the national educational framework. This policy emphasised the need to provide free and compulsory basic education, which includes early childhood care and education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The NPE (2013) introduced the ECCDE policy to further address the needs of children under the age of five. It outlines the policy position towards upholding basic education for

children aged 0 to 12 years, covering early childcare development and education (ECCDE) to kindergarten and primary school. This policy highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to child development integrating health, nutrition, protection and early learning (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013).

The policy demonstrates the intention to ensure child readiness for school and smooth transition across various stages. It also stipulates the support that the government will provide for these stages of education. However, both the NPE (2004) and the NPE (2013) do not explicitly mention parental engagement regarding early child development and learning. For example, NPE (2013, p. 15) mentions "effect a smooth transition from home to the school," but not in relation to collaborating with parents for this to happen.

Other critical needs addressed by the policy include providing free basic education (NPE, 2013, p. 18), setting and monitoring education standards across stages, capacity building for teachers, and curriculum development. The policy does not focus on the support that parents or caregivers can give to their children's literacy and language acquisition, placing more emphasis on institutions and schools.

Nonetheless, basing this conclusion on the NPE (2004 and 2013) policy documents alone may not be sufficient evidence to suggest that Nigerian policies do not support or promote parental or caregiver engagement in children's literacy acquisition and development. There may be indirect programmes and sub-policies that are not explicitly spelled out or even documented.

In summary, the policy frameworks in both Ghana and Nigeria outline objectives related to early childhood education but largely fall short of explicitly addressing parental engagement in children's literacy development. In Ghana, while the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Policy and Education Strategic Plan (ESP) mentions family and community engagement, these guidelines remain unclear and are not effectively enforced. In Nigeria, policies such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasise institutional roles and providing free basic education but lack clear provisions for involving parents in early literacy. Overall, both countries demonstrate strong policy intentions. However, the frameworks lack sufficient specificity and clear, actionable strategies for effectively promoting parental engagement in children's literacy development.

### **3.5.2 Literature sources from Ghana and Nigeria**

Our review covered ten literature sources that mentioned our focus countries, Ghana, and Nigeria: Amadu et al. (2018), Achievers Ghana & Gold for Gold, Mohammed et al. (2023), Akyeampong et al. (2021), Mohammed and Arshat (2022), the Nigeria Reads project, Akinrinmade et al. (2021), Yuwana (2021), Molliora (2023), and Uzosike (2018). Among these, three focused on interventions in Ghana and Nigeria (Amadu et al., 2018; Achievers Ghana & Gold for Gold; Nigeria Reads). Seven of the studies were exploratory: Akyeampong et al. (2021), Mohammed et al. (2023), Mohammed and Arshat (2022), Akinrinmade et al. (2021), Yuwana (2021), Molliora (2023), and Uzosike (2018). Additionally, two studies were multi-country: Amadu et al. (2018), which involved Ghana and Uganda, and Millora (2023), which covered Mexico, Nepal and Nigeria.

We began our review of literature sources from Ghana and Nigeria by focusing on specific interventions. We first examined a studied intervention (Amadu et al., 2018), and then reviewed a non-studied intervention (Achievers Ghana & Gold for Gold in Ghana). In Nigeria, we looked at the non-studied intervention (Nigeria Reads). This initial focus helped us gain a practical understanding of the context. Next, we reviewed exploratory studies from both countries, Mohammed et al. (2023), Akyeampong et al. (2021), Mohammed and Arshat (2022), Akinrinmade et al. (2021), Yuwana (2021), Molliora (2023), and Uzosike (2018). This approach allowed us to highlight concrete examples of both studied and non-studied interventions and then broaden the analysis with more general exploratory research.

In Ghana, we reviewed two interventions: Amadu et al. (2018) and Gold-4-Gold (2020) (see Section 3.4 for further details). We also reviewed an exploratory study by Mohammed et al. (2023), which investigated how caregiver-child interactions, early stimulation and learning opportunities affect early childhood development. The study focused on children aged 36-59 months. It used data from 6,752 children collected in the 2011 and 2017 Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). The study measured literacy-numeracy, social-emotional, learning-



cognitive, and physical development using UNICEF's Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI). One key finding was that access to children's books at home was positively associated with literacy-numeracy and social-emotional development. Overall, the study found that caregiver-child interactions and early learning opportunities significantly enhanced children's chances of reaching developmental milestones. This included the development of cognitive, language, emotional and social skills.

Additionally, Akyeampong, et al. (2021), examined how children's language preference and home environment affected literacy retention. Data from Ghana's Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme showed many disadvantaged students lost reading skills after a four-month school closure. Girls were especially affected if they did not understand the language of instruction or lacked home support and resources. For boys, literacy gaps widened due to lack of home resources and support, but not language preferences. The findings of this study suggested that the need to pay attention to language preferences for girls to avoid literacy barriers and that home support is also essential for reducing learning inequalities, particularly during school closures.

In Nigeria, we identified one intervention: Nigeria Reads (See section 3.4 for further details). The exploratory studies we reviewed included a study by Mohammed and Arshat (2022) which explored the impact of play, family involvement, and literacy interest on the literacy skills of preschoolers from low-income families in Taraba State. Using a stratified random sampling approach, it selected 394 preschool children aged 3 to 5 years and their mothers. It found significant positive effects of play, family involvement and literacy interest on literacy skills. It also found that gender moderated the relationship between play and literacy skills, as well as between family involvement and literacy skills. However, gender did not significantly moderate the relationship between literacy interest and literacy skills. Mohammed and Arshat's study (2022, p. 269) argued that 'when developing educational policies for which play could be desired to improve literacy interest, different provision should be made between male and female preschoolers because the relationship between play and literacy skills varies by gender'.

In another study in Northern Nigeria, Akinrinmade et al. (2021) investigated the role of parental support in the literacy development of early grade children during the COVID-19 school closures. Specifically, the study focused on the experiences of parents as they helped their children with reading during the pandemic school closures. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with parents of middle- and low-socioeconomic status in Kano State. The study revealed that parents faced challenges in helping their children to read including the lack of textbooks and other suitable reading materials, time constraints and a lack of knowledge about teaching reading strategies. Despite these challenges, the increased time spent together as a family had benefits beyond improved children's literacy. Discussing issues like moral development helped improve household relationships. This created conditions that made children more disciplined. Parents gained a better understanding of their children's behaviours and implemented measures to address them. As a result, children were better prepared for positive social interactions at school. The study also found that parents who were able to support their children's learning at home were less likely to think that the pandemic would adversely affect their own children's education. However, they were less optimistic when it came to children with illiterate parents and who had limited access to learning opportunities including reading outside of school. The authors recommended that providing learning materials for home use, and the introduction of educational radio and television programmes, as well as simple literacy assessments for parents to monitor their children's progress, were essential.

Yuwana (2021) explored how the home literacy practices of four families influenced the literacy experiences of 4-5-year-old children in Nigeria. Using data from observations, interviews, and children's writings, the study reported that home language played a crucial role in family interactions and conversations, such as greetings, daily chats, play, leisure, and other routine activities. Some families also used media to listen and sing along to songs in their home language. These activities supported early language development as children learned new vocabulary and developed narrative skills. Other languages, such as English, were primarily used for reading and communication, though its value varied across families. In some households, English was used for writing, reading homework, and religious activities. Religious activities facilitated both language and literacy acquisition through reading religious texts (e.g., Bible reading), praying, and singing religious songs. Some children-initiated

activities like role-playing to imitate their families' religious practices, strengthening their language and literacy skills. The study highlighted that active parental engagement, access to literacy spaces and resources, meaningful interactions, and encouraging technology use supported literacy and language skills development of children. Interactions among siblings, between grandmothers and children, and within the community network also contributed to the development of literacy and language skills. Yuwana (2021) recommended that integrating cultural literacy practices, such as using the home language and religious activities, into early education would be beneficial to children's foundational literacy skills. It further suggested fostering partnerships between schools and communities to improve availability of literacy resources.

In Millora's (2023) study which examined family literacy programmes in Nigeria, Mexico, and Nepal. We focus on the Nigeria case study which examined a mother and child education programme (MCEP). The programme provided support for family-based education and bilingualism (using both English and the local language). The aim was to improve literacy but also increase economic opportunities for families. The MCEP used a 'civic approach' to learning which involved community leaders in creating the curriculum and giving participants a voice in the process. The programme highlighted the importance of parents and communities in supporting children's education. It advocated using a social-contextual approach to family literacy and advocated for programmes which build on families' existing skills and knowledge and were flexible enough to meet different family needs and promote community ownership, rather than just participation.

Uzosike (2018) examined the roles parents play in the assessment of literacy in early childhood. The study used a descriptive survey with a simple random sampling procedure of 12 public pre-schools in Rivers state, Nigeria. Key roles played by parents in their children's literacy assessment included having regular and positive interactions with children, visiting schools for feedback, conducting reading sessions at home, engaging in shared reading, providing a variety of reading materials, asking children about the school day, and providing a quiet place for homework. Additionally, Uzosike, explored the impact of parents' involvement on children's performance in literacy assessment. The finding revealed that teachers believed that parental involvement significantly enhances children's literacy skills, motivates them to learn, and improves test scores and grades. According to the author, parental involvement helped develop children's vocabulary and print awareness and boosted reading comprehension and decoding abilities. Following these findings, Uzosike's (2018), recommends that parents and teachers should foster positive and mutual communication and support to assess and help children's literacy development both at school and in homes.

In summary, our review of ten sources from Ghana and Nigeria identified several key strategies for enhancing children's literacy development, with varying degrees of implementation and impact.

Community-based models were present in 6, leveraging local resources, volunteer involvement, and community spaces to drive literacy outcomes. These models often focused on building local capacity through collective efforts and volunteerism.

Technology was highlighted in only **2** out of 10 sources, with limited use due to challenges in low-resourced contexts, such as lack of access to digital devices and unreliable internet.

Workshops and training targeted at parents and caregivers featured in **5** out of 10 sources. These interventions recognised the critical role of families in early literacy, using models like "train-the-trainer" to empower local educators and caregivers.

Mother tongue or home language was used in **4** out of 10 sources to facilitate literacy development, demonstrating the effectiveness of familiar languages in making learning more accessible for children.

Contextually relevant resources, such as locally made learning materials, were mentioned in **4** out of 10 sources. These resources helped engage communities in literacy efforts by utilising culturally appropriate materials that supported children's language development.

Quantitative evaluations, such as Randomised Controlled Trials, were used in **3** out of 10 sources to assess the impact of interventions, providing evidence on the influence of family involvement and early learning opportunities on literacy outcomes.

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) was integrated into **2** out of 10 sources, recognising the importance of addressing children's mental well-being alongside their literacy skills.

Large-scale interventions were implemented in **4** out of 10 sources, demonstrating potential for broad impact while also reflecting the challenges of scaling programmes in low-resourced contexts.

#### **4.0 Activities promoting parental *and* caregiver engagement.**

We identified a range of activities that promote parental and caregiver engagement in supporting children's literacy development. These activities were grouped into conventional and indigenous knowledge literacy practices, carried out by both nuclear families and extended family members—such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—and play a significant role in fostering literacy. Conventional activities, such as shared book reading, homework assistance, and storytelling, are recognised as positively contributing to children's literacy development. Additionally, indigenous knowledge literacy practices, including traditional folktales and songs, are seen to support informal literacy practices. These culturally relevant practices offer valuable opportunities for children to develop literacy skills while also strengthening their sense of identity and deepening their connection to their community.

#### **4.1 Conventional literacy activities utilised by parents and caregivers**

Our review has highlighted that the activities supporting children's literacy development often extend beyond the nuclear family, involving not only parents but also caregivers from the broader family network. Extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, play a significant role in fostering literacy development through conventional practices like shared book reading, homework assistance, and storytelling (Chansa-Kabali, 2017; Kalindi, McBride, & Dan, 2017; Kajee & Sibanda, 2019; Knauer et al., 2019; Tsebe & Scherman, 2020; Kaiser et al., 2023). These activities contribute positively to the enhancement of children's literacy skills by reinforcing the importance of literacy within the home environment and family interactions.

Moreover, community involvement further complements these conventional practices. By organising literacy programmes, facilitating access to reading centres, and providing opportunities for literacy-focused gatherings, community participation has been shown to support children's literacy development. Studies by Kajee and Sibanda (2019), Knauer et al. (2020), Taylor et al. (2019), and Scherman and Tsebe (2020) suggest that such community efforts help bridge gaps in literacy development, particularly in settings where families may have limited resources or literacy levels.

Collectively, these studies emphasise the critical role of both family and community contributions in promoting children's formal literacy development. The active participation of parents and caregivers in supporting out-of-school literacy practices—such as storytelling and the creation of literacy-rich environments—significantly contributes to children's reading skills and overall academic outcomes. Kajee and Sibanda (2019) found that in South Africa, parents who engaged in these practices, such as storytelling and providing access to books, educational materials, and other resources, were key drivers of their children's literacy development.

Similarly, Taylor et al. (2019) demonstrated the positive impact of community-based literacy programmes, which include initiatives like literacy awareness seminars for parents, as well as providing access to local resources such as libraries and reading clubs. These efforts are crucial in enhancing early grade reading and improving literacy outcomes for children.

Additionally, community-led tutoring programmes and reading clubs have proven to be especially beneficial in marginalised communities with low parental literacy rates. For instance, the Mishig Reading Camp in Ethiopia has been an effective example of how community-driven literacy interventions can make a significant impact in fostering literacy skills among children (See section 3.4 for further details).

## 4.2 Literacy beyond the pages of books: The fidelity of Indigenous knowledge in literacy practices

Integration of Indigenous knowledge and culturally relevant materials, including folktales, traditional songs, and contextually familiar materials emerges as a promising approach to enhance children's literacy acquisition. For example, projects such as the *Zambian Folktales Children's Book* initiative and the *Read Liberia* project exemplify the integration of culturally relevant content to stimulate children's interest and engagement in literacy activities. These initiatives not only bolster language and social-emotional development but also foster a sense of ownership and identity among participating communities and members.

Nomlomo and Sosibo (2016), examined IsiXhosa and IsiZulu folktales and traditional children's songs, aiming to emphasise the connection between Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and early literacy development in children. Employing cognitive and socio-cultural theories, they delve into the knowledge encapsulated within folktales and songs, and the significance of these practices in fostering early literacy skills. Nomlomo and Sosibo (2016) argue that although oral literacy in Indigenous languages has always been present, 'it has been overshadowed and rendered invisible due to assimilation into Western norms' (p. 2). Also, folktales and traditional children's songs serve as valuable resources for young learners, offering not only literacy skills but also cognitive, linguistic, and social competencies, preparing the evolving landscape of future workplaces (Nomlomo and Sosibo, 2016). Nyota et al. (2008) have argued about the potential of folktales within Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to support cognitive development of young children. See also *Read Liberia* (Vazquez, 2022) in Section 3.4 for further details.

In summary, both family and community play a critical role in boosting children's literacy. Research shows that supportive home environments and active parental involvement are key. Effective community efforts, especially in low-resourced communities, have led to notable improvements in literacy. Integrating local knowledge and fostering supportive environments at home and in the community are essential for enhancing children's reading skills.

## 4.3 Categories of literacy engagements reported in literature sources reviewed

We identified four key categories derived from the review of literature sources. It is important to note that the review does not suggest that each activity type is exclusive to a single or group of literature sources. Instead, most of the literature sources referenced a combination of these activity types. The categorisation presented below, aims to highlight the kinds of activities reported in the literature that parents and caregivers use to support children's literacy development, rather than to determine which activities are more or less commonly used.

- 1) Traditional book reading where a physical book is involved
- 2) Home literacy activities: Such as storytelling, singing, and outdoor play, is less traditional literacy building activities that don't directly involve books. Support children's literacy, language, and communication skills by fostering foundational learning in an informal, culturally relevant environment
- 3) Community-based literacy programmes: They engage local organisations to provide literacy resources and education, fostering active parent involvement, cultural relevance, and community engagement to support literacy development beyond traditional school settings.
- 4) Interventions that focus on capacity building for parents and caregivers: Interventions focusing on capacity-building for parents and caregivers, provide structured literacy resources and training to enhance family involvement in children's education, empowering parents and caregivers to become effective literacy advocates in their communities. (See, Figure 6).

Categories	Activities happening in studies reviewed
Traditional book reading	Book reading, looking at pictures, reading aloud

	Parent-child educational activities, technology and surfing the net and alternative support from tutors, extra lessons, and support from other family members to mitigate parents' inability
	Assisting children to learn how to pronounce words fluently, read and answer short passages from textbooks, reviewing children's books, using technology like learning apps,
	Bedtime stories, setting up a mini library within each cottage where books are available and within reach, setting up a reading time.
	Engaging in shared reading with children; providing varieties of reading materials to children, including, use of available technology-based reading support, such as mobile reading apps.
<b>Home literacy activities</b>	Telling the child stories, singing songs to or with the child including lullabies, encouraging the child to name, count or draw things for or with the child, engaging children in outdoor activities
	Learning to write through scribbling, various forms of play like social play, communication play and dramatic play religious activities such as prayer time and introducing them to religious texts
	Children identifying and talking about pictures in books or in their environment, reading words, learning new sounds, words, syllables, and phrases
	Fire-place storytelling, singing, playing games, naming of common things around and outside of the home, counting and drawing
	Parents directly teaching children through storytelling, giving explanations, responding to and re-in forcing children's responses, engaging children in purposeful mundane interactions like talking to children, children learning new words during leisure.
	Literacy experience is facilitated by relatives at home and during role play (home interaction and play activities)
	Interacting with children through oral language enhancers/ activities like singing and games in home languages.
	Parents engaging in activities like encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction
	Providing to reading materials in home language.
	Supporting children to play interactive and dialogical role in folktales, songs, games, rhymes, and dance.
	Educating children through advice, stories, and encouragement, as well as providing instrumental support (e.g., teaching letters and offering learning resources).
	Locally available resources to learn through games
	Parent-child engagement in early care and education
<b>Community-based literacy programmes</b>	Establishing literacy centres and programmes Promoting community learning centres/libraries Involving community leaders in creating the literacy curriculum Reading camps-weekends with children with the use of picture books, free play, song time, story reading, and activities that focus on improving reading skills.
	Volunteer tutoring programme: communities' outreach to various homes to teach children how to read through fun and educative literacy activities.
	Adult-child writing interaction (Joint writing activities)



<b>Interventions that focus on capacity-building for parents and caregivers</b>	Equipping caregivers with social emotional learning games for whole child development
	Parent literacy-workshops with parents to enhance their support of their children's literacy
	Parent-Child engaging with and stimulate their children with books, with a particular focus on empowering illiterate caregivers to discuss illustrated storybooks and interact with their children.
	Activities like watching educational programmes and organising family reading support programme,
	Training and coaching teachers how to support parents
	Visiting various households on weekly bases to engage children in reading activities
	Group-based parenting programme to train parents on how to support their children's literacy
	Workshops organised for teachers, teacher trainees, parents, and members of the community to educate them about the role of sociocultural resources and texts embedded in people's homes that could be collected and used to aid literacy pedagogy and to enhance local reading materials development
	Home-school partnership programme for parents and young children
	Locally developed folktales children's books used in parent child interaction through shared reading, parents reading out to children, prompts from parents to identify pictures in books
	Social Behaviour Change (SBC) communication plan which was three pronged i.e., targeting parents/caregivers, teachers, and community leaders.
	Parents and teachers' partnership
	Creation of reading, learning, and play materials in languages children understand to hard-to-reach homes

**Table 3: Categories of literacy engagements reported in studies**

#### **4.4 Categories of literacy engagements reported in studies explained**

To provide further clarity and insight, the following narrative elaborates Table 3 above. This narrative will detail the strengths and weaknesses of each category, highlighting their significance within both community and home contexts.

##### **4.4.1 Traditional book reading**

Emphasising interactive and shared reading between parents and children is essential. Parents engage children in book reading, looking at pictures, and reading aloud. These activities encourage children to participate in dialogues about the content, enhancing their comprehension skills, critical thinking, and narrative abilities (Knauer et al., 2020). Unlike dialogic reading, shared book reading is less structured but aims to foster a love of reading and develop literacy skills. Both methods focus on interactive storytelling and discussion, which help build language skills and literacy (Kaiser et al., 2023). For example, a South African study found that caregivers who employed dialogic reading and shared book reading practices encouraged children to continue reading, engaged in picture reading, and created mini libraries at home (Tayob and Moonsamy, 2018). These techniques, through their emphasis on interaction, questioning, and storytelling, can enrich a child's vocabulary, comprehension, and overall enjoyment of reading (Tayob and Moonsamy, 2018). Additional activities, such as setting up mini libraries, reading bedtime stories, and establishing reading time within households, create an

environment conducive to regular reading practices. Moreover, the use of technology, such as learning apps, supplements traditional literacy activities, especially when parents are less literate, helping to mitigate educational gaps. Another example is the Read@Home programme, a World Bank initiative, operated in Senegal and other countries focused on quickly delivering reading and learning materials to hard-to-reach homes. The programme also supported parents and family members in engaging with their children's learning (World Bank, 2020). It provided resources and guidance to help parents and caregivers create a supportive learning environment at home (World Bank, 2020).

**Strengths:**

- Enhances parent-child interaction and language development.
- Encourages children's active participation, improving critical thinking, comprehension, and narrative ability.
- The integration of technology provides additional resources and addresses literacy barriers.

**Weaknesses:**

- Requires a high level of parental involvement, which may be challenging for families with low literacy or limited time.
- Some families may not have access to diverse reading materials or structured literacy support.

#### **4.4.2 Home literacy activities**

Home literacy activities are centred around informal educational engagements that occur within the household. These activities include telling stories, singing songs, engaging in outdoor play, and introducing children to religious texts or traditional stories. Activities like scribbling, social play, and naming objects around or outside the home fosters foundational skills in literacy, language, and communication. For instance, a study in Zambia (Chansa-Kabali, 2017), showed how children experienced oral language through interactions such as games and songs. These activities were found to improve children's literacy outcomes. The study highlighted the importance of both formal and informal literacy activities in the home environment. Such approach, helps to create supportive learning environments for children, allowing them to explore language, storytelling, and reading in ways that are both educational and enjoyable. Through these purposeful daily interactions, parents encourage the use of new words and concepts. Storytelling and other oral traditions play a significant role in teaching children new vocabulary and concepts, often in the child's home language, making learning accessible and culturally relevant.

**Strengths:**

- Supports the development of oral language skills through everyday activities.
- Uses familiar cultural practices (e.g., storytelling and religious texts) to make literacy more relatable.
- Encourages continuous and natural learning in the home environment.

**Weaknesses:**

- The effectiveness of home literacy practices may vary depending on parents' literacy levels.

#### **4.4.3 Community-based literacy programmes**

These programmes are usually led by local organisations or groups that provide literacy education and resources to individuals and families. An example is the Kitengesa Community Library Family Literacy Project in Uganda. This project collaborated with community groups to translate children's books into Luganda, the local dialect, to encourage shared reading sessions between parents and children (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014). It was part of broader efforts to integrate family literacy practices into children's education, demonstrating an active role for parents in supporting literacy beyond traditional school settings, ensuring cultural relevance, and fostering community engagement. Community-based literacy programmes empower local populations to take charge of their literacy progress, creating a collaborative ecosystem where literacy becomes a shared priority (Read Liberia, 2022). By promoting active engagement from community stakeholders, these programmes directly address community needs, thereby building a stronger, more resilient foundation for literacy that can adapt to the evolving needs and cultural practices of the community.

**Strengths:**

- Promotes inclusivity by involving local leaders and the wider community.
- Supports literacy development through culturally relevant content, improving retention and engagement.
- Provides a sustainable framework for literacy efforts by embedding them within the community's structure.

**Weaknesses:**

- Requires ongoing community buy-in and resources to remain effective.
- Limited reach in areas where community engagement is low, or leadership is weak.

**4.4.4 Interventions that focus on capacity-building for parents and caregivers**

Structured interventions that provide literacy resources and training to parents and caregivers. Programmes like adult-child joint writing activities or workshops to train parents on supporting literacy are designed to enhance family involvement in children's education. Highlighting the Lively Minds initiative in Ghana (as a key example). This programme trained volunteer mothers, equipping them with the skills to support their children's literacy development. Regular workshops and mentorship within these groups ensured continuous support and skill reinforcement. By providing structured training and resources, Lively Minds empowered these mothers to take an active role in their children's education. Such initiatives demonstrate how capacity-building can transform parents into effective literacy advocates within their communities (Amadu et al., 2018).

**Strengths:**

- Provides structured support for parents, particularly those with low literacy levels.
- Involves diverse activities like technology use, local resources, and community engagement, making it adaptable to different contexts.
- Enhances collaboration between parents, teachers, and community leaders, ensuring that literacy development is a shared responsibility.

**Weaknesses:**

- Requires sustained funding and resources to maintain outreach efforts and technology-based interventions.
- Success may depend on parental engagement and the availability of trained volunteers.

In summary, each category of literacy engagement plays a crucial role in promoting literacy development, particularly among disadvantaged communities. Dialogic and shared book reading encourage active learning through parent-child interaction, while community-based literacy programmes offer a sustainable and culturally relevant approach to improving literacy outcomes. Home literacy activities ensure that children are exposed to learning in familiar environments, while project-led family literacy engagements provide much-needed structure and resources for families that may lack access to formal educational opportunities. Together, these approaches highlight the importance of involving both families and communities in literacy efforts, ensuring that literacy is not just a school-based endeavour but a shared, communal responsibility.



## 5.0 Challenges

Our review reveals that parents and caregivers can be important agents in supporting children to develop literacy skills. However, this potential can be hampered if parents or caregivers have low literacy skills (Kaiser et al., 2023), lack confidence (Chansa-Kabali, 2017), or are from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ong'ayi et al., 2020). Families with low socio-economic status often have limited resources and insufficient time to devote to supporting their children's learning, including learning to read. These limitations make it harder for parents and caregivers from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds to support their children in developing literacy skills in the home environment. In these contexts, it is crucial to engage parents and caregivers in the co-creation of literacy activities. Incorporating their voices and lived experiences in designing interventions not only empowers them but also ensures that literacy initiatives are more relevant and culturally appropriate. By working together, educators, practitioners, researchers, and families can create more effective and sustainable solutions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by these communities. Co-creation helps ensure that interventions are not just imposed but are shaped by the knowledge and perspectives of those directly involved, particularly in settings where resources are limited, and literacy skills are low.

### 5.1 Low socio-economic status

Our review reveals that there is a link between home learning environments, family socio-economic status and level of parental engagement. For instance, Ndjuyue's (2020) explored how different home learning environments and socioeconomic status affect children's learning outcomes across three different population groups (i.e., refugee, rural, and urban majority groups) in Tanzania. The study looked at the kinds of educational resources available at home (e.g., availability of books, access to technology), the extent to which parents or caregivers are involved in their children's education (e.g., assisting them with their homework), as well as the various learning activities engaged in at home (e.g., reading, storytelling). The study found that home learning environments promote children's learning outcomes; however, the outcomes are influenced by higher socioeconomic status, availability of educational resources, and higher parental involvement. Ndjuyue (2020) study underscores the influence of these factors on literacy acquisition. Two other studies from our review also noted that access to children's books and play-based materials at home has been linked to enhanced children's literacy skills (see, Mohammed et al., 2023; Nkomo et al., 2023).

Families with young children from low-income backgrounds often struggle to balance economic demands with parenting responsibilities (Ong'ayi et al., 2020). A UNICEF study in three rural counties in Kenya found that parents were minimally involved in activities like play, reading, and storytelling due to the demands of subsistence tasks (Ong'ayi et al., 2020). Additionally, while having reading materials at home supports literacy, financial challenges often prevent low-income families from acquiring books (Ong'ayi et al., 2020; Chansa-Kabali, 2017). Loye et al. (2022) observed that children from families who could afford preschool had better language skills than those from poorer families. This disparity impacted the children's ability to develop literacy skills in school (Loye et al., 2022).

Given these findings, it seems important for educators and NGOs to implement targeted interventions to build parents and caregivers confidence and skills in supporting their children's literacy at home. Developing community resources to support low-income families is also essential. By creating a supportive environment and providing the necessary tools and resources that are sensitive to their low literacy levels, parents and caregivers can help develop their children's literacy skills.

### 5.2 Low literacy skills

Limited literacy skills of parents or caregivers impacts how they can use books to foster early reading (Kaiser et al., 2023). For instance, Chansa-Kabali (2017) investigated the degree to which factors within the home environment contribute to the differences observed in early literacy achievements during the initial year of schooling. Through a self-reported home literacy questionnaire, this study found that low literate experience (e.g., educational attainment) hindered parents' ability to engage in literacy activities in support of their children's literacy development (Chansa-Kabali, 2017). Parents may lack confidence in interacting with their

children on such activities and tend to shift responsibility of teaching their children to read to schools ([Chansa-Kabali, 2017](#), p. 7).

Ngwaru and Opoku-Amankwa (2010) examined home and school literacy practices in Africa. The study included a multilingual urban primary school in Ghana and a rural bilingual school in Zimbabwe. In Ghana, the case study showed that parents' socio-economic conditions limited their ability to support their children's education. In Zimbabwe, while the case study also noted that parents' socio-economic conditions limited their ability to support their children's education, it highlighted another important aspect. It showed what happens when parents are given a voice in their children's education. Findings revealed that parents relied heavily on teachers and schools for their children's literacy development and education. Initially, teachers at the rural bilingual school in Zimbabwe 'expressed the opinion that parents had nothing to offer to the literacy development of their children' (p. 302). Teachers observed that parents, especially those with low literacy skills or from rural areas, provided minimal support for their children's learning. However, as the study progressed, the authors noted that 'the inclusion of Zimbabwean parent voices moves us from speculation about their situation and its impact on their children's learning to a more nuanced understanding of their 'ruling passions' – their priorities and immediate needs' (p. 305).

### **5.3 Lack of awareness of the Power of Parents (POP)**

In addition to low literacy skills, a significant challenge faced by parents is their lack of awareness regarding the potential impact they can have on their children's literacy development. Many parents perceive their experiences as inadequate compared to the skills and knowledge deemed necessary to support the formal literacy instruction provided in schools. Parents often failed to recognise how their home efforts could boost their children's literacy development (Chansa-Kabali, 2017; Serpell and Lyytinen, 2014). A study found that 62.5% of parents believed teachers' actions were more important than their own (Chansa-Kabali, Serpell, and Lyytinen, 2014, p. 415). These parents thought buying more books and arranging extra classes were essential. However, they undervalued activities like storytelling, sharing local stories, and playing literacy games (Chansa-Kabali, Serpell, and Lyytinen, 2014).

This perception fosters a belief that they lack the resources to engage meaningfully in their children's education, leading to minimal or no involvement in reinforcing school-based learning at home. Consequently, this disengagement not only limits the support children receive outside the classroom but also undermines the value of parental contributions to their literacy development. This sentiment is reflected in the findings of Ngwaru and Opoku-Amankwa (2010), which suggested that parental involvement was secondary to formal education, further diminishing parents' confidence in their abilities. However, as the study progressed, it became evident that including parents in discussions about their children's education fostered a more nuanced understanding of their needs and aspirations. The research indicated that parents are willing and able to engage in their children's learning, even when faced with limited literacy skills. By acknowledging their contributions and facilitating opportunities for dialogue between parents and teachers, educational initiatives can empower parents to assume a more active role in their children's education.

In summary, the challenges identified in the review, including low socio-economic status, limited literacy skills, and a lack of awareness regarding the potential impact of parental involvement, are often framed as significant barriers to parental engagement in children's literacy development. However, these challenges should be critically examined, as many are perceived barriers, which have for so long been underpinned by deficit narratives. For instance, while parents with low literacy skills may encounter difficulties in directly supporting formal literacy instruction, the review indicates that they possess valuable knowledge and skills that can be effectively utilised to enhance children's learning within informal settings, such as through storytelling and play-based activities.

Similarly, the lack of resources in low-income households is frequently positioned as a considerable hindrance; however, community-based approaches and the co-creation of literacy activities with parents can mitigate these resource constraints. Furthermore, the perceived inability of parents to contribute meaningfully to their children's literacy development is largely a matter of awareness. Many parents fail to recognise how everyday interactions, such as sharing local stories or engaging in social play, can significantly support literacy

development. Shifting the narrative towards empowerment—by recognising and utilising the rich experiences and skills that parents bring—is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and sustainable approach to literacy development especially in low-resourced settings. By involving parents as co-creators of literacy initiatives, educators and practitioners can develop interventions that are more relevant, culturally grounded, and effective. Integrating the voices and experiences of parents and caregivers in co-creating literacy activities, particularly in contexts impacted by poverty and low literacy skills, can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, which enhances the long-term success of initiatives. This response approach not only empowers parents but also ensures that literacy initiatives are better aligned with the specific needs of communities, thereby supporting sustained literacy growth. This can help challenge and reshape prevailing perceptions regarding the contributions that parents with low English literacy skills can make in their children’s literacy development.

## **6. Key takeaways**

This section provides an overview of key takeaways from the review. It highlights approaches that involved family and community, home languages, and leveraged on parents’ cultural knowledge to support children’s literacy development. Drawing from diverse case studies, it highlights how incorporating culturally relevant materials, participatory methods, and accessible resources can enhance literacy outcomes, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged settings. By examining these approaches, this section underscores the importance of building literacy initiatives that resonate with local contexts, ultimately creating supportive networks for sustainable literacy improvement.

### **6.1 Involving both family *and* community is key for effective literacy development**

Community based initiatives and family literacy projects that involve extended family and community members are crucial for children’s literacy development, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. These programmes not only support children’s literacy development but also create a supportive network that reinforces the importance of literacy within the community. By engaging families and communities in literacy activities, children receive consistent encouragement and reinforcement, which helps to build their confidence and steer their interest in reading (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014).

The Kitengesa community library project (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014) illustrates the power of community-community involvement in literacy development, especially in rural and under-resourced settings. This project leverages existing community enthusiasm for education and the social capital embedded in the local context. It pools resources and expertise to increase access to educational materials. A core strength of community involvement is aligning literacy activities with the community’s socio-cultural realities and daily lives. This alignment fosters greater engagement and participation. For example, engaging women from the Lwannunda women’s group in Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato’s (2014) study was critical for ensuring the project’s acceptance and sustainability.

Community involvement creates spaces for discussing daily life challenges. It addresses practical concerns while advancing literacy. It further enhances cultural and linguistic relevance while highlighting the importance of contextualising literacy interventions. Levering community involvement in literacy initiatives can support the integration of familiar elements, such as community artefacts, history and, traditions into literacy programmes. This enhances the authenticity and relatability of materials and resources. Ultimately, these efforts illustrate how literacy can be embedded into the real-world experiences of communities to focus on their needs and aspirations.

### **6.2 Leveraging parents' knowledge and cultural capital**

Involving parents in the design, creation, and implementation of literacy programmes ensures that these initiatives are culturally relevant and effectively address the specific needs of the community. Such a participatory approach fosters local ownership, empowering parents and recognising their significant contributions to their children's education by drawing on their social and cultural capital. Parents' lived

experiences, knowledge of their communities, and understanding of cultural practices play a critical role in shaping literacy activities that resonate with both children and families.

Interactive reading methods, where adults and children discuss stories and pictures together, significantly enhance children's language skills and comprehension. These practices go beyond the pages of the book, to leverage cultural capital such as storytelling, folktales, and songs to create engaging and relatable literacy experiences. Encouraging parents to participate in these culturally anchored practices fosters improvements in children's literacy skills while preserving and celebrating community traditions and values.

Activities such as teaching alphabet knowledge, storytelling, and incorporating educational media into home environments are also essential (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014; Kaiser et al., 2023). Involving parents with low literacy skills in these activities has dual benefits: it not only improves their own literacy, fostering a more literate home environment, but also empowers them to support their children more effectively. For parents who may have previously felt unable to engage in their children's learning due to their low literacy levels, participation in these programmes builds their confidence, positioning them as active participants in the educational process.

By adopting a community-owned and co-created model, literacy programmes ensure that they remain locally contextualised and grounded in the home language. This approach reinforces the use of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices, ensuring relevance and accessibility for families. Such initiatives highlight the importance of social capital, participatory processes and local ownership in supporting children's literacy development while fostering sustainable community engagement.

### **6.3 Home language and culturally relatable books spark children's interest in reading and language acquisition**

The use of home language and culturally relevant activities was identified as a valuable practice for supporting children's literacy development. Parents often integrate their home language into interactions with their children, which significantly enriches their language and literacy skills (Ngwaru, 2014; Nomlomo and Sosibo, 2016; Kajee Sibanda and Sibanda Kajee, 2019; Ong'ayi, Dede Yildirim, and Roopnarine, 2020). For example, Kajee and Sibanda Kajee (2019) highlighted that children in South Africa develop early language skills through literacy experiences embedded in daily activities such as play and family interactions. Activities like storytelling, singing, playing games, praising children, and shared reading in the local language provide essential opportunities for language development (Uzosike Ngozi, 2018; Kajee Sibanda and Sibanda Kajee, 2019). Similarly, Nomlomo and Sosibo (2016) observed that South African learners acquire oral language skills naturally in their social environments, emphasising the role of Indigenous and home-based practices in fostering language development.

These practices are mirrored in structured literacy interventions, such as the Nal'ibali Trust programme in South Africa, which advocates for using home language to build strong reading cultures. Nal'ibali promotes positive reading experiences by incorporating storytelling and oral traditions in home languages to enhance children's language acquisition and literacy skills (Nal'ibali, 2022). This underscores the critical role of home language as a foundational element in cultivating a love for reading and strengthening literacy skills.

Equally important is the use of culturally relevant and contextually relatable literacy materials. Books specifically designed to reflect local cultures and experiences have been shown to spark children's interest in reading and facilitate language acquisition. Such materials improve caregiver-child interactions through shared reading as parents find them relatable and children see them as relevant and engaging (Evans et al., 2010; Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014; Amadu et al., 2018; Kaiser et al., 2023; Mofu et al., 2023). For instance, Mofu et al. (2023) demonstrated that locally developed picture books encouraged parental involvement in literacy activities, even among those with limited literacy skills, by teaching new sounds, words, and phrases through enjoyable, shared experiences. Similarly, Ndijuye and Tandika (2023) found that parents were more likely to participate in learning activities when the materials were socio-culturally relevant.

Moreover, literacy programmes that integrate Indigenous knowledge, such as local folktales, proverbs and songs, are particularly effective in engaging both parents and children. These materials foster a deeper connection to literacy activities, as they resonate with the lived experiences of families and communities (Parry, Kirabo, and Nakyato, 2014).

#### **6.4 Participatory methods are key to fostering children’s love for reading**

Diverse approaches, such as participatory reading—where children actively engage with stories through retelling, role play, and discussions with peers and parents—have been shown to support children and their families by creating interactive and enjoyable reading experiences that make literacy learning both enjoyable and meaningful.

Nal’ibali used community storytelling and peer-led reading sessions to foster children's love of reading and empower them as literacy advocates in their communities. Participating children expressed a genuine enjoyment of reading. They cited multiple benefits, such as improved language skills, learning about real-life situations, curbing boredom and unwinding through reading. Parents, on the other hand, said reading helped to enhance language skills, foster imagination, critical thinking, and taught children valuable life lessons. They also highlighted how reading strengthens the parent-child bond and improves skills like drawing, public speaking and confidence. Parents engaged in conversations with their children after reading, using stories to teach life lessons and stimulate meaningful discussions. This practice further deepened children's understanding and engagement with the material.

#### **6.5 Leveraging accessible resources for inclusive literacy development**

Accessible resources can empower parents and caregivers to actively participate in their children’s literacy development, particularly in settings where formal educational support is limited (Ubongo, 2018). By equipping families with usable materials, children are given the opportunity to engage with reading and writing activities outside of school, thus reinforcing learning in the home environment.

Educational radio and television programmes are highlighted as an inclusive approach. These sources of media provide an accessible, cost-effective way to reach large audiences, especially in rural or under-resourced areas where traditional educational infrastructures may be lacking. Educational broadcasts can complement formal education, offering structured learning content that engages children and provides supplementary literacy development opportunities.

Finally, the importance of simple literacy assessments for parents to enable caregivers to track their children’s progress, identify challenges and tailor their support accordingly. By involving parents in monitoring their child’s literacy journey, the process of learning becomes more collaborative, reinforcing the role of parents as critical agents in the development of their children's skills (Akinrinmade et al. (2021).

#### **6.6 Enhancing literacy development through collaborative parent-teacher partnerships**

Fostering positive and mutual communication between parents and teachers is essential for supporting children’s literacy both in school and at home (Uzosike, 2018). For this partnership to be effective, it is not sufficient for parents and teachers to simply share information about the child's progress; rather, it should be a partnership that actively contributes a unique perspective and knowledge. One significant aspect of this collaboration is the role of parents' "funds of knowledge"—the unique cultural, social, and practical experiences they bring from their daily lives.

A parents' knowledgebase can provide valuable insights into the child's learning habits, interests and strengths, which teachers may not have access to in the classroom setting. For example, a parent might be aware of specific interests or cultural practices that can be integrated into learning activities to make literacy development more engaging and relevant for the child. By sharing these insights, parents can help teachers understand the child as an individual, beyond the formal context of the school.



Teachers, on the other hand, bring a wealth of professional knowledge about effective literacy strategies, which can guide parents in supporting their children's reading and writing development at home. By discussing specific literacy goals, challenges, and strategies, teachers can support parents to utilise practices that align with the child's educational needs.

When both parents and teachers actively contribute to the child's literacy journey, they build support systems that can foster continuity between the home and school environments. This holistic approach ensures that literacy development is not seen as a task isolated to the classroom but as an ongoing process that is supported by both settings.

## 7.0 Case study deep dive: key insights from selected community-based literacy interventions

This section provides an in-depth analysis of three particularly promising case studies, each showcasing effective community-based literacy interventions. These examples illustrate key factors contributing to the success of these initiatives and offer actionable steps that mc2h can apply within its literacy programmes. Through this examination, we emphasise practical strategies that strengthen community engagement, build local ownership, and enhance literacy outcomes, ultimately supporting long-term improvements in literacy and educational opportunities within low-literacy, resource-limited contexts.

1. **What worked:** The Kitengesa community library project's engagement with the Lwannunda Women's Group was crucial to its success. Leveraging the group's established community presence and credibility significantly enhanced the project's relevance and sustainability. Additionally, by integrating local engagement and ownership through a partnership with the local secondary school, the project fostered intergenerational collaboration and promoted community-driven leadership.

### Recommendations:

- Conduct a community mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders, including existing community groups and influential community members such as community leaders, religious leaders, educators, women's group leaders and youth leaders.
- Engage with identified community groups and leaders to understand their current activities and challenges, with a focus on how these can be leveraged to support children's literacy development
- Identify and recruit trusted and respected members of the community who are passionate about education and can act as facilitators for literacy groups.
- Develop and deliver training sessions for CLCs.
- Set up community literacy groups facilitated by the CLCs.
- Implement a monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the community literacy groups and CLCs.
- Organise regular meetings and workshops for CLCs and community members to share experiences, successes and challenges. This helps to maintain momentum and encourage ongoing collaboration.

### Potential impact:

- Builds stronger community ownership of literacy initiatives. This approach fosters deeper engagement, as local stakeholders are more likely to support and sustain programmes they have helped shape.
- Literacy programmes that reflect local contexts can address specific community challenges.

2. **What worked:** Nal'ibali's success with children enjoying stories was because of embedding stories that reflect their real-world environment and worldviews (e.g., stories set in local regions like the Eastern Cape) highlights the effectiveness of contextually relevant content. Children showed increased engagement as they could see themselves in the stories and how it related to their own experiences. Nal'ibali also integrated a participatory joyful and enjoyable reading approach. Furthermore, the project successfully promoted peer-led reading through reading clubs, where children are both the readers and the storytellers. This peer involvement fostered confidence and a deeper connection to reading.



**Recommendations:**

- Pilot stories that are set in familiar environments for children and their families. For example, to bring together parents, caregivers, and community members in a co-creative workshop to craft stories around local festivals, markets, traditional games, etc. These could also include lessons on morals, community values or problem-solving.
- Identify what works with various age groups such as story retelling, acting, and group discussions. For younger children, acting out stories or using visual aids might be more effective, while older children may benefit from group discussions or retelling stories in their own words.
- Test each approach—such as story retelling, acting and group discussions—to identify which methods best sustain engagement and foster deeper comprehension for each specific age group.
- Implement a monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of each approach, specifically monitoring children's engagement levels, comprehension outcomes and the consistency of participation across different age groups.

**Potential impact:**

- Increased engagement levels and a greater sense of relatability among children.
- Deeper comprehension, evidenced by the enhanced ability to retell and discuss stories and greater participation in reading and literacy activities.

**3. What worked:**

Community-led initiatives like World Bank Lively Minds programme (Amadu et al., 2018), have been seen to empower parents and caregivers with low literacy skills through leadership roles. This has significant implications for community engagement and the sustainability of literacy programmes. Providing these parents, especially mothers, with leadership opportunities alongside continuous support and training, fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community. This approach not only boosts their confidence but also equips them to guide and inspire others. By taking on leadership roles, these parents become advocates for literacy, helping to sustain and drive community initiatives forward. The shared experiences and peer support create a collaborative environment, ensuring the programme's ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

**Recommendations:**

- Start by forming small groups of 6-8 mothers in a pilot community. Facilitate initial meetings with guidance from educators but gradually transition leadership to the mothers themselves. Monitor how frequently the groups meet, the level of engagement, and the impact on both mothers' confidence and children's literacy outcomes. Collect feedback from the mothers on what topics and formats work best for them.
- Introduce a mentorship model within the Mothers' Literacy Circles. Choose 1-2 mothers per group to serve as literacy champions and provide them with additional training in facilitation and peer mentoring. Track how this leadership role affects both the confidence of the leader-mothers and the overall participation and success of the group. Monitor whether these leaders help sustain group momentum and improve the literacy development outcomes.
- Implement regular workshops or training sessions for the mothers' literacy circles, using a similar monthly schedule. These workshops should be interactive and focus on practical activities that mothers can do with their children at home. Incorporate sessions on leadership, problem-solving, and child development to reinforce their roles as literacy champions. Track participation rates, the quality of engagement during these sessions and the subsequent impact on children's literacy progress at home.

**Potential impact:**

Forming literacy circles for mothers with low or no literacy skills will significantly boost their confidence and engagement in their children's education. These circles will not only provide structured support but also involve more literate and experienced mothers in mentoring roles. This peer support system allows mothers with low literacy levels to benefit from the guidance and skills of their more experienced peers, fostering mutual learning and empowerment. As experienced mothers share their knowledge and strategies, they will help enhance the literacy skills of less literate mothers, creating a collaborative environment that supports the overall literacy development of both mothers and their children.

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