

## Family Literacy Perceptions And Early English Literacy Skills In Pre-Primary Grade One Children In Gasabo District, Rwanda

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### ABSTRACT

The Rwandan government has reached remarkable success in education since 1994; sound educational planning processes, and children's access to education. However, early literacy skills in the foundational early childhood years should be further boosted to promote standard of education in Rwanda. For the age range of 0-3, more can be done in education of parents to promote their comprehension of how to support their children's early cognitive development. Rwandan children come from their homes to nursery schools with oral skills in Kinyarwanda (mother tongue) but without any skills in the English language. Moreover, English is taught at all levels of education, including pre-primary schools. This study aimed at establishing family literacy perceptions and how they are related with children's early literacy development in pre-primary grade one children in the Gasabo district. A descriptive survey design was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. 380 respondents constituted the sample size: 6 teachers, 187 children and 187 caregivers of sampled children. Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed. A close-ended questionnaire for caregivers, an interview guide for teachers, and a tool for children's dynamic indicators of early English literacy skills were used to collect data. The qualitative data from the teachers' interviews were analyzed differently from quantitative data from caregivers' responses and children's early literacy development activities. Results from teachers' interviews revealed a significant role of both teachers and children caregivers in promoting children's early literacy skills. The chi-square test results revealed association between family literacy perceptions and children's early English literacy skills development. The caregiver positive literacy perceptions were linked with higher early literacy achievements of children and negative caregiver literacy perceptions were linked with lower early literacy achievements of children at grade one pre-primary school.

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**Keywords:** Pre-Primary, Family Literacy, Framework, Pre-Primary Grade One Children, Gasabo District

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### INTRODUCTION

Yunus [1] confirms that various research carried out on early literacy affirm that the early literacy chances availed to children in the home setting yields positive contributions on children's literacy abilities in the years ahead. However, parents' perceptions have not acquired due attention in analyzing children's literacy achievement in East Africa. In Kenya, home is not yet given priority as an environment for reading achievement. Additionally, Ondieki [2] in research still carried out in Kenya, showed that children whose parents got involved in their pre-primary activities excelled than those whose parents did not or rarely got involved or got involved less frequently. On the other side, Rwanda Early Literacy Promotion report [3] explored that Rwanda is commended for its remarkable success in education since 1994, for the soundness of its educational planning processes, and for its praiseworthy endeavors to widen access to education to all children and youth. In acknowledging this success, the same report further indicates other areas of institutions in education and policymaking

that could be further boosted. This is to promote standard of education in Rwanda, and to further the development of basic pre-literacy and literacy skills in the foundational early childhood years. For the age range of 0-3, more can be done in education of parents to promote their comprehension of how to support their children's early cognitive development.

Rwanda Education Board [4] pronounced that Rwandan children come from their homes to nursery schools with oral skills in Kinyarwanda. Kinyarwanda is the first language in the Rwandan context and is acquired or learnt by children when they start talking in their homes. On the other hand, more than 50% of those children join pre-primary schools without any skills in the English language. Moreover, English stands as a second language to Kinyarwanda (mother tongue), and in Rwanda, English is taught at all levels of education, including pre-primary schools. Therefore, the children's participation in different literacy activities at home is useful at the entry level of grade one pre-primary, this

shows their competence in several early English literacy skills. It is the skills these children transition with from their homes that determine teachers' efforts in supporting literacy hand capped children to develop future literacy skills like reading and writing. Variations in early English literacy skills achievement identified among children at pre-primary entry level are detrimental to faster literacy development among children in future. The problem identified is likely to be rooted in a lack of parents'/caregivers' involvement in their children's early literacy skills development before their children start pre-primary education. Therefore, the caregivers' perceptions towards children's early English literacy skills have not been explored. It is upon the above bedrock that this study established the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children's development of early English literacy skills among Grade One pre-primary children in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed at establishing family literacy perceptions and how they are related with children's early literacy development. The results of this study laid a foundation of children's early literacy development based on the family context in Rwanda. The study results contributed to the sustainability and empowerment of caregivers in dealing with meaningful support towards early literacy development for young children at home. The results of this study were critically important to the government of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education for maintaining existing early English literacy programs and implementing additional research-based and contextualized literacy initiatives among parents and other caregivers of children. The results of this study demonstrated the need for the Rwandan government and key educational stakeholders to hold regular meetings between parents or caregivers and pre-primary English teachers to discuss early English literacy development concerns for both parties. This helped to change the misconception among some Rwandan parents that children's literacy development should be solely the responsibility of teachers, while parents are only responsible for other school requirements. Based on the study results, there was need to review approaches, methods and techniques used for children's early English literacy development by pre-primary teachers. This review helped in resolving early English literacy development gaps discovered among new grade one pre-primary children. Again, the study results informed the government of Rwanda through MINEDUC, the urgent need for well-formulated early English literacy development policies clarifying the responsibilities of parents/caregivers as first educators of their children, and how parents/caregivers could be supported in fulfilling those responsibilities.

The results of this study were very significant in informing the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) need for early English literacy development budget allocation for mass sensitization of parents/caregivers on their roles as first educators of their children on different educational matters and early literacy promotion in particular. Building on the above rationale, this study established the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children's development of early English literacy skills among Grade One pre-primary children in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Given that this study established the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children's development of early English literacy skills among Grade One pre-primary children in Gasabo District, Rwanda, it is supported by the 1979 bioecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner. Navarro [5] explains that the bioecological systems theory highlights that an individual's development is brought up and put in a set of fixed, intersecting, but similar forms. With Bronfenbrenner's descriptions of support in the environment of development, he explains influences of network of these contexts and points out the right object of study in early literacy development as child-in context instead of the child being an individual. Bronfenbrenner's assertion lies in the view of a primary context. With this, a child sees and gets involved in activities of other people who have knowledge and skills that are not yet acquired by the child. This is important to what the current study adopts: Caregiver-perceptions and caregivers behaviors that children see, encounter, and have the advantage of under the guidance of family members. Additionally, Goodson [6] assumes that when caregivers embrace positive perceptions towards literacy development, children end up demonstrating early literacy skills that set strong foundation for formal literacy. Therefore, this assumption is clearly aided by a strong body of empirical research which shows that caregivers who firmly participate in their children's learning or show positive perceptions about literacy and reading attract their children in literacy activities early enough before entering pre-primary and have children with higher-ranking early literacy abilities. Such abilities lay a stronger foundation for the development of formal literacy in school and after. Hence, this study focusses on establishing the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children's development of early English literacy skills.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Research design***

The study employed a descriptive survey design. It helped in gathering information from different participants (grade one pre-primary children, teachers of sampled children and caregivers of the sampled

children). Significantly, the design helped in sharing the understanding of respondents views on the processes through which family literacy perceptions impacted children's development of early literacy skills of grade one pre-primary children in the sampled sectors of Gasabo district. Rahi [7] affirms that the design fits in this study since it gathers information from a specific population or phenomenon at a particular point in time.

### ***Study location***

This study was carried out in the Gasabo district, particularly in the Kimironko and Gikomero sectors, in the city of Kigali, Rwanda. Rwanda census report [8] indicates that Gasabo's surface area is 429.2 km<sup>2</sup>, and out of this, a large part is rural (84%), and the smallest part represents the developed urban area (16%). For this reason, the Gasabo district was selected for this study due to its diverse urban and rural settings. Its broader geographical and various economic coverage was quite relevant to this study.

### ***Study population***

Cox [9] defines a research population as a group of individuals or entities that share the same characteristics. For this study, the population consisted of 6 pre-primary schools (both private and public)-only pre-primary schools that offered opportunities to children in grade one (aged 3) were targeted. 187 grade one children with first experience in pre-primary education, 6 grade one teachers of English of the sampled children from both private and public schools, and 187 caregivers of the sampled children. The above population was got from both urban and rural settings.

### ***Sampling techniques***

To produce enriching data from diverse geographical and socioeconomic settings, this study used both stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The researcher's decision to utilize the purposive sampling technique was in line with Bowling [10], who explains that the purposive sampling method is an intentional method of selecting participants for research, allowing individuals to be chosen because they possess practical knowledge relevant to the study. After obtaining lists of pre-primary schools from education offices, stratified random sampling techniques were employed. Mugenda [11] says that stratified random sampling strategy is essential when dealing with study populations that are heterogeneous. However, one of the weaknesses of this sampling technique is that selecting appropriate strata for a sample can be difficult. This weakness was minimized as follows: Pre-primary schools that offered opportunities to grade one pre-primary children were first grouped into two major groups: 3 from public schools and three from private schools. Only pre-primary schools that accepted signing the consent forms were chosen

to participate in the study. The aim of selecting stratified random sampling was to get the required representation from different sub-groups in the population (based on diversified socioeconomic settings). Mugenda asserts that this technique ensures the involvement of sub-groups that would otherwise be left out entirely by other sampling techniques due to their smaller numbers in the population. Grade one pre-primary children of age 3, without previous pre-primary school experience, were purposively included in the study. The caregivers of children who participated in the study were also involved in this study. Moreover, the pre-primary teachers of English who handled those children were purposively chosen for interviews that were audio-recorded. One weakness of purposive sampling is that the sample taken may not accurately represent the entire population. This may hinder the use of the results beyond the selected group. Another weakness of purposive sampling is that identifying participants who fit the defined criteria can be challenging. These weaknesses were minimized by using critical case sampling and the census method, where 100% of the children were selected. Class registers were also used to ensure that only qualifying children were selected.

### ***Sample size***

The sample size comprised all 6 pre-primary schools, 187 sampled children and 187 caregivers of the sampled children and 6 grade one teachers of English of the sampled children. Glenn [12] affirms that a researcher uses the entire population as a sample for small populations. Therefore, for this study, the researcher used 100% of the respondents.

### ***Data collection***

The study was structured to gather both primary and secondary data. Consequently, three research tools were designed and used to collect primary data: an interview guide for teachers of English, Close-ended questionnaires for caregivers, and a tool for children's dynamic indicators of early English literacy skills. The tools were piloted first before their administration. Piloting helped shed clarity on the items that were administered. McMillan and Schumacher [13] explain that researchers should pilot their research tools on a sample of respondents who have the exact attributes of the respondents who would be surveyed in the study. Therefore, the questionnaire designed for this study was piloted in two pre-primary schools. These pre-primary schools were not included in the group that would participate in this study. This was intended to ascertain the clarity and accuracy of the tools before they were adopted for administration. Their feedback was instrumental in refining them where it was necessary.

The researcher ensured content validity with the help of experts who reviewed the responses from the administered tools to ensure that these responses

accurately addressed the questions asked. What was found to be inadequate in providing the required information was modified or omitted and replaced with accurate information. In agreement with the above, Quintao [14] said that validity is the level to which a factual measure, or several estimates of a notion, correctly measures the idea. Then, the internal consistency method was used to test reliability during the piloting phase. As recommended by Creswell [15], to ensure greater internal consistency of the research tools, unclear questions were refined following the pilot study.

**Ethical Considerations**

The participants were assured that their responses would be used only for the study. The researcher ensured a conducive research relationship and trust among respondents. The respondents’ autonomy was guaranteed to facilitate accurate and objective feedback. The research tools were reviewed by the supervisors and the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Rwanda-College of Education to ensure conformity to set standards. Written consent was sought from the headteachers of the sampled schools and their teachers. A signed consent was also obtained from the caregivers of children who participated in the study. The intention of the research and their freedom to participate in this study, along with their right to withdraw their children at any time without penalty, was shared. The teachers who participated in the study signed a consent form, allowing for the audio recording of their responses for later use. All the scholarly works were recognized.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative data from the teachers’ interview was recorded using a computer tablet, responses cleaned, different responses classified by identifying significant responses for various themes, the record was transcribed, and patterns emerging from significant responses were identified. The above agrees with Vears and Gillam [16], who state that qualitative research surveys provide individual perspectives that are not easily measured. Interrelationships between identified patterns were studied, and inferences were drawn from the patterns and their relationships. All-important responses from the interview were consolidated. Interviews and narratives were also reported verbatim in the form of extracts. Quantitative analysis began with data entry, cleaning, analysis, and interpretation. This was done using a computer software programme (SPSS version 27). This was mainly for statistical scores from family literacy perceptions and children’s dynamic indicators of early English Literacy Skills checklists. The data for this study were analyzed using Chi-square to establish the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children’s development of early English literacy skills among Grade One pre-primary children in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

**RESULTS**

In this section, the study aimed at establishing the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children’s development of early English literacy skills as a foundation to literacy development. The thematic categories of teachers’ responses generated from recorded interviews on the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children’s development of early English literacy performance outcomes were recorded as shown in table 1. These are the results for the qualitative data.

**Table 1: Thematic categories of teachers’ responses on children’s development of early English literacy skills**

Themes	Descriptions
A	Teachers are the ones responsible for promoting phonemic awareness among children
B	Interactive communication among caregivers and children at home help children to develop spoken communication at an early age
C	Educated caregivers can support children at home to recognize letters of alphabet at an early age
D	A school library with children readers help children to develop basics of book knowledge
E	Dedicated caregivers support their children at home to develop their writing abilities before pre-primary school

**Source: Primary data, 2025**

Teacher A was interviewed on teachers’ responsibility to promoting children’s early literacy skills and explained that:

“I think teachers have a bigger responsibility in ensuring that young children master letter sounds at an early age. You know, teachers are professionals in teaching and therefore have better understanding on how children can be supported to master letter sounds compared to how easily children’s parents can support them. This does not mean that parents cannot support their children at home to identify letter sounds-they can but not as teachers can do it.”

On whether interactive communication among caregivers and children at home support young children to develop spoken communication skills, teacher B reported that:

“Yes, every learning starts at home. Parents and caregivers that usually interact with their children at an early age help them to develop spoken communication skills. Their children gain confidence while talking and when they start pre-primary school, they don’t fear teachers and fellow children. I have been witnessing this among new entrants of my grade one class. Basing on conversations I had with those children, they told me that their parents tell them stories in English at night.”

Among teachers interviewed on children’s early literacy skills development, teacher C revealed that:

“Surely, it is educated caregivers that support children at home to recognize letters of alphabet at an early age-otherwise, uneducated caregivers cannot afford helping their children in recognizing letters of alphabet because most of those caregivers do not know those letters! You cannot give what you do not have. Most children in my grade one that come from homes with educated caregivers, come with some knowledge of letter recognition compared to children with caregivers who are not educated. Still, as a trained teacher I support weak children to recognize those letters.”

In an interview with teacher D, the teacher said that: “To some extent, a school library with children readers help children to develop basics of book knowledge but this is not enough. Parents should understand that they have the first responsibility to ensure that their children are supported in literacy matters before starting school. Children should be taught how to handle books, open pages and look at pictures in books before children start school. This helps a teacher not to start teaching from nothing. I have witnessed that parents who support their children in this exercise, their children come to my class when they have basic knowledge about books.”

In an interview with teacher E on children’s early literacy skills development, the teacher affirmed that:

“Dedicated caregivers support their children at home to develop their writing abilities before pre-primary school. You know, supporting children at home just needs dedication of parents regardless of their educational capabilities. I have seen parents who are not educated supporting their children at home to improve their writing capacities. They always consult me on how they can do this, and I have always advised them on how to do it. I have seen some of their children developing better writing skills compared to some children of educated parents. So, dedication of caregivers in supporting children is more important.”

In table 2, the grouping of the family literacy perceptions was done on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Not sure, Disagree and Strongly disagree). As seen in table 2, the family literacy perceptions were paired with the early English literacy skills performance outcomes (phonemic awareness, spoken communication letter recognition, , book recognition, print interest and early writing capacity) of children at grade one of pre-primary school. In table 2, the children’s’ early English literacy skills performance outcomes are indicated under “Not at all, Fair, well and Extremely well.”

**Table 2: Distribution of family literacy perceptions on children’s early English literacy skills development (N=187)**

Family literacy perceptions	X	early English literacy skills development levels								Total
		Not at all	%	Fair	%	Well	%	Extremely well	%	
Teachers reading with children regularly promotes child literacy skills for phonemic awareness	Strongly agree	6	11.8	5	9.8	29	56.9	11	21.6	51
	Agree	8	16	12	24	20	40	10	20	50
	Not sure	4	23.5	4	23.5	6	35.3	3	17.6	17
	Disagree	13	41.9	14	45.2	3	9.7	1	3.2	31
	Strongly disagree	16	42.1	17	44.7	5	13.2	0	0	38
Engagement of family members and children in communication help children to develop early language skills for spoken communication	Strongly agree	4	7.3	8	14.5	29	52.7	14	25.5	55
	Agree	8	15.4	11	21.2	25	48.1	8	15.4	52
	Not sure	6	22.2	8	29.6	9	33.3	4	14.8	27
	Disagree	11	39.3	12	42.9	3	10.7	2	7.1	28
	Strongly disagree	14	56	10	40	1	4	0	0	25
Able family members have more responsibility in the children's early literacy skills development for letter recognition	Strongly agree	6	10.2	7	11.9	30	50.8	16	27.1	59
	Agree	4	7.8	7	13.7	26	51.0	14	27.5	51
	Not sure	8	32	8	32	6	24	3	12	25
	Disagree	9	31.0	12	41.4	6	20.7	2	6.9	29
	Strongly disagree	10	43.5	11	47.8	1	4.3	1	4.3	23
A school environment having reading materials help children to develop literacy skills early for book understanding	Strongly agree	7	12.5	8	14.3	27	48.2	14	25	56
	Agree	5	8.5	10	16.9	34	57.6	10	16.9	59
	Not sure	4	26.7	8	53.3	2	13.3	1	6.7	15
	Disagree	14	46.7	10	33.3	5	16.7	1	3.3	30
	Strongly disagree	10	37.0	12	44.4	5	18.5	0	0	27
Teachers are the only ones with the knowledge of early literacy skills for print interest	Strongly agree	8	14.5	6	10.9	26	47.3	15	27.3	55
	Agree	4	8.2	1	2.0	36	73.5	8	16.3	49
	Not sure	11	64.7	4	23.5	2	11.8	0	0	17
	Disagree	13	35.1	14	37.8	7	18.9	3	8.1	37
	Strongly disagree	15	51.7	10	34.5	3	10.3	1	3.4	29
It is the responsibility of family members to have ample time with children in literacy activities for early writing capacity	Strongly agree	2	2.9	8	11.6	40	58.0	19	25.7	69
	Agree	3	5	10	16.7	29	48.3	18	30	60
	Not sure	8	57.1	2	14.3	3	21.4	1	7.1	14
	Disagree	10	43.5	8	34.8	4	17.4	1	4.3	23
	Strongly disagree	15	71.4	4	19.0	2	9.5	0	0	21

Source: Primary data, 2025

Table 2 presents the results of the family literacy perceptions on children’s early English literacy skills development. Results reveal a notable divide in perceived value, with a clear distinction between those who endorsed or strongly endorsed the activities and those who showed skepticism.

For children’s phonemic awareness through teachers reading with children regularly, a large portion of caregivers who “strongly agreed” with the activity (recognizing its value), their children equivalent to 78.5% performed well and extremely well in phonemic awareness activities, 60% of children whose caregivers “agreed” with the practice performed well and extremely well in phonemic awareness activities. However, caregivers who “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the activity, their children equal to 87.1% and 86.8% respectively failed or got low results in phonemic awareness activities.

For children’s spoken communication skills development, caregivers who “strongly agreed” with the activity, their children equivalent to 78.2% did well and extremely well in spoken communication activities whereas 63.5% of children whose caregivers “agreed” with the activity performed well and extremely well in spoken communication activities. Conversely, among the “disagree” and “strongly disagree” caregiver groups, respectively 82.2% and 96% of the caregivers’ children failed or performed fairly in spoken communication activities.

In the area of children’s letter recognition activities, the data shows that among caregivers who “strongly agreed” with the statement, 77.9% of their children recognized well and extremely well different letters given to them. Then, caregivers who “agreed” with the statement, 78.5% of their children also did well and extremely well in the letter recognition activities. Contrary, caregivers that “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed” with the statement, the majority of their children (72.4% and 91.3%) respectively failed or performed fairly in letter recognition activities.

For the children’s development of book understanding, caregivers who “strongly agreed” with the statement, 73.2% of their children did well and extremely well in telling different concepts in a book, while caregivers that “agreed” with the statement, 74.5% of their children got better and extremely good results in book understanding. Nevertheless, the “disagree” and “strongly disagree” caregiver groups, most of their children (80% and 81.4%) respectively failed or got low results in recognizing concepts in a book.

With the children’s development of print interest, caregivers who “strongly agreed” on the statement, 74.6% children of those caregivers showed better and

extreme good interest in print, and caregivers that agreed on the statement, 89.8% of their children developed better and extreme good interest in print. Oppositely, caregivers who disputed or strongly disputed the statement, 72.9% and 86.2% of their children respectively failed or had low interest in print.

Lastly, with children’s early writing capacity, the majority of caregivers who “strongly agreed” on the statement had their children equal to 83.7% developing better and extremely good early writing capacity, whereas 78.3% children of caregivers that agreed on the statement developed early writing capacity well and extremely well. Adversely, a majority of 78.3% and 90.4% children whose caregivers respectively negated or strongly negated the statement failed or had low results in developing early writing capacity.

**Table 3: Chi-square test results for the association between family literacy perceptions and children’s early English literacy skills development**

Family literacy perceptions	Chi-square statistics ( $\chi^2$ )	Degree of freedom	P-value (Sig. at 2-tails)
Teachers reading with children regularly promotes child literacy skills for phonemic awareness	63.27	12	0.0001
Engagement of family members and children in communication help children to develop early language skills for spoken communication	56.7	12	0.0003
Able family members have more responsibility in the children's early literacy skills development for letter recognition	51.1	12	$7.16 \times 10^{-8}$
A school environment having reading materials help children to develop literacy skills early for book understanding	60.17	12	$2.10 \times 10^{-8}$
Teachers are the only ones with the knowledge of early literacy skills for print interest	87.04	12	$1.84 \times 10^{-13}$
It is the responsibility of family members to have ample time with children in literacy activities for early writing capacity	49.45	12	0.0002

Source: Primary data, 2025

**DISCUSSIONS**

This section presents the discussion and interpretation of results on the teachers’ responses from interviews conducted, as presented in Table 1 of the qualitative data. The quantitative data results (Table 3) indicate

the relationship between family literacy perceptions and children's development of early English literacy skills as a foundation to literacy development.

The teachers' responses (Table 1) on teachers' responsibility to promoting children's early literacy skills (mastering letter sounds) correspond with the family literacy perception results of higher teachers' responsibility to promoting children's early literacy skills (mastering letter sounds) (Table 2). However, it should be noted that caregivers who negated promotion of children's early literacy skills (mastering letter sounds) being the teachers' responsibility also their children passed letter sound activities at grade one pre-primary school though with low results (Table 2). Therefore, regardless of family literacy perceptions on the teachers being with a higher responsibility in promoting children's early literacy skills, families should be sensitized in school meetings on their responsibility in promoting children's early literacy skills as first educators. This will help children caregivers know that literacy development of their children require a combined effort from both teachers and family members-it is not a one side responsibility.

The teachers' responses (Table 1) strongly affirm the early family literacy value of interactive communication among caregivers and children to develop spoken communication skills among children. This affirmation aligns with the children's higher spoken communication results from children literacy activities done at grade one pre-primary school (Table 2)-the performance is for children whose caregivers supported interactive communication being supportive to children's literacy development. Nevertheless, children caregivers who underestimated the value of interactive communication with their children to develop spoken communication skills at home, some of the caregivers' children performed fairly well in spoken communication activities at their entry of grade one pre-primary school. This highlights that engagement of family members and children in communication at home does not guarantee that children will develop spoken communication skills at 100% level. Still, some children can develop the skill without frequent engagement of family members.

The teachers' interview responses (Table 1) reveal their acceptance of educated children caregivers being supportive at home in helping children to recognize different letters of alphabet at an early age. The teachers' feedback show that uneducated caregivers cannot afford helping their children in recognizing letters of alphabet because most of those caregivers do not know those letters. The above feedback is not far from the caregivers' perspectives in Table 2 where results show that able family members have more responsibility in the children's

early literacy development for letter recognition. This is proved by better letter recognition results of children whose caregivers are from urban setting and educated. Contrary, caregivers who disagreed or strongly disagreed the statement "able family members have more responsibility in the children's early literacy development for letter recognition" are from rural settings and with less education or no education at all. Children of these caregivers either failed completely letter recognition activities or achieved low results in those activities.

The teachers' feedback responses (Table 1) indicate some significant impact of a school environment (school library) with reading materials being helpful to children in developing literacy skills early for book understanding. Nonetheless, the responses further indicate that parents have the first responsibility to ensure that their children are supported in literacy matters before starting school. The teachers' results agree with family literacy perception results in Table 2 where children whose caregivers affirmed strongly or agreed that a school environment with reading materials help children develop literacy skills early for book understanding performed well in book understanding activities at grade one pre-primary school. Still, caregivers who did not see the value of school literacy materials being impactful on children's literacy development, their children passed book understanding literacy activities though at a lower level. These results show that both a school literacy environment and home literacy environment all contribute to children's literacy development and therefore, both environments' role in developing children's early literacy should not be underestimated.

Teachers' feedback responses (Table 1) attribute children's development of writing abilities at home to dedicated caregivers other than all caregivers. These responses coincide with Table 2 results on family perceptions regarding whether "It is the responsibility of family members to have ample time with children in literacy activities for early writing capacity or not." The results from mostly caregivers from urban settings that understood the value of literacy development at an early age and dedicated their time to supporting their children develop their writing abilities while at home, their children's writing abilities had developed before joining grade one pre-primary school. At the same time, a smaller number of children whose caregivers perceived the practice not being a responsibility of parents, performed fairly well in literacy activities of writing development-meaning that the development of children's writing ability is not only in the hands of their caregivers only but even others like teachers can support children better in developing their writing abilities. Hence, both children's teachers and caregivers should closely work together in supporting children develop early literacy skills.

Again, the chi-square test results of this section (Table 3) reveal the association between family literacy perceptions and children's early English literacy skills development. A statistically significant association was found between teachers and children reading together regularly supporting phonemic awareness ( $\chi^2 = 63.27$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p \approx 0.0001$ ). The extremely low p-value suggests that the differences in responses across levels of perceived effectiveness are unlikely due to chance. This implies that caregivers who hold stronger positive perceptions (e.g., strongly agree or agree) are more likely to perceive these activities as effective in promoting their children's phonemic awareness, while those with negative perceptions (e.g., disagree or strongly disagree) tend to rate the effectiveness lower. The above results agree with the work of Bachman [17] where he said that:

"Parents' literacy perceptions are associated with their literacy practices to help young children develop their reading abilities, including their phonological awareness." Connectedly, Preece[18] explained that:

"Parents' regular reading with their children positively affects children's language vocabulary and make children readers that are more successful. The study also revealed that parents who perceived reading frequently with their children being helpful, their children's emergent literacy developed positively than others whose parents did not value it being important." All the above results support the significance of caregivers being supportive to their children's early literacy development.

A statistically significant association between engagement of family members and children to develop children's early language skills in spoken communication was found ( $\chi^2 = 56.7$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p \approx 0.0003$ ), with a low p-value. These results indicate that the differences in perceptions across the different levels of agreement are unlikely to have occurred by chance. This suggests that caregivers who strongly agree with the value of these activities tend to rate their effectiveness more positively, while those who disagree or strongly disagree tend to rate them lower, supporting the idea that caregivers' perceptions significantly influence their children's spoken communication development. This is supported by the study results of Segal [19] where he declared that:

"Caregivers reading loudly to their children improves the children's language skills and develops foundational literacy behaviours among children, hence sustaining their later reading achievement." These results indicate the need for children caregivers in Rwanda to be sensitized on their prime role of supporting children while at home in spoken language activities before starting pre-primary school.

This will build a good foundational literacy among their children.

The Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between caregivers' perceptions and their level of agreement on the responsibility they have in supporting their children in letter recognition activities ( $\chi^2 = 51.1$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p \approx 7.16 \times 10^{-8}$ ), with a very low p-value. This suggests that caregivers who strongly agree with the statement of able family members having more responsibility in the children's early literacy skills development are more likely to perceive it as highly effective, while those with opposing perceptions tend to rate its effectiveness lower, confirming a meaningful relationship between perceptions and perceived impact on children's early literacy skills development for letter recognition. The above results are in line with study findings of Poolman [20] where he noted that:

"Early literacy skills like recognizing letters of alphabet are acquired naturally through families. The ability of children to recognize letters of alphabet at an early age is affected by mother's literacy understanding whereby mothers with higher level of literacy understanding support their children to develop literacy skills easier than mothers with low or no literacy understanding because their perception towards supporting their children in literacy matters is minimal or not there at all." Therefore, this shows the close relationship between how the literacy perceptions of caregivers contribute to children's literacy development.

There is a statistically significant association between caregivers' literacy perceptions and how well a school environment having reading materials help children to develop early literacy skills for book understanding ( $\chi^2 = 60.17$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 2.10 \times 10^{-8}$ ). These results suggest that caregivers who strongly agree with the value of these literacy activities are much more likely to perceive them as highly effective, while those with less agreement tend to rate their effectiveness lower leading to lower literacy achievement among children. These findings highlight the important role that caregiver perceptions play in shaping their participation in supporting their children in book understanding. The work of Raver [21] support the above results where it was observed that:

"Parents' literacy perceptions impact the children's early literacy development within home settings. Literacy perceptions parents have determine the number of books that are bought for the children and even the time that parents spend reading with their children. This is an indication that parents who attach much value on shared literacy activities with their children, focus a lot on emphasizing literacy promoting behaviours within their day to day

activities. Consequently, their children will always exhibit higher levels of literacy within their early years of literacy development.”

The Chi-square test results ( $\chi^2 = 87.04$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 1.84 \times 10^{-13}$ ) reveal a highly significant association between caregivers' perceptions of how they perceive teachers as the only ones with the knowledge of early literacy skills and children's development of print interest. The extremely small p-value indicates that the differences in responses across all levels are not due to chance. This suggests that caregivers who strongly agree with the value of the teachers' role in children's literacy development overwhelmingly perceive them as beneficial for developing children's interest in print, whereas those who disagree or strongly disagree with it tend to rate them as less effective or not effective. The results align with the work of Okwilagwe and Lelikkuma [22] who argued that:

“There is a significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and learners' literacy development. Enhancing the early reading culture and early literacy development among children needs cooperation from different stakeholders that include teachers, parents and local authorities among others.” Therefore, Rwandan caregivers should work collaboratively with teachers of their children to ensure that children develop early literacy skills at an early age.

The chi-square test results ( $\chi^2 \approx 49.45$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p \approx 0.0002$ ) showed a statistically significant impact of family literacy perceptions on time they allocate for shared literacy activities with their children for early writing capacity development. These results inform that caregivers' literacy perceptions are meaningfully related to their children's early writing capacity development, highlighting the importance of caregiver perspectives in promoting shared early literacy activities with their children. The above results resonate with the work of Tan [23] which indicated that:

“The academic benefits from caregivers' perceptions connected to their involvement in supporting children to develop early literacy skills are categorized by socioeconomic status-with lower income families less likely to participate in literacy-rich interactions for the development of children's early literacy abilities.” All the above results emphasize the importance of supporting Rwandan children caregivers to shape their literacy perceptions towards children's literacy development.

#### RESEARCH LIMITATION

This study looked at early literacy abilities of only newly admitted children at grade one pre-primary school-without any previous experiences of pre-primary school. The study did not look at the literacy

performance of children who had repeated grade one of pre-primary school. This would help in determining if there is any difference in literacy performance of children that repeated compared to those that were newly admitted.

#### RESEARCH IMPLICATION

The results of this study helped the Ministry of Education in Rwanda maintain existing early literacy programmes and initiate other research-based and contextually relevant literacy promotion programmes among caregivers of children. The programmes empowered children caregivers from different socioeconomic backgrounds on early literacy matters. More emphasis was placed on caregivers from rural settings, as they were found to have limited literacy knowledge and skills. The knowledge and skills acquired by caregivers was beneficial in supporting their young children as they prepare them for entry into pre-primary schools.

#### CONCLUSION

Caregivers from different socioeconomic settings in selected sectors of Gasabo district, Rwanda revealed their literacy perceptions about the role of families in promoting children's early literacy. This is a very significant aspect that should be utilized in a positive home literacy environment for children's early literacy development before children join pre-primary school. Caregivers' literacy perceptions were noted to shape their behaviours towards shared family-child literacy activities. It was evident that the stronger the caregivers' literacy perceptions, the better the children's early literacy scores at their grade one pre-primary school. The weaker the caregivers' literacy perceptions, the lower the children's early literacy scores at grade one. Consequently, whatever children caregivers perceive about their children's literacy development, their understanding about their roles as first teachers of children anticipates their children's literacy development. Notably, this is an important variable for children's literacy development support at home and school to bridge the gap between children's literacy development disparities at grade one pre-primary school entry. The results of this study revealed a significant relationship between caregivers' literacy perceptions and children's early literacy development. Literacy perceptions of caregivers determine literacy activities designed in families for children's literacy development hence predicting children's early literacy outcomes at grade one pre-primary school entry.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

*Family empowerment on literacy knowledge, skills, methods and mindset change through literacy programs*

The government of Rwanda should make every effort to put in place different literacy programs aiming at empowering family members (children caregivers)

from all socio-economic settings but specifically those from rural settings with literacy knowledge and skills that can help them support their young children at home as they prepare them to join pre-primary schools.

The government should put emphasis on the methods all parents/caregivers (literate and illiterate) should employ at home to support their children develop different early literacy skills. The importance of having a print-rich home setting should be emphasized and parents be encouraged to have shared literacy activities with their children at home.

Through different literacy programs, caregivers of children should be mobilized and sensitized on how they should use their limited resources including finances to improve their children's early literacy skills at home. Caregivers of young children should be supported to know that it is not the responsibility of teachers only to ensure that young children learn to read and write, but it is their principal responsibility as parents/caregivers to ensure that their children develop early literacy skills when at home.

#### ***Regular meetings of pre-primary teachers and parents/caregivers on early literacy curriculum matters***

There should be regular meetings of pre-primary teachers and parents/caregivers on early literacy curriculum discussions. They should be sensitized on a shared responsibility of ensuring that early literacy skills are developed at the foundational level (from the home environment).

#### ***Early literacy development teacher training programs***

To ensure that the knowledge gap on literacy development young children transitioning from their homes to grade one pre-primary schools come with is discovered earlier and resolved before it is too late, there is need to have well qualified Early Childhood Education teachers with a good command of literacy knowledge. Therefore, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) should ensure that the pre-service teaching given to Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers incorporate particular contextualized early literacy teaching.

Furthermore, improved partnership between the University of Rwanda, College of Education (UR-CE) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB) should be emphasized in order to expand sound pre-service training, educational policies, in-service professional development programs and literacy development efforts. MINEDUC should champion a robust and financed plan for pre-service and in-service teaching of Early Childhood education teachers in the broad pre-primary curriculum and more specifically in early literacy development content.

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