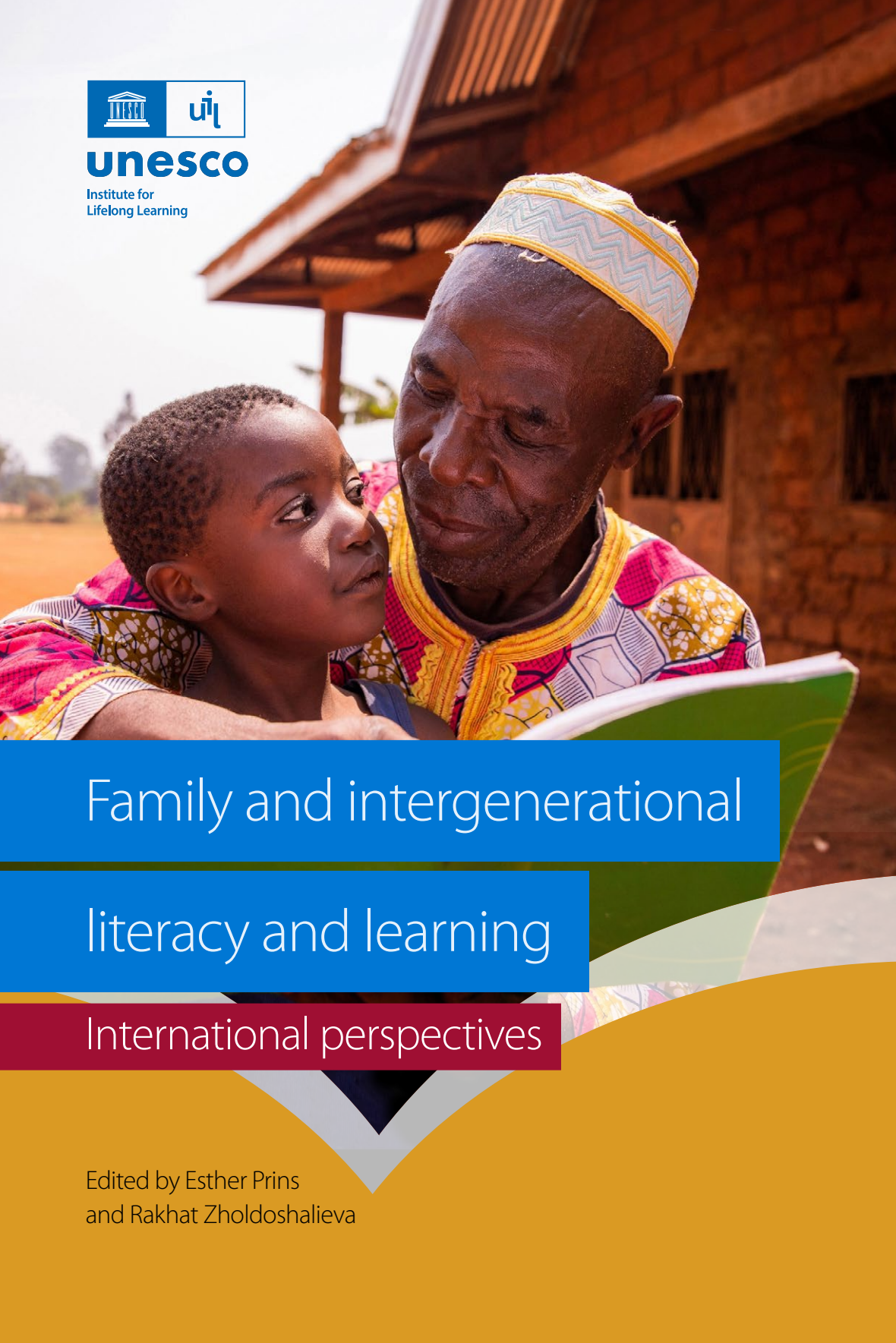




unesco

Institute for
Lifelong Learning



Family and intergenerational

literacy and learning

International perspectives

Edited by Esther Prins
and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva

Family and intergenerational literacy and learning

International perspectives

EDITORS

Dr Esther Prins, The Pennsylvania State University,
United States of America

Dr Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, UNESCO
Institute for Lifelong Learning, Germany

Published in 2025 by
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
Feldbrunnenstraße 58
20148 Hamburg
Germany

© UNESCO

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) undertakes research, capacity-building, networking and publication on lifelong learning with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education.

Its publications are a valuable resource for education researchers, planners, policy-makers and practitioners. While the programmes of UIL are established along the lines laid down by the General Conference of UNESCO, the publications of the Institute are issued under its sole responsibility.

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO or UIL concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO or UIL.

ISBN: 978-92-820-1259-8

Editors: Esther Prins and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva

Design: Terry Sunderland Graphic Design

Cover: © 2023 Media Lens King/Shutterstock



This publication is available in Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>). By using the content of this publication, the users accept to be bound by the terms of use of the UNESCO Open Access Repository (<http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>).

Foreword

The educational challenges we face today are complex. They demand thoughtful, cohesive responses that span formal and non-formal learning contexts and consider the learning needs of every community member, throughout their lives and in all the settings in which they learn.

Family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL) is an essential, if undervalued, part of this picture, especially in the discourse on lifelong learning in different historical, social, cultural, economic and livelihood contexts. It has demonstrable benefits, not only for the children and adults who take part in it, but for the wider community. It helps families to become more adaptable and resilient and to improve their life chances, while developing confident, empowered learners. It is also an anchor during times when access to education is limited for public health or political reasons, especially for girls and women.

FILL has the double benefit of boosting children's education while enabling parents (and other adult carers) to develop their own literacy and numeracy capabilities. It also fosters a range of wider benefits, including self-esteem, agency and civic participation, while creating social networks that can offer ongoing support to adults as they continue their learning journeys.

For learning to be truly transformative, in the way envisaged by UNESCO and the United Nations, it must be part of the day-to-day life of every family. By investing in FILL and learning, we put into families' hands the means to make better futures, for themselves and their communities.

Yet, for all this promise, family learning remains under-researched and under-appreciated. With a few notable exceptions, most of the existing literature focuses on countries in the Global North, particularly in North America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK). Little is known, by comparison, about family learning in the low- or middle-income, non-Anglophone nations in which most of the people in the world live.

That was the inspiration for this book and the reason I am so pleased to welcome it. We wanted to understand the different ways that family literacy and learning was conceptualized and delivered around the world, with a special focus on the Global South, and to show that although Western perspectives dominate the research, there are other models and much more to learn beyond them.

The editors of this volume, Esther Prins, of The Pennsylvania State University in the United States of America (USA), and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, have brought together an impressive list of

contributors, primarily from low- or middle-income, non-Anglophone countries, who traverse linguistic, cultural and national borders in presenting their diverse perspectives, encompassing every world region.

Together, the 20 chapters offer a distinctively comprehensive picture of how people and organizations in countries around the world are approaching and practising family literacy and learning. They show the value of looking beyond the dominant perspectives of FILL research and, at times, challenge conventional assumptions of what works in family learning and why it matters.

As the editors note in their afterword, most of the countries considered in this book were at one time colonized. Rediscovering traditional intergenerational knowledge systems, ways of transfer and learning practices, including reviving traditional languages, represents a critical part of family literacy and learning in these countries and reflects the importance of building on these practices in fostering community flourishing, prosperity and well-being.

One theme emerges very clearly from these studies: There is more than one route to literacy and learning. The chapters in this book highlight that by marginalizing other cultures, other languages or other literacy practices, we commit epistemic injustice, stifle communities and prevent them from thriving. Family learning works best, and becomes even more sustainable, when it grows with the grain of local history, culture and tradition, not against it.

Policy-makers, educators, scholars and the wider public will be able to draw valuable lessons from the comprehensive picture pieced together by the two editors and the numerous authors who contributed their work. They deserve enormous credit.

The resulting book merits a wide readership and will, I hope, help demonstrate the significance of FILL in advancing global efforts to position education both as a common good and as part of a future characterized by inclusion, equity and peace, ensuring that no one, no matter where in the world they live, what culture they belong to or what challenges they face, is left behind.

Isabell Kempf

Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the dedication of all the authors who have contributed chapters. We appreciate their contributions to expanding the knowledge base on FILL from a diverse range of contexts and perspectives.

Additionally, we are grateful to Chung Dolma, Assistant Programme Specialist at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), for her assistance with the initial planning and communication, and to Gonca Acaray, a graduate assistant at The Pennsylvania State University, for creating the index and assisting with other publishing tasks. Special thanks go to Dr Lyn Tett of the University of Edinburgh, Dr Sharifa Abdulla of the University of Malawi, and Dr Nancy Palacios of the Universidad de Los Andes of Colombia for their critical review and feedback, which helped strengthen the manuscript.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Paul Stanistreet, Head of Publications at UIL, for managing the process of editing and design with the support of Cendrine Sebastiani, Jan Kairies, Jennifer Kearns-Willrich, Linda Gardiner and Terry Sunderland.

Table of contents

FOREWORD	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	8
1. INTRODUCTION • Esther Prins and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva	17
Section 1: FILL policies and theoretical frameworks	27
2. TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY LITERACY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH • Hélène Binesse, Chris Millora, Sheila Aikman and Anna Robinson-Pant	29
Section 2: FILL in Africa	43
3. INDIGENOUS AFRICAN INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING PRACTICES AND THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGIES • Omobola O. Adelere and Solomon O. Ojedeji	45
4. COMMUNITY-BASED INTERGENERATIONAL DIGITAL LITERACY LEARNING IN UGANDA: EXPERIENCES OF A LOCAL NGO • Willy Ngaka	61
5. A CULTURAL MODEL OF MUSLIM INDIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA • Leila Kajee	79
6. THE LIBERIAN FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE • Jo-Anne L. Manswell Butty, Yvonne Capeheart, Ruby Joseph, Barbara Kamara, Ronald E. Mertz, David Rosen, Edward A. Socker, Stephanie Vickers and Miriam Westheimer	93
Section 3: FILL in the Arab States	107
7. A CASE STUDY OF AN INTERGENERATIONAL AND FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMME IN EGYPT • Haiyan Hua, John P. Comings, Huai-Ming Sanchez, Essam Assaad, Mona Hussein, Maddie Brancel, Fatma Mossallem and Michaela Tobin	109
Section 4: FILL in Asia	125
8. DECOLONIZING LITERACY: TRANSFORMATIVE INTERGENERATIONAL LITERACY AND LEARNING IN NEPAL AND INDIA • Anuprita Shukla, Kamal Raj Devkota and Sushan Acharya	127
9. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING AT HOME: A STUDY IN RURAL CHINA • Yan Li, Seyda Subasi Singh and Jiacheng Li	143
10. CREATING 'PLAY INVITATIONS' FROM OPEN-ENDED MATERIALS IN THE PHILIPPINES: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT DURING INFANCY • Josephine Louise F. Jamero and Maria Theresa Z. Mora	159

Section 5: FILL in Europe and North America 175

11. ENRICHING THE TURKISH HOME LITERACY ENVIRONMENT WITH DIGITAL PICTURE BOOKS • Burcu Sarı Uğurlu and Adriana G. Bus 177
12. SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL, OR NOT? THE IMPACT OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN A MULTILINGUAL, SMALL ISLAND STATE • Charles L. Mifsud 193
13. EXPLORING PARENTAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF FAMILY LITERACY: A GREEK STUDY OF PARENTS OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN • Chrysoula Tsirmpa and Nektarios Stellakis 209
14. FAMILY LITERACIES IN A POLITICAL MOMENT: NEWLY ARRIVED MOTHERS AND CHILDREN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE AFFECTIVE ENTANGLEMENTS OF LITERACIES WITH PLACE, SPACE AND THE BODY • Mary-Rose Puttick 225
15. HOPE AND AGONY: MAINTAINING CHINESE AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM • Jinyao Chang and Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen 241

Section 6: FILL in Latin America and the Caribbean 257

16. EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN FAMILY AND INTERGENERATIONAL LITERACY AND LEARNING IN THE CARIBBEAN • Arlene Bailey 259
17. CHALLENGING EPISTEMIC EXCLUSION: CREATING A SPACE FOR UNDERSTANDING CARIBBEAN FAMILY LITERACY PRACTICES • Zoyah Kinkead-Clark and Charlotte Hardacre 275
18. THE STUDY OF CHILDREN'S HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS AS THE BASIS FOR AN INTERCULTURAL AND BILINGUAL EARLY LITERACY PROGRAMME • Celia Renata Rosemberg, Alejandra Stein, Florencia Alam, Maia Julieta Migdalek and Gladys Ojea 293
19. INTERGENERATIONAL APPROPRIATION OF TECHNOLOGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES IN MEXICO • Patricia Valdivia and Judy Kalman 311

Section 7: FILL policy analysis 327

20. FAMILY AND INTERNATIONAL LITERACY AND LEARNING POLICIES: 12 QUESTIONS TO GUIDE CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS • Esther Prins, Alexis Cherewka, Carol Clymer and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva 329
- AFTERWORD: THEMES AND CONTRIBUTIONS • Esther Prins and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva 347
- INDEX 350

List of contributors

Editors

Esther Prins

Professor, Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Program
Co-Director, Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy and
Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Rakhat Zholdoshalieva

Team Leader, Quality Learning Ecosystems Programme
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
Hamburg, Germany

Chapter authors

Sushan Acharya

Professor, Central Department of Education
Tribhuvan University
Kathmandu, Nepal

Omobola O. Adelere

Professor, Adult and Distance Education
Deputy Director, Distance Learning Centre
University of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria

Sheila Aikman

Associate Researcher, School of International Development
University of East Anglia
Norwich, UK

Florencia Alam

Education & Linguistics Expert
Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Mathematical and Experimental
Psychology, National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CIIPME)
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Essam Assaad

Adult Literacy Specialist

USAID/Egypt Literate Village Project, Save the Children

Cairo, Egypt

Arlene Bailey

Senior Research Fellow

The University of the West Indies, Mona

Kingston, Jamaica

Hélène Binesse

Research Associate, Research for Equitable Access and Learning
(REAL) Centre

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

Cambridge, UK

Madeline Brancel

Senior Program Officer

World Education, a division of JSI Research & Triangle, Inc.

Boston, Massachusetts, USA*

Adriana G. Bus

Professor, Learning Problems

Coordinator of the Erasmus+ project, Stimulating Adventures for
Young Learners (SAYL)

National Centre for Reading Education and Research

University of Stavanger

Stavanger, Norway

Jo-Anne L. Manswell Butty

Education Expert

Howard University

Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Jinyao Chang

PhD candidate, Department of Education

University of Bath

Bath, UK

* Madeline is currently employed as a Policy Manager at J-PAL but was a Senior Program Officer at World Education during the time of the production of this paper.

Alexis Cherewka

Senior Technical Advisor,
US World Education, a division of JSI Research & Triangle, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Carol Clymer

Co-Director, Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy and
Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

John P. Comings

Adjunct Faculty, Center for International Education
School of Education
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts, USA

Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen

Professor, Department of Education
Director, Centre for Research in Education in Asia (CREA)
University of Bath
Bath, UK

Kamal Raj Devkota

Assistant Professor, Central Department of Education
Tribhuvan University
Kathmandu, Nepal

Charlotte Hardacre

Lecturer, Institute of Health
Department of Social Science
University of Cumbria
Lancaster, UK

Haiyan Hua (deceased)

Vice President
World Education, a division of JSI Research & Triangle, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Mona Hussein

Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
USAID/Egypt Literate Village Project, Save the Children
Cairo, Egypt

Josephine Louise F. Jamero

Assistant Professor, Department of Family
Life and Child Development
College of Home Economics, University of the Philippines – Diliman
Quezon City, Philippines

Ruby Joseph

Associate-in-Research
Department of Child and Family Studies
College of Behavioral and Community Sciences
University of South Florida

Leila Kajee

Professor, Language and Literacy, Faculty of Education
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg, South Africa

Judy Kalman

Research Professor, Departamento de Investigaciones Educativas
(Department of Educational Research)
Centro de Investigación y Estudios Avanzados (Center for Research
and Advanced Studies)
National Polytechnic Institute
Mexico City, Mexico

Sia Barbara Ferguson Kamara

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Liberia)
Friends of Liberia
Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Zoyah Kinkead-Clark

Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education
School of Education
The University of the West Indies
Mona, Jamaica

Jiacheng Li

Executive associate dean

Shanghai Municipal Institute for Lifelong Education, East China Normal
University
Shanghai, China

Yan Li

Senior lecturer

Department of Education, Jiangnan University
Wuxi, China

Charles L. Mifsud

Professor, Language and Literacy Education
Director, Centre for Literacy
University of Malta
Valletta, Malta

Maia J. Migdalek

Education & Linguistics Expert
Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Mathematical and Experimental
Psychology, National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CIIPME)
University of Buenos Aires
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Chris Millora

Lecturer, Educational Studies
Department of Educational Studies
Goldsmiths, University of London
London, UK

Maria Theresa Z. Mora

Instructor, Department of Family Life and Child Development
College of Home Economics
University of the Philippines – Diliman
Quezon City, Philippines

Willy Ngaka

Associate Professor, Department of Adult,
Community and Lifelong Learning
Coordinator, Andragogy Lab
Kyambogo University
Kampala, Uganda

Gladys L. Ojea

Education & Linguistics Expert

Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Mathematical and
Experimental Psychology, National Scientific and Technical
Research Council (CIIPME)

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Solomon O. Ojedeji

Lecturer, Centre for Literacy Training and Development

Programme for Africa (CLTDPA)

University of Ibadan

Ibadan, Nigeria

Mary-Rose Puttick

Research Fellow, Institute for Community Research
and Development (ICRD)

University of Wolverhampton

Wolverhampton, UK

Anna Robinson-Pant

Professor Emerita, School of Education and Lifelong Learning

UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social

Transformation

University of East Anglia

Norwich, UK

Celia R. Rosemberg

Education & Linguistics Expert

Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Mathematical and
Experimental Psychology, National Scientific and Technical
Research Council (CIIPME)

University of Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires, Argentina

David J. Rosen

President

Newsome Associates

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Huai-Ming Sanchez

Senior Technical Advisor
World Education, a division of JSI Research & Triangle, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Anuprita Shukla

Teaching Fellow, Global Development
School of Global Development
University of East Anglia
Norwich, UK

Seyda Subasi Singh

PhD, Senior researcher
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria

Edward A. Socker

Co-Chair of Friends of Liberia Education Committee
Friends of Liberia
Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Alejandra Stein

Education & Linguistics Expert
Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Mathematical and
Experimental Psychology, National Scientific and Technical
Research Council (CIIPME)
University of Buenos Aires
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Nektarios Stellakis

Associate Professor, Department of Educational Sciences
and Early Childhood Education
Erasmus Departmental Coordinator
University of Patras
Patras, Greece

Michaela Tobin

Senior Program Officer
World Education, a division of JSI Research & Training, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Chrysoula Tsirmpa

Department of Educational Sciences and Early
Childhood Education
Education Counsellor for kindergarten teachers
in the region of Achaia, Greece
University of Patras
Patras, Greece

Burcu Sarı Uğurlu

Associate Professor, Child Development Department
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University
Çanakkale, Türkiye

Patricia Valdivia

Doctoral candidate, Departamento de Investigaciones
Educativas (Department of Educational Research)
Centro de Investigación y Estudios Avanzados
(Center for Research and Advanced Studies)
National Polytechnic Institute
Mexico City, Mexico

Stephanie Vickers

Teacher Trainer Educator
Friends of Liberia
Portland, Oregon, USA

Yvonne Capehart Weah

Program Manager
WE-CARE Foundation (Liberia)
Monrovia, Montserrado, Liberia

Miriam Westheimer

Chief Program Officer
HIPPY International
Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv, Israel



Chapter 1

Introduction

Esther Prins and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva

FILL programmes are an effective means of developing and improving the literacy, numeracy and other foundational skills of parents and children, promoting parents' support for children's education, and fostering wider benefits such as self-esteem, supportive social networks, civic participation, and adults' pursuit of further education and learning. Although intergenerational learning has been happening informally for millennia, family literacy and learning programmes emerged in the USA in the 1980s and have since been implemented across the globe (Lynch and Prins, 2022). UNESCO promotes FILL in its Member States as a way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 4, to '[e]nsure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning for all' (World Education Forum, 2015).

Researchers, practitioners and policy-makers around the world use different terms to denote programmes, practices and policies that are related to FILL. Such terms include:

- family literacy
- family learning
- family language, literacy and numeracy (FLLN)
- family and intergenerational learning
- home learning
- intergenerational (transgenerational) learning/literacy
- parent(al) education
- parental/family involvement, engagement, or participation (in children's learning, education)
- parental/family support for children's education (learning, academic achievement, academic success)
- two-generation programmes

In this book, authors use different terms depending on their topic, academic discipline, geographic area and/or their organization's nomenclature. For instance, 'family literacy' is most common in the USA, whereas 'family language, literacy and

numeracy' originates in the UK. Here, we follow UNESCO's usage by employing FILL as an umbrella term that encompasses the related terms above.

FILL practices, programmes, models and policies in low- or middle-income, non-Anglophone nations are poorly documented. To date, most of the academic literature has focused on FILL in high-income, English-speaking countries, particularly the USA, Canada and the UK. The exceptions include UNESCO-developed resources (e.g. Desmond and Elfert, 2008; Elfert, 2008; Elfert and Hanemann, 2011; Hanemann and Krolak, 2017; Hanemann et al., 2017; UEA UNESCO Chair, 2021; UNESCO, 2020) and a handful of scholarly publications (e.g. Desmond, 2012; Furness et al., 2023; Jung et al., 2010; Leung and Li, 2012; Rosemberg, Stein and Alam, 2013; Stein and Rosemberg, 2012). A recently published special issue of *Compare* ('Family Literacy and Indigenous Learning: Comparative Perspectives from the Global South', edited by Acharya, Mjaya and Robinson-Pant, 2025) included articles by several of our chapter authors and colleagues.

The literature also lacks a complex understanding of informal family and intergenerational relations and learning, including literacy, as practised around the world. FILL research and practice are rife with the colonial impulse to export or impose culturally specific assumptions about learning, literacy, education and families onto programme participants, communities and other countries (Binesse et al., this volume; Reyes and Torres, 2007). For example, models developed in the USA, Canada, UK, or other countries may not be suitable elsewhere due to differing approaches to language and literacy learning, parent-child roles and interactions, family structures (e.g. reliance on relatives and other adults who function as parents), educational systems and policies, and material resources. In many cultures, for instance, children and adults are not viewed as equal interlocutors, and it may not be considered appropriate for children to initiate talk (Van Kleeck, 1994). This is a challenge for FILL programmes that encourage a style of parent-child talk and interaction rooted in the practices of White, middle-class and often North American families.

Moreover, print literacy (particularly storybook reading) has become so dominant that it has often eclipsed other, valuable forms of intergenerational literacy and learning that predate or are practised outside formal schooling. Our understanding of family literacy would also be enriched by learning about programmes that effectively incorporate local knowledge and respond to community needs, whether or not they adhere to established FILL programme models.

To address these needs, this collection presents examples of conceptual discussions, policies, research and practices, primarily from low- or middle-income, non-Anglophone countries. By presenting geographically diverse

perspectives, it should create possibilities for transferring knowledge across linguistic, cultural and national borders. It will also contribute to scholarly efforts to show how family literacy, as a concept and practice, is situated in and informed by distinctive historical, social, cultural and political contexts (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2022; Anderson et al., 2010; Anderson, 2017; Auerbach, 1989; Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander and Hernandez, 2013; Lynch and Prins, 2022; Millora, 2023).

Overview

Here we summarize how the book is organized and the topic of each chapter. After the introduction, Chapter 2 proposes ‘an alternative framework for family literacy in the Global South’. This chapter explores the assumptions about literacy, families and intergenerational learning that underlie FILL in countries such as the USA and the UK. Drawing on ethnographic research in various African and Asian countries and with Indigenous peoples, it discusses how families informally share intergenerational knowledge, learning and literacies. The authors conclude with a framework intended to guide and ‘decolonize’ family literacy.

The following chapters are organized by geographic region, using UNESCO’s categories. In all, the book covers five continents and 15 countries, from Argentina to Uganda. Two chapters focus on a continent (Africa) or region (the Caribbean) rather than a specific country or countries. This geographic diversity is a strength of the book, as is the focus on countries classified as lower- or middle-income. The two exceptions are chapters on the UK that discuss FILL programmes and literacy practices among immigrant and refugee families who are linguistic and racial/ethnic minorities.

Africa

Chapter 3: Omobola O. Adelere and Solomon O. Ojedeji discuss Indigenous intergenerational learning practices in Africa, focusing on moonlight tales, apprenticeships and initiation ceremonies, with examples from several countries. They describe the detrimental effects of Western-style, colonial, formal schooling and urban development on these traditional practices, and explore how technologies could be used to document, revive, enrich and expand the traditional ways in which younger generations have historically learned from elders.

Chapter 4: Willy Ngaka examines an intergenerational digital literacy programme for children and adults (not necessarily their parents) offered by the Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association (URLCODA). Through community libraries located at schools, URLCODA has taught ICT (information and communication technologies) skills and provided mini-laptops for adults and

children. The findings highlight the importance of developing inventive ways of providing access to digital tools and skills and of fostering supportive, respectful relationships between instructors and learners of differing ages and among learners themselves.

Chapter 5: Leila Kajee's chapter focuses on informal literacy practices in a Muslim Indian immigrant family in Johannesburg, South Africa. Drawing on observational and interview data, Kajee highlights the multilingualism (Urdu, English, Arabic) in which a 6-year-old boy is immersed at home and school, the ways that home and school literacies intersect and diverge, and his mother's reflections on language, literacy, religion and culture as she decides how to raise and teach her child in the new host country.

Chapter 6: Jo-Anne L. Manswell Butty and colleagues analyse the Liberian Family Literacy Initiative, which includes a home visiting component based on the well-known HIPPY International (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) curriculum and an Adult Literacy Programme in English (added in 2018). They discuss implementation challenges and present evaluation results showing positive short- and long-term results for children (e.g. school readiness, academic performance) and print literacy gains for parents, as well as parents' desire to support their children's early learning.

Arab States

Chapter 7: Haiyan Hua and colleagues describe an intergenerational family literacy programme (part of the Literate Village Project) in Egypt. The mothers' education component helps rural mothers acquire or improve reading skills, while learning and practising ways that they – and other family members – can support their school-age children's literacy acquisition. Results from four research studies showed that mothers made literacy gains, helped their children achieve school success, and enlisted the help of husbands and other family members in this endeavour.

Asia and the Pacific

Chapter 8: Anuprita Shukla, Kamal Raj Devkota and Sushan Acharya draw on decolonial theories and ethnographic data to examine informal, intergenerational learning approaches among two Indigenous communities – the Tharu in Nepal and the Mahadeo Koli in India. They explore how oral and print literacies and intergenerational learning are implicated in religious practices and livelihood practices such as rearing buffaloes, running a small business and organizing a wild vegetable festival, and argue for legitimizing these informal types of literacy teaching and learning across generations.

Chapter 9: Focusing on rural China, Yan Li, Seyda Subasi Sing and Jiacheng Li examine parental involvement in children's early learning at home. Using data from four focus group discussions with rural mothers and fathers of different socio-economic status, they explore how rural parents perceived and were involved in supporting children's early learning. Salient findings include parents' differing perceptions of 'free development' and play-based learning, use of *guanxi* (familial ties) in education, and homework supervision practices.

Chapter 10: Josephine Louise F. Jamero and Maria Theresa Z. Mora describe how the Infant Development Programme for Remote Learning (IDP-RLP) in the Philippines was converted to a virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic. IDP-RLP equips parents to use 'play invitations' to support their young children's development. Using play kits (inexpensive, sustainable materials that encourage open-ended play), parents learned to involve infants in playful language and literacy routines. The authors describe what parents learned through the programme and how the IDP-RLP was and could be further adapted.

Europe

Chapter 11: Burcu Sarı Uğurlu and Adriana G. Bus ask whether access to digital picture books in Türkiye can promote book reading experiences and, in turn, the development of early literacy skills. They describe the Digital Children's Book Library, a free app that offers more than 200 Turkish picture books for 3- to 7-year-olds. Based on analysis of 60 digital books, they discuss the advantages and limitations of the books and their multimedia features for supporting children's learning and offer suggestions for increasing the efficacy of the Digital Children's Book Library.

Chapter 12: Charles L. Mifsud focuses on multilingual Malta, where the National Literacy Agency supports five types of family literacy programme for children from birth to the age of 11. He presents four case studies on the impact of these programmes on children and parents. Together, the results show how the Maltese family literacy programmes supported parental education, influenced children's and parents' literacy practices (including use of e-books), and elicited children's individual responses to stories and books, as well as revealed factors that hindered the participation of mothers with low socio-economic status.

Chapter 13: Chrysoula Tsirmpa and Nektarios Stellakis explore the relationship between parents' literacy beliefs and practices in the context of preschoolers' literacy development in Greece. Using data from a mixed-methods study of 13 public kindergartens, they compare the literacy beliefs and practices of 'facilitative' and 'conventional' parents, defined as those who play more or less active roles in supporting children's literacy.

Chapter 14: Mary-Rose Puttick reports on participatory ethnographic research with mothers and young children enrolled in a family literacy programme at a refugee community organization in Birmingham, UK. Situating the programme in the context of the politics and anti-migrant rhetoric in the UK, she describes the family literacies that emerged in visual, spatial and affective forms during the English classes. The chapter highlights seldom explored aspects of family literacy teaching and learning, such as emotions, artefacts and senses, from the perspectives and experiences of Afghan, Albanian and Kurdish immigrants in the UK.

Chapter 15: Jinyao Chang and Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen also focus on immigrants in England – three transnational, multi-generational Chinese immigrant families (grandparents, parents, children). They examine the differences between the first and second immigrant generations with respect to their attitudes and expectations about developing Chinese literacy and in their strategies for teaching the Chinese language. Guided by a family language policy framework, the study underscores families' commitment to maintaining Chinese as a heritage language and the complexity of heritage language development in the second and third generations.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Chapter 16: Based on a review of academic literature, reports, news articles and other literature, Arlene Bailey discusses initiatives in various countries in the Caribbean that used ICTs (e.g. online learning platforms, access to digital devices and the internet) to support children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and to guide parents and caregivers in helping children learn at home and school. She shows how the pandemic accelerated the need for navigating online spaces and revealed the critical role of family support in school-based and out-of-school learning activities.

Chapter 17: Zoyah Kinkad-Clark and Charlotte Hardacre describe how Jamaican families' culturally rooted family literacy practices have been ignored and devalued due to what they call 'epistemic exclusion'. After summarizing how slavery, colonialism and other socio-political factors have shaped education and literacy in Jamaica, they discuss some historical and contemporary everyday family literacy practices, particularly those featuring oral storytelling, music, dance and Jamaican patois (e.g. Miss Lou's *Ring Ding* TV show). They call for 'epistemic inclusion' that values and preserves these cultural and literacy practices.

Chapter 18: Celia Renata Rosemberg and colleagues report on an Argentine early family literacy programme (2004–present) that serves families in extreme poverty, including urban Spanish monolingual children and Spanish-Qom bilingual children from Indigenous, semi-rural and rural communities. The intercultural, bilingual curriculum and educational activities are based on collaborative ethnographic research and linguistic analysis. The authors describe the learning activities, ethnographic children's storybooks and digital early literacy materials, and programme implementation in family and community settings.

Chapter 19: Patricia Valdivia and Judy Kalman analyse two literacy activities within one family who live in a working-class Mexico City neighbourhood. Drawing on qualitative data, they examine six family members' engagement in a collective book-writing project and the adult children's mediation of their mother's efforts to learn to use her cell phone. They describe how people learn and appropriate print and digital literacies and construct knowledge by participating in meaningful, everyday activities involving multiple generations, leading to new knowledge and capabilities.

In **Chapter 20**, Esther Prins and colleagues provide a framework for analysing, revising, or creating FILL policies. This chapter is the first academic publication on international FILL policies. Informed by critical policy analysis, it proposes 12 guiding questions and elements to include in FILL policy (e.g. funding, intended beneficiaries, cultural relevance, who is involved in policy-making), illustrated by international examples. The questions cover both policy content and policy-making processes, and underscore concerns about equity and participation of stakeholders, including programme participants.

Themes

Collectively, the chapters include research on rural and urban communities, and on groups whose language, literacy and educational practices have received little attention – for example, Indian immigrants in South Africa, third-generation Chinese families in the UK, Afghan, Albanian and Kurdish immigrants and refugees in the UK, Indigenous families in Argentina, India and Nepal, and rural parents in China.

The topics discussed range from the micro-scale of linguistic and literacy interactions in one family to the macro-scale of family literacy policy and theoretical frameworks. Some chapters document how language, literacy and intergenerational learning are practised informally on varying scales, namely families, communities and geographic regions. Other chapters analyse non-formal FILL programmes, investigate parents' perceptions of and involvement in supporting their children's education, or describe initiatives that make reading

more accessible. Several chapters analyse FILL programming and support for families during the COVID-19 pandemic or describe creative ways of teaching digital literacies and of using digital platforms and technologies.

Multilingualism within families, communities, regions and programmes is another theme. These chapters stress the need to offer bilingual or multilingual programming for families and show how families incorporate two or more languages into their intergenerational learning practices in the home. Languages should be viewed as a resource, rather than a barrier, for cultivating children's and families' learning and literacy.

Lastly, the book addresses the multiplicity of FILL practices and programme models. One study examines a well-known FILL model (HIPPIY International), while all the other programmes were individually designed. Together, the chapters highlight learning outside of formal institutions and argue for locally relevant programming that incorporates families' knowledge and the ways they use – and want to use – language and literacies in their daily lives. The book, as a whole, underscores the belief that there are many paths to literacy and that participants flourish when programmes are informed by community histories, traditions and cultural resources, and respond to their existing and emerging needs.

References

- Acharya, S., Mjaya, A. and Robinson-Pant, A. (2025) 'Family Literacy and Indigenous Learning: Comparative Perspectives from the Global South - Editorial introduction', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 55(1). Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ccom20/55/1>
- Acharya, S. and Robinson-Pant, A. (2022) 'Towards a reconceptualisation of family literacy: exploring religious literacy learning and practices in two communities in Nepal', *Compare* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03057925.2022.2149241>.
- Anderson, J. et al. (2010) 'Taking stock of family literacy: some contemporary perspectives', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 10(1), pp. 33–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798409357387>.
- Anderson, J. (2017) 'Family literacy programs in immigrant and refugee communities: some observations from the field', *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Preprint]. Available at: <http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Anderson-1.pdf>.
- Auerbach, E.R. (1989) 'Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy', *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(2), pp. 165–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.59.2.h23731364l283156>.

- Baquedano-López, P., Alexander, R.A. and Hernandez, S.J. (2013) 'Equity issues in parental and community involvement in schools: what teacher educators need to know', *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), pp. 149–182. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x12459718>.
- Desmond, S. (2012) 'Family literacy programmes in South Africa', in B.H. Wasik (ed.) *Handbook of family literacy*. Routledge, pp. 370–384.
- Desmond, S. and Elfert, M. (2008) *Family literacy: experiences from Africa and around the world*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000180481>.
- Elfert, M. (2008) *Family literacy: global approach to lifelong learning; effective practices in family literacy and intergenerational learning around the world*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001777/177753e.pdf>.
- Elfert, M. and Hanemann, U. (2011) *Review of international experience and best practice in family literacy: in the framework of the CapEFA Mauritania 2009–2011*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: https://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/Literacy/en/Review_UIL_Family_Literacy_Mauritania_2011_final.pdf.
- Furness, J. et al. (2023) 'A Mātauranga Māori perspective of literacy for adult learners', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(2), pp. 309–324. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-023-00302-6>.
- Hanemann, U. et al. (2017) *Learning together across generations: guidelines for family literacy and learning programmes*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248446/PDF/248446eng.pdf.multi>.
- Hanemann, U. and Krolak, L. (2017) *Fostering a culture of reading and writing: examples of dynamic literate environments; selected case studies from* <http://litbase.uil.unesco.org>. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000257933/PDF/257933eng.pdf.multi>.
- Jung, H.S. et al. (2010) 'Development and implementation of a family literacy program for multicultural families in South Korea', *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 16(2), pp. 73–93.
- Leung, C.B. and Li, Y. (2012) 'Family literacy in China', in C.B. Leung and J. Ruan (eds) *Perspectives on teaching and learning Chinese literacy in China*. Springer Netherlands, pp. 199–210. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4822-4_12.

- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Millora, C. (2023) “Social-contextual” approaches to family literacy programmes: policy and practice lessons from Nigeria, Mexico and Nepal’, *Compare* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2023.2254231>.
- Reyes, L.V. and Torres, M.N. (2007) ‘Decolonizing family literacy in a culture circle: reinventing the family literacy educator’s role’, *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 7(1), pp. 73–94. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798407074837>.
- Rosemberg, C.R., Stein, A. and Alam, F. (2013) ‘At home and at school: bridging literacy for children from poor rural or marginalized urban communities’, in K. Hall et al. (eds) *International handbook of research on children’s literacy, learning, and culture*. Wiley, pp. 67–82.
- Stein, A. and Rosemberg, C.R. (2012) ‘Redes de colaboración en situaciones de alfabetización familiar con niños pequeños. Un estudio en poblaciones urbano marginadas de Argentina.’ *Interdisciplinaria Revista de Psicología y Ciencias Afines*, 29(1), pp. 95–108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.16888/interd.2012.29.1.6>.
- UEA UNESCO Chair (2021) *Family literacy, indigenous learning and sustainable development: ethnographic Insights from Ethiopia, Malawi, Nepal and the Philippines*. Norwich: UEA. Available at: https://www.uea.ac.uk/f/185167/x/d48dc4737d/synthesis-report_final_ecopy-compressed.pdf
- UNESCO (2020) *Unlocking the potential of family and intergenerational learning*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373512>.
- Van Kleeck, A. (1994) ‘Potential cultural bias in training parents as conversational partners with their children who have delays in language development’, *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 3(1), pp. 67–78.
- World Education Forum (2015) *Education 2030: Incheon declaration and framework for action for the implementation of sustainable development goal 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. UNESCO, World Education Forum 2015 and Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656>.

Section 1

FILL policies

and theoretical

frameworks



Chapter 2

Towards an alternative framework for family literacy in the Global South

Hélène Binesse, Chris Millora, Sheila Aikman and
Anna Robinson-Pant

Introduction

New ways of thinking about family literacy are urgently needed to develop approaches that respond to the educational aspirations and experiences of communities in the Global South.¹ This chapter reimagines family literacy by exposing the assumptions that have informed many programmes in the USA, Europe and Canada. When family literacy initiatives are implemented in the Global South, these underpinning ideas – such as targeting disadvantaged families, beliefs that parents are the main caregivers, taking the nuclear family as the norm and school as the most important place for literacy interactions – have often been transplanted to those very different contexts. The experiences of government and non-governmental organization (NGO) literacy providers suggest that such approaches are less appropriate as a starting point for developing family literacy initiatives in countries of the Global South.

This chapter first explores the assumptions about literacy, families and intergenerational learning that have informed family literacy projects in the Global North. Drawing on recent ethnographic research conducted in the Global South, the second section develops a comparative dimension, identifying key differences and influences and discussing how non-mainstream families and languages have been framed in other country contexts. Lastly, we develop a new framework to guide and ‘decolonize’ family literacy in the Global South, drawing

1 As Dados and Connell (2012) point out, ‘the term Global South functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment’ and ‘marks a shift from a focus on development or cultural difference towards an emphasis on geopolitical power relations’ (p. 12–13). Particularly relevant to this chapter, the term signals histories of colonialism, marginalized languages and epistemologies, and we have chosen this terminology in preference to ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ income countries (which emphasize economic inequalities).

on research with and by Indigenous peoples² to look at alternative principles, such as valuing place-based knowledge and self-identification, and focusing on learning spaces beyond formal institutions. By building on existing forms of knowledge and literacy practices and engaging with whole communities rather than selected families, this approach could not only help to reimagine family literacy in the Global South but also enhance the quality and relevance of programmes in the Global North.

Exploring the origins of family literacy

Research on literacy within families, mainly focused on disadvantaged families and low-income communities in the USA, originally investigated the underlying reasons for their children's poor school achievements. Based on the assumption that socio-economic background, cultural differences and family structure impeded literacy development, policy-makers first supported children's early learning within schools through family literacy initiatives in the 1980s (Gadsden, 2008). Many family literacy programmes assumed that these 'problematic' home environments were not conducive to literacy learning because parents lacked the resources, (literacy) skills and time to effectively support their children (Anderson et al., 2010; Reyes and Torres, 2007). Family literacy was promoted because of its contribution to improving children's reading ability, cognition, behaviour and school achievement. Within this approach, home literacy was somewhat neglected. To enhance interventions, the proposed solution was to teach parents to perform the role of teachers, bringing 'school and middle-class values and forms of literacy into diverse homes' (Street, 1995, p. 8).

The development of parenting skills became central to policies helping parents to develop literacy and become better supporters of their children's learning. Shared storybook reading was promoted as a common literacy activity, as was engaging in school-like literacy tasks and particular types of language game (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019). Parents were often seen as the key teachers of their children in these family literacy programmes, overlooking the role that other family members – siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles – and community members played in supporting children's literacy practices and learning activities (Anderson et al., 2010; Lynch and Prins, 2022).

A critique of some family literacy programmes was that they draw on a deficit approach 'rooted in an assumption of a single, homogenous society and a single homogenous literacy required of its members' and consequently 'fail to see the

2. By considering here some examples from Latin America and Asia as well as broader research, we are not conflating Indigenous peoples with racial or ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, or local communities, but recognizing their inherent rights in international law (UN E/C.19/2022/L.8 Chapter 1, B.1). Moreover, there is no one definition of Indigenous peoples that adequately covers their diverse societies and geographical and political contexts (see www.esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1/pdf).

richness, complexity, and diversity of other peoples' lives' (Street, 1995, p. 9). Exploring questions regarding culturally sensitive literacy definitions in the 1970s and 1980s, Taylor (1983) researched literacy values and everyday literacy practices within the family as the originating and organizing principle that people share. She challenged school-based literacies, stressing the importance of ethnography to uncover the diversity of literacy practices in the home. Through an ethnographic study with three communities in the southern USA, Heath (1983) investigated the complex relationships within these home-school-community contexts, based on a (dis)continuity of literacy practices and (bi)directionality of learning, and highlighted the richness of children's linguistic practices in historically underserved communities. Early research by Heath and Taylor uncovered the tensions created by cultural and home differences when students' experiences were not familiar to or valued in the school setting (Gadsden, 2008).

Imposing a family literacy programme based on 'Western' approaches may be related to what Reyes and Torres describe as the 'colonization' of traditionally non-mainstream families by 'fixing' them and measuring them against European-American middle-class family literacy practices.

Despite such research on the diversity of cultural and social contexts, family literacy policy and practice remained uniform in approach. Programmes were designed to address low literacy within poor families and dismissed bringing home-based literacy practices into schools, as if these did not exist (Reyes and Torres, 2007). Policy-makers focused on creating richer literate environments to respond to educational and psychological studies that emphasized the strong links between mothers' low formal literacy and children's school failure (Gadsden, 2008). The underlying assumption was that parents' transfer of skills to children is one-way, and that if this does not happen an 'intergenerational cycle of illiteracy' would be created (Auerbach, 1995, p. 75). These family literacy models have often been 'transplanted' to very different cultural contexts, disregarding the (inter) generational literacy and learning practices that families already engage in.

Whitehouse and Colvin (2001) noted an 'unstated belief that transforming culturally diverse families to mirror mainstream families will produce educational and economic success for their children' (p. 212). Imposing a family literacy programme based on 'Western' approaches may be related to what Reyes and Torres (2007) describe as the 'colonization' of traditionally non-mainstream families by 'fixing' them and measuring them against European-American middle-class family literacy practices (Ada and Zubizarreta, 2001; Panofsky, 2000; Prins

and Toso, 2008; Valdés, 1996). We develop an alternative approach that builds on research findings about diverse experiences of intergenerational and Indigenous learning in the Global South.

Family literacy in the Global South: What influences the way we see intergenerational learning in differing cultural contexts?

Much research has already challenged the deficit thinking outlined above, presenting evidence that, regardless of their socio-economic status and educational level, families have rich practices and traditions that involve texts and support literacy learning (cf. Auerbach, 1989; Gadsden, 2008). Such research has often been conducted with migrant communities in the USA, Canada and UK, exploring everyday literacy practices and texts. It investigates activities at home that are not school-related, such as reading religious texts, collecting recipes, sharing magazine articles and making charts of basketball scores (Land, 2008; McTavish, 2009; Reyes and Torres, 2007), as well as the creation of literate home environments through play and leisure such as watching *telenovelas* (soap operas) and engaging in fun *pláticas* (conversations) and jokes at home (Torres and Hurtado-Vivas, 2011).

As one participant insisted, 'It is very important to know that we all have different modes of reading, writing, and numeracy. We all have our own ways!'

The imposition of school-like family literacy practices has led to some parents' frustration that they are failing to support their children in the right way (see Land, 2008; Reyes and Torres, 2007). Children themselves can feel alienated by school activities that are so different from their home culture (McTavish, 2009). For example, analysis of a reading programme in a low-income US Latino community found that reading activities were very structured and used stories unfamiliar in Latino cultures, with the result that participants regarded the activity as *castigo* or punishment (Janes and Kermani, 2001). In another study, Latino families in family literacy programmes rejected top-down instructions from facilitators; as one participant insisted, 'It is very important to know that we all have different modes of reading, writing, and numeracy. We all have our own ways' (Reyes and Torres, 2007, pp. 85–86).

The tensions between different ways of learning in families can also be understood by looking at family literacy programmes that aim to 'induct' newly resettled refugee and migrant families into host countries. These families are

often problematically seen as ‘non-mainstream’, and family literacy programmes are assumed to be the means to facilitate their integration into their new society. The assumption of some early parenting and family literacy programmes that non-literate parents are less concerned about their children’s education has long been challenged (see, for instance, critiques by Reyes and Torres, 2017; Hope, 2011). Research has demonstrated that most immigrant families see education as vital to mobility and reducing generational poverty (Auerbach, 1989; Reyes and Hurtado-Vivas, 2011). Many family literacy programmes focus on enhancing refugees’ competence in the host country’s dominant language, and at times fail to recognize that multilingualism is the norm for most families (Hope, 2011; McTavish, 2009). For Hope (2011), the most effective family literacy programmes for refugee families are those that build upon or draw from their rich cultural capital in designing programme provisions.

These examples highlight the tensions that exist when expectations around what family literacy is or should be differ among stakeholders. They point to the importance of understanding how family literacy can be practised differently in different cultural contexts.

In their anthology of family literacy programmes in Africa, Desmond and Elfert (2008) argued that literate environments in African homes were much more limited than in the Global North, with constrained access to resources and reading materials. Recent ethnographic research into family literacy and Indigenous learning in Nepal, Ethiopia, the Philippines and Malawi (UEA UNESCO Chair, 2021) offers an alternative, broader perspective on the meaning of a ‘literate environment’ by exploring Indigenous texts and local literacy practices, including digital literacies. This research revealed a complex picture of the diverse multimodal, multilingual ways in which parents and children shared and constructed knowledge. In Nepal, religious literacies and texts played an important role in intergenerational literacy and learning development. For instance, in one Muslim community the Quran was found in every household, and teaching of Islamic literacy took place not only in formal institutions like madrasas, but also at home, with teenage girls teaching their siblings and neighbours informally (Acharya and Devkota, 2021). In contrast to school education in these communities, as this study pointed out, ‘this informal literacy teaching involves not only decoding the letters and understanding the text...but is also about learning to perform through reading the prayers in public’ (UEA UNESCO Chair, 2021, p. 58). In a Gurung Buddhist community, young boys were learning to read Tibetan Bon scriptures with priests and then helping their elders to digitize these texts to make them more widely available.

Similarly, in Ethiopia, the priests of the Orthodox Church traditional schools supported young boys to become proficient in religious literacies through a

highly structured approach (Warkineh et al., 2023). The study comments on the broader meaning of literacy in this context: 'Literacy is valued not only for interpretation of religious texts, but also extends to the knowledge of how to prepare the materials and the development of calligraphy skills' (UEA UNESCO Chair, 2021, p. 59). These examples demonstrate that the notion of a 'literate environment' in literacy policy has often focused on more formal and bureaucratic texts and resources such as national newspapers, official posters, public notices, or libraries, and so has failed to recognize the informal texts and literacy practices that are dominant and valued in many countries

The Malawi study concluded that 'learning does not take place by simply listening to someone explaining it to you in a decontextualized situation. You learn through involvement!'

The concept of 'literacy' as synonymous with reading and writing has also limited the approach to family literacy promoted through development programmes. Within communities in the Global South, family literacy programmes have tended to focus on literacy as decoding and coding meaning through written script. Recent research with rural communities in Malawi (Mjaya et al., 2021) analysed how young people and their elders constructed and shared knowledge related to their livelihoods. For instance, when collecting mushrooms in the hills, adults would explain to their children how to tell if they were poisonous or edible, as well as how to ensure the mushrooms were picked, stored and carried carefully for marketing: 'Tilimanja told us that to identify the mushrooms, they relied mostly on their sense of sight and smell as well as the knowledge passed on to them by those who knew the mushrooms' (UEA UNESCO Chair, 2021, p. 56). This complex, scientific, in-depth knowledge of the texture, look and differences between mushrooms was shared informally in a structured yet spontaneous way, and print literacy played no part in the process.

The Malawi study also investigated how fishermen passed on skills to their children, for instance by using a tree like a compass, as one fisherman explained: 'So, you pick two trees on land and see their positions relative to each other as you paddle. When you see that one of the trees is hidden behind the one in front, then you set your nets' (ibid., p. 57). Taking this perspective meant not only recognizing different approaches to teaching and learning based on demonstration and oral communication, but also emphasizing the value systems behind such practices and demonstrating the limitations of 'schooled' literacy promoted through formal literacy or numeracy programmes. The Malawi study concluded that 'learning does not take place by simply listening to someone

explaining it to you in a decontextualized situation. You learn through involvement' (ibid., p. 57) This understanding of learning challenges the text-based 'literacy first' (Rogers, 2000) approach that underpins many family literacy programmes

The notion that 'parents are the first teachers', while a common expectation informing many family literacy programmes (cf. Anderson et al., 2011; Auerbach, 1989), is not universal. Working with US Latino communities, Torres and Hurtado-Vivas (2011) found that immigrant Spanish-speaking parents 'have come with the idea that they educate their children with values, respect and a desire to learn', while it is the school that should give them the necessary 'instruction' for a better future (p. 237). Research in the Philippines explored the changing roles of families and parents in a rural community that was affected by female migration to higher-income countries in search of work (Lontoc, Vizconde and Castro, 2021). Grandparents and other family members increasingly stepped in to support children's schooling, while also learning from their grandchildren how to use mobile phones and other technologies. The study revealed the importance of two-way intergenerational learning in relation to these different literacy practices.

Turning from everyday intergenerational literacy practices to family literacy policy and programmes in the Global South, the few documented examples appear to adopt similar approaches to those in the USA and UK, being based in school classrooms and aiming to support children's reading through parental involvement. However, Desmond and Elfert (2008) noted that some family literacy programmes in Africa were not limited to basic literacy but included other aspects such as citizenship, health, human rights and the environment, with literacy as just one component. This model connects closely with 'functional literacy' approaches, where literacy is connected to livelihood activities or conscientization processes. For example, the Mother and Child Education Programme in Nigeria sees the literacy learning of mothers and their children as a component of the programme's wider aim of economic empowerment (see UIL, 2015).

This section has drawn on research into literacies and intergenerational learning to expand our understanding of what family literacy might mean in different cultural contexts, as well as various (e.g. religious, agricultural, political) literacy 'domains' (Barton, 1994). Experiences documented by researchers include multilingualism as the norm rather than exception; strong reliance on informal and intergenerational learning for livelihoods; shared identities, literacies and languages; the importance of multimodal and oral communicative practices for intergenerational learning; and the interconnectedness of knowledge, place and identity. Programmes responding to these different contexts have adopted broader aims than simply promoting 'schoolled' literacy and have recognized that intergenerational learning can take place across, as well as within, families. These aims and insights have led to a greater focus on literacy and learning between generations across the community as a whole.

Towards a new framework for developing family literacy

It is clear that new principles are needed to develop family literacy programmes that respond to the different life experiences, values and forms of knowledge shared intergenerationally in many communities. Rather than transplanting dominant, school-focused approaches into different cultural contexts, we suggest that literacy providers could build on recent research into intergenerational literacy and learning processes to develop more locally relevant family literacy programmes in all contexts. As an alternative to beginning from a critique or an adaptation of family literacy in the UK, USA, or Canada, the starting point could be to identify and build on the distinctive perspectives on learning discussed above.

Research with and by Indigenous peoples, reflecting the broad concepts of education, learning and knowledge embedded in their distinct cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems, offers important insights for developing alternative frameworks for family literacy. Indigenous peoples have always maintained and developed complex education systems rooted in cultural principles and practices refined over generations (McKinley and Smith, 2019, p. 1), based on shared values and meaningful social interactions. These systems are integral to their ways of life, families and communities, and to them as peoples. To refer to this learning and knowledge as a system is to emphasize its complexity, fluidity and continual motion, distinct from a programmatic or linear sense of education as formal or informal or singularly focused on 'literacy'. Indigenous learning or education systems should not be seen in terms of a superficial notion of 'tradition' which equates it with folklore, antiquity or ancient knowledge that is static and unchanging, but should rather be understood as new and evolving (IWGIA, 2021, ff.1). The term 'traditional' is important, however, when applied to knowledge, practices, languages and literacies that relate Indigenous peoples to their territories and identities. In this sense 'traditional' is also contemporary and part of Indigenous people's lives today.

Forms of knowledge and learning are shared, transferred and transformed across generations through learning from life and for a particular way of life. The concept of lifeways (Blaser, 2004; Ødegaard and Rivera Andía, 2019) helps to understand shared values and meaningful social interactions, including interactions with human and non-human entities in diverse Indigenous cosmologies. Lifeways refers to ways of life of peoples committed to a shared way of life, and, as with social relationships and language forms, they are not static (Tom et al., 2019). Indigenous peoples lobby and struggle with and against the loss of language, identity and forms of knowledge that have hitherto passed down the generations. Their education and learning systems sustain their

lifeways and are embedded in their histories and visions of the world and the future, distinct from those promoted by states and markets (Ødegaard and Rivera Andía, 2019).

A framework for understanding, researching and collaborating with Indigenous peoples on their diverse education systems derives from sociocultural concerns rather than instrumental or strategic 'educational' aims. The starting point is the Indigenous peoples and their lifeways as they, themselves, express them and the meanings they hold, rather than an attempt to make a functional family literacy programme culturally appropriate. The concept of lifeways expands Moll and colleagues' (1992) concept of 'funds of knowledge', giving more agency to people to decide what counts as valid knowledge (see critiques of Moll et al. in Oughton, 2010).

Indigenous peoples' struggles to maintain their distinctive historical knowledge systems and identities are often manifest in efforts to reinforce and revitalise their oral languages.

Indigenous peoples' struggles to maintain their distinctive historical knowledge systems and identities are often manifest in efforts to reinforce and revitalise their oral languages. As Wyman et al. (2014, p. 18) state, 'Desanitizing, reclaiming and creatively employing these histories remain central to fostering indigenous linguistic and educational self-determination'. Although one way of reinforcing and revitalizing Indigenous languages has been to develop written forms suitable for school use and to teach younger generations, Tom et al. (2019, p. 5) call for a 'recentering of oral traditions'. The teaching of oral traditions and the enactment of Indigenous stories, myths, songs and narratives encapsulate theories of life, values and instructions for how to live in the world (Sumida Huaman, 2019). This kind of learning takes place through participation and relationships within family and community, but also from plants, forests, rivers, animals and other components of diverse Indigenous cosmologies.

Through continuous learning through and for their lifeways, Indigenous peoples are developing their knowledge and linguistic repertoires to serve them in their changing lives (Aikman, 2017). Indigenous youth face multiple challenges in relation to knowledge and language development, as their societies are confronted with the rapid pace and magnitude of change in both urban and rural spaces (McCarty, 2011). Some research examines how young Indigenous people are using their learning in new ways to counter racism, discrimination and marginalization and investigates the diverse plurilingual contexts in which they interact. The evidence challenges notions of 'language endangerment' or 'language loss' to question what young people are doing with their forms of knowledge and

languages. Examples include Zavala's (2019) research in Lima, Peru, where young Quechua are shifting dominant ideologies about Indigenous languages, official intercultural education programmes and, indeed, Indigenous peoples. She noted how a Quechua woman's videos about traditional types of food also discussed current issues such as corruption and university reform. Cru (2013), working with Mayan peoples in Yucatan, showed how young men and women were using rap, Facebook, television and other media to formulate powerful social critiques, and were identifying non-institutional domains, particularly the arts, to promote Mayan culture from the ground up and make their voices heard.

We can explore the potential to develop new approaches that build on these differing understandings and experiences of education in its widest sense.

Taking these ideas and research findings about Indigenous peoples, languages, literacies and forms of knowledge into our earlier discussion of family literacy, we can explore the potential to develop new approaches that build on these differing understandings and experiences of education in its widest sense. This approach could be underpinned by the notion of education as complex and fluid, challenging the usual binary of formal and informal learning through developing strong connections between the spaces where younger and older people are sharing and constructing new forms of knowledge in everyday life. The concept of 'lifeways' presents an exciting starting point for developing literacy and learning programmes that are embedded in people's lives and livelihoods, rather than focused on responding to economic and political objectives. This means moving away from the dominant functional literacy approach, which prioritizes instrumental uses of literacy, and finding ways family literacy could respond to and support processes of sociolinguistic change. In relation to language, this would suggest, for instance, a focus on what communities are doing with language and literacies, both dominant and local.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a first step towards reconceptualizing family literacy and developing a new framework to inform policy and programmes. Central to this approach is the aim of finding out more about people's experiences of and aspirations for intergenerational learning through building on in-depth ethnographic research. However, the challenge identified by Gadsden (2008) in the UK and US context remains, namely, how to address the tension that has persisted in the field of family literacy, which "centers on disjunctures between research that emphasizes multiple literacies, sociocultural contexts, and social

change in understanding families' learning and the policy push for instructional programming for parents and children that assumes universality of interests, needs, and backgrounds of learners" (p. 103).

We have focused on only one possible starting point for developing alternative approaches to family literacy, through presenting ideas about existing local literacy practices, Indigenous identities, learning and literacies – perspectives that we see as having much to offer in contrasting cultural contexts, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Our aim is not to suggest that these principles should be applied universally, but rather to identify methodological and theoretical approaches that begin from a 'resource' rather than a 'deficit' perspective on families and communities. Taking such an approach could result in family literacy programmes that look at what is already there and what is already valued, and build on everyday literacies and intergenerational learning, targeting whole communities rather than individual families. We can then work towards family literacy for all – a more inclusive approach in the Global North as well as the Global South.

References

- Acharya, S. and Devkota, K.R. (2021) *Family literacy, indigenous learning and sustainable development: proof of concept pilot: Nepal report*. Norwich. Available at: www.uea.ac.uk/documents/96135/5482035/UNESCO_NEPAL_final+version_6+sept+smaller.pdf/c237c2c8-28fa-9484-656f-0cb4d9e83d93?t=1631000182725 (Accessed: 9 June 2022).
- Ada, A.F. and Zubizarreta, R. (2001) 'Parent narratives: the cultural bridge between Latino parents and their children', in M. de la L. Reyes and J. Halcon (eds) *The best for our children: critical perspectives on literacy for Latino students*. New-York: Teachers College Press, pp. 229–244.
- Aikman, S. (2017) 'Changing Livelihoods and language repertoires', *International Journal of the Sociology of Education*, 246, pp. 85–108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijse-2017-0014>.
- Anderson, J. et al. (2010) 'Taking stock of family literacy: some contemporary perspectives', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 10(1), pp. 33–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798409357387>.
- Auerbach, E.R. (1989) 'Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy', *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(2), pp. 165–182. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.59.2.h23731364l283156>.
- Auerbach, E.R. (1995) 'From deficit to strength: changing perspectives on family literacy', in G. Weinstein-Shr and E. Quintero (eds) *Immigrant learners and their families: literacy to connect the generations*. Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, pp. 63–76.

- Barton, D. (1994) *Literacy: an introduction to the ecology of written language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Blaser, M. (2004) 'Life projects: indigenous peoples' agency and development', in M. Blaser (ed.) *In the way of development: indigenous peoples, life projects & globalization*. London: Zed Books, pp. 26–44.
- Compton-Lilly, C.F., Rogers, R.L. and Ellison, T.L. (2019) 'A meta-ethnography of family literacy scholarship: ways with metaphors and silence', *Reading Research Quarterly* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.272>.
- Cru, J. (2013) 'Language diversity in Mexico', in T.L. McCarthy and S. Coronel-Molina (eds) *Indigenous language revitalization in the Americas*. Routledge.
- Dados, N. and Connell, R. (2012) 'The global south', *Contexts*, 11(1), pp. 12–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504212436479>.
- Desmond, S. and Elfert, M. (2008) *Family literacy: Experiences from Africa and around the world*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000180481>.
- Gadsden, V. (2008) 'Family literacy', in B. Street and N.H. Hornberger (eds) *Encyclopedia of language and education, volume 2: literacy*. Springer, pp. 163–177.
- Heath, S.B. (1983) *Ways with words: language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hope, J. (2011) 'New insights into family learning for refugees: bonding, bridging and building transcultural capital', *Literacy*, 45(2), pp. 91–97.
- IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) (2021) *The indigenous world 2021*. Copenhagen. Available at: <https://iwgia.org/en/resources/publications/305-books/4513-the-indigenous-world-2021.html> (Accessed: 9 June 2022).
- Janes, H. and Kermani, H. (2001) 'Caregivers' story reading to young children in family literacy programs: pleasure or punishment?', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44(5), pp. 458–466.
- Land, S. (2008) 'Whose family literacy? Is there a "right" kind of family literacy that is exclusively middle class and Eurocentric?', in D. Snoeks and M. Elfert (eds) *Family literacy: experiences from Africa and around the world*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- Lontoc, G., Vizconde, C. and Castro, B. de (2021) *Exploring the role of local and indigenous knowledge systems in promoting family literacy and lifelong learning in the Philippines*. Norwich. Available at: https://www.uea.ac.uk/f/185167/x/0f13836463/unesco_philippines_final_6-sept.pdf (Accessed: 9 June 2022).

- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) 'The role of other family and community members in family literacy', in *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge, pp. 151–162. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429352805-14>.
- McCarty, T.L. (2011) *Ethnography and language policy*. London: Routledge.
- McKinley, E. and Smith, L.T. (2019) 'Towards self-determination in Indigenous education research: an introduction', in E. McKinley and L.T. Smith (eds) *Handbook of indigenous education*. Singapore: Springer, pp. 1–15.
- McTavish, M. (2009) "'I get my facts from the Internet": a case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy in in-school and out-of-school contexts', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 9(1), pp. 3–28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798408101104>.
- Mjaya, A. et al. (2021) *Exploring literacy and intergenerational learning for sustainable development in Malawi*. Norwich. Available at: www.uea.ac.uk/documents/96135/5482035/UNESCO_Malawi_final+version_6+Sept.pdf/0dc7311b-92ab-9c9c-369e-2e4f76666181?t=1631000166536 (Accessed: 9 June 2022).
- Moll, L.C. et al. (1992) 'Funds of knowledge for teaching: using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classroom', *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), pp. 132–141.
- Ødegaard, C. and Rivera Andía, J. (2019) *Indigenous Life Projects and Extractivism. Ethnographies From South America*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oughton, H. (2010) 'Funds of knowledge – a conceptual critique', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 42(1), pp. 63–89. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2010.11661589>.
- Panofsky, C.P. (2000) 'Examining the research narrative in early literacy: the case of parent child book reading activity', in *What counts as literacy: challenging the school standard*. New-York: Teachers College Press, pp. 190–212.
- Prins, E. and Toso, B.W. (2008) 'Defining and measuring parenting for educational success: a critical discourse analysis of the parent education profile', *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), pp. 555–596. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831208316205>.
- Reyes, L.V. and Torres, M.N. (2007) 'Decolonizing family literacy in a culture circle: reinventing the family literacy educator's role', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 7(1), pp. 73–94. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798407074837>.
- Rogers, A. (2000) 'Literacy comes second: working with groups in developing societies', *Development in Practice*, 10(2), pp. 236–240.

- Street, B.V. (1995) 'Foreword', in G. Weinstein-Shr and E. Quintero (eds) *Immigrant learners and their families: literacy to connect the generations*. Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co.Inc., pp. 8–14.
- Sumida Huaman, E. (2019) 'Yachayninchis (our knowledge): agriculture, environment, and human rights education in the Peruvian Andes', in E. McKinley and L.T. Smith (eds) *Handbook of Indigenous education*. Singapore: Springer.
- Taylor, D. (1983) *Family literacy: young children learning to read and write*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Tom, M.N., Sumida Huaman, E. and McCarty, T.L. (2019) 'Indigenous knowledges as vital contributions to sustainability', *International Review of Education*, 65(1), pp. 1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09770-9>.
- Torres, M.N. and Hurtado-Vivas, R. (2011) 'Playing fair with latino parents as parents, not teachers: beyond family literacy as assisting homework', *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 10(3), pp. 223–244. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2011.581108>.
- UEA UNESCO Chair (2021) *Family literacy, indigenous learning and sustainable development: ethnographic Insights from Ethiopia, Malawi, Nepal and the Philippines*. Norwich. Available at: https://www.uea.ac.uk/f/185167/x/d48dc4737d/synthesis-report_final_ecopy-compressed.pdf (Accessed: 9 June 2022).
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2015) *Mother and Child Education Programme (MCEP), Nigeria*. Available at: <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/mother-and-child-education-programme-mcep-nigeria> (Accessed: 2 July 2024).
- Valdés, G. (1996) *Con respeto: bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Warkineh, T. et al. (2023) 'Indigenous and intergenerational learning in families and communities in Ethiopia: what can adult literacy programmes learn from the traditional Orthodox church education?', *Compare* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2023.2220068>.
- Whitehouse, M. and Colvin, C. (2001) 'Families: deficit discourse and family literacy', in *Already reading: children, texts, and contexts*, pp. 212–219.
- Wyman, L.T., McCarty, T.L. and Nicholas, S.E. (2014) *Indigenous youth and multilingualism: language identity, ideology, and practice in dynamic cultural worlds*. New York: Routledge.
- Zavala, V. (2019) 'Youth and the repoliticization of Quechua', *Language, Culture & Society*, 1(1), pp. 59–82.

Section 2

FILL in Africa



Chapter 3

Indigenous African intergenerational learning practices and the role of technologies

Omobola O. Adelore and Solomon O. Ojedeji

Introduction

Indigenous African intergenerational learning practices are deeply rooted in the continent's rich cultural and traditional heritages. They have been passed down for centuries and continue to play a vital role in preserving Indigenous knowledge, values and skills (Majeke, 2002). Many African communities rely on oral traditions to pass on knowledge, history and cultural values from one generation to the next. Storytelling, proverbs and songs are common methods used to transmit wisdom, history and important life lessons (Majoni and Chinyanganya, 2014). Cultural events, festivals and ceremonies are also important platforms for intergenerational learning (Eyong, 2007), because they provide opportunities for the transmission of cultural values, history and skills through music, dance and other art forms.

Elders are highly respected in many African cultures and are seen as repositories of wisdom and knowledge (Domffeh, 2007). They play a central role in intergenerational learning by sharing their life experiences, stories and expertise with younger community members. Such learning also often involves apprenticeships and mentorship systems (Odore, 2002). This hands-on approach allows for the transfer of practical skills, such as farming techniques, traditional craftsmanship and healing practices. Traditional healers pass down their knowledge of herbal remedies, spiritual healing and diagnostic techniques to the next generation (Ntuli, 2002). This knowledge is crucial for maintaining community health and well-being.

Many African cultures have rituals that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood (Majoni and Chinyanganya, 2014). These rite-of-passage ceremonies include teachings and guidance for young people as they prepare to take on adult responsibilities within their communities. Thus, in traditional African

societies elders transmit Indigenous knowledge to younger generations through initiation ceremonies, community songs and dances, folktales and apprenticeship systems (Edosomwan and Peterson, 2016).

In a typical traditional African society, however, the teacher's role is not static: the older generation can also learn from the younger generation. The teacher in the traditional African setting never stops learning (Matunhk, 2011). This is one of the strengths of African Indigenous intergenerational literacy: knowledge is not seen as restricted or limited to a particular generation. Rather, the younger and older generations learn from each other. Knowledge is continuous, and life itself is seen as a process of learning that goes from birth to death, or even beyond (Akinpelu, 1981; Emeagwali, 2006). For example, Omolewa (2009) argues that learning continues in the grave, since at the time of burial certain utterances addressed to the dead (e.g. in the Nigerian Yoruba language) indicate that the corpse is being educated about new ways of doing things in the world beyond.

This is one of the strengths of African Indigenous intergenerational literacy: knowledge is not seen as restricted or limited to a particular generation. Rather, the younger and older generations learn from each other.

Many African Indigenous training and socialization practices were developed to benefit the entire community (Mosweunyane, 2013). Learning and training in the Indigenous African system mostly took the form of communal activities, in which the individual could benefit from the knowledge of the community and contribute to its future. Knowledge, values and skills were often transmitted orally, through mentoring of younger community members by a more experienced tradesperson. However, the colonization of the continent and the expansion of Western-style, age-based formal schooling, coupled with urbanization, has adversely affected Indigenous intergenerational learning and socialization practices.

This chapter showcases three such practices in African societies, and asks how they could be revived, enriched and expanded through the use of digital technologies, thus sustaining cultural identities and systems of intergenerational learning and practice.

Indigenous intergenerational learning practices: Three examples

Akinwumi (2014) identified several approaches to Indigenous knowledge and skills acquisition, especially those that employ oral traditions of passing

down community wisdom from one generation to the next. Notable among these approaches are tales by moonlight, initiation ceremonies and traditional apprenticeships.

Tales by moonlight

Tales by moonlight are forms of storytelling and artistic expression that play a significant role in handing down cultural knowledge, history, values and traditions. Oha and Andah (2002) define tales by moonlight as the practice of storytelling that typically takes place in the evening, often outdoors in the moonlight or around a campfire. Elders or skilled storytellers share folktales, myths, legends and moral stories with younger members of the community. These are not just for entertainment; they convey valuable life lessons, cultural norms and ethical principles (Adedeji, 1986; Dei, 2020). Elders use storytelling to impart wisdom, guide behaviour and reinforce community values. Historical events, family traditions and the collective memory of the community are preserved and passed down (Lockett, 2007), helping to maintain a sense of identity and continuity.

Children in Africa would be told these stories before they started formal education, with parents and grandparents serving as their first teachers (Ojonugwa and Sunday, 2020). Grandparents told stories about tortoises, hyenas, snails and other animals, tales often filled with community wisdom and moral lessons (Akinwumi, 2014). Although relatively unplanned in comparison with today's formal education, folktale sessions were rich learning experiences (Edosomwan and Peterson, 2016). According to Ojonugwa and Sunday (2020), most of the tales by moonlight teach wisdom, hard work, honesty, obedience, kindness and bravery, among other virtues.

For example, in Igbo culture in eastern Nigeria, elders often gather children and young adults together around a fire or in the moonlight to tell traditional folktales with animal characters such as Anansi the Spider who carry moral lessons about good behaviour, respect and wisdom (Ojo and Ayodele, 2015). Egypt also has a rich tradition of oral folktales and legends featuring characters like Juha (known as Nasreddin in other cultures), who embodies wit and wisdom (Ukoha, 2002). The various ethnic groups in the Grassfields region of Cameroon, such as the Bamileke and Bamum, also have oral storytelling traditions, which often include animal fables and legends that teach lessons about leadership, bravery and community values (Moser, 2007). In the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia, elders gather children and young adults together to share traditional Anbessa (lion) stories. Elders in South Africa's Zulu culture share tales featuring characters like Isinkwa Somuntu (the human thread) and Unkulunkulu (the creator) (Oha and Andah, 2002). All these stories aim to entertain, educate and pass on cultural wisdom.

Traditional apprenticeship practices

The apprenticeship system was another means of transmitting Indigenous knowledge and skills to younger generations. Africa had her own civilizations, which were the product of Indigenous knowledge. For example, the use of this knowledge in agriculture – such as the shared cropping system in Kenya, an agricultural practice where a landowner allows a tenant farmer to use their land in exchange for a share of the crops produced; traditional rain-fed irrigation in Chad; resistance to SR52 hybrid maize in Zambia; neem biopesticides in Togo and Niger; and the ethnoveterinary medicine and fishing practices in the Niger river – has contributed immensely to the development of this sector in Africa (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

In traditional African societies everyone is a teacher, provided they have experience that can be passed on to the next generation. People apply Indigenous knowledge gained through apprenticeships in trade, economics and Indigenous medicine, among others. For example, Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) claims that the wares displayed for sale in the marketplace in several African societies reflect the application of Indigenous knowledge gained through apprenticeship in trade and economics.

Traditional apprenticeship practices have played a significant role in skills transmission and vocational training in Africa, especially in artisanal and craft-based industries (Oyewunmi, Oyewunmi and Moses, 2021), and have helped preserve cultural heritage and foster economic sustainability (Obidi, 1995). Although these practices have evolved over time, they remain an important means of intergenerational knowledge and skills transmission (Neil, 2010). For instance, traditional blacksmiths and metalworkers in Algeria often follow apprenticeship systems, where young apprentices work alongside skilled artisans to learn metalworking, including forging tools, weapons and decorative items, as well as techniques for shaping and manipulating various metals (Kangwa, 2011).

Storytelling also involves apprenticeship. Griots (French) or *gewel* (Wolof) are hereditary oral historians, storytellers and musicians in many West African societies, including Senegal (Adekola, 2013). Young apprentices, often from griot families, learn from experienced griots to become oral historians, praise singers and musicians by acquiring knowledge of traditional songs, stories and historical narratives.

In Burundi, traditional drumming and dance are vital cultural practices. Young apprentices often join drumming and dance groups, where they learn intricate rhythms, body movements and traditional songs. They master the art of playing various drums, such as the *karyenda*, and participate in cultural performances and rituals (Adekola, 2013). Pottery-making is a traditional craft in Angola, and

apprentices work with experienced potters to learn the techniques of shaping clay, glazing and firing pottery (Adekola, 2013). In Malawi, aspiring healers often undergo apprenticeships with experienced traditional healers (*chigal*) to learn about medicinal plants, traditional healing methods, spiritual practices and divination techniques, and how to diagnose and treat various ailments and illnesses (Neil, 2010).

Initiation ceremonies

Initiation ceremonies, often associated with ethnic or cultural groups, are important rites of passage that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood or signify entry into a specific societal role (Bullock, 2015). Although initiation practices vary among African societies, a primary function is to mark a child's growth and development into a responsible, community-oriented adult (Emeagwali, 2006). In this way, initiation rites link individuals to the community and the community to the broader spiritual world. They can be more or less elaborate, but all contain structures necessary for individual growth and development (Mkandawire, 2005). Parker and Rathbone (2007) argue that Africa has an integrated initiation system, which has achieved stability and longevity through a model of consistency and intergenerational unity inherent in its Indigenous cultures.

Many traditional African societies believe that an infant comes with a message and an assignment from the spirit world, and it is the family's and community's responsibility to discover this.

We recognize that these initiation rites and rituals can have multiple, contradictory and even harmful effects on the participants' human capabilities and capacity to flourish, particularly in the case of children who cannot consent, women, gender-diverse people, and other groups seeking fuller rights and recognition in their communities and countries. In this chapter, our focus is on delineating the mechanisms used to transmit intergenerational knowledge, rather than the substance of that knowledge per se.

Initiation entails going through a fundamental set of rites to begin a new phase of life, signalling progression to a more mature phase (Bullock, 2015). It has long been a crucial component of traditional African cultures, spanning birth to death and even beyond. Five major African initiation rites in the literature mark birth, adulthood, marriage, eldership and ancestorship (Parker and Rathbone, 2007). The rite of birth is the first major rite, which involves the initiation of an infant into the world through a ritual and naming ceremony. Many traditional African societies believe that an infant comes with a message and an assignment from

the spirit world, and it is the family's and community's responsibility to discover this (Emeagwali, 2006). Hence the need to consult a diviner and perform certain rituals to guide the infant along its life path. Within this belief system, the infant's name is also determined by its mission on earth.

The rite of adulthood is another major initiation rite, often conducted at the onset of puberty, which is around 12-13 years old in most African cultures. The aim of this rite is to ensure that adults will be productive, responsible and community oriented.

Eldership is crucial in traditional African societies, because elders are seen as representatives of tradition who possess wisdom from the past.

The rite of marriage joins two families, and also the separate missions of the new couple (Parker and Rathbone, 2007). In most traditional African societies, these rites go beyond the coming together of a man and woman for procreation; through the marital union, the spouses complement each other in their life pursuits and fulfilment of their life missions. Marriage is seen from the perspective of building families and communities; people are not considered adult until they are married with children.

Eldership is crucial in traditional African societies, because elders are seen as representatives of tradition who possess wisdom from the past (Emeagwali, 2006; Dei, 2020). The elderly are expected to be role models for the younger generation to emulate and are therefore accorded the greatest regard in society (Mkandawire, 2005).

The rite of ancestorship entails the passage of the elderly into the spirit world. In traditional African societies, death does not end the ties and communications that the dead have with the living (Kangwa, 2011). The spirit of the dead person is still with the living relatives or community (Parker and Rathbone, 2007).

Here we give some examples of initiation ceremonies across Africa. Among the Tuareg community of the Sahara Desert, initiation ceremonies known as *Takoubelt* are held for boys. At around 12 to 14 years old, boys are sent into the desert with experienced Tuareg guides. There they undergo a series of trials and lessons, in which they learn survival, navigation, and the customs and values of the Tuareg. At the end of the initiation, the boys are welcomed back to their community as young men (City Press, 2010). In Burkina Faso, the Dagara people hold an initiation ceremony known as 'witch camp' (Kangwa, 2011). Young boys and girls undergo separate initiations, where they are taught the cultural and spiritual practices of their community. The boys learn about traditional leadership and healing, while the girls are trained in women's roles and responsibilities. These

initiations involve learning songs, dances and rituals. Also in Burkina Faso, young Mossi women participate in fertility initiation ceremonies (*Longo*), in which they are educated about family life, reproduction and the role of women in society. They also learn traditional songs, dances and rituals associated with fertility (City Press, 2010).

Among the Temne people of Sierra Leone, initiation ceremonies include the application of tribal marks on the face, arms, or other parts of the body to symbolize cultural identity and tribal affiliation. Young initiates are taught the meanings and significance of these marks (Kangwa, 2011). In Chad, the Sara people have an initiation ceremony (*Mundu*) that marks young boys' transition into adulthood. Boys learn essential skills such as hunting, fishing, farming and cultural knowledge, and are taught about traditional customs and values (Bullock, 2015). The Ngoni people in Malawi have male initiation ceremonies that prepare boys for adulthood and include teachings on Ngoni culture, warrior traditions and the responsibilities of men in Ngoni society. Circumcision is often a part of these initiation rites (Dionne, 2015). Mutunda (2016) identifies the *Umhlanga* Reed Dance or *Incwala* as one of the most famous initiation ceremonies in Eswatini. During *Umhlanga*, young unmarried Swazi girls gather reeds from nearby riverbanks and present them to the queen mother and royal family. The ceremony promotes sisterhood and reinforces their commitment to Swazi cultural values.

The impact of modern schooling and urban development on Indigenous learning practices

Assié-Lumumba (2016) argues that informal education existed in Africa before the arrival of colonial powers and the establishment of their education systems. Both informal education and higher-level learning were provided by Africa's functioning institutions. The educational content was based on Indigenous knowledge, skills and attitudes that were transmitted orally across generations, and in rare cases via Indigenous writing systems such as *Vai* script (Scribner and Cole, 2013). Though it lacked a formalized curriculum, the African traditional learning process qualifies as education because it satisfies the conditions specified in a definition of education as everything that prepares young people for either integration in a given society with the aim of perpetuating the established values and norms of such a society or transforming and changing such values and norms (Koma, 1976, p. 52). The means of transmitting Indigenous knowledge, skills and attitudes included traditional folktales, initiation ceremonies and apprenticeship, all of which were based on word of mouth (Jain and Jibril, 2016). Training children and sharing knowledge through intergenerational communication did not necessarily conform to Western standards (Parker and Rathbone, 2007). At that time African countries did not

have the sophisticated science laboratories of the Western world, yet people still practised science, largely in the form of Indigenous knowledge gained through observation and experimentation and passed on orally to younger generations.

The preservation or survival of Indigenous African literacy and learning practices has faced notable challenges. One of the oldest criticisms levied against African Indigenous knowledge is that it is mostly shrouded in secrecy (Meredith, 2006; Mosweunyane, 2013). The transmission of Indigenous knowledge and skills was made without written documentation of what ought to be learned, leading some scholars (e.g. Parker and Rathbone, 2007; Marginson, 2011) to argue that it lacked the needed standardization and formalization. Meredith (2006) also claims that there was neither an explicit curriculum guiding knowledge and skills transfer nor principles to integrate these into formal education systems.

Since colonial powers saw education as a means to extract resources from Africa more efficiently, they aimed to train a labour force capable of serving colonial economic interests.

From the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, European colonial powers introduced and established formal education institutions and systems in Africa (Omolewa, 2009). These school systems were key levers of colonial control and influence, which aimed to serve the interests of the colonial powers while often neglecting the cultural practices and resources, educational needs and aspirations of Indigenous populations (Adhikari, 2001). Since colonial powers saw education as a means to extract resources from Africa more efficiently (Falola, 2007), they aimed to train a labour force capable of serving colonial economic interests such as mining, agriculture and administration.

Colonial authorities also established schools to create a class of Indigenous elites who could help manage and maintain colonial control and power (Nwanosike and Onyije, 2011; Akinpelu, 1981). These elites often received a Western-style education that emphasized loyalty to the colonial state. Different types of school were established. For instance, missionary organizations, often affiliated with churches, established schools across Africa to provide basic education alongside religious instruction, aiming to convert Africans to Christianity while providing vocational training and literacy in order to read the Bible (Omolewa, 2009). Similarly, colonial administrations set up government-run schools, which typically offered a standardized curriculum to train Indigenous administrative elites and civil servants.

These colonial school systems often disrupted or competed with traditional, informal African intergenerational learning practices (Muedin, 2008). Indigenous knowledge and skills, once shared informally via oral traditions, apprenticeships and communal activities, were devalued or replaced by Western-style formal education. In sum, colonial education aimed to assimilate Africans into the Western values and cultures it imposed, often leading to a loss of Indigenous languages, customs and cultural practices (Matunhk, 2011).

Despite the imposition of formal education, some Indigenous intergenerational learning practices survived, largely because of Africa's linguistic diversity, with over 2,100 languages spoken across the continent (Adhikari, 2001; Omolewa, 2009). Indeed, linguistic diversity is a critical cultural tool for preserving, maintaining and transmitting Indigenous social practices and knowledge systems via the oral tradition and storytelling, among other means (Omolewa, 2009), whereas colonial education included linguistic imposition and uniformity, with students forbidden to use local languages (Iliffe, 1979). Some communities did continue to operate their own informal education systems alongside colonial schooling, emphasizing traditional knowledge and skills (Abdi, 2020; Urch, 1971).

In addition to colonial education, urban development and urbanization have shaped Indigenous intergenerational learning practices in Africa. With urban development and technological advancement came the use of newer methods of communication, such as telecommunications and teleconferencing (Adelore and Ojedeji, 2022). These phenomena have profoundly changed social networks, community composition, forms of communication and the system of transmitting Indigenous knowledge intergenerationally (Mosweunyane, 2013).

Using technologies to strengthen, expand and enrich Indigenous intergenerational learning

Advances in science and technology have engendered new forms of communication, from radio, television and telephone to more recent digital technologies and social media platforms, both in Africa and globally. Any individual, institution, nation, or culture unable to keep up with changes orchestrated by advances in technology is sure to be left behind (Mosweunyane, 2013; Adelore and Ojedeji, 2022). New technologies have driven innovation in spheres such as health, education, marketing, banking and politics (Feldstein, 2021; Adelore and Ojedeji, 2022). However, the innovative capacity of technology depends on the population's level of digital skills (OECD, 2016), and is restricted by limitations such as low bandwidth, unreliable power supply and lack of access to devices, among other things (Adelore and Ojedeji, 2022). Despite these challenges, Adelore and Ojedeji argue that mobile phones have great educational potential in Africa: they have a higher penetration rate than other technology

tools, and they are cheaper, require less internet data and have longer battery life than other digital devices. Here we explore how digital technologies, particularly mobile phones, could be used to foster intergenerational language and literacy learning, child socialization and cultural identity in Africa.

Promoting Indigenous intergenerational learning through the creative use of technologies like video recordings can be a powerful way to preserve cultural wisdom and oral traditions (Sandvine, 2020). For example, digital storytelling archives can include a repository in which elders can record themselves sharing stories, wisdom and teachings in their native languages (Andreoletti and Howard, 2018). These recordings could be organized by themes, regions, or tribes, making it easy for younger generations to access and learn from them (Snowball, Tarentaal and Sapsed, 2021).

Interactive virtual museums also harness digital technologies to promote Indigenous African intergenerational learning (GSMA, 2019). Such museums use 3D modelling and virtual reality to showcase artifacts, oral histories and traditional practices. Users can explore them from anywhere in the world and gain a deep understanding of Indigenous African cultures. Similarly, digital art galleries that showcase Indigenous art could also be used (Snowball, Tarentaal and Sapsed 2021). Audio explanations by artists or community members, providing context and understanding of the art works' symbolism and cultural significance, could be included. In augmented reality (AR) storytelling (Andreoletti and Howard, 2018), AR apps allow users to point their smartphones or tablets at specific locations or objects and receive augmented reality presentations of Indigenous stories, dances, or teachings related to that place or object. This technology could be especially valuable for heritage sites (Sandvine, 2020).

Language preservation apps including voice recognition, pronunciation guides and interactive language lessons could be used to help Indigenous communities document and teach their languages. In video-facilitated virtual language exchanges, these communities could connect with people interested in learning their languages (Adelore and Ojedeji, 2019). Similarly, Virtual Elders Councils would enable younger community members to engage in live or recorded video discussions with elders, including question and answer sessions, discussions about cultural practices, and the sharing of life lessons (Feldstein, 2021). Another possibility is a crowdsourced folklore collection: community members could be encouraged to contribute their own recordings of oral traditions and wisdom, including folktales, proverbs and traditional songs (Adelore and Ojedeji, 2020). Users could upload and share these recordings on a digital platform.

Educational YouTube channels dedicated to Indigenous cultures are another tool (Feldstein, 2021). High-quality videos would explain various aspects of these cultures, with input from elders and community members. They could

also include podcasts and webinars featuring elders and experts discussing Indigenous African cultures, traditions and wisdom, either as live events or pre-recorded for on-demand listening. Adedokun and Ojeda (2022) note the usefulness of interactive storytelling apps that allow users to engage with Indigenous stories by making choices that affect the outcome. This tool could help younger generations understand the moral and cultural significance of the tales.

Creative approaches can help bridge generation gaps, promote cultural preservation, and foster a sense of pride and continuity among younger generations.

Another way of leveraging technology for intergenerational learning is through online platforms where community members can collaboratively create and document new stories, poems, or songs inspired by their oral traditions. This approach fosters creativity while preserving cultural elements (Sandvine, 2020). Similarly, community-run radio and TV stations could broadcast Indigenous cultural content, including storytelling, music and discussions about traditions, and feature content produced by younger community members (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). By combining technology with the rich oral traditions and wisdom of the communities, these creative approaches can help bridge generation gaps, promote cultural preservation, and foster a sense of pride and continuity among younger generations.

Conclusion

Intergenerational learning practices in Indigenous communities vary across cultures and regions. In many African cultures, elders pass down knowledge, history and moral lessons through storytelling via tales by moonlight, initiation ceremonies and traditional apprenticeship. Although these traditional intergenerational learning practices remain vital, they are also evolving to adapt to modern contexts. Younger generations may incorporate formal education, technology and new forms of communication into their learning, while still valuing and respecting their cultural heritage. This chapter has advocated for efforts to document and preserve Indigenous knowledge and practices through written records, digital media and cultural institutions, so that traditions are not lost as societies evolve. By harnessing the power of technology, Indigenous African intergenerational learning can become more inclusive, engaging and effective, ensuring the continued transmission and enrichment of cultural knowledge for generations to come.

References

- Abdi, A.A. (2020) 'Decolonizing knowledge, education, and social development: Africanist perspectives', *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2, pp. 503–518.
- Adediji, R. (1986) *John West Moonlight Stories*. Lagos: John West Publications Ltd.
- Adekola, G. (2013) 'Traditional apprenticeship in the old Africa and its relevance to contemporary work practices in modern Nigerian communities', *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, 3(4), pp. 397–406. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9734/BJESBS/2013/4292>.
- Adelore, O.O. and Ojedeji, S.O. (2019) 'Widening access to learning in cities of the twenty first century', in I. Biao (ed.) *Learning cities, town planning, and the creation of livelihoods*. IGI Global, USA.
- Adelore, O.O. and Ojedeji, S.O. (2020) 'Retooling adult literacy in a new normal world: the place of digital literacy', in K.O. Ojokheta and K.O. Kester (eds) *Education re-engineering in the new normal world: Festschrift for Prof. Aderinoye*.
- Adelore, O.O. and Ojedeji, S.O. (2022) 'Digital literacy: key to equity and social justice in a tech-dependent world', in P.A. Robinson, K.V. Williams, and M. Stojanovic (eds) *Global citizenship for adult education: advancing critical literacies for equity and social justice*. Routledge, USA.
- Adhikari, M. (2001) 'British colonialism and its opponents', *Journal of African History*, 42(3), pp. 523–525.
- Akinpelu, J.A. (1981) *An introduction to philosophy of education*. London: Macmillan.
- Akinwumi, S.A. (2014) 'Yoruba folktales, the new media and postmodernism', *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 17(2), pp. 74–87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.2014.17.2.74>.
- Andreoletti, C. and Howard, J.L. (2018) 'Bridging the generation gap: intergenerational service-learning benefits young and old', *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 39(1), pp. 46–60.
- Assié-Lumumba, N.T. (2016) 'Evolving African attitudes to European education: resistance, pervert effects of the single system paradox, and the ubuntu framework for renewal', *International Review of Education*, 62(1), pp. 11–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-016-9547-8>.
- Bullock, R. (2015) *It's hard to be a man: a month with three initiates during the Xhosa circumcision ritual*, *Africa Geographic Magazine*. Available at: <https://africageographic.com/stories/xhosa-circumcision-ritual-south-africa-its-hard-to-be-a-man> (Accessed: 5 September 2023).
- City Press (2010) 'Initiation in the rural areas'

- Dei, G.J.S. (2020) 'Elders' cultural knowledges and African indigeneity', in J.M. Abidogun and T. Falola (eds) *The Palgrave handbook of African education and indigenous knowledge*. Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, pp. 279–302.
- Dionne, K.Y. (2015) 'Social networks, ethnic diversity, and cooperative behavior in rural Malawi', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 27(4), pp. 522–543. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951629814556173>.
- Domffeh, K.A. (2007) 'Indigenous knowledge systems and the need for policy and institutional reforms', *Tribes and tribals special*, 1, pp. 47–52.
- Edosomwan, S. and Peterson, C.M. (2016) *A history of oral and written storytelling in Nigeria*. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED581846.pdf> (Accessed: 19 November 2019).
- Emeagwali, G.T. (2006) 'Africa and the textbooks', in G.T. Emeagwali (ed.) *Africa and the academy*. Trenton: Africa World Press, pp. 1–30.
- Eyong, C.T. (2007) 'Indigenous knowledge and sustainable development in Africa: case study on Central Africa', *Indigenous Knowledge System and Sustainable Development Relevance for Africa, Tribes and Tribals*, Special Vol. No. 1, pp. 121–139.
- Ezeanya-Esiobu, C. (2019) *Indigenous knowledge and education in Africa*. Springer. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6635-2_5.
- Falola, T. (2007) *The Amistad's Legacy: Reflections on the Spaces of Colonization*. Available at: <http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd>.
- Feldstein, S. (2021) *Digital democracy network: issues on the frontlines of technology and politics*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- GSMA (2019) *Mobile internet connectivity 2019 Sub-Saharan Africa factsheet*. Available at: <https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-SSA-Factsheet.pdf>.
- Iliffe, J. (1979) *Modern history of Tanganyika*. London: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584114>.
- Jain, P. and Jibril, L. (2016) *Expanding library services for indigenous community posterity: a case of selected public libraries in Botswana*. Available at: <http://library.ifla.org/1445/1/168-jainen.pdf> (Accessed: 8 June 2022).
- Kangwa, J. (2011) *Reclaiming the values of indigenous female initiation rites as a strategy for HIV prevention: a gendered analysis of Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people of Zambia*. University of KwaZulu-Natal. Available at: <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/147c9c32-e42a-40f4-99a0-af0112245e6d/content>.

- Koma, K. (1976) *Education in black Africa*. Mahalapye: Botswana National Front Secretariat.
- Lockett, M. (2007) *History of storytelling*. Sage.
- Majeke, A.M.S. (2002) 'Towards a culture-based foundation for indigenous knowledge systems in the field of custom and law', in H.C. Odore (ed.) *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems towards a philosophy of articulation*. Claremont: New African Books, pp. 141–150.
- Majoni, C. and Chinyanganya, T.L. (2014) 'Integrating traditional african education into current educational practices: suggestions for primary school pedagogy', *Greener Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 2(3), pp. 64–70.
- Marginson, S. (2011) 'Imagining the global', in R. King, S. Marginson, and R. Naidoo (eds) *Handbook on globalisation and higher education*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, pp. 10–39.
- Matunhk, J. (2011) 'A critique of modernization and dependency theories in Africa: critical assessment', *African Journal of History and Culture*, 3(5), pp. 65–72.
- Meredith, M. (2006) *The state of Africa*. London: The Free Press.
- Mkandawire, T. (2005) 'African intellectuals and nationalism', in T. Makandawira (ed.) *African intellectuals*. New York: Zed Books, pp. 10–55.
- Moser, R. (2007) 'Kabba folktales', in *LINCOM Studies in African Linguistics*, pp. 3–25.
- Mosweunyane, D. (2013) 'The African educational evolution: from traditional training to formal education', *Higher Education Studies*, 3(4), pp. 50–59.
- Muedin, A. (2008) *Urban indigenous peoples and migration, speech: item 8c, seventh session of the permanent forum on indigenous issues*. Available at: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/cache/offonce/pid/1336?entryId=17054>.
- Mutunda, S. (2016) 'Luvalé personal names and naming practices: a socio-cultural analysis', *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 1(3), pp. 75–81.
- Neil, M. (2010) *An assessment of informal apprenticeship to inform the inception of a five-year project on upgrading informal apprenticeship in Zimbabwe*.
- Ntuli, P.P. (2002) 'Indigenous knowledge systems the African Renaissance', in C.A. Odora Hoppers (ed.) *Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems*. Cape Town: New Africa Books, pp. 53–62.
- Nwanosike, O.F. and Onyije, L.E. (2011) 'Colonialism and education', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(4), pp. 41–47.
- Obidi, S.S. (1995) 'Skill acquisition through indigenous apprenticeship: a case of the Yoruba blacksmith in Nigeria', *Comparative Education*, 31(3), pp. 369–383.

- Odore, H.C. (ed.) (2002) *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems towards a philosophy of articulation*. Claremont: New African Books.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2016) *Innovating education and educating for innovation: the power of digital technologies and skills*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264265097-en>.
- Oha, O. and Andah, L. (2002) 'Tales by moonlight and the televisual education of the Nigerian child', *Journal of Identity, Culture and Politics*, 3(1).
- Ojo, M. and Ayodele, A. (2015) 'Moonlight tales as potential tools for behavioural moulding: cases of five selected moonlight tales', *American Journal of Educational Science*, 1(3), pp. 41–46. Available at: <http://www.aiscience.org/journal/ajes>.
- Ojonugwa, S.J. and Sunday, S.E. (2020) 'Towards preserving Igala folktales', *Journal of Modern European Languages and Literature (J MEL)*, 13.
- Omolewa, M. (2009) 'The history of colonialism in Africa', *Journal of African American History*, 94(2), pp. 248–257.
- Oyewunmi, A.E., Oyewunmi, O.A. and Moses, C.L. (2021) 'IGBA-BOI: historical transitions of the Igbo Apprenticeship Model, Indigenous African Enterprise: The Igbo Traditional Business School (I-TBS)', *Advanced Series in Management*, 26, pp. 13–25.
- Parker, J. and Rathbone, R. (2007) *African history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sandvine (2020) *2020 mobile internet phenomena report*. Available at: <https://www.sandvine.com/download-report-mobile-internet-phenomena-report-2020-sandvine>.
- Scribner, S. and Cole, M. (2013) *The psychology of literacy*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Snowball, J., Tarentaal, D. and Sapsed, J. (2021) 'Innovation and diversity in the digital cultural and creative industries', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 45, pp. 705–733. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-021-09420-9>.
- Ukoha, N. (2002) *Tales by moonlight*. Heinemann.
- Urch, E.G. (1971) 'Education and colonialism in Kenya', *History of Education Quarterly*, 11(3), pp. 249–264.



Chapter 4

Community-based intergenerational digital literacy learning in Uganda: Experiences of a local NGO

Willy Ngaka

Introduction

Although family and intergenerational learning (FIL) has always been part and parcel of African traditional education (Ssekamwa, 1997), the introduction of the formal education system greatly eroded its importance. The traditional system of education, where knowledge was transmitted orally and informally in homes, outside and around the fireplace, came to be seen as primitive and uncivilized, and was replaced by classroom-based education focused on the acquisition of reading and writing skills. A radical shift from oral intergenerational learning to formal education took place.

Unfortunately, Western-style school education is inconsistent with the notion of lifelong learning, which occurs in varied contexts (formal, non-formal and informal) and uses the community as a locus and resource for learning (Fitzpatrick, 2019). Viewing learning and education as a formal endeavour that only involves young people disadvantages those adults who never attended school, curtailing their participation in various digitally based activities. The accelerated pace of digital innovations presents a formidable challenge to some individuals, especially older ones who lack digital literacy skills (Rosales and Blanche-T, 2021). Investing in intergenerational digital literacy learning (IDLL) in this era of information and communication technologies (ICTs), digitization, and 'onlineization' of activities that shape people's everyday lives, could contribute to the realization of SDG 4.

Digital literacy skills – the skills needed to live, learn and work in a society where communication and access to information are increasingly provided by digital technologies (Western Sydney University, n.d.) – are becoming a necessity if communities are to achieve a decent quality of life. ICTs have come to play a

crucial role in people's lives, yet research on them has focused on formal rather than non-formal education (Rosales and Blanche-T, 2022). Such profound changes suggest the need for initiatives that help people develop necessary skills to navigate and participate in the digital age. Unfortunately, digital literacy skills are lacking among communities in developing countries, including Uganda, especially among the elderly and in rural and marginal urban areas (UIICT, n.d.).

Although intergenerational practices and programmes that bring children and elders together for shared activities have grown in popularity (Kaplan, 2002), most are in Europe, North America and Australia (Kernan and Cortellesi, 2019). The FIL literature tends to focus either on the experiences of communities in developed countries or on school-based programmes (Kaplan, 2001). For instance, of the 26 family literacy-related programmes highlighted in a UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning report (Hanemann, 2015), only six are from Africa. Even among the 14 family literacy programmes described in Desmond and Elfert (2008), only one is truly intergenerational, and its emphasis is not on digital literacy. Research on intergenerational digital literacy initiatives from an African perspective is seldom published.

This chapter offers a much-needed Afrocentric perspective on intergenerational approaches to digital literacy learning. It draws on the experiences of the Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association (URLCODA), an NGO that implements an IDLL programme via community libraries in rural northwestern Uganda. In addition to describing what the IDLL programme does, this chapter analyses teachers' behaviour, interactions between the teachers and learners and among the intergenerational learners themselves, and benefits and challenges related to the IDLL programme. I examine the first two of these topics because teachers' professional conduct profoundly influences the quality of education, while social interaction among learners enriches learning (Okita, 2012) and creates a supportive educational environment (Prins, Toso and Schafft, 2009).

I argue that in the current context, where efforts are directed towards the realization of SDG 4, it is no longer useful to think of learning as taking place exclusively in formal settings that primarily focus on children and young people, especially in this technology-driven era. Rather, learning should be seen to occur in diverse settings and across generational boundaries, so as to widen spaces for lifelong learning.

The concept of FIL

Intergenerational learning is not a new concept (Fitzpatrick, 2019), nor does it have a universally accepted definition. Family literacy programmes for parents and children have been more common in the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia than

in most developing countries. However, such learning contexts have always been part of the African traditional education system (Ssekamwa, 1997; Ouma, 2021). FIL is distinct from family literacy because participants are not necessarily a family unit. It is a wide concept, encompassing both the formal and informal aspects of literacy learning for participants from different generations. It takes place in the home and in communities, including online, and involves different members of the family (UNESCO, 2020). According to UNESCO (2020), ‘intergenerational learning captures the multi-directionality of learning interactions, i.e. children can learn from adults; adults from children; younger children from older siblings, and from other relatives. Therefore, it is a collective learning process in which the whole family learns together’ (p. 2).

FIL is a wide concept, encompassing both the formal and informal aspects of literacy learning for participants from different generations.

In this chapter, IDLL refers to a learning context where both children and adults (who may be unrelated) are acquiring digital literacy, in this case via community libraries. Digital literacy is conceptualized as the basic skill or ability one needs to live, learn and work in a society where communication and access to information happens increasingly through digital technologies like social media platforms, and on mobile devices (Western Sydney University, n.d.). URLCODA's IDLL programme shares one of the key characteristics of FIL: the recognition that the relationships between children and adults and their instructors in an intergenerational educational setting are important because they affect the learning, usage and development of digital literacy skills.

URLCODA and the IDLL programme

The study was conducted in northwestern Uganda, which is still recovering from the 1971 war and over two decades of rebel insurgency. The sub-region's population of 3.2 million includes more than six ethnic groups. More than 90 per cent of residents live in rural areas (Lakwo, Cwinyai and Abdallay, 2008), and 35 per cent live in extreme poverty (Agency for Accelerated Regional Development, n.d.). In this region, 44 per cent of women are unable to read and write meaningfully in any language (Muzuva, 2022). Despite the increased use of ICTs and social media, a persistent challenge is limited access to computers and ICT equipment, reliable hydro power, internet connectivity, public libraries and print literacy materials.

URLCODA, a volunteer-led Ugandan NGO, works with the 39 community libraries under the Uganda Community Libraries Association (UgCLA), which complements the Ministry of Education and Sports' efforts to promote literacy skills. Founded in 2003, URLCODA creates opportunities for communities to develop their literacy skills and contributes indirectly to improving their livelihoods.

URLCODA coordinates a network of over 10 community libraries in northwestern Uganda. All but one – the 'Mother Community Library' – are situated in primary schools. The community libraries are not physical buildings; rather, an intergenerational group of learners negotiates with primary school authorities to use an available room or outdoor area for meetings and educational purposes and constitutes itself as a community library. The initiative challenges the dominant belief among community members that learning and education are only for children and that libraries can only be physical spaces.

The initiative challenges the dominant belief among community members that learning and education are only for children and that libraries can only be physical spaces.

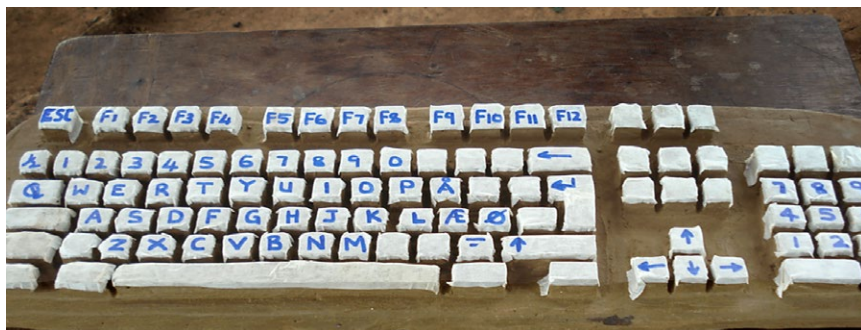
Since 2013, URLCODA has used the community libraries to run intergenerational classes (lasting 90 minutes twice a week) that teach reading, writing, numeracy and computer skills. The classes are managed by volunteer instructors, university students on vacation and recent university graduates with basic digital literacy skills who come from the region. Though not trained in adult literacy and numeracy education, they use the knowledge acquired through reading adult literacy-related materials such as *Adult Literacy Programmes in Uganda* (Okech et al., 2001), the *REFLECT Mother Manual* (Archer and Cottingham, 1996), the *Functional Adult Literacy Instructors' Guide* and primers from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to help teach effectively. Their motivation to read literature on adult literacy and numeracy teaching and learning arises from three factors: their desire to give back to the community that raised and educated them, to help improve the digital literacy skills of the communities so as to contribute to closing the urban-rural digital divide, and to gain practical experience working with communities, which they hope to apply after their university education is complete.

The aforementioned materials are complemented by materials embedded in the community and informed by learners' everyday activities and needs. Learners are also involved in storytelling, development of local literacy materials, income-generating activities and national literacy learners' conferences. Among the activities, learners showed great interest in acquiring digital literacy skills. ICT devices such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets, calculators, radios and automated cash machines are common in northwestern Uganda, but IDLL participants had

limited or no access to these resources. Moreover, everyday activities increasingly require using ICTs (e.g. for ATM cards and SMS messages).

Because the IDLL programme is volunteer-led and has no external funding, URLCODA partners with other organizations. The Maendeleo Foundation, a local NGO, provided three mini-laptops per community library. The learners demonstrated their enthusiasm about digital literacy by building their own keyboard out of clay (*Figure 1*) to help them learn the alphabet and simulate how to use computers and other ICT devices in real life. To reinforce instruction by URLCODA volunteers, Maendeleo Foundation trainers conducted quarterly mobile outreach (a car brought solar-powered mini-laptops) to teach digital literacy to community library members (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 1. A keyboard made of clay by URLCODA participants



Source: Adapted from Ngaka (2014)

Between 2013 and 2018, 750 learners (about 150 annually) participated in the IDLL programme. Although the classes initially attracted only adults, children aged 9 and over gradually started attending. Thus, the sessions included adult learners and their children who attended the primary school, adults whose children were students but not IDLL participants, adults whose children were neither IDLL participants nor primary school students, and children whose parents were not IDLL participants. The classes are intergenerational but, unlike most family literacy programmes, they are not directed towards family units.

The classes attracted some adults because they helped them to support their children in Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE), where parents are required to engage in school activities, including monitoring and supporting their children's learning (Okech et al., 1999). This role put parents with limited literacy abilities (and hence their children) at a disadvantage, because they found it hard to check homework, interpret report cards and examine receipts of financial contributions to schools, among other things.

Figure 2. Women engage in IDLL learning with pupils at St Daniel Primary School



Photo taken by the author with consent of the participants

IDLL classes reflect several key FIL principles: they are participatory, culturally grounded and asset-based, and challenge the belief that learning is only for children.

The programme is an example of the ‘indirect adults – indirect children’ FIL format (Kerka, 1991), where participation and attendance are voluntary, commitment is short-term, and there is informal learning through literacy enrichment events and activities such as computer-based games.

Research methods

I was one of the founders of URLCODA and assisted with programme implementation. As a university lecturer, I was the lead researcher who documented the experiences of programme participants. In this case, I used ethnographic research methods (Reeves, Peller, Goldman and Kitto, 2013) to immerse myself in the participants’ natural environment and gain a deeper understanding of the IDLL programme. Ethnographic methods included participant observation, focus group discussions and key informant interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Data collection focused on understanding the teacher’s behaviour, relationships between the learners and instructors and among the learners during the sessions, the benefits and challenges associated with IDLL, and strategies for enhancing the teaching and acquiring of intergenerational digital literacy.

From January to August 2018, I conducted eight naturalistic observations (lasting 45–90 minutes) of IDLL sessions at the Mother Community Library, focusing on teaching and learning processes and interactions between teachers and learners and among learners. To minimize my influence on participants' behaviour, I took very few notes during the sessions (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). I also led four focus group discussions (lasting 45–60 minutes) with learners aged 18 and over and volunteer instructors. Finally, I conducted semi-structured key informant interviews with three volunteer instructors (lasting 40–50 minutes).

I used member checks, interviewer corroboration, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, confirmability and bracketing to enhance rigour and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I also kept reflexivity journals or analytic memos (Saldaña, 2009). I analysed the data thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006), by identifying, analysing and interpreting the patterns of meaning or themes they contained. Since data were only collected at the Mother Community Library, results cannot be generalized to all the IDLL sites.

Findings on intergenerational digital literacy learning in practice

This section discusses instructors' behaviour during IDLL sessions, the relationships between the instructor and learners, and the relationships among the learners themselves.

Instructor behaviour in IDLL sessions

The behaviour of instructors in a literacy learning context encompasses how they perceive the various age groups in the class, administer discipline (for children), and understand how learners of different generations should be engaged, along with their knowledge about the community's norms, values, standards and taboos. During IDLL classes, the instructors paid great attention to helping adults identify different parts of a computer, appropriately use computer accessories, type letters, read simple words in their vernacular dialects on the screen, play games, and differentiate between the various ICT tools such as laptop computers, mobile phones, calculators, printers and scanners, to name a few.

In addition, observational data showed that the instructors demonstrated their skills in dealing with different age groups in their class. When some adult learners would not talk in class, instructors would find out what the problem was and encourage them to feel free to communicate and work with each other and with the instructor. When instructors identified some children's disrespectful comments to elders, they addressed such behaviours. For example, an elderly woman arrived late to class, prompting the young learners to shout, 'late comer, late comer, late

comer'. The male instructor stressed that elderly people need to be valued and respected, stating that 'Mama had other things she was attending to, and that possibly delayed her', adding 'Our culture also teaches us to treat elders respectfully.' This response demonstrated his awareness of the age differences, the unique needs of younger and older learners, and the social norms and values of the community.

In another instance, an elderly woman came to class with a baby who kept crying. The children complained, 'How can you come to class with a crying baby?' and 'Please teacher, tell her to go out, she is disturbing us'. The teacher told the children to respect the woman, saying, 'Look here, my good children. Mama cannot go out because of the baby crying. I will do something to stop the baby from crying.' Through talking with the woman, he learned that the baby (her granddaughter) was hungry. The instructor immediately took some sweets from his bag and gave them to the baby, who stopped crying. He then said, 'Class, it's okay now, we can continue, but always remember to talk to elderly learners with respect.' This action brought joy to the faces of the elderly learners and made them feel at home. It also underscored that telling the elderly learner she should leave the class was rude and not the best remedy.

***Effective teaching of adult literacy depends
on good human relations, which in turn
depend on the teacher's attitudes, skills,
knowledge and behaviour.***

The above examples align with prominent ideas about effective adult education. For example, Bhola (1994) argued that effective teaching of adult literacy depends on good human relations, which in turn depend on the teacher's attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour. A good climate for learning requires a number of things: creating a warm, friendly atmosphere free of threats from learners and teachers, encouraging new ways of self-expression without ridicule, nurturing a continuous and interdependent relationship among the learners and between the learners and the teacher, and establishing an effective three-way channel of communication (teacher-learners, learners-teacher, and learners-learners (Comings and Kahler, 1984). The way the instructors handled instances of disrespect illustrate these qualities.

Instructor-learner relationships

Relationships between teachers and learners are crucial for enhancing adult learning. A cordial, positive instructor-learner relationship is characterized by two-way trust and respect, honouring who learners are and what they bring to the learning environment (Cristine et al., 2022). In the four focus group discussions,

learners and instructors were asked how they relate to each other in the IDLL classes. Learners gave positive descriptions of their instructors – friendly, approachable, respectful, awesome, kind, nice, free with learners and warm, among others. Most adult learners stated that they liked how their instructors treated them. Their comments included:

I have always heard that teachers are rude to learners, but ever since I joined this class, what I found is different.

I was received in a very warm and friendly way.

Our instructors are kind and nice to us when they are teaching.

I came to this class with a lot of fear and shame because I didn't know anything. In fact, I didn't believe that I would fit in a class together with..., but I was wrong.

Steve [a pseudonym] my teacher was really very kind to me. For instance, the other day he asked me to switch on the small laptop, but I failed and got ashamed. Can you imagine, he happily showed me how it is done and assured me that I would do well next time. That really made me feel great.

My instructor is awesome; she always receives me warmly each time I arrive late for lessons.

One woman described the instructors this way:

The people who are giving us lessons are wonderful. Even if I ask them ten silly questions in one session, they don't get annoyed; instead, they focus on helping me to understand what is being taught. I think if this was in those other schools where my children go to, they could grow angry and even say bad things. Me, I am very, very happy to receive instructions from such wonderful instructors.

The responses from the children, some of whom were primary school pupils, reflected a sharp contrast between their relations with their primary school teachers and with the IDLL instructors. They said that compared to their primary school teachers, the IDLL instructors were friendly, easily approachable and encouraging.

We can freely talk with the instructors here, which is almost impossible with our primary teachers.

Unlike the instructors, primary school teachers make us feel very scared, as they sometimes give us strokes [corporal punishment], especially when we give an incorrect answer.

Here in the IDLL class, the instructor always encourages us and not make us feel scared.

I am surprised that here teachers do not hit us. In the other primary school I come from, oh oh, teachers can hit us. I like here very much because teachers do not hit children when they make mistakes.

In a nutshell, both adult and young learners came to the IDLL programme with the belief that teachers are tough and scary.

The instructors corroborated the above views in focus groups, explaining that they treat their learners with care and compassion. Although they said that they never received any formal training in teaching adults, they acknowledged that they read books about learning methods, theories and approaches which they were using as their guide:

I was brought up in an environment where you must respect elderly people. So I treat my adult learners with all the respect they deserve.

I make sure that I make my learners feel at home irrespective of their age and I use learner-centred approach in teaching them.

Teaching learners who have not interacted with computers before requires patience, so I am always patient and try to help them get what they want to know.

Generally, the findings show that the relationship between instructors and learners in URLCODA's programmes was cordial and positive. This could be because learners come from the same culture, where issues like racial and ethnic difference are minimal or absent. Although some elderly female participants said they were uncomfortable during their first few days in class, the volunteer instructors always encouraged them to participate in the class activities. The IDLL programme instructors' role is that of unleashing learners' potential to help them realize their dream of what Sen (1999) calls discovering who they want to be and what they want to do. This requires the use of learner-centred methods that allow and encourage free interactions between the learners and instructors and the possibility of peer learning, particularly in mixed-level classes. In a nutshell, both adult and young learners came to the IDLL programme with the belief that teachers are tough and scary. However, this view quickly changed as they started interacting with the instructors in a non-formal learning setting. This made them realize the difference between a primary school teacher and a non-formal education instructor.

Learner-learner interactions during IDLL sessions

Intergenerational learning initiatives usually bring together young and adult learners. When classes include parent-child units along with adults and young learners who are not their children, this can create tension among older and younger learners. URLCODA's programme included this mix of learners.

The volunteer instructors were asked how the learners related to one another during the sessions. They commented that when the programmes were beginning there was some discomfort about the mixed-age classes, but that this eventually subsided. One instructor described the situation:

At first, the children feared coming to mix with the adult learners. I think it was because they thought we [instructors] would hit them, but after some time, they were able to join. Even then, their presence at first made the adult learners feel uncomfortable, but we kept encouraging them to feel at ease and told them that everyone had come to learn and not interfere with other people's plans.

One woman acknowledged that when she first joined, she did not think it was a good idea to be taught together with the children:

At the beginning I did not like being taught together with the children, one of whom was my own child. I thought they would laugh at me if I made mistakes. However, our instructors kept telling us that it was okay for the children to join the IDLL sessions because they could at some point help us (the adult learners) with some tasks. Indeed, as time went on, the children proved to be helpful in learning digital literacy skills. I no longer see the children as a threat in the class.

The fear, discomfort and anxiety that both the young and adult learners initially expressed about being in a mixed group was not unusual, for power relations always shape group dynamics (Lewin, 1945; Gençer, 2019). Power imbalances can manifest in many forms, including resentment, endless arguments and emotional distance. It was important to ascertain how power shaped learner-learner interactions in the IDLL programme, because the literature on power dynamics in classroom interactions overwhelmingly focuses on instructor-learner dynamics (Milton, 2000, cited in Ngaka, 2004).

The findings presented above are consistent with Comings and Kahler's (1984) research on group dynamics in informal or non-formal learning, which stressed overcoming initial reservations about participation and learning, on the one hand, and interrupting the habits of certain learners (e.g. dominating some activities, leading to others' exclusion), on the other. If such domineering habits and ensuing tensions are not addressed, they may become ingrained in the learning processes and inhibit learners' participation. These habits and tensions may be amplified when the group includes unrelated children and adults, as in URLCODA.

When learners first come together their initial shyness often hinders participation, especially at the beginning of a programme (Comings and Kahler, 1984). As reported above, such a scenario was observed in URLCODA's classes, where women, most of whom had not seen or touched computers before, felt scared of making mistakes in front of children. In a community where people had limited or no access to ICT tools before joining the IDLL class, such fears were not strange. However, with continuous support and encouragement from the instructors, these learners' fear of making mistakes dissipated.

Benefits and challenges of URLCODA's IDLL programme

Benefits of the IDLL classes

The data showed the benefits and challenges of the IDLL programme for adult learners. First, URLCODA's IDLL programme adopted a participatory, learner-centred approach that emphasized not just digital literacy skills acquisition, but also the immediate application of the knowledge and skills. During focus groups, learners reported that their participation equipped them to receive and share information from their Saving and Credit Co-operatives (SACCOs) using short message services (SMS) via mobile phones. Some of the adult learners also reported that with the help of their children they could now receive news from across the world via social media platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok. This news exposure further enhanced their awareness of critical issues in the community and increased their participation in ICT-mediated community activities. The key informants held similar views on learners' application of the skills acquired through the IDLL programme.

Since the majority of rural people across the world, including northwestern Uganda, have limited access to ICTs, the IDLL programme conveniently offered local communities a rare opportunity to access basic ICT education and acquire foundational skills needed to conduct their everyday activities. In the focus groups, older learners revealed that with the knowledge and skills they acquired through the programme and with help from young learners, they can now identify the parts of a computer, appropriately use computer accessories like the mouse, type their names using the keyboard, read simple words in vernacular dialects on the computer screen, receive and send messages via mobile phones, play games on computers and mobile phones, and differentiate between various ICT tools (e.g. laptops, mobile phones, printers). One of the women said that if it were not for the IDLL programme, she would not have touched a computer. The programme thus helped to demystify computers and their use.

The programme not only helped to strengthen solidarity among children, and younger and older generations, in accessing foundational digital literacy education and skills, but also clearly demonstrated the importance of complementary roles that learners of different age groups can play in informal

The intervention has demonstrated that the long-held belief that learning and education are for young people and exclusively occur in formal settings is fallacious.

and non-formal settings. The intervention has demonstrated that the long-held belief that learning and education are for young people and exclusively occur in formal settings is fallacious. In short, the programme has helped to foster mutual, respectful relationships between learners from different age groups. The older learners reported that their young counterparts treated them with respect and helped them in areas where they were experiencing difficulties. This was corroborated by observational data.

Challenges of IDLL classes and mitigation strategies

Data analysis revealed several challenges for the IDLL programme. Uganda lacks a comprehensive, coherent policy for the design and implementation of non-formal adult education. Certificates and practical skills acquired through non-formal education are not recognized by the government or employers. Since URLCODA's IDLL programme does not lead to certificates, it discourages those learners who would have liked to apply the certificates to continue their education, particularly higher education. In fact, the majority of IDLL adult learners indicated that they would have liked to enter formal education. This problem is also visible in the lack of a National Qualification Framework for Uganda that would address the concerns of learning and knowledge acquired through paths other than formal education.

URLCODA is a volunteer-led organization with no external funding, meaning it lacks resources to sustain its activities. This explains its reliance on volunteer instructors and partnerships for programme development and delivery. With limited financial resources, organizing, training instructors and supporting the various activities all become difficult.

Lastly, IDLL participants come to learn during the hours and seasons they consider free, but not during peak agricultural seasons, when they are involved in either planting or harvesting their crops. These seasonal disruptions tend to stop adults from attending and leave the children to study alone, dampening the excitement that usually characterizes the intergenerational learning atmosphere.

Strategies for mitigating the challenges of the IDLL programme

In view of these challenges, a number of changes are needed: to engage the relevant authorities and stakeholders to develop policies that promote FIL programmes for the betterment of communities across the country; to institute a national qualifications framework that recognizes learning and skills acquired outside the formal education system; to identify and establish partnerships to promote collaborations that can boost resource mobilization for FIL programmes beyond the current efforts; and to continuously sensitize communities about the importance of FIL programmes.

Implications of URLCODA's IDLL programme for FIL research, policy and practice

This study of URLCODA's IDLL programme has several implications. First, it is important to conceptualize digital literacy not only as knowledge about and ability to use available technologies, but also as building learners' confidence to adapt to rapid changes in technology. Second, government and development partners need to invest more resources in research on and provision of intergenerational approaches and programmes in the global South – not only programmes focusing on family units, but also those like URLCODA that bring elders and children to learn together in the community. While designing intergenerational learning programmes, policy-makers, programme designers and implementers should take account of how peak agricultural seasons disrupt participation.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed IDLL in a non-formal educational setting, using the experiences of a Ugandan NGO in the northwestern region. IDLL was conceptualized as a format in which children and adults, not necessarily from the same family, can acquire digital literacy skills via community libraries, a phenomenon rarely seen in Uganda. The chapter has shown that instructors can exhibit positive behaviour and treat their learners with respect, and learners can enjoy cordial relationships with their instructors and among themselves.

The programme benefited the participants in a number of ways. It was responsive to learners' immediate needs, enabling them to acquire the basic skills required for solving everyday ICT-related problems, increasing communities' access to digital literacy education, instilling respect for the older generation in the younger generation, and enabling young learners to collaborate with elders beyond their classrooms.

The challenges facing the programme included an inadequate number of computers, lack of a comprehensive, coherent national policy to guide non-formal adult education, non-recognition of certificates acquired via non-formal education, inadequate resources for promoting intergenerational learning, and interruptions caused by the agricultural calendar.

In sum, given the current desire to realize SDG 4, governments, development partners and civil society organizations should consider promoting intergenerational approaches to skills development and learning. The initiatives should integrate digital literacy skills and look beyond the borders of formal schools. Building intergenerational learning solidarity in skills development is key because it positively affects both generations and society and also contributes to a more inclusive society (Brasileiro et al., 2019).

References

- AFARD (Agency for Accelerated Regional Development) *Living in West Nile*. Available at: <https://www.afard.net/what-we-do/146-living-in-west-nile> (Accessed: 22 November 2022).
- Archer, D. and Cottingham, S. (1996) *REFLECT: mother manual*. London: ActionAid.
- Bhola, H.S. (1994) *A source book for literacy work: perspectives from the grassroots*. Paris; London: UNESCO ; Jessica Kingsley.
- Brasileiro, M.L.S. et al. (2019) 'Intergenerational programs among children, young and elderly people with educational emphasis: an integrative review', *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine*, 5(1).
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Comings, J. and Kahler, D. (1984) *Peace Corps literacy handbook*. Washington: Peace Corps (Peace Corps ICE Manual, M-21).
- Coristine, S. et al. (2022) *The importance of student-teacher relationships: classroom practice in 2022*. Available at: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/educ5202/chapter/the-importance-of-student-teacher-relationships/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022).
- Desmond, S. and Elfert, M. (2008) *Family literacy: experiences from Africa and around the world*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000180481>.
- Fitzpatrick, A. (2019) 'Towards a pedagogy of intergenerational learning', in M. Kernan and G. Cortellesi (eds) *Intergenerational learning in practice: together old and young*. London: Routledge.

- Gençer, H. (2019) 'Group dynamics and behaviour', *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), pp. 223–229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2019.070128>.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: principles in practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hanemann, U. (2015) *Learning Families: Intergenerational Approaches to Literacy Teaching and Learning*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- Johnson, B. and Christensen, L. (2012) *Educational research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kaplan, M.S. (2001) *School-based intergenerational programs*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education.
- Kaplan, M.S. (2002) 'International programs in schools: considerations of form and function', *International Review of Education*, 48(5), pp. 305–334. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021231713392>.
- Kerka, S. (1991) *Family and intergenerational literacy*.
- Kernan, M. and Cortellesi, G. (eds) (2019) *Intergenerational learning in practice: together old and young*. London: Routledge.
- Lakwo, A., Cwinyaai, W. and Abdallay, O. (2008) *West Nile profiling report*. Available at: <https://www.afard.net/publications/evaluation-and-research/46-west-nile-profiling-fianl-report-august-2008/file> (Accessed: 11 May 2022).
- Lewin, K. (1945) 'The Research Center for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology', *Sociometry*, 8(2), pp. 126–136.
- Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Milton, J. (2000) *The Senglea family literacy programme*. Malta: Faculty of Education, University of Malta.
- Muzuva, J. (2022) *An examination of household factors affecting female literacy in West Nile region, Uganda*. Unpublished undergraduate dissertation. Makerere University.
- Ngaka, W. (2004) *An Inquiry into the Dynamics of Intergenerational Learning in URLCODA's Adult Literacy Classes in Arua District, Uganda*. M. Ed. Thesis submitted to the School of Community Development and Adult Learning, Faculty of Community and Development Disciplines. University of Kwazulu-Natal.
- Ngaka, W. (2014) 'Intergenerational and cross-cultural interactions for enhancing literacy learning and sustainable societies in Uganda' (Paper presented at the Kominkan-CLC International Conference on Education for Sustainable Development entitled Community Based Human Development for Sustainable Society). Available at: <https://www.city.okayama.jp/sdgs-esd/cmsfiles/contents/0000038/38249/26.pdf>.

- Okech, A. *et al.* (1999) *Evaluation of the Functional Adult Literacy Programme in Uganda*. Kampala: MoGLSD and World Bank.
- Okech, A. *et al.* (2001) *Adult literacy programs in Uganda*. Washington: World Bank (Africa region human development series).
- Okita, S.Y. (2012) 'Social interactions and learning', in N.M. Seel (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the sciences of learning*. Boston: Springer, pp. 3104–3107. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_1770.
- Ouma, A. (2021) 'Intergenerational learning processes of traditional medicinal knowledge and socio-spatial transformation dynamics', *Frontiers in Sociology* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.661992>.
- Prins, E., Toso, B.W. and Schafft, K. (2009) "'It feels like a little family to me": social interaction and support among women in adult education and family literacy', *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(4), pp. 335–352.
- Reeves, S. *et al.* (2013) 'Ethnography in qualitative educational research: AMEE Guide No. 80', *Medical Teacher*, 35(8), pp. e1365–e1379.
- Rosales, A. and Blanche-T. D. (2021) 'Explicit and implicit intergenerational digital literacy dynamics: how families contribute to overcome the digital divide of grandmothers', *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 20(3), pp. 328–346. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2021.1921651>.
- Saldaña, J. (2009) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Sen, A. (1999) *Development as freedom*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ssekamwa, J.C. (1997) *History and development of education in Uganda*. Kampala, Uganda: Foundation Publishers.
- UIICT (Uganda Institute of Information and Communications Technology) *Digital literacy skills transfer of 50 trained community instructors (change agents) to 5000 community members in 30 districts across the country*. Available at: <https://www.uiict.ac.ug/digital-literacy-training/> (Accessed: 11 June 2019).
- UNESCO (2020) *Unlocking the potential of family and intergenerational learning*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373512>.
- Western Sydney University *What is digital literacy?* Available at: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/study_skills_guides/digital_literacy/what_is_digital_literacy (Accessed: 22 August 2019).



Chapter 5

A cultural model of Muslim Indian immigrant family language and literacy development in South Africa

Leila Kajee

Introduction

We are witnessing unparalleled global interest in young children and their literacy development. However, much of the research in the field is conducted with English-speaking, middle-class families and reflects colonial Eurocentric values and traditions, with no consideration of the children's cultures, histories and communities (Anderson et al., 2016). The relationship between the home, community and school is significant, since home literacies contribute to children's early language and literacy skills (Anderson, Anderson and Sadiq, 2017). When culturally defined home and school literacy practices fail to reinforce each other, some children (such as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds) may be in danger of not succeeding in school. Generally, what is valued by the school is expected to be 'taken up' at home; however, the opposite should also hold true, but is often overlooked. In the South African context, little attention has been given to what happens in non-Western homes or to the unofficial literacy practices in which people engage.

The situation in South Africa is compounded for immigrant children and their families. Unlike their parents, immigrant youth find themselves caught between two worlds, neither fully part of the host country nor fully part of the parents' world (Kajee, 2011; Ngoh and Kajee, 2018; Noguera, 2006). Rogoff and Correa-Chavez (in Gregory, Long and Volk, 2004), recognize that children today connect with 'hybrid traditions of several communities'; for example, children learn to speak, read and write different languages and scripts simultaneously (such as Urdu and English). Although children may not show schooled literacy in the school's predominant language (usually English), in home and community settings they establish intricate language and literacy patterns and behaviours as they participate in multilayered literacy activities. These multiple literacies,

however, go unrecognized by schools, whose personnel assume that parents who are literate in the dominant language are the children's primary support in language and literacy. Researchers have argued that it is only when schools respond positively to community literacies that something can be done to reduce the inequalities between dominant and minority groups (Blackledge, Creese and Takhi, 2014; Gregory, Long and Volk, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2012).

The purpose of this chapter is to present a more nuanced view of family and intergenerational literacy practices and cultural models of literacy in an immigrant family from a Muslim religious background, living in Johannesburg, South Africa. My work is derived from a larger project on immigrant literacies, conducted in South Africa, where I used snowball sampling to select families in inner-city Johannesburg (Kajee, 2011). In most cases, the families referred us to other families who met the criteria we were looking for. The larger study examined home literacies in Indian immigrant families from different backgrounds, parental beliefs about literacy, and how families deal with contradictions of culture among home, school and community literacy practices. In this chapter, I examine the possibilities for literacy improvement within one Indian immigrant family.

Exploring literacy through a socio-cultural lens allows for language and literacy practices to be seen in relation to historical, situational, cultural and societal factors that collectively shape learning, rather than as isolated, personal phenomena.

Drawing on data elicited from two interviews with the family, the mother's narrative, and data from three observations of the family, the chapter concludes that families' traditions and cultural heritage can provide them with empowering means to help develop reading and writing skills, which are important for many everyday functions and can contribute to advanced literacy development (Wasik and Van Horn, 2012). Some implications for teaching and learning are also noted.

Theoretical lens

Socio-cultural theories have long informed conceptions of literacy. The emergence of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993; New London Group, 1996) with a focus on literacy as a social practice embedded in relationships, the purposes of literacy, power relations, and particular socio-cultural settings, has enabled us to ask what literacy means in families, especially in out-of-school settings (Lynch and Prins, 2022). Exploring literacy through a socio-cultural lens allows for language and literacy practices to be seen in relation to historical, situational, cultural and societal factors that collectively shape learning (Anderson et al., 2016; Larson and

Marsh, 2012), rather than as isolated, personal phenomena. Although literacy has historically been viewed as a schooled practice, schooled or autonomous models of literacy do not adequately account for how families, communities and cultures contribute to children's early literacy learning. From this perspective, literacy learning is seen rather as a dynamic process, one which involves complex social relationships that the learners form with members of their socio-cultural contexts.

Several assumptions are foundational to a social practice view of literacy:

- literacy may be understood as a set of social principles;
- different literacies function in different domains;
- literacies are patterned by social institutions and power relationships;
- literacies are purposeful, historically situated and open to change. (Barton and Hamilton, 2000)

As Lynch and Prins (2022) observe, literacy is much more than interacting with a text. It involves feelings and beliefs about the literacy activity or event. Individuals may be considered literate in one area but not another, and some literacies have more power in society than others. Much research on family literacy is informed by a social practice model of literacy (see e.g. Rogers, 2008; Heath, 2013, in Jones, 2018).

'Family literacy is a multifaceted concept. It refers both to how families learn and use literacy in their daily lives, and to intergenerational programmes or activities that seek to enhance parents' and young children's educational, language, and literacy development and/or to foster parental involvement in education' (Lynch and Prins, 2022, p. ix). A mother reading a bedtime story to her child, a father and son praying at a mosque, and siblings helping one another complete their homework, are instances of family literacy. Morrow (1995) describes how parents, children and other family members use literacy at home and in their community, often as part of routines of daily living. Conversations, beliefs and interactions are tied to literacy development in the home. Activities such as interactions around recipes, lists and advertisements have all played a role in our understanding of family literacy (Lynch, 2008; Lynch and Prins, 2022). However, for Taylor (1997, p. 4) 'no single narrow definition of family literacy can do justice to the richness and complexity of families, and the multiple literacies, including often unrecognized local literacies, that are part of their everyday lives'. Examples of intergenerational programmes include those discussed by Anderson et al. (2016) in British Columbia and Le Roux (2020) in South Africa.

Cultural models of literacy are representations of 'what is valued and ideal, what activities should be enacted and avoided, who should participate, and the rules of interaction' (Reese and Gallimore, 2000 in Lynch and Prins, 2022, p. 66). 'Cultural

models are so familiar and mundane that they are often invisible and unnoticed by those who hold them' (Reese and Gallimore, 2000, p. 106). They constitute shared beliefs and practices but allow for individual variation. Such models may be influenced by socio-economic conditions (Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003).

Data sample and discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the hybrid literacy practices in an immigrant Muslim Indian household in Johannesburg, as well as how parents' (in this case, the mother's) cultural models of literacy might influence their children's literacy development.

Indians in South Africa are descendants of immigrants from India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. New immigrants served as indentured labourers and later as coal miners, farmers, railway workers, clerks or businesspeople. Most were of Hindu or Christian faith, and a smaller percentage were Muslim. Languages spoken included Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, as well as several dialects. Later immigrants had 'passenger' status, meaning that they paid their own way to the country. Passenger Indians initially worked in Durban but later spread inland to the Transvaal (now Gauteng), then Cape Town. Following the demise of apartheid, new surges of immigration from India took place, akin to the movement of Africans from neighbouring countries to the post-apartheid state, seeking opportunities for betterment.

Muslims are a minority religious group in South Africa, constituting some 3 per cent of the population, and the constitution prohibits all forms of religious, cultural and linguistic discrimination. Tolerance and diversity are promoted. However, there are still instances of Islamophobia in the country (Edroos, 2017; Vahed, 2007).

Urdu is used as a code for cultural and linguistic identity, while Arabic is used for religious reasons, and English for socio-economic reasons.

Azima (pseudonyms are used for the family members for ethical reasons) came to South Africa aged 26 to join her husband Fadil, who works for an Indian IT company with a branch in South Africa. She is proficient in English, having studied the language throughout school and university. She is an engineer by profession, but does not work in South Africa. Azima and Fadil have two children, a six-year-old son named Shahid and a daughter who was born during the course of this study. Azima speaks Urdu and English at home with her husband and son. Urdu is used as a code for cultural and linguistic identity, while Arabic is used for religious reasons, and English for socio-economic reasons. She and Fadil live

in a Johannesburg apartment complex. As a Muslim family, their religion and culture are not dominant in India or South Africa. The family has to negotiate their identities and adjust to the expectations of dominant cultures and languages, and literacies associated with them. The chapter focuses on Azima and Shahid, rather than Fadil (who was mostly at work and did not participate in the study directly) or their friends.

It was a Monday afternoon, and Azima and I were sharing a cup of *chai* (milky Indian tea). Azima had just made a batch of *roti* (Indian flatbread) for the evening meal, something she did daily. The apartment was functionally decorated. There were Indian images on the walls, as well as verses and prayers in frames. Azima and I were sitting in the lounge while Shahid watched a cartoon on TV, having just had a post-school snack. He was drawing a picture while he watched TV. He attended a semi-private Muslim school in town, so did not have to attend *madrassa* (Islamic religious school) in the afternoons. The school is attended predominantly by Muslim children, and most of the teachers are Muslim as well. The medium of instruction at the school is English. Azima asked him about his day. For my benefit, they spoke mostly in English.

Azima: *How was school, beta [child]?*

Shahid: *Madam [teacher] was happy, she said I am reading nice now. I said you are making me read at home.*

Azima: *Good boy, where's your library books – the Peter one? Mustn't lose that one. We will go again Saturday to the library. I must go see Madam again, she said they are doing fundraising and the mothers must bake something. Madam is nice [addressing the researcher]. Every time she will ask what we need, say what to do in the house to help his reading.*

Researcher: *Do you tell her what you do with him [Shahid] at home?*

From this point, the conversation only includes Azima and the researcher.

Azima: *No, that is not important, school is important. English is important. If she says I must do something, I do it. She can send books; we will read at home. Remember I also did English in school and college, so it is never hard for me. I am an English speaker. For the other mothers who did not study it is very hard. To communicate. How can they know what the school wants?*

Researcher: *Do you go to school often?*

Azima: *When I get the driver, I go, sometimes the driver is busy. But always I try. Other mothers don't like to go for English sake [sic] [because of*

English]. They cannot speak too good, so they are shy. They must learn to speak, to talk. To the teacher. You are in a new country. You must learn the ways. Here it is the English way. That's why we came here. They can talk baking, cooking, but they must also learn schoolwork: reading, writing, English ways [sic].

Researcher: *Do you think it is important to go to school to speak to the teacher?*

Azima: *This is too important. This is how we know about homework, about reading, how to help. For English words. School is more important, but we must help at home. If the teacher sends notes in the book, we must answer. When there is a meeting, we must go. Teachers [sic] says reading is very important, I agree.*

Researcher: *And his Arabic and Urdu?*

Azima: *He does some Arabic in school. They are starting alphabet, and duas [prayers], from the Qur'an. At home I make him say his [Arabic] alphabet. Also, Fadil [his father] helps him a lot. He goes with Fadil to the mosque, too. Because I am not working here [in South Africa] all my time goes with the child. For education. That is how he will grow, why we are here, even if we miss India.*

Researcher: *How do you help Shahid with his reading? Like you were taught? Ok, maybe tell me how you were taught?*

Azima: *Ok, so when I was small, we didn't do reading at home. Only in school with the teacher. Our parents would say verses, prayers. We make words, sounds, then sentences in school. The sounds go into a word. Then we repeat and repeat. I can do that now, but only when Shahid is stuck. He will read from the library books and the schoolbooks. He will say the sentence and if he is stuck with big words, I break it down. My English helps a lot.*

Researcher: *Do you explain the story, the meaning of words, when you read? Do you ask questions about the story?*

Azima: *Sometimes, if it is a new word. Sometimes it's easier in Urdu to say the meaning, then he understands. But we don't ask too many questions – have not tried.*

Researcher: *Your English is good, what language do you speak at home ... as a family?*

Azima: *Urdu, but because English is important, we also speak English. But when the nani and dadi [maternal and paternal grandmothers,*

respectively] come we speak Urdu. This is also good for Shahid, so he does not forget his main language, Urdu. It is easy to forget if we do not speak at home. And it is respectful. It is the heart for our culture.

Researcher: How do you find being an Indian in South Africa?

Azima: It is fine – not like other countries, like Europe and America. Here people look like you. But remember South African Indian is very different from Indian from India. You [Indian South African] are like white South African. Only religion is the same: mosque, praying, clothing, Ramadan [month-long Muslim fast], Eid [the three-day celebration after Ramadan]. Here you are not a terrorist if you are Muslim. Here we can go to functions, talks, khatams [prayer gatherings] and there is no fear. In UK and US, you can be blacklisted. You are called a terrorist. That's not good, here is better.

In this extract, Azima highlights the importance of maintaining contact with the school, which she believes is important for her child's English proficiency and academic success. She also thinks Urdu is important as a cultural language and must be maintained. (Urdu is not a national language, although it is an officially recognized language in India.) The extract demonstrates the linguistic diversity that Shahid is exposed to: English, Urdu and Arabic. He is taught in English at school and his parents speak English and Urdu at home. He is also exposed to Arabic text in the Quran; however, it seems he is not exposed to Urdu written text. At six, he may be considered bilingual (in English and Urdu); he belongs to hybrid linguistic communities.

***The meaning of Quranic texts for Muslims
does not lie entirely in the interpretation of the text
but is symbolically related to the Quran as the
Word of God. Thus, verbalizing the word is
regarded as a blessed act.***

Azima also emphasized the value of English books, reading, the library and the home language. The extract resonates with many South African immigrant parents who prefer their children to learn English and encounter English as a medium of instruction. The Quran is written and read in Arabic. This is a language seldom understood by many of its readers worldwide. The meaning of Quranic texts for Muslims does not lie entirely in the interpretation of the text but is symbolically related to the Quran as the Word of God (Farah, 1998, in Blackledge, 2000). Thus, verbalizing the word is regarded as a blessed act. Azima's concern about worldwide distrust of Islam (being seen as a terrorist in America, Britain

and Europe, for instance) echoes her identity and cultural values. Her words 'looking like other people in South Africa' indicate that in South Africa she feels unstigmatized as a Muslim. She does not associate much with Indian South Africans; she finds them very dissimilar to Indians from the Indian continent.

Azima's words about reading resonate with Reese and Gallimore's (2000) work on cultural models of reading. Azima was not taught to read at home when she was a child, indicating firm boundaries between her home and school. At school, the phonetic approach of breaking up words into syllables was used, which she still relies on today with her son. While she reads with him, she does not really focus on discussions or understanding the story. She focuses more on pronunciation and vocabulary. The formal teaching of reading is relegated to school. Repetition or rote learning also appears to be favoured. In this extract, Azima appears to encourage her son to read, even providing opportunities for him to do so. The father was not observed reading during any of the sessions, since he was at work.

In these studies, as in Azima's home, it is noticeable that children spend more time with the mother than with the father, not surprisingly because the men went out to work. Most of the early childhood literacy practices were therefore shaped by women.

The family also engages in multiple, multifaceted literacy practices. School is valued and seen as a means of advancement and upward mobility, while English is considered a cultural code to access this status. Being in South Africa is also valued. These practices do not suggest a deficit model. Rather, they are linguistically rich, and the family is surrounded by social and literacy resources. In her work with Hispanic and Russian immigrant communities, Delgado-Gaitan (2012) discusses how texts are used in these households: letters to home are treasured, as are telephone calls and invitations that arrive through the post. Nonetheless, it is often assumed that minority-culture families offer less effective literacy and language environments than middle-class, majority-culture families (Blackledge, Creese and Takhi, 2014; Delgado-Gaitan, 2005; 2012). In these studies, as in Azima's home, it is noticeable that children spend more time with the mother than with the father, not surprisingly because the men went out to work. Most of the early childhood literacy practices were therefore shaped by women. This division of labour appears to contribute to gendered expectations and practices. Azima mentions that her husband Fadil takes Shahid to the mosque: since literacy practices span many social contexts, Fadil also contributes to his son's multiple, multifaceted literacy practices – in this case, religious literacy.

Schools often implicitly favour certain groups over others, and the values attached to literacy at school may be different from those held by parents and communities. Authority is vested in the mainstream culture, and these literacy practices have elevated status and power (Blackledge, 2000). Thus, for children from the dominant or mainstream culture, there is more consistency and continuity between home and school. In South Africa, the numerically dominant cultural groups are Zulu, Sotho and Xhosa. However, during more than 40 years of apartheid, white men dominated. Thirty years post-apartheid, white men still dominate in most domains of privilege, such as the workplace. Where there is closer congruence between home and school, children are more likely to become literate in school terms: 'When children possess the cultural repertoires upon which school depends, all goes well' (Blackledge, 2000, p. 8). In the present case, we could say that the family has internalized the expectations and practices of the dominant group or culture and is exhibiting congruent practice.

Language and religion play an important role in this family. Azima does not want to lose her culture or language, and speaking the language appears to be a symbolic marker of her cultural identity. Shahid is deemed fortunate by the family that he attends a Muslim school, where he is exposed to a religious as well as a traditional curriculum. Families are often motivated by religion to maintain their home literacies and to avoid language loss, as evidenced by Gregory's (1996) study of the Bengali community.

Azima makes a concerted effort to help her child to progress in the new country, drawing on her own cultural models. She appears to be constructing her identity more around South Africanness and sees that Indians of South African origin behave differently from Indians from India. What is not unexpected is Azima's belief that Islam is associated with terrorism (Islamophobia) in Europe, the UK and the USA. In South Africa, she can associate with other South African Muslims, even though she considers them more Western in their mindset. The basic cultural values appear to be the same. It seems that in South Africa she does not feel she is being discriminated against for her religious beliefs.

Unsurprisingly, schools demand that minority language parents adopt the linguistic rules of the dominant group to support their children's learning. For some families, literacy, as demanded by schools, involves reading English texts, which lays the foundation for academic success. For others this is intimidating. Minority language families may feel they have to give up their cultural identity and assimilate facets of the dominant culture. At this stage, Azima's family appears to be adopting the linguistic rules of the school (by speaking English and reading English books), while still trying to maintain their own culture and language.

Implications for teaching and learning

Change can only occur when schools modify power relations with minority group parents (Blackledge, 2000; Blackledge, Creese and Takhi, 2014). They must be involved as equals in the process of learning. What goes unnoticed by schools is that many minority group parents already provide their children with literacy-rich environments. This must be valued: schools need to give up their roles as gatekeepers of the dominant culture and acknowledge the right of minorities to basic education. However, Azima says that she only goes to Shahid's school when she has access to a driver. She does not yet drive in South Africa. She mentions other mothers who do not go to school meetings because they are not proficient in English, which hampers their interaction with the school and the teachers. As she says, 'You must learn the ways. Here, it is the English way', meaning that these mothers need to learn to speak English in order to participate in their children's schooled literacy. The mothers she mentions are disempowered in the school domain. A continuing challenge for post-apartheid South Africa is providing education for a democratic, socially just country, one which caters to its minorities as well.

If the parents do not see their responsibility for early literacy at home as important to literacy development, they will not create literacy activities, or respond when their children show an interest in literacy opportunities in the world around them.

In this vignette, we do not see Azima playing the role of the first teacher to her child. This role is delegated to the school. She believes that the school plays a more important role than the home, although she also realizes the need for some home input. She spends time reading with her child, but mostly focusing on repetition and correction, and in the dominant language. It is the extension of school literacy to the home. If the parents do not see their responsibility for early literacy at home as important to literacy development, they will not create literacy activities, or respond when their children show an interest in literacy opportunities in the world around them.

Teachers and parents need to create effective ways to involve parents in children's learning in and beyond the classroom. To build cultural continuity between students' home and school learning experiences, teachers need also to bring their students' cultures to the classroom, involving families and cultural communities in students' learning in school (Wasik and Van Horn, 2012). Wasik and Van Horn

assert that by recognizing participants' lived experiences, homes and schools can bond more strongly through a culturally reciprocal approach. This requires validating the families' multiple social and cultural literacies. Teachers need to be informed by students and their families' beliefs and practices, 'to incorporate culturally familiar and relevant content and provide culturally familiar contexts; to involve learners in the curriculum development; and to take a stance that emphasizes cultural maintenance and negotiation rather than cultural assimilation' (Wasik and Van Horn, 2012, p. 13).

Conclusion

Studies of family literacy have not always given parents advice on how they can best help. Most often, schools are shown to have little capacity to integrate home experiences. Yet these border crossings are necessary, even critical for literacy practices and development. This study shows how one immigrant family is practising school-based literacies. Using families' oral traditions and cultural heritage can provide a creative and empowering means of helping them develop reading and writing skills that are important for many everyday functions, and can potentially serve as a foundation for more advanced literacy development (Wasik and Van Horn, 2012, pp. 20–30).

References

- Anderson, A. et al. (2016) *Language, learning, and culture in early childhood: home, school, and community contexts*. Edited by A. Anderson et al. New York: Routledge.
- Anderson, J., Anderson, A. and Sadiq, A. (2017) 'Family literacy programmes and young children's language and literacy development: paying attention to families' home language', *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3–4), pp. 644–654. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1211119>.
- Barton, D. and Hamilton, M. (2000) 'Literacy practices', in D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič (eds) *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context*. New York: Routledge, pp. 7–15.
- Blackledge, A. (2000) *Literacy, power and social justice*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Blackledge, A., Creese, A. and Takhi, J.K. (2014) 'Communicative repertoires in the community language classroom: resources for negotiating authenticity', in J. Cenoz and D. Gorter (eds) *Multilingual education: new perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (2005) 'Family narratives in multiple literacies', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 36(3), pp. 265–272.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (2012) 'Culture, literacy, and power in family–community–school–relationships', *Theory into Practice*, 51(4), pp. 305–311.
- Edroos, F. (2017) 'Islamophobia to blame' for Cape Town mosque attacks, *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/1/12/islamophobia-to-blame-for-cape-town-mosque-attacks> (Accessed: 10 October 2022).
- Gregory, E. (1996) *Making sense of a new world: learning to read in a second language*. New York: Routledge.
- Gregory, E., Long, S. and Volk, D. (2004) 'A sociocultural approach to learning', in E. Gregory, S. Long, and D. Volk (eds) *Many pathways to literacy*. New York: Routledge.
- Gutiérrez, K.D. and Rogoff, B. (2003) 'Cultural ways of learning: individual traits or repertoires of practice', *Educational Researcher*, 32(5), pp. 19–25.
- Jones, S. (2018) *Portraits of everyday literacy for social justice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kajee, L. (2011) 'Literacy journeys: home and family literacy practices in immigrant households and their congruence with schooled literacy', *South African Journal of Education*, 31, pp. 434–446.
- Larson, J. and Marsh, J. (eds) (2012) *The Sage handbook of early childhood literacy*. Sage.
- Le Roux, S.G. (2020) 'Family literacy programmes in South Africa: should we take note?', *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 10(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.819>.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Lynch, T.L. (2008) 'Re-readings and literacy: how students' second readings might open third spaces', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(4), pp. 334–341.
- Morrow, L.M. (1995) *Family literacy: connections in schools and communities*. Newark: International Reading Association.
- New London Group (1996) 'A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures', *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), pp. 60–92.

- Ngoh, D. and Kajee, L. (2018) 'Mapping the literate lives of two Cameroonian families living in Johannesburg: implications for language and literacy education', *Per Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning*, 34(1), pp. 1–16.
- Noguera, P.A. (2006) 'Latino youth: immigration, education, and the future', *Latino Studies*, 4(3), pp. 313–320.
- Reese, L. and Gallimore, R. (2000) 'Immigrant Latinos' cultural model of literacy development: an evolving perspective on home-school discontinuities', *American Journal of Education*, pp. 103–134.
- Rogers, A. (2008) 'Informal learning and literacy', in B. Street and N.H. Hornberger (eds) *Encyclopedia of language and education*. 2nd edn. New York: Springer, pp. 133–144. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3_41.
- Street, B. (1993) *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, D. (1997) *Many families, many literacies: an international declaration of principles*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Vahed, G. (2007) 'Islam in the public sphere in post-Apartheid South Africa: prospects and challenges', *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 27(1), pp. 116–149.
- Wasik, B. and Van Horn, B. (2012) 'The role of family literacy in society', in B.H. Wasik (ed.) *Handbook of family literacy*. New York: Routledge, pp. 3–15.



Chapter 6

The Liberian Family Literacy Initiative

Jo-Anne L. Manswell Butty, Yvonne Capeheart,
Ruby Joseph, Barbara Kamara, Ronald E. Mertz,
David Rosen, Edward A. Socker, Stephanie Vickers
and Miriam Westheimer

Introduction

How can an international family literacy programme that is widely used in 15 countries be effectively implemented in Liberia? This chapter addresses this question by describing the unique partnership created to identify the need, organize initial training for programme implementation, and adapt the programme to the Liberian context. It presents ongoing evaluation procedures and findings to explain how the need for an adult literacy component arose and to share programme challenges. And it describes how a structured family literacy programme (in this case, one developed in the USA) can be successfully implemented in a new country with different socio-economic, cultural and educational conditions.

A unique partnership

The impetus for establishing the Liberian Family Literacy Initiative (FLI) grew out of a 2014 statement by Liberia's then Foreign Minister, Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan: 'If Liberia does not put an end to illiteracy, it will be illiteracy that will put an end to Liberia' (Government of the Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

The Friends of Liberia (FOL) is a US non-profit created by returned Peace Corps volunteers (US citizens who served in Liberia through a US government programme). For over 30 years, FOL has worked to improve education in Liberia by holding conferences, renovating schools, sending supplies for schoolchildren and training more than 300 teachers in five counties, while witnessing high illiteracy among Liberian educators. In recent years the FOL Education Committee has shifted its focus to literacy in Liberia. All of the authors of this chapter are active members of the FOL Education Committee.

Realizing that their approach was important but insufficient, FOL in 2015 sought partner organizations to create a two-generation programme starting with early home visiting, now known as the FLI. Through its Education Committee, FOL provides capacity-building, finance and programme oversight, monitoring, and resource identification. The WE-CARE Foundation (WE-CARE), a Liberian not-for-profit, serves as the implementing partner (co-author Yvonne Capeheart is one of its founders), and HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) International provides access to its evidence-based curriculum, training approach and evaluation guidance (Payne et al., 2020; HIPPY International, 2022; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). HIPPY was developed in Israel and the USA; the USA version of the curriculum was used in Liberia. HIPPY International also coaches the supervisors to ensure that its curriculum is implemented faithfully and connects WE-CARE and FOL to the HIPPY network worldwide. Co-author Miriam Westheimer is the Chief Program Officer for HIPPY International.

HIPPY is an international early childhood development (ECD) programme grounded in the belief that learning begins at home and that parents can play a critical role as educational partners with schools. It is widely known that children are more successful when parents are engaged in their learning (Castro et al., 2015). The programme is designed to help parents prepare their pre-school children for success in school and life and to equip parents with the tools, skills and confidence they need to support their children's learning at home successfully.

Together, these three core partners bring the expertise that has supported and sustained FLI/HIPPY since 2015. All three partners are active participants in the monthly meetings of the FOL Education Committee and bring respected, knowledgeable voices to the table.

The need for the FLI/HIPPY programme in Liberia

Liberia was relatively stable from its founding in 1847 until 1989. During this time, the government developed the capital, Monrovia, and some other coastal areas, but largely ignored the interior parts of the country. Government officials became increasingly corrupt, often prioritizing themselves, their family and their friends before the needs of the Liberian people. In 1989 Charles Taylor led an uprising against the government that started a civil war, which lasted for 14 years (1989–2003) and destroyed infrastructure, brought child soldiers to West Africa and spilled over into some neighbouring countries. Many people left the country, and the war left a generation with little or no safe access to school. Peace did not come to Liberia until 2005, when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President.

While Liberia was still recovering from its civil war, an Ebola epidemic (2014–2015) broke out, causing many organizations and businesses to temporarily suspend their operations or leave the country (BBC News, 2018).

The civil war left many developed areas in ruins and communities in the capital overpopulated due to forced displacement. Massive destruction of homes and schools meant that facilities for early childhood care and education were unavailable, especially in economically challenged communities. The Ebola epidemic also closed schools for an extended period. Ebola negatively affected any recovery gained in the education system. These events have deprived thousands of children of early childhood education (ECE).

Less than half of Liberian children attend school at all, and less than 10 per cent attend high school.

For decades, the Liberian government offered various forms of ECE. However, it was not until 2011 that Liberia formally and strategically positioned itself through the Education Reform Act to establish the Bureau of Early Childhood Education and approve the National Inter-Sectoral Early Childhood Development Policy, which covers children up to eight years old. The policy calls for a child to start pre-primary school at the age of two and be enrolled in Grade 1 at the age of six.

Less than half of Liberian children attend school at all, and less than 10 per cent attend high school. The Education Ministry Information System in 2016 showed that ECE's Gross Enrolment Ratio was above 100 per cent (meaning enrolment overall was up over the previous years); however, the Net Enrolment Rate for ECE was 29 per cent (after adjusting for factors such as over-age students). This difference was driven by late enrolment and over-age enrolment. Nearly 50 per cent (over 250,000) of students enrolled in ECE were aged six or above. In the education sector, under a third of three- to five-year-olds benefit from ECE.

Most children from birth to eight years old in Liberia have families living in extreme poverty, with limited opportunities to learn about their rights to have their needs met (Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia, 2016). The Early Childhood Development policy was intended to ensure that children have access to high-quality early learning and stimulation programmes and environments that enable them to develop age-appropriate cognitive, physical and social skills. Despite the policy, this early stimulation is severely lacking in Liberia, as shown by low ECE enrolment. The gap in ECE accentuates the potential benefits of engaging the parents in their child's education. The desire to improve and expand early childhood services was heightened by the devastating impact of the Liberian civil war on women and children from birth to eight (Human Rights

Watch, 1994). The 2017 literacy rate was estimated at 48.3 per cent countrywide, with a large gender gap (62.7 per cent male literacy versus 34.1 per cent female, UIL, 2022). Women's literacy levels have remained very low. This literacy level has implications for how parents can support their children's early learning, since even when parents are highly motivated to promote their children's success, they are limited when their literacy is low due to gaps in schooling.

Many children do not enter primary school until they are 8 or 10 years old (Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia, 2016). Most of these over-aged children come from families who cannot afford to pay the low government fees. These families, with unpredictable revenue streams, have problems accessing high-quality ECE for their children, denying many the preparation and support they need for school readiness.

All this points to the need for programmes such as FLI/HIPPY, where parents can start their children's learning journeys in their homes, helping to fill the gap in ECE. FLI/HIPPY can address Liberia's high illiteracy rate and, in the long run, a future where parents are directly involved in their children's education. FLI/HIPPY targets families who make their living through informal economic activities or are employed with low salaries. Their low income is not sufficient to meet their basic needs: these families often live without proper housing, clean water, healthy food and medical care, and cannot afford ECE for their children. The FLI/HIPPY programme helps engage these parents in developing and practising the requisite skills to help their children by providing the necessary preparation for Grade 1, thus increasing their chances of school success. Each HIPPY programme defines success differently. For Liberia, success is defined by two factors: that the child enters school at the appropriate age ready to learn, and that the child performs at or above grade level and is promoted to the next grade each year. Before students start school, children in the programme are considered to be successful when their pre-test Bracken School Readiness Assessment–Third Edition (BSRA-3) test scores improve post-test, and they improve the foundational skills taught in the HIPPY curriculum. In the future other metrics will be included in addition to the BSRA-3. Children's early years and an early educational start are critical for their life chances.

HIPPY programme implementation

In this section, we discuss components of implementation, including initial training, programme cultural adaptation, the emergence of an adult literacy programme and challenges.

HIPPY is being implemented in 15 countries, and although its model has a few variations in different countries and within specific communities, all HIPPY programmes around the world follow a similar plan for promoting parents as

their children's first teachers: home visiting, overseen by a paraprofessional who provides the parents with a structured curriculum and guidance in using it. The programme is designed as a weekly intervention for parents from disadvantaged backgrounds with children aged two to five. The intervention aims to improve school readiness, reducing gaps in education and attainment. It is not conducted by certified teachers or health care professionals, nor do the home visitors

Role-playing with a structured curriculum is one of the programme's most important features. The emphasis is on action rather than talk, because interactive, concrete, experiential learning easily engages parents.

instruct the children directly. Instead, these paraprofessionals provide the parents with storybooks and other resources, and teach them to use these materials with their children. Role-playing with a structured curriculum is one of the programme's most important features. The emphasis is on action rather than talk, because interactive, concrete, experiential learning easily engages parents. Often the paraprofessional home visitors are mothers who previously participated in the programme. Training local community members to become home visitors greatly reduces the cost of the intervention while increasing staff availability, exponentially improving the impact on the children (Lombard, 1994).

HIPPY International provided a five-day initial training to 20 paraprofessionals in Liberia. Afterwards, a programme coordinator, an assistant programme coordinator and six home visitors started recruiting families for the programme. WE-CARE staff looked at communities around Monrovia to pilot the programme and conducted needs assessments with community members in four communities. They selected the three communities with the highest number of out-of-school three-year-olds. Next, they circulated among the community to explain the programme, its benefits and the commitment expected of the parents. In the programme's first year, 20 families from each community were selected from a total of 60 families.

After two years of programme implementation, showing clearly that the HIPPY approach had promising potential in Liberia, our focus turned to the curriculum's content and appropriateness. One of WE-CARE's many literacy-focused projects was the encouragement of emerging Liberian children's book authors. A small team of Liberian and HIPPY International staff reviewed the books to identify those that would fit within the HIPPY curriculum. In some instances, this meant replacing books (e.g. *A Snowy Day* was replaced with a new book called *A Rainy Day*). In others, it meant making subtle but meaningful changes to the text (e.g. *Pete and the Vegetable Soup* was rewritten as *Blamo and the Okra Soup*). Once

all the new books had been identified, new parent-child activities were written and piloted with participants. These changes were critical to the programme's acceptance and success.

Liberian families believe that many things are learned through play. The Ministry of Education also includes play in the ECE curriculum. The HIPPY curriculum uses role-play as the primary way for parents to interact with their children during each lesson, which makes the curriculum well suited to the Liberian family dynamic and to what the Liberian Ministry of Education dictates in their own curriculum. Parent-child role-playing in the HIPPY lessons has apparently resulted in closer and more frequent parent-child interactions than those observed before the programme, although this observation is anecdotal.

FLI/HIPPY weekly home visits enable parents who cannot read to engage in the programme. Parents learn how to do the upcoming week's activities by role-playing and then remembering the activity. However, in Year 1 of implementation (2017), some parents expressed a desire to learn to read to their children. In Year 2 (2018), a survey of parents showed that more than half wanted literacy classes.

The parents in FLI/HIPPY families often struggle with literacy in English, because many were unable to attend school regularly.

This led to the FLI Adult Literacy Programme (ALP), implemented in 2018, which started with 30 FLI/HIPPY parents to help them improve their English reading, writing and numeracy skills. Although the parents' initial motivation to improve their literacy levels came from their desire to better understand and use the HIPPY materials, the benefits turned out to be much greater.

The programme resulted in the development of two levels of the ALP curriculum, with a new version under consideration for parents who speak languages other than English.³ Although the official language in Liberia is English, many families speak different local languages such as Kpelle and Bassa. The ALP curricula are contextualized to the HIPPY materials but also allow other reading, writing and numeracy activities based on learner-specific needs, such as how to read and write numerical and text versions of the Liberian currency.

3 Most people, at least in the more populated parts of Liberia, speak English, commonly pidgin English (known as Liberian English). In school, children are taught to read and write (American) English. As ALP looks to expand to more rural areas, we have considered but not yet developed a variation of the ALP programme for adults who do not speak (as much) English. In Liberia, even in a rural setting, younger people are more likely to speak some English, whereas some adults, some of whom are caregivers, may speak very little. Instead, they speak one of 15 or 16 local languages, some of which are closely related while others are extremely different. Only a handful of these languages have a written form.

Attending school in Liberia is not free. Because there is very little government revenue, the schools that parents can afford to send their children to are underfunded (Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia, 2016). They mostly lack teacher training and age-appropriate materials for ECE and literacy. The Ministry of Education does include FLI/HIPPY in its ECD Plan, but does not contribute funding to any ECE programmes. Consequently, ECE in Liberia, including FLI/HIPPY, is almost entirely donor-funded.

The parents in FLI/HIPPY families often struggle with literacy in English, because many were unable to attend school regularly. This means that while a typical home visit lasts for one hour, more time is needed to provide extra explanation of the HIPPY activities. Home visitors must adjust their work schedules to allow more time with these parents. Some parents sell goods at the market during the day to make extra income, which leaves them limited time to dedicate to the HIPPY materials. The parents sometimes skip sections entirely; this creates problems as the programme progresses, given that it is sequential.

It is difficult to get the programme materials produced in Liberia. The few businesses that can print the books used in the programme can only produce small quantities, and the quality is mediocre. Instead, WE-CARE imports books printed outside Liberia. When shipments arrive at the airport, WE-CARE must negotiate for several days how much to pay to get the packages released. It is also challenging to get things to Liberia from the USA or Europe, since only a handful of airlines fly there. Another issue affecting supply access is the rainy season, which lasts about six months and causes roads to flood or become blocked by mudslides. As WE-CARE has worked to expand to more rural communities, road conditions have delayed both the supplies and the people due to attend scheduled classes and training.

The population in Monrovia has increased post-war. One example of this is the FLI/HIPPY community of West Point: during the Ebola outbreak, its estimated population was 60,000–70,000 people, living in a 131-acre area (Fabian, 2015). Since many of the families enrolled in FLI/HIPPY have very small houses, they do most of the activities outside and have trouble doing them at all when it is raining.

The ongoing economic problems in Liberia, lack of infrastructure, and overcrowding in Monrovia mean that people sometimes move out of their communities abruptly. Consequently, although programme retention in FLI/HIPPY is very strong, attrition remains a concern. For example, every year some families who have gone through a large portion of the curriculum move away and do not complete the programme.

Programme evaluation

The programme evaluation of FLI/HIPPY breaks down into three parts: monitoring programme implementation, assessing the children's outcomes and assessing the ALP.

Monitoring programme implementation

The coordinator at WE-CARE played an active role in the evaluation, creating quarterly coordinator reports, which included information on family/child enrolment, the number of home visits by each home visitor, the number of group meetings in each community, and the number of parents and staff in attendance. This information was important for programme monitoring and enabled the coordinator to report on the programme's accomplishments, implementation challenges, steps taken to address the challenges, and recommendations for improving implementation and outcomes.

Documentation procedures also included surveys (conducted by Ronald E. Mertz) and stakeholder interviews with parents, home visitors, administrators and FOL Education Committee members. The first survey asked committee members, including programme administrators, to assess implementation at the end of Year 1. Information from two surveys led to programme modifications. For example, data from a home visitor survey indicated that more than half of parents had difficulty reading the home instructional material. In another parent survey, a significant number of parents expressed an interest in strengthening their ability to read and write in English. This led to the creation of the ALP, as described above.

Although a formal observational study was not conducted, HIPPY trainers, FOL Education Committee members and other programme visitors shared findings from informal observations. For example, early in the programme the HIPPY International director and staff conducted staff training and shared their experience with the Education Committee. During the second year, an Education Committee member with expertise in programme evaluation and literacy spent several days visiting homes and observing interactions between home visitors and parents.

Assessing children's outcomes

The evaluation focused on a target population of three- to five-year-olds from four low-income communities in Liberia who participate in the HIPPY early education intervention. It involved ongoing collaboration among FOL, HIPPY Evaluation Staff from the University of South Florida (Ruby Joseph) and WE-CARE staff, who ensured that input from parents' perspectives was considered in the overall evaluation design. The evaluation applied quantitative and qualitative methods from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Short- and long-term learner outcomes

were evaluated during and after the intervention using seven strategies: 1) quarterly coordinator reports; 2) collaborative monthly stakeholder meetings; 3) site visits to observe implementation by FOL, HIPPY International and other stakeholders; 4) on-site and virtual training of WE-CARE staff; 5) surveys and interviews with parents and staff/home visitors; 6) student academic assessments; and 7) a study tracking students who completed the programme.

The authors understand the shortcomings of using a test developed for the USA in Liberia and continue to search for appropriate alternatives.

Evaluators assessed children's short-term learning outcomes using the BSRA-3, five sub-tests with age norms in three-month intervals ranging from three to six years. Although norms were based on a sample of children in the USA, they did provide a standardized measure for monitoring progress. Great care was exercised when selecting the BSRA-3 as the assessment. While other assessments exist, the BSRA-3 offers a balance between the complexity of administering the assessment and the outcomes assessed. The authors understand the shortcomings of using a test developed for the USA in Liberia and continue to search for appropriate alternatives.

To assess short-term outcomes, children were tested at programme entry and the end of each year. Completed tests were scanned and forwarded to an evaluator in the USA during the first three years and to a Liberian evaluator in later years to check for scoring accuracy, analysis and reporting. The scanned tests were summarized and reported using one of five descriptive classification categories: Very Delayed (1st–2nd percentile), Delayed (3rd–16th percentile), Average (18th–82nd percentile), Advanced (84th–97th percentile) and Very Advanced (98–99th percentile).

A consistent pattern has shown that a high percentage of children score in the Very Delayed or Delayed category at programme entry, but that almost all progress to a higher category by the end of the first and later years. For example, among children who entered the programme in 2018, all initially tested either Very Delayed (52 per cent) or Delayed (48 per cent), while at the end of three years, only 2 per cent tested Very Delayed and 26 per cent tested Delayed. Of the remaining children, 57 per cent tested Average and 14 per cent tested Advanced.

To assess long-term outcomes, WE-CARE collaborated with the FOL Monitoring and Evaluation education sub-committee to develop a plan for tracking FLI/HIPPY graduates. FLI/HIPPY has four graduating cohorts enrolled in the Liberian school system. The first phase of the tracking study provided a snapshot of Cohort 3 students' academic progress at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year.

Cohort 3 included 52 students, 38 of whom had complete data. Descriptive analyses of students’ demographics and academic outcomes were conducted, along with a qualitative summary of teachers’ comments on students’ academic performance and behaviour.

WE-CARE staff were responsible for data collection, in six stages: 1) obtaining informed consent from parents and teachers; 2) verifying students’ school attendance; 3) identifying the students’ communities, schools and teachers; 4) collecting and entering student demographic information into a database; 5) conducting the Year-End Teacher Survey with teachers of Cohort 3 students; and 6) entering student academic data into a spreadsheet. The primary source of data collection, the Year-End Teacher Survey, included teacher demographics and teacher assessments of students’ academic performance and classroom behaviour.

The results show that 38 FLI/HIPPY students (73 per cent) were enrolled in 24 community schools, 9 (17 per cent) had moved away from their communities and 5 (10 per cent) were not attending school. Of the enrolled students, 18 (47 per cent) were female and 20 (53 per cent) were male. Of these, 17 (45 per cent) had perfect attendance and 35 (92 per cent) were promoted to the next grade. The snapshot of the tracked Cohort 3 students (n=38) showed the following:

Table 1. Overall academic performance

	BEGINNING OF YEAR		END OF YEAR	
	FREQUENCY/PER CENT		FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
Exceptional	3	7.9	4	10.5
Above average	12	31.6	14	36.8
Average	19	50.0	16	42.1
Below average	4	10.5	4	10.5
Total	38	100.0	38	100.0

Table 2. Student academic performance

	ENGLISH/READING		MATHS		OTHER SUBJECTS	
	FREQUENCY/PER CENT		FREQUENCY/PER CENT		FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
Exceptional	3	7.9	1	2.6	4	10.5
Above average	8	21.1	12	31.6	5	13.2
Average	20	52.6	17	44.7	26	68.4
Below average	6	15.8	7	18.4	3	7.9
Missing	1	2.6	1	2.6	0	0.0
Total	38	100.0	38	100.0	38	100.0

Table 3. Student behaviour

	FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS		CLASS PARTICIPATION		PEER INTERACTIONS	
	FREQUENCY/PER CENT		FREQUENCY/PER CENT		FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
Exceptional	4	10.5	3	7.9	1	2.6
Above average	18	47.4	16	42.1	18	47.4
Average	14	36.8	11	28.9	14	36.8
Below average	2	5.3	6	15.8	4	10.5
Missing	0	0.0	2	5.3	1	2.6
Total	38	100.0	38	100.0	38	100.0

Written teacher comments supporting their ratings provided insights into students' academic performance and behaviour. These comments indicated that most FLI/HIPPY students were prepared for school and had good behaviour:

'...is always ahead of most of the lessons/activities.'

'...started excellently in all the subjects.'

Teachers also described some challenges faced by students who were 'below average' at the beginning of the school year:

'Not regular, playful and parents did not help him with his schoolwork.'

'He is a slow learner...'

This study showed that of the 73 per cent of FLI /HIPPY Cohort 3 students who attended school in their community after completing the programme, most progressed academically. FLI/HIPPY has made a positive impact. Overall, the study showed 89.5 per cent of students were generally prepared for school, with 50 per cent entering the school year as 'average', 31.6 per cent as 'above average' and 7.9 per cent as 'exceptional' (Table 1). Students performed at average or better in reading (81.6 per cent) and maths (78.9 per cent) (Table 2). Most students (57.9 per cent) were 'above average' or 'exceptional' in following teacher instructions, and half of the students (50 per cent) were 'above average' or 'exceptional' in class participation and peer interactions (Table 3). Tracking data also showed that students were successful in school at the end of the year, with 42 per cent rated 'average' and 47 per cent 'above average' or 'exceptional' (Table 1).

These positive preliminary data provide a rationale for evaluating other cohorts, and highlight the need to conduct a comparison study between FLI/HIPPY students and their peers and to monitor other FLI/HIPPY cohorts. The programme team hopes to use technology to improve data tracking efficiency.

A study limitation was the small sample size (n=38); as a result, no inferential statistics were extracted. However, for phase 2 the sample size is expected to increase as data from the other cohorts are collected. This larger sample will support a more robust analysis of students' educational data. During this first phase, no comparison study of FLI/HIPPY graduates and non-FLI/HIPPY students was conducted; a comparison study will be conducted in phase 3. Another limitation was due to the fact that data collection was primarily through teacher surveys, which are subjective and may include some bias. Teachers knew the children were participating in FLI/HIPPY, so they may have been more likely to perceive improvement. In phase 2, the study will incorporate report cards as a more objective measure of student progress.

Assessing the ALP

The Education Development Center's (n.d.) Out of School Youth Literacy Assessment tool, which was specifically developed to assess older youth and adult learners in Liberia, along with a pre- and post-test, was used to measure learning gains and to place adult learners at the appropriate level or to enable referral to a local adult evening or afternoon school, when available. Large literacy gains were found in the case of learners who finished the class. However, in some years the ALP class attrition rate was high because the adult learners from these extremely low-income communities have difficult demands to meet as parents and as workers in the markets.

Challenges in scaling up the FLI programme

Members of FOL and HIPPY International have decades of experience in scaling up evidence-based early learning centres and home-based ECD interventions in the USA and other countries, including Liberia. During the third year of implementation, WE-CARE and FOL team members participated in the Scaling Early Childhood Programme at the Harvard Kennedy School. This training provided capacity for WE-CARE to expand the programme in Liberia from three to five communities. To build on to their model for ECE in Liberia, WE-CARE is currently piloting a nurturing care model that includes the successful, evidence-based Jamaica Reach Up Programme (<https://reachupandlearn.com>), which is being scaled up in several African countries.

Three factors are critical for expanding the FLI: 1) creating awareness of the positive results of FLI/HIPPY, the ALP and the nurturing care model, 2) integrating FLI/HIPPY and the ALP into existing systems through education and advocacy to government, civil society and key stakeholders, and 3) building public will to support the implementation of FLI/HIPPY and the ALP programmatically and financially. The successful expansion of these interventions should follow the

framework proposed by Britto et al. (2018) in their article, 'What implementation evidence matters: Scaling-up nurturing interventions that promote early childhood development'. The authors propose two major components: improving implementation of the interventions; and implementing the six strategies for taking interventions to scale. Stated briefly, the six strategies are: 1) developing a collaborative, multi-sector policy, 2) building and supporting a professional workforce, 3) establishing effective data and monitoring systems, 4) building a costing structure with appropriate expenditure monitoring, 5) initiating broad advocacy and communication channels, and 6) differentiating and adapting all strategies to specific country contexts.

A steady, committed and well-trained programme staff continues to provide high-quality delivery of the evidenced-based FLI/HIPPY programme.

We foresee several challenges as the FLI expands: 1) identifying strong service providers and recruiting staff with adequate educational background and skills, especially in rural communities, 2) ensuring adequate training of personnel to administer data tools correctly, 3) having a streamlined cost model, 4) having appropriate and sufficient tools for data collection, and 5) assessing strategies for implementation in different contexts in Liberia and beyond.

Summary

2022 marked the seventh year in which the FLI/HIPPY programme provided Liberian families with intergenerational literacy and learning opportunities. The strong, three-way partnership has made it possible to overcome many obstacles and allow the programme to grow and thrive. A steady, committed and well-trained programme staff continues to provide high-quality delivery of the evidenced-based FLI/HIPPY programme. The adult literacy component adds a much-needed dimension to the focus on children's learning and education. In addition, the ongoing evaluation continues to show that children are prepared for school and that parents want to be engaged in their children's early learning. The FLI/HIPPY programme is now well positioned to expand through Liberia as an integral component of the government's broader national ECE strategy.

References

- BBC News (2018) *Liberia profile - timeline*, BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13732188>.
- Britto, P.R. *et al.* (2018) 'What implementation evidence matters: scaling-up nurturing interventions that promote early childhood development', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1419(1), pp. 5–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13720>.
- Castro, M. *et al.* (2015) 'Parental involvement on student academic achievement: a meta-analysis', *Educational Research Review*, 14(1), pp. 33–46. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.01.002>.
- Education Development Center (2022) *Out-of-school youth literacy assessment*. Available at: <https://eola.edc.org/> (Accessed: 22 November 2022).
- Fabian, C. (2015) *U-Report Liberia launches in Westpoint*, UNICEF Office of Innovation, UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/stories/u-report-liberia-launches-westpoint> (Accessed: 25 November 2022).
- Government of the Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014) *If Liberia doesn't put an end to illiteracy, illiteracy will put an end to Liberia*, Min. Ngafuan warns. Available at: <https://mofa.gov.lr/index.php/media/press-releases/if-liberia-doesnt-put-end-illiteracy-illiteracy-will-put-end-liberia-min>.
- HIPPY International (2022) *The HIPPY program*. Available at: <https://hippy-international.org/program/> (Accessed: 16 November 2022).
- Human Rights Watch (1994) *Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1994/liberia2/> (Accessed: 28 August 2024).
- Lombard, A. (1994) *Success begins at home: the past, present and future of the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters*. Guilford: Dushkin.
- Payne, T. *et al.* (2020) 'Florida HIPPY parents successfully prepare their children for kindergarten', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 53.
- Republic of Liberia. Ministry of Education (2016) *Getting to best education sector plan 2017-2021*. Available at: https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/getting_to_best_education_sector_plan_2017-2021._liberia.pdf?VersionId=teaK0BCiCXy9OrY6tlYFpI3T2KS5uzRI (Accessed: 23 November 2022).
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2022) *Global Alliance for Literacy Country Profiles: Liberia*. Available at: https://www.uil.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/files/2022/11/gal_country_profiles_liberia.pdf?hub=90 (Accessed: 15 August 2022).
- US Department of Health and Human Services (2022) *Home visiting evidence of effectiveness*. Available at: <https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/> (Accessed: 16 November 2022).

Section 3

FILL in the

Arab States



Chapter 7

A case study of an intergenerational and family literacy programme in Egypt

Haiyan Hua, John P. Comings, Huai-Ming Sanchez, Essam Assaad, Mona Hussein, Maddie Brancel, Fatma Mossallem and Michaela Tobin

This chapter describes a programme in three of Egypt's 27 governorates (Sohag, Beheira and Assiut) that is helping rural mothers acquire or improve reading skills while they learn and practise ways to support their children in learning how to read and to involve their family members in this effort.

Context

In Egypt, women represent the majority of individuals aged 15 and older who lack literacy skills, accounting for 61 per cent, according to the most recent estimate, from 2022 (UIS, 2024). Although non-readers are able to support their children's literacy in many ways, for example by enrolling children in school and encouraging school attendance, they are unable to directly support reading and writing skills development and have limited ability to improve their own lives and navigate the written world around them. Women's high illiteracy rate is both the result of and a contributor to poverty (Sywelem, 2015) and to gender inequalities, because their families may not value education, especially for their daughters. Rural families in Egypt are more likely to opt out of enrolling their daughters in school for economic and socio-cultural reasons, preferring to enrol their sons instead (Iqbal and Riad, 2004). Furthermore, women with limited literacy skills face barriers to accessing public health and other government services and formal work opportunities (Irin News, 2006).

Programme design

In 2017, the Egyptian government and the United States Agency for International Development initiated the Literate Village Project (LVP), which combines an effort to improve early grade reading instruction in community primary schools with an effort to teach mothers literacy and numeracy skills and how

to support their children's success in school. In this case, Save the Children is implementing the community schools component and World Education is implementing the mothers' education component. LVP's intergenerational literacy learning project began in 2017 and ends in 2025. World Education designed the mothers' education component of LVP with buy-in from Egypt's Adult Education Authority (AEA), which is now responsible for implementing the mothers' education activities. This component provides women who are illiterate and/or mothers of primary school-age children with literacy instruction and training on intergenerational and family literacy practices that foster learning. By August 2024, LVP had reached 1,933 communities in four governorates in Egypt (Sohag, Beheira, Assiut and Beni Suef). Within the beneficiary communities, 3,972 adult literacy classes were organized with the participation of 60,905 women.

Over the course of the programme, participants are taught and supported to employ family literacy practices, including the skills and knowledge needed to help children learn to read and to have meaningful conversations about education in their families.

The facilitators in the mothers' education component are drawn from the same community as their students, and are trained by AEA master trainers, who in turn have been trained by programme staff. The literacy instruction employs the curriculum and text of the government-approved *Talaam Tahrar* (Learn to Be Free) adult literacy programme (Sywelem, 2015). The mothers' component includes additional materials that support the *Talaam Tahrar* curriculum and helps women learn to engage in intergenerational and family literacy practices and also to involve other family members in this effort. These practices are introduced from the fourth month of the nine-month literacy programme, and mothers are encouraged and supported to integrate what they are learning in their literacy classes into their life at home.

The mothers' component includes six books, developed by the project, for families to read together. Each book focuses on topics relevant to the women's lives and uses the reading skills covered in the *Talaam Tahrar* curriculum. For example, the 'Health and Happiness' book follows a family conversation about healthy hygiene practices. All the books employ simple Arabic text that successful programme participants can read on their own or with the help of their school-age children. Over the course of the programme, participants are taught and supported to employ family literacy practices, including the skills and knowledge needed to help children learn to read and to have meaningful conversations about education in their families.

Literacy programmes that help mothers acquire or improve literacy skills and learn how to support their children's learning to read have been criticized as placing this responsibility on mothers alone (Prins and Toso, 2008 and Rizk, 2020). To address this issue, the programme teaches women how to employ open-ended, non-judgemental questions and active listening skills by practising with one another. This deepens their understanding of how to listen to another person's perspective and engage in constructive dialogue. Participants are then trained to use their new conversation skills to involve family members, including fathers, in educational activities with children at home, such as reading and discussion of the family literacy books. The goal of these conversations is to engage all family members in activities that support the literacy skill development of their pre-school and early grade children, although these discussion tools can also be used to address other family issues. This is in line with evidence that, while, globally, mothers tend to be the primary caregivers of children in the household, some programmes have improved fathers' engagement and level of responsive parenting, even when they are not targeted directly (Evans and Jakiela, 2024).

To further support these activities, the programme establishes community-based libraries open to students, mothers and other community members. These libraries provide materials suitable for children and for adults who are learning to read. After completing the nine-month initial literacy programme, participants may opt into a six-month follow-on programme, which seeks to marry the participants' needs and interests, determined through a participant survey, with literacy-strengthening activities. The follow-on programme pairs continued literacy skills development with income-generation skills acquisition, women's health information and learning strategies to pursue independent lifelong learning.

Through the community schools, which tend to serve older children aged from 9 to 14, the programme provides additional interventions that promote intergenerational learning. Children in the community schools engage in play-based learning and reading activities either after school or during the summer school break, and parents are encouraged to read and discuss storybooks linked to those activities with their children. Parent awareness sessions provide mothers of children attending community schools with simple strategies that they can use to support their children's literacy development in their homes, regardless of their own education status. Community schoolteachers also design homework assignments that require parental involvement to complete each monthly unit.

Evaluation, research and assessment

The mothers' component of LVP undertook an internal mixed-methods evaluation using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to assess

the programme's effectiveness and to guide improvements to its intervention. The first quantitative method was a direct assessment of literacy learning gains, while the second quantitative method was a household survey based on a questionnaire given to participants in their homes to identify changes in intergenerational and family literacy beliefs and practices. In addition, qualitative interviews with eight participants and their families were conducted to identify five themes that described the impact of the programme. A second qualitative study implemented focus groups with parents who were part of the household study, to identify ways to improve the programme. The studies all took place during the first three years of implementation.

A RARS score has been shown to differentiate between levels of literacy skill and to be easy and inexpensive to develop and implement.

In the assessment of learning gains, 2,155 women were tested at the beginning of their literacy class (pre-test) and at the end (post-test). The assessment employed the Rapid Assessment of Reading Skills (RARS) test (Comings, Strucker and Bell, 2017). A RARS score has been shown to differentiate between levels of literacy skill and to be easy and inexpensive to develop and implement (Comings, Strucker and Bell, 2017). The RARS letter and word list is a continuum that begins with letters and simple, common words and ends with complex and less common words. The number of letters and words (out of 100) correctly read orally within 120 seconds yields a score ranging from 0 to 100. *Figure 1* is an example of a RARS Test Instrument in Arabic.

5	خ	ظ	ن	م	ك
10	ف	ذ	ض	ز	ج
15	جد	سن	في	سد	من
20	كتب	وقت	ذلك	فهد	أنا
25	ذنب	سأل	قوة	أسد	ألم
30	نافع	تديم	تغرق	شارع	طبيب
35	أضاء	أسود	نائم	مريح	سماء
40	رمضان	مسائل	العصر	مكتبة	بطتان
45	يتأثر	الأفكار	مسائل	تتوقف	أظافر
50	الكبير	السعادة	الرحمن	صحراء	الطعام
55	يتناثر	تماشيح	يمكننا	جراثيم	برئقال

60	المأذن	يتفاعل	الشرطة	الفؤاد	السكان
65	الأزهار	الملابس	المساكن	بالقطار	الواسعة
70	الرياضة	التعليم	السباحة	الزراعة	اختلفوا
75	يتسابقان	الشهيرة	مستثمرون	يستحدثون	المستقبل
80	الضمان	يستغرقون	الأبناء	الكهرباء	استعملها
85	المساومات	مستقبلات	الإدارية	الاستثمار	يستأثرون
90	الاستيقاظ	المستشرقون	الجمهورية	التلفزيون	المسابقات
95	أصحح	المنازل	مُستشفى	العُقاب	يَتَمَكَّن
100	المُسْتَوْدَعَات	المُوطِئُونَ	الضَّمَائِر	تَسْأَل	التَّسْبِيح

Figure 1. RARS test instrument

During a RARS assessment, a participant reads aloud a list of 10 letters (both letter name and sound) and 90 words in order of difficulty. First, if the participant can read at least one letter among the first group of ten letters, then she is invited to proceed with reading the remaining words. If a participant makes five mistakes in a row before the allotted 120 seconds, the test ends. A response is considered correct if the pronunciation conforms to any regional accent.

The RARS word lists were assembled by randomly drawing words from the *Talaam Tahrar* textbook and the reading materials used in the literacy classes, enabling RARS to measure the ability to read the range of words that participants encountered in their classes. The programme staff developed a RARS and field-tested it with a sample of 38 women and 32 men.

A high percentage of the participants scored zero on the pre-test; these women were unlikely to have improved without the literacy classes. The women who had low pre-test scores could have improved through practice rather than instruction, but that practice is unlikely to have happened without the materials and encouragement of the classes. The most likely cause of increased scores on the RARS is the instruction and reading practice provided by the classes. To facilitate the assessment and to avoid any sensitivity that might arise if particular learners were chosen for assessment, the project team decided to test all learners in selected classes and include them in the sample. Pre-tests were administered immediately after the establishment of a class.

Of the 2,155 students who took the pre-test, 1,337 students (62 per cent) had zero scores. At the post-test, only 34 (1.6 per cent) had zero scores. The mean gain (35 out of 100 points) is the result of both effective instruction and time-on-task, with the mean hours of instruction at 141. Only 15 participants scored above 50 (less

than 1 per cent) at the pre-test but 415 (20 per cent) scored above 50 at the post-test. A 62 per cent retention rate, a mean of 141 hours of class participation, and a mean gain of a score of 35 out of 100, constitute a sufficiently positive impact, taking into account the problems caused by COVID-19.

Household survey

The purpose of the household survey was to assess the impact of the programme on mothers' literacy practices, perception of education, parenting skills with their school-age children and support of their children's education. The project evaluation team developed a composite indicator of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) concerning education. After multiple iterations of the item sensitivity tests, 18 items were considered the most reliable for the composite indicator, with an overall reliability alpha coefficient of .739. The household survey composite indicator score ranges from 0 to 18. High scores on the composite mean that women place a high value on education for themselves and their children. These women were more likely to respond positively to survey questions asking whether they believe education is important, want to join a literacy class, ask about their children's schoolwork, help their children receive supplementary education services, and spend time with and read to their children. Conversely, these women were less likely to respond positively to survey questions asking whether they are too old for education or that education is a waste of time.

The household survey composite indicator score ranges from 0 to 18. High scores on the composite mean that women place a high value on education for themselves and their children.

The study collected data annually over the first three years of the programme from women participating in the intervention in Beheira and Sohag, as well as a control group in Assiut who had not yet received the intervention. Most of the interview questions were closed-ended and were developed by programme staff in consultation with the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the government agency responsible for data collection.

After three years of implementation, women who participated in the programme scored an average of 1.435 composite score points (8 percentage points) higher on the composite KAP assessment than women who did not, suggesting that participation in literacy classes made a difference in women's knowledge, attitudes and practices after accounting for other explanatory factors.

To complement the analysis of the effectiveness of adult literacy alone in increasing women's composite KAP, the project team also assessed whether participation in supplemental project activities predicted a positive change in KAP throughout the intervention. Women's participation in the follow-on literacy classes, parenting awareness sessions and community school meetings were statistically significant predictors of increase in KAP from the baseline to the endline. Furthermore, women who participated in more interventions were more likely to show a positive change in KAP; this held true when controlling for their baseline literacy status and enrolment in adult literacy classes.

The study indicated that when women participated in the programme activities (such as the follow-on literacy classes, parental awareness sessions and community school meetings), their attitudes towards their own and their children's education showed a large improvement over time. This improvement was compounded when they participated in more than one of these activities.

Focus group discussions

The focus group discussion (FGD) study was conducted one year into the programme. It sought insights from participants who were outliers (those with KAP assessment scores higher or lower than one standard deviation from the composite mean) and asked them to respond to questions covering six themes. The evaluation team held 12 FGDs in two districts in each of the three governorates. In each district, between 12 and 15 women and some of their husbands participated, for a total of 82 women and 43 husbands. The FGD women participants included both women who completed the programme and those who dropped out. FGDs for women were organized separately from those with men, to ensure open and honest responses, especially from the women. No clear differences among the three governorates or the two districts within each governorate were apparent in the FGD data.

The six themes explored by the questions were: 1) the importance of education for their children, 2) confidence in their children's schools, 3) the perceived usefulness of mothers' literacy for their children, 4) belief in the relationship between literacy and social and economic well-being and beyond, 5) parenting for school-age children, and 6) quality of learning in the literacy classes. For each domain, this chapter presents a summary of the most common answers.

Regarding the importance of education for their children, both women and men were in favour of positive practices and attitudes relating to education, the need to support their children in education, and the belief that boys and girls should have equal access to education. This indicated that LVP and other

governmental efforts to raise awareness around this theme were successful among LVP participants and their husbands. However, when explored through further questioning, it appeared that, in some households, reservations remained as to the importance of girls' education. For example, some respondents said that they would send their boy to school if they could only afford to send one child.

With respect to their beliefs about the relationship between literacy and social and economic well-being and beyond, women and men agreed that education is more important now than in the past. Many of the responses, from both women and men, suggested that girls' education was important for marriage and family responsibilities and that boys' education was important for employment. These responses appear to confirm that for the respondents, the purpose and opportunity value of education is limited to the traditional gendered roles of men and women in rural Egypt.

It appears that both women and men see women's newly gained or improved literacy to be useful for their household and their children. Since the women's role in rural Egypt is to run the household, the benefits of literacy were expressed in two ways. First, literate mothers make home life easier and more supportive for children. Women commented that the literacy classes enabled them to help their children with reading, and their husbands agreed that this is helpful for their children. Further, women said the resulting literacy skills not only enabled them to help their children but also to read signs and the Quran, and not feel ignorant. The husbands corroborated these positive perspectives, stating that they saw the classes as helping their children succeed in school, helping their children see their mother as not ignorant, and enabling their wives to start small businesses. Women said that the dominant impact of learning to read was their increased ability to help their children, while men said that women's improved literacy could help in increasing family income. Although men felt that women would prefer to focus on the home and children, women expressed interest in income generation. Since these focus groups were conducted just prior to women's participation in the follow-on programme activities (which included training on income generation), women and men probably had not yet begun communicating to each other about women's interests in income generation. Later in the programme, after participating women began contributing to their household's income, husbands were much more likely to acknowledge their wives' interest in this, and even their wives' business and management acuity.

In terms of parenting practices, both men and women reported supporting their children's education. Women stated that they judge their children's learning by observing them reading and writing and by visiting a school and asking questions,

while men said they asked their children about school and then followed up with their children's school and teacher. Women also said they tried to teach their children good habits, while men said they supported children by encouraging and reassuring them as well as rewarding children for good schoolwork.

Despite the parenting efforts mentioned above, both women and men reported that they were not very involved with school and felt that there was not much that they could do to help their children complete schooling. Few respondents, male or female, reported that they participated in community education teams, which form the structure responsible for supporting and improving the community schools. As a result, both mothers and fathers said they felt helpless in making sure their children would be able to excel and complete their education, despite their intentions and the home support that they could provide.

Most notably, women noted that the classes helped to relieve worries about being taken advantage of because they could not read or were perceived as illiterate.

The dominant response from both men and women was that the LVP literacy programme met their needs. Men said that they were happy their wives were learning to read. Some women who already had some reading skills joined the classes so that they could take the national literacy certificate exam, which would give them greater access to further learning and employment opportunities. Women stated that the classes provided many benefits to their and their husbands' lives, including helping them with family tasks such as reading instructions for taking medicine. Husbands said the classes helped their wives in many aspects of life, including income-generation activities and time management. Most notably, women noted that the classes helped to relieve worries about being taken advantage of because they could not read or were perceived as illiterate. This is consistent with Prins's (2005) study, in which learners reported losing the shame and lack of agency associated with illiteracy through participation in an adult literacy programme.

The most common area for improvement noted by both men and women was that the classes should meet fewer days during the week but for more hours each time, because their time away from home upset their husbands. This finding is also consistent with literature that suggests that although the psychological benefits of literacy education are foundational for women's empowerment, literacy education is an 'insufficient basis for ameliorating entrenched social and gender hierarchies' (Prins, 2008, p. 25). After only one year of participating in the programme, women's roles within the household had not changed dramatically

enough for the entrenched social and gender hierarchies to be overturned. Those types of desired change can take much longer and often also require changes at the community and community leadership levels. Some of the desired changes were revealed during the eight in-depth interviews that were conducted after three years of implementation (see below).

Women were motivated to complete the class primarily by their desire to help their children, but they were also encouraged by their children, the facilitators and each other to complete it. Men said that their wives were motivated to continue attending by the quality of the classes and by their desire to learn to read.

These parental opinions and beliefs provide insights that could improve this programme. For example, since parents suggested that their support for a child attending school is contingent on the child doing well in school, incorporating specific ways parents could help a struggling child succeed could be a useful addition to the programme. Specifically, the existing programme design could benefit from additional elements that support school attendance of girls and that help parents support the success of girls as much as boys.

In-depth interviews

The goal of the in-depth interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the family experience during and after the project. Eight families and other related community members from six rural villages were selected to participate in the interviews. To ensure that all interviewed families would be able to talk informatively about their experiences, the selected families had to satisfy several criteria: mothers should have completed the adult literacy class, the post-literacy class and the parenting awareness sessions (with at least a 75 per cent attendance rate), and at least one child should have attended a community school for two years (with a 75 per cent attendance rate).

Each family case included four interviews: a group interview with all family members, and individual interviews with the adult literacy and post-literacy facilitators, the community school facilitator, and a family friend or neighbour. Data were collected by an Egyptian consultant. The findings are grouped into five themes.

Theme 1 is the love of reading and learning. Although reading and writing acquisition alone was considered a sufficient goal and achievement, reading and writing were also identified as the first step to self-betterment and as tools for accessing knowledge and information. Some families said they accessed more knowledge and information through the conversations and open dialogues they participated in after reading a text. For example, two of

the families responded that their family reading activities included borrowing books from the community-based libraries so that the entire family could read together and learn about new and interesting topics through the stories they chose to read. Being able to read and write became a gateway to access more information and to use that information to improve their lives.

Theme 2 is the importance of conversation and open dialogue. Socio-cultural norms in rural Egypt typically limit women's ability to communicate; more generally, these norms do not recognize the use of conversation and open dialogue for the purpose of shared understanding and education. In LVP classes, women were taught how to participate in open dialogue by using active listening, critical thinking and oral language skills. Even though open dialogues were introduced to mothers as learning techniques to promote their and their children's literacy skills, women saw other uses for them. Mothers mentioned using conversation and dialogue as a parenting tool to engage with their children, to communicate and negotiate with their husbands, and to provide advice to friends and neighbours. They also said that when they engaged their children and husbands using open dialogue, the family began to emulate it. For example, one of the wives reported that she began talking more with her son to better understand and improve his behavioural issues. Just as important, families began to use conversation and open dialogue to engage in intergenerational learning on their shared topics of interest. This is a critical skill for developing the attitude that learning is life-wide and lifelong, not confined to classrooms but happening anywhere and with anyone, no matter their age.

Women participating in the programme were well positioned within the family to instil and establish the desired intergenerational learning and family literacy practices.

Theme 3 is the importance of the mother's role. Participants described the role of the woman in a family as caring for family members, her husband, her in-laws and her children. Women defined their identity by these relationships, but they used their newly acquired literacy and discussion skills to expand their role in the family. Mothers were the ones responsible for their children's education, disciplining their children and overseeing their household. As a result, women participating in the programme were well positioned within the family to instil and establish the desired intergenerational learning and family literacy practices. The parenting training and coaching support from their facilitators provided mothers with the tools and encouragement to do this. Furthermore, once husbands saw their wives successfully supporting and teaching their

children, they were persuaded to take on these practices too, either by playing a more active role in supporting their children's education or by developing their own literacy skills, as some of the husbands interviewed have done. The mothers became effective change agents within their families, transforming the way they engage with literacy and learning. The benefits of constructing the family literacy programme around the socio-cultural identity of mothers here parallel Blaire Toso's study (2012) of family literacy programmes for Mexican immigrant women in the USA.

Theme 4 is harmony within the family. All eight families spoke about a lack of communication and frequency of miscommunication among family members, and how bullying between siblings, between parents and children, and between husband and wife made their home environment unhappy or unpleasant. The women who participated in the LVP programmes learned how to have open conversations and address bullying in their and their children's lives, and reported improved relationships with their children and husbands and increased harmony within the family. These types of change are important, because research indicates that positive socio-emotional states support the capacity to learn for both children and adults (Um et al., 2012).

Theme 5 is women's empowerment. In choosing to work primarily through women, the programme was able to customize the activities, topics and approaches to meet the needs of rural Egyptian women. This approach directly affected the women's sense of personal, relational and societal empowerment,

Once the community recognized the transformation in these women, they became more respected and became change agents in their communities, especially with regard to promoting literacy and education among other women.

as conceptualized in the Three-Dimensional Model of Empowerment (Huis et al., 2017). For example, the literacy sessions gave women access to knowledge that allowed them to make more informed decisions for themselves and their family members. The information that the women acquired through the adult literacy, post-literacy and parenting sessions helped them improve their health, increase their income, become more effective parents and manage their family's needs. With these new abilities and knowledge, the women felt they had become more successful wives, mothers and participants in the community. As they experienced positive changes in their lives, these wives and mothers

became more self-confident. Their newfound sense of empowerment also influenced their roles within the community. Once the community recognized the transformation in these women, they became more respected and became change agents in their communities, especially with regard to promoting literacy and education among other women. For example, one woman's status within the community changed once her neighbours, friends and extended family began to recognize her advances in education, knowledge and wisdom. If two of her neighbours were fighting, she would be the one called upon to help resolve any misunderstanding. Not only did she become a change agent within her family, once she became a role model within the community and gained their respect, but she also became a change agent within that community.

These themes demonstrate the factors to be considered in the design of curriculum, materials and promotional campaigns supporting participation and learning in literacy programmes, and the design of materials for instruction and reading practice. They also suggest outcomes that could be measured in a rigorous evaluation of impact.

Summary of findings

This programme proved successful in helping women to acquire or improve their literacy skills, to help their children be more successful in school, and to expand the support their husbands and other family members gave to their children. We argue that four elements contributed to these gains. First, the programme was linked to a companion effort to improve the teaching of reading in the schools attended by the participants' children. Second, the materials and instructional approaches were consistent with research on reading skill acquisition. Third, the participants had sufficient time in instruction and practice (i.e. programme intensity) to make progress. Fourth, the facilitators were trained and were committed to teaching.

Beyond the successful design of the programme and materials to achieve improved literacy, evaluation findings showed that the women-centred and family-centred approach taken to designing the materials for the women's education programme enabled women to improve their roles within their households and communities. This approach not only made the programme more enjoyable for many women, thus improving their retention in the programme, but also gave them access to skills and knowledge that they wanted to acquire to improve their lives.

Implications

Improvement in the effectiveness of early grade reading instruction for children is proceeding slowly because many parts of each national education system must improve their performance before the results show up on an assessment of literacy skills (not to mention the need to expand free and low-cost ECE). Although many interventions for families tend to focus on strengthening literacy skills among younger children, older children can also benefit from

Family engagement in support of literacy learning could be an effective approach that provides the boost children need to learn to read successfully.

robust literacy support from their families. Teaching mothers how to read and helping literate mothers improve reading skills for children of all ages enables them to play a more effective role in helping their children learn to read and to use reading to learn. In low- and middle-income countries, where literacy levels tend to be low and limited resources impede government efforts to improve literacy learning instruction, family engagement in support of literacy learning could be an effective approach that provides the boost children need to learn to read successfully. Teaching women how to help their husbands and other family members to play a greater and more effective role in helping their children succeed at learning to read also compensates for weaknesses in the education system. Beyond the benefits for children's educational outcomes, the approach to family literacy that includes women as beneficiaries of literacy support leads to improvements in women's status through increased self-confidence, better access to social services and expanded leadership roles.

Roles of chapter authors

Haiyan Hua led the household survey design (including focus group discussions), data analysis and report writing, supported by Maddie Brancel and Michaela Tobin. John P. Comings led the design, data analysis and report writing for the RARS test, supported by Essam Asaad and Huai-Ming Sanchez. Huai-Ming Sanchez and Fatma Mossallem co-led the design, data analysis and report writing of the in-depth family interviews (case study report). Mona Hussein is the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for LVP and supported the implementation of all the evaluation and research activities for the programme.

References

- Comings, J., Strucker, J. and Bell, B. (2017) 'Two reading assessments for youth in alternative basic skills and livelihood skills training programmes', *Prospects*, 47(1–2), pp. 229–243. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-017-9396-7>.
- Evans, D.K and Jakiela, P. (2024) *The role of fathers in promoting early childhood development in low- and middle-income countries: A review of the evidence*. CGD Working Paper 686. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. Available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/role-fathers-promoting-early-childhood-development-low-and-middle-income-countries>
- Huis, M.A. *et al.* (2017) 'A three-dimensional model of women's empowerment: implications in the field of microfinance and future directions', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01678>.
- Iqbal, F. and Riad, N.S. (2004) 'Increasing girls' school enrollment in the Arab Republic of Egypt: A case study from Reducing Poverty, Sustaining Growth—What Works, What Doesn't, and Why', in *A global exchange for scaling up success. Working paper presented at the Scaling Up Poverty Reduction: A Global Learning Process and Conference, Shanghai, 25–27 May 2004*.
- IRIN News (2006) *Illiteracy still rife among rural women*. Available at: www.irinnews.org/report/26179/egypt-illiteracy-still-rife-among-rural-women.
- Prins, E. (2005) 'Learning to communicate: an adult literacy programme in postwar El Salvador', *Convergence*, 38(1), pp. 69–90.
- Prins, E. (2008) 'Adult literacy education, gender equity and empowerment: insights from a Freirean-inspired literacy programme', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 40(1), pp. 24–39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2008.11661554>.
- Prins, E. and Toso, B.W. (2008) 'Defining and measuring parenting for educational success: a critical discourse analysis of the parent education profile', *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), pp. 555–596.
- Rizk, J. (2020) "'Well, that just comes with being a mama": the gendered nature of family literacy programs', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48, pp. 393–404.

- Sywelem, M.M.G. (2015) 'Literacy and adult education in Egypt: achievements and challenges', *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3(7), pp. 793–799.
- Toso, B.W. (2012) *Educational and mothering discourses and learner goals: Mexican immigrant women enacting agency in a family literacy program*, *Research Brief No. 8*. Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy.
- UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics) (2024) 'Percentage of illiterates who are female; adult illiterate population, 15+ years, % female'. UIS Data Centre. Available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3840> (Accessed: 13 September 2024).
- Um, E. "R" *et al.* (2012) 'Emotional design in multimedia learning', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(2), pp. 485–498. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026609>.

Section 4

FILL in Asia



Chapter 8

Decolonizing literacy: Transformative intergenerational literacy and learning in Nepal and India

Anuprita Shukla, Kamal Raj Devkota and Sushan Acharya

Introduction

Amchya purvaja ne amchya aai baapala shikavale, tyani amhala. Amhi bi shikavo amchya porana, zalayawar. Manushya Jeevan asach. Sagale shalaat nahi shikaat kaun. *(Our ancestors taught it to our parents. They taught us, and someday we will teach it to our younger ones. That is how human life is intended. One does not learn everything in school.)*

This observation was made by one of our research participants from India, to express his beliefs and values about the role of informal, non-institutionalized and intergenerational learning and its implications for life. His response forms part of a larger research study with Indigenous communities about traditional and modern livelihood, food security and farming.

This chapter is informed by decolonial theories that challenge Eurocentric epistemological and cultural dominance by putting the marginalized knowledge of Indigenous communities at the centre of analysis. Specifically, we present the practices and beliefs regarding informal intergenerational learning approaches in India and Nepal and examine the politics of knowledge production and development work on literacy and learning.

Decolonial theory is a vast field of scholarship that challenges the dominance of cultural and epistemological Eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2005; De Lissoy, 2010). For the purposes of this chapter, we restrict our decolonial theory framework to epistemological diversity, namely, developing knowledge and knowledge systems that have been historically silenced and colonized. Drawing on the works of Fanon (1963), Mignolo (2005) and Mohanty (2003), we focus on the scholarship of

cultural diversity while challenging the dominant, colonial universal approaches to education and literacy. Decentring the dominant content in the curriculum, we engage with subjugated intergenerational forms of knowledge and focus on reclaiming epistemological diversity. We do so by employing a strategy from decolonial education, namely the examination of peoples' practices, cultural identities, and physical and community spaces.

This chapter reports on ethnographic data from cross-country, comparative qualitative case studies in Nepal and India. We focus on two Indigenous communities, Tharu people from Koluwa village in Nawalpur district, Nepal, and Mahadeo Kolis from western India, to investigate what constitutes knowledge within an intergenerational teaching and learning practice. We argue that while we recognize informal intergenerational literacy and learning as a practice informed by unique cultural, historical and socio-political contexts (Rogers, 2014), there is a need for further investigation of everyday processes in the context of changing realities with which families are required to engage. At a conceptual level, through unpacking informal intergenerational learning and literacy, we echo the push towards legitimizing it, mainly through a decolonial lens that focuses on everyday literacy practices of culture, livelihood, varied learning spaces and sustainable development (Mignolo, 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Rogers, 2014; Smith, 2021; UIL, 2009).

We focus on two Indigenous communities, Tharu people from Koluwa village in Nawalpur district, Nepal, and Mahadeo Kolis from western India, to investigate what constitutes knowledge within an intergenerational teaching and learning practice.

The chapter first introduces family literacy and intergenerational learning within the sustainable development agenda, specifically literacy and education policies in Nepal and India. The following section presents a brief methodological overview, including the context of the field sites that we draw on in this comparative essay. It then discusses the decolonial conceptual framing we employ to understand literacy practices. Lastly, we present ethnographic data from the intergenerational interactions specific to language and literacy and the different meanings and values that families attached to them. The chapter concludes by identifying future research implications for family and intergenerational literacy, and for learning from a decolonial approach.

Decolonizing literacy, informal, local and situated

UIL's (2009) *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* defines informal learning as resulting 'from daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time, or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional, but, in most cases, it is non-intentional (or incidental/random)' (p. 27). The 'unstructured' and often seemingly random elements of learning, shaped through lived experience, form the core of informal learning (Rogers, 2014). It is thus context-dependent, and characterized by the unconscious influences of family, individuals, peers and wider society throughout the course of our lives, shaped by common interests and socio-cultural norms (Rogers, 2014).

Rather than viewing literacy narrowly in terms of individual reading and writing skills, particularly foundational reading and writing skills, we opt for a social practice approach. Drawing on literacy as a social practice (LSP) and 'situated' literacies (Acharya and Robinson-Pant, 2019; Street and Street, 1984), we focus on the intergenerational, everyday experience of literacy and learning practices, outside formal institutions and structures, acknowledging the existence of multiple sites and modalities of learning. For example, fields, forests and mountains are learning sites for both the Indigenous communities in our study (place-based ways of knowing). Similarly, diverse modalities are employed, such as the generational transmission of religious rituals, oral traditional medicinal knowledge, skills-based experiential learning in agriculture, or learning new digital approaches to basic activities. Although it appears fluid, informal literacy may be structured and embedded within specific local contexts. The informal literacy prepares people in these Indigenous communities to articulate their voice, agency and identities.

Much of the Western academic tradition, particularly in literacy studies, has been criticized for its text-centric focus and valuing of the written text over oral knowledge. The wider application of this type of approach results from colonization and is embedded within 'institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, colonial bureaucracy and colonial styles' (Said, 2014, p. 2). Similarly, Smith (2021) points out 'the negation of Indigenous views of history' (p. 22) and goes on to argue that 'Indigenous language, knowledge and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses', an erasure that engenders the need to 'defend and prove authenticity for their own knowledge' (p. 120).

Against the backdrop of hierarchies of knowledge and learning, education, as one of the tools of colonialism, has always treasured the written form over oral knowledge and exchange practices (Smith, 2021). For example, Indigenous pedagogical conventions shaping oral traditions across the globe, such as the

valuing of oracy, debates and structured silence (Smith, 2021), have been largely invisible in scholarship. Formal and institutional system-based learning has emphasized literacy as a monolithic technical reading and writing skill, contrasted with locally situated informal and intergenerational learning. By exploring the literacy and intergenerational learning of Tharu and Mahadeo Koli communities in Nepal and India, we argue that literacy is embedded in locally situated cultural, religious and everyday activities, which need to be considered in framing adult literacy policies and programmes.

Education policies in Nepal and India

In Nepal, teaching and learning in informal and non-formal settings have been practised for an unknown length of time, primarily embedded in religious, cultural and livelihood activities and transferred across generations. These practices have continued from the Vedic period, in which teaching and learning were transmitted both orally and in written form (Acharya and Devkota, 2021). After the establishment of democracy in 1951, successive governments have formulated and implemented non-formal education (NFE) policies and plans for adult learning opportunities. However, with the increased enrolment in formal education, adult literacy initiatives have gradually disintegrated.

The existing policies ignore intergenerational learning in promoting and sustaining local culture, language, and Indigenous knowledge and skills. They disregard the rich tradition of intergenerational teaching and learning in which families and communities engage.

At present, three main documents emphasize literacy and NFE in Nepal: 1) the National Education Policy 2019, the main education policy document that has replaced all the previous policies on NFE and adult literacy, 2) the School Sector Education Plan 2021–2030, and 3) the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education 2030–Nepal National Framework 2019. These all focus on NFE, lifelong learning and skills development in Nepal. Specifically, they focus on strengthening and expanding community learning centres to provide learning opportunities to adults and youth, promoting Indigenous knowledge, local culture and languages. Although the current policies recognize literacy and adult education as essential components of lifelong learning and sustainable development, significant gaps remain. The existing policies ignore intergenerational learning in promoting and sustaining local culture, language, and Indigenous knowledge and skills. They disregard the rich tradition of intergenerational teaching and learning in which families and communities engage.

Ghosh (2012) argues that in India, which became independent on 15 August 1947, the historically embedded colonial construct is a formative basis of education policy. Since independence, India has had three national education policies. The first dates from 1968, and is also called the Kothari Commission, the second from 1986 (National Policy on Education), was revised in 1992. The third National Education Policy (NEP), dating from 2020, restructured and revised the Indian education system.

Aligning with SDG 4, the NEP 2020 has restructured India's education policy. The key aspects of this redesigned policy are its focus on education in local languages and greater focus on the socio-economically disadvantaged regions and peoples, including the Indigenous communities. With respect to adult education, NEP 2020 states that its new curriculum framework shall include 'foundational literacy and numeracy; critical life skills (including financial literacy, digital literacy); vocational skills development; basic education; and continuing education' (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020, p. 51).

The NEP outlines initiatives to foster languages, arts and culture (for example, an option of trilingual education in states that wish to participate in the three-language formula), promoting experiential language learning by bringing in local experts, including traditional Indigenous and local knowledge across the curriculum in schools, and offering bilingual dual degrees.

While recognizing the barriers to achieving the SDG 4 goal, we need to understand how these policies play out in practice. Although the NEP promises inclusivity of parents and peers in teaching and learning, it lacks an explicit focus on intergenerational informal learning and literacy.

Methodology

We report on ethnographic accounts of two Indigenous communities in Nepal and India in order to recognize informal intergenerational learning in everyday life, employing the concept of literacy as a social practice. The Tharu and Mahadeo Koli communities, in Nepal and India respectively, were selected because they have rich and distinctive cultural, linguistic and religious bodies of knowledge and practice, which they are still passing down across generations. For the Nepal study, three families with at least two generations living in the same residence were selected. The researchers observed their interaction with Indigenous knowledge and practices as well as modern ones.

The fieldwork was conducted in early 2020, with follow-up in early 2022. In India, the data were collected through several methods, including 2 focus group discussions, 20 interviews with three generations of Indigenous farmers, and

2 months of participant observation of informal group meetings of farmers on issues of forest conservation, village governance and irrigation (Shukla, 2023). The data were collected in local languages, then transcribed into English, and several themes were generated (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researchers are Nepali and Indian nationals (from the same state as the communities studied). The first author, who has two decades of experience working with Indigenous communities – including, recently, from an intergenerational knowledge perspective – collected the data in India. The two co-authors undertook data collection in Nepal, and have been engaged with schools, teachers and parents for an extended period on the topics of language, literacy and school learning. The analysis has been shaped by the researchers' positionality, based on their in-depth cultural understanding and extended engagement with participants.

The Tharu are perceived as being educationally disadvantaged, yet like other Indigenous communities they practise their own ways of teaching and learning, transferring knowledge and skills to younger generations primarily through memorization, demonstration, observation and hands-on practice.

The Tharu ethnic group makes up 6.6 per cent of Nepal's population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). They have their own language, culture, customs, ritual practices and community organization system. Under the influence of their Hindu neighbours, elite Tharus began adopting Hindu practices, and directed people under their influence to do so as well (Rajaure, 1981). Thus, 94 per cent of Tharus reported being Hindus in the 2011 population census (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The Tharu language, which includes several dialects using Devanagiri script, belongs to the Indo-European language family. Traditional songs, dances, arts, artefacts and rituals are predominantly related to planting and harvesting crops and worshipping nature, forest spirits, deities and goddesses (Krauskopff, 2011).

For this research, we selected a community located on the Narayani River of central Nepal, where the Tharu have resided for approximately four centuries. The Tharu are perceived as being educationally disadvantaged, yet like other Indigenous communities they practise their own ways of teaching and learning, transferring knowledge and skills to younger generations primarily through memorization, demonstration, observation and hands-on practice (Chaudhary, 2014; Niure, 2014).

The Mahadeo Koli, also known as the Dongar Koli, is an Indigenous group whose members primarily live in the Sahyadri mountain ranges of the western states of Maharashtra and Goa in India. ('Dongar' means 'mountain' in the Marathi language.) Predominantly followers of the Hindu religion, they are considered

a sub-caste of the Koli (fishing) community. During the British rule in India, the Mahadeo Koli and other tribes were outlawed under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1924.⁴ They were declared thieves, habitual criminals, bandits and *dakait* (members of a gang of armed robbers).

According to the 2011 census (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2011), Maharashtra state had a population of 112 million, of whom 54,131,277 are female. The scheduled tribes constitute over 9 per cent of the state's total population; the Mahadeo Koli scheduled tribe has approximately a million members. 'Scheduled tribes' is an administrative term for the officially designated groups of most disadvantaged tribal communities in India. Scheduled tribes have certain constitutional privileges, reservation status, political representation and protection.

The study was conducted in Makadwadi (a pseudonym), a village in the foothills of Kalsubai, the highest peak in Maharashtra. Makadwadi is a scheduled tribe village, in which more than 95 per cent of the population belong to the Hindu Mahadeo Koli tribe (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2011). Agriculture is the main livelihood.

Makadwadi has *Koradwahu Shethi* (rain-fed agriculture), and shift cultivation and terraced farming are practised on mountain slopes. Traditional agricultural practices of land clearing, worship and sacrificial rituals to prepare the land for sowing, weeding, harvesting and threshing are performed manually without industrial machinery.

Traditional intergenerational learning and literacy practices: Religious values and practices

The study findings show how these two communities preserve their cultural and religious traditions and practices through intergenerational learning. In one instance, some literate Tharu community members performed ritual practices for fellow Tharu households. For example, Patiram Gurau, a Tharu man in his early seventies, had been performing Tharu rituals in his community for decades. During our fieldwork, Patiram was writing texts about Tharu rituals and rites in the Tharu language. As he reported, Tharus lacked written texts for performing their cultural practices, which were transmitted only orally to the next generation. He added that the 'younger generation has limited knowledge and misunderstanding of these practices and skills in the absence of reading materials'. In response to this gap, Patiram and other Guraus (Tharu pandits⁵) collected oral narratives from

4 Originally passed in 1871, the Act was amended in 1876 and 1911.

5 Guraus are members of the Tharu community who are entitled to be pandits, the religious leaders who perform ceremonies and preside over rituals. They also act as counsellors and advisers to the community.

their gurus, reflected on their own experiences, and produced reading materials of rituals and rites. Patiram showed several Hindu religious books and scriptures that he consulted while preparing Tharu texts and methods for performing Tharu rituals.

In addition to recording cultural practices, Patiram organized training for the younger generation in how to perform religious and cultural rituals based on the Tharu texts. One morning, we found him teaching these texts and methods to two prospective Guraus. They were learning to perform *Jakhadi puja*, an annual event when deities and nature spirits are worshipped. The next day, Patiram and his apprentice Goraus performed a *Jakhadi puja* in the communal space, where all community members could participate and observe. Patiram recited the mantras (sacred verses) and sacred texts that he translated and wrote in the Tharu language, while the apprentice Goraus performed the rituals. Patiram explained that he engaged his learners in practice so that they could learn both the texts and methods of performing their ritual in practice. In the past, Patiram's own guru (teachers) recited the mantras, which he had to memorize just by listening. Unlike his guru, Patiram shared the written notes with his apprentices so that they could memorize by reading. He said,

I learnt all these mantras from my guru. I had to listen to them and memorize them. But now, I have written these mantras in the Tharu language. They (apprentices) can read themselves, take notes in their diaries, and learn by reading and writing. I engage them in real-life activities, I mean practice, so they read, write and perform rituals for the villagers.

Patiram's apprentices also reported that they had a chance to read different texts written in Tharu. Like their guru, the written notes helped them better understand and remember the methods of religious and cultural practices.

Patiram and some other men from his community had the opportunity to be trained in other religious and cultural values. Around 16 years earlier, a group of Buddhist monks came to the village and selected about 39 Guraus and non-Garau men, including Patiram, whom they taught about Buddhist religious values and practices. One of the criteria for selecting these participants was their literacy skill. In Patiram's words, it was a 'religious training that attempted to motivate the Guraus to define and write their cultural and religious practices from a Buddhist perspective'. He said that some Buddhist monks coached them to draw ideas from Buddhist religious practices and write them in Tharu. They participated in a week-long training. But afterwards, Patiram and other Guraus rejected this idea and decided to produce texts about their own religious and cultural values and the Hindu rituals they have been practising for centuries.

Community members appreciated the initiative taken by Patiram and other literate Guraus to write down their culture and religious practices in the Tharu language. Patiram explained that the purpose of this attempt to use reading and writing was to conserve and give continuity to their own culture and religious practices and motivate younger generations to keep these going.

Similarly, the Mahadeo Koli in India took pride in their family identity as *Malkaris* or *Warkaris*, devoted followers of the Hindu Lord Vitthal. In a tradition lasting over 50 years, the organization of a *Saptaha* (the literal meaning of this word is a period of seven days, and in this context means a week of reading Hindu religious texts) is the key social and communal religious event in their village. Their distinct cultural identity is embedded in the practice of daily food rituals (Shukla, 2024). Following strict vegetarian diets, eating specific foods when fasting, not consuming alcohol and participating in communal religious activities were some of these rituals. Elderly family members used the *Saptaha* to teach the younger generation about their cultural practices and identities. Literacy practices include teaching *bhajans* and *kirtans*, forms of Hindu devotional song, which are passed down orally across generations. In the digitized world, younger people record cultural and religious songs on their mobile phones in order to learn and continue practising them.

Patiram explained that the purpose of this attempt to use reading and writing was to conserve and give continuity to their own culture and religious practices and motivate younger generations to keep these going.

Vanna aaushadhi, traditional Indigenous medicine, based on wild medicinal plants, is a crucial aspect of this community's life. According to the participants, their lives are intertwined with nature, forests and mountains, and their community's health and well-being are interconnected. The knowledge of the medicinal value of herbs, trees and fruits for certain ailments has long been preserved by certain members of this community, passed down orally across generations through the family members of *Bhagats*, or traditional spiritual healers. Panduba, a highly respected 85-year-old *Bhagat*, carefully described certain aspects of his spiritual chanting, the seasonal rituals he practised and the sources of medicinal herbs. At the time, he was teaching his 55-year-old son, whom he believed had earned the right to acquire this sacred knowledge. This illustrates how the community uses rules to protect certain types of knowledge until an acceptable age and maturity are achieved.

Transformative intergenerational literacy and learning: Livelihood practices

We observed that most of the families in the Tharu community in Koluwa village were using their literacy skills to accomplish tasks required by their daily lives. For example, Sunaina Chaudhary, a woman in her late forties with basic Nepali literacy skills, kept a notebook where she recorded all of her transactions in Nepali, including a bank loan, dealings with the women's group, family expenses and children's school fees. Sunaina explained:

I got married when I was studying in Grade 6. I could not continue my study after I moved to my in-laws' home (arkako ghar). I had learnt simple reading and writing at school. Now, I am using it to do these everyday tasks. I would be dumb if I did not use these skills.

Another woman in her fifties, Shem Kumari Mahatohas, told a different story about her literacy skill and learning. She is the mother of two children studying in the local public secondary school. During the research study, her husband was working in Malaysia. Shem Kumari was raised in a family of 12 children. She was married off at the age of 13 and could not attend school because she had to look after her younger siblings. She recalled that in the past the Tharu people had never sent their daughters to schools. The adult literacy classes she attended after her marriage were also ineffective, and she felt too tired to attend them due to her burdensome household responsibilities. However, she gave credit to the literacy class, where she could at least learn how to write her name. For the last five years, like several other women, Shem Kumari had been rearing buffaloes to produce milk, and took out a bank loan to buy buffaloes. She sold around seven litres of milk per day. From her earnings, she deposited 300 Nepalese rupees per month (about two euros) in her bank savings account. The local bank provided a record book to track transactions; Shem Kumari could do the simple calculation but waited for her children to record the amounts. This intergenerational teamwork involving calculation, reading and writing skills mainly took place in the evening: Shem Kumari summarized the day's transactions and her children wrote them in her record book. Here, the children's school literacy skills supported their mother's business transactions and financial skills.

Similarly, the family of Balu Bhau, an Indian man who has two teenage children and a wife, demonstrates how new literacy practices are being practised intergenerationally. Balu Bhau is a farmer who also runs a successful ecotourism business. He often caters to clients from nearby cities, offering a home-stay package with home-cooked, Indigenous meals and guided trekking tours through the mountains, sleeping in mud huts. Until recently, Balu Bhau had successfully promoted his business by word of mouth, '*khush ghrhak sangotoy*

aplye naav' ('often, delighted customers recommended his name'). However, due to accessible technology, his children had begun to use a mobile phone to manage the booking orders from new customers. They created a Facebook page for his business and kept it updated with the latest photos of successful events. Most evenings after returning from the field, Balu and his wife would sit with their children and learn how to use a smartphone and a Facebook account. Balu's wife was a *panchayat* member (village council leader) and was already well respected in her village. Other women farmers now regarded her as someone with digital capacities and were proud of her.

This family had adopted a hybrid model of informal intergenerational learning and literacy, traditional knowledge combined with school-learned or formal literacy skills.

Due to their social media presence, their business has boomed. For instance, Balu's wife said, 'We both must go for a photo shoot in the fields today for the Facebook'. She thinks people will be drawn to the business if they see her and her husband in their traditional outfits in their natural environment, carrying out traditional farming activities. Displaying her awareness and lived experience of 'indigeneity' (Merlan, 2009), she said, 'A photo should tell our real story'. Since the performance of indigeneity and its authenticity are more attractive to tourists, and thereby good for business, Balu's wife passes this on to her children by engaging them in this process. The children reported, 'We have learned so much from them (parents), how to cook, identify wild leafy vegetables, and farm activities, and now we are teaching them how to use mobile phones and the internet.' This family had adopted a hybrid model of informal intergenerational learning and literacy, traditional knowledge combined with school-learned or formal literacy skills.

Since agrarian livelihoods are seasonal and food insecurity is widespread during the lean period,⁶ Indigenous communities must survive on wild foods, such as fruits, roots, tubers and vegetables from the forests. Identifying and gathering wild foods are crucial skills. Balu Bhau's family now organizes *Raanbhajyaa Mahotsaav*, an annual wild vegetable festival, to make their Indigenous traditional knowledge more visible and help promote their culture. However, this type of informal, traditional, intergenerational knowledge learning and literacy remains insufficiently appreciated in national policies and programmes.

6 Rural families in agriculture-based economies often experience seasonal hunger. The period between planting and harvesting, often marked by reduced livelihood opportunities and low income, results in reduced food diversity. In Makadwadi, it coincides with the rainy season; food stocks from earlier harvests are rationed and then depleted.

Conclusion

This study has focused on two Indigenous communities whose literacy practices have not been previously studied. We examined how the Tharu and Mahadeo Koli communities use their oral and written literacies to share their traditional knowledge, skills and culture intergenerationally.

The empirical data from our cross-country case studies were informed by the theory of literacy as a social practice (Carter, 2006). The literacy practices of both communities are deeply embedded in their ideological motivation to maintain their cultural and religious values, preserve their language, and creatively adapt to emerging needs in everyday life, as well as to exchange knowledge and skills. The members of both communities have been striving to convert or document their orally transmitted cultural rituals and practices in written texts in their language. The Tharu Guraus, who have performed rituals for their communities for decades, use their literacy skills to read the given texts and to document those rituals and practices. Similarly, the younger Mahadeo Kolis attempt to record the *bhajans* and *kirtans* to preserve their culture. Indigenous communities often express their cultural traits through festivals, dances and songs, yet most of these are not documented in writing (Chaudhary, 2021). These written or video- or audio-recorded documentation practices provide spaces for intergenerational engagement and offer multiple modalities to share and sustain traditional knowledge, skills and practices with the younger generation. Both communities are striving to promote their native language and sustain their ethnic and cultural identity through informal intergenerational transformative learning.

Our findings show the creative ways both communities are using modern literacy skills to sustain their traditional, cultural and religious knowledge.

The Tharu and Mahadeo Koli Indigenous communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in adapting to changing times. Through writing and utilizing technology to document their cultural knowledge, they aim to preserve, revitalize and refine their traditional practices, cultural identity and survival skills to be passed down to future generations. We call for policy-makers and educators to recognize these literacies and learning practices in order to give them the status of legitimized knowledge, and to redesign literacy teaching in schools and non-formal adult education from a decolonial perspective that views literacy as place-based knowing, giving voice, agency and identity to individuals. Our findings show the creative ways both communities are using modern literacy skills to sustain their traditional, cultural and religious knowledge. This community knowledge could be incorporated into the school curriculum, promoting the

use of Indigenous languages in instruction and learning. In adult education programmes the knowledge generated through co-construction with adult learners of these communities could enrich the formal school curriculum content and learning process (Fanon, 1963).

We recommend an inclusive approach to the school curriculum that employs strategies such as introducing courses on historically marginalized people, creating strategic priority for scientific knowledge, and acknowledging cultural and epistemic diversity, thus redesigning the narrative of failed or marginalized groups. Community Learning Centres (CLCs) can serve as learning hubs for non-formal adult education about Indigenous knowledge systems, skills and practices. By engaging local knowledge experts like grandparents, community leaders, traditional healers and gurus, CLCs can help retell and preserve their stories. Schoolteachers, educators and literacy facilitators should also incorporate CLCs into their teaching approaches. CLCs can act as sites of experiential intergenerational learning by offering more learning pathways for the next generation. They also have the potential to work as hubs for the professional development of teachers and educators, in line with decolonial pedagogical practices.

Acknowledgement

The Global Challenges Research Fund grant at the University of East Anglia, UK, partially supported the fieldwork in India (grant number BBSRC BB/P027970/1).

References

- Acharya, S. and Devkota, K.R. (2021) *Family literacy, indigenous learning and sustainable development: Proof of concept pilot: Nepal Report*. Norwich: University of East Anglia. Available at: www.uea.ac.uk/documents/96135/5482035/UNESCO_NEPAL_final+version_6+sept+smaller.pdf/c237c2c8-28fa-9484-656f-0cb4d9e83d93?t=1631000182725.
- Acharya, S. and Robinson-Pant, A. (2019) 'Women, literacy and health: comparing health and education sectoral approaches in Nepal', *Compare*, 49(2), pp. 211–229.
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001) 'Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research', *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), pp. 385–405.
- Carter, S. (2006) 'Redefining literacy as a social practice', *Journal of Basic Writing*, 25(2), pp. 94–125.

- Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) *National population and housing census 2011 (national report)*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission.
- Chaudhary, A.K. (2014) *Womb to tomb of Tharu: learning for mainstream education*. Tribhuvan University.
- Chaudhary, N. (2021) 'Unravelling indigenous pedagogy: tracing dances and songs of Dangaura Tharus', *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education*, 6(2), pp. 126–155.
- De Lissovoy, N. (2010) 'Decolonial pedagogy and the ethics of the global', *Discourse: Studies in the cultural Politics of Education*, 31(3), pp. 279–293.
- Fanon, F. (1963) *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Ghosh, S.C. (2012) "'English in taste, in opinions, in words and intellect': indoctrinating the Indian through textbook, curriculum and education', in J.A. Mangan (ed.) *The imperial curriculum: racial images and education in the British colonial experience*. Routledge, pp. 185–203.
- Krauskopff, G., Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. and Toffin, G. (2011) 'Fluid belongings: the weight of places in a valley of western Nepal', in *The politics of belonging in the Himalayas: local attachments and boundary dynamics*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Merlan, F. (2009) 'Indigeneity: global and local', *Current Anthropology*, 50(3), pp. 303–333. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/597667>.
- Mignolo, W.D. (2005) *The idea of Latin America*. Blackwell.
- Ministry of Human Resource Development (2020) *National education policy 2020*. Government of India. Available at: https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf. Archived at http://web.archive.org/web/20211201000000*/https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf.
- Mohanty, C.T. (2003) *Feminism without borders*. Duke University Press.
- Niure, D.P. (2014) *Indigenous knowledge of Tharus related to educational Practices: implications in formal schooling*. Tribhuvan University.
- Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. (2011) *Population census 2011. Table a-11 appendix: district wise scheduled tribe population (appendix), Maharashtra – 2011*.
- Radhakrishna, M. (2001) *Dishonoured by history: 'Criminal Tribes' and British colonial policy*. Orient Blackswan.
- Rajaure, D.P. (1981) 'Tharus of Dang: the people and the social context', *Kailash*, 8(3/4), pp. 155–185.

- Rogers, A. (2014) 'The classroom and the everyday: the importance of informal learning for formal learning', *Investigar em Educação*, 2(1), pp. 7–34.
- Said, E. (2014) *Orientalism*. Routledge.
- Shukla, A. (2023) 'The caving in and the crawling out: creating intergenerational vernacular food literacies', *Compare*, pp. 1–19.
- Shukla, A. (2024) 'Examining the Role of Intergenerational Relations in Food Systems: Evidence from Western India', *Progress in Development Studies*, 24(3), pp. 234–251. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14649934231215116>.
- Smith, L.T. (2021) *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury.
- Street, B.V. and Street, B.B. (1984) *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2009) *Global report on adult learning and education*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186431>.



Chapter 9

Parental involvement in children's early learning at home: A study in rural China

Yan Li, Seyda Subasi Singh and Jiacheng Li

Introduction

In recent decades, parental involvement (PI) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been increasingly recognized as an important source of support for all children, particularly the socio-economically disadvantaged (Epstein, 1995; Jaynes, 2007). Studies have shown that PI, beginning as early as the pre-school years, has positive effects on children's literacy and mathematics skills (e.g. Stylianides and Stylianides, 2011). PI is considered especially important for decreasing or even closing the achievement gap between children from lower- and higher-income families (e.g. Dearing et al., 2006). The positive effects of PI in pre-school on school readiness are consolidated by studies that underline its importance for high educational attainment in later primary school (Park and Holloway, 2013). Increasingly, PI in children's learning from infancy is being encouraged by a wide range of agencies such as federal and state governments, health services and community organizations (Nichols et al., 2009). PI in early learning at home can be intensified by academic opportunities and activities in which parents participate to support the child's learning and foster family and moral values. This is considered especially beneficial for children living in disadvantaged societal conditions and/or at risk of school failure.

In this context, discussions about the partnership model – parents and teachers working together to 'reach common goals' for children – have emerged. Epstein (1995) identified six types of PI, classified by what parents can do at home and at school. In this typology, which is known worldwide, the most frequent type of PI activity was helping in the classroom, followed by attending parent meetings (Castro et al., 2004). However, these activities can be criticized because they instrumentalize parents as tools in the school environment. Similarly, policy-makers and researchers tended to describe PI in relation to a range of

school-based PI activities (Gross et al., 2020; Li, Liu and Guo, 2019). The range of possible PI is commonly narrowed down to behaviours that are only visible in school settings, often reducing it to ‘school-centric involvement’ (Manz, Fantuzzo and Power, 2004). Moreover, the perspective of parents in rural areas is included in the research less often than that of parents in urban settings. Due to lack of representation in the US-based research, parents who are low-income, racial/ethnic minorities and/or living in rural areas seem to be viewed from a deficit perspective that characterizes them as more ‘incompetent’ or ‘unwilling’ to be involved in children’s early learning than their higher-income, White counterparts (e.g. Durand and Perez, 2013). The concepts and interpretations of PI developed in these studies might not fit non-Western conditions.

More research is needed that does not assume that these conceptualizations of PI are universally valid, but instead examines nuances embedded in specific cultural, geographical and historical settings. It will be increasingly important not only to normatively describe how PI is to be implemented but also to investigate how parents themselves give it meaning in early learning at home.

Evidence shows that parents and educators tend to define involvement differently (Anderson and Minke, 2007). Relatively little research has explicitly examined parents’ views about involvement in early learning at home, and even less in countries outside the USA, Canada and Europe, such as rural China. Although Chinese children stand out as high achievers on the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), Chinese parents have rarely attracted the attention of researchers in education. To our knowledge, no study to date has examined rural Chinese parents’ perspectives on involvement in children’s early learning. Recognizing the family and the pre-school as two important microsystems that influence the child (Arndt et al., 2013), this study explores PI in early learning at home in rural China. It aims to help close this gap in our current knowledge by analysing how rural Chinese parents are involved in their children’s early learning.

Parental involvement in rural China

Since the reforms and opening-up policy introduced in 1978, China has experienced rapid economic growth and generated tremendous wealth. However, due to rapid industrialization, urbanization and modernization following the economic reforms, the gap between rich and poor has widened (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). More than 509 million people still live in rural areas, and the uneven socio-economic development of urban and rural areas has intensified (Meng, 2020). The conceptualization of PI should therefore not only attend to differences between nations but also within the nation.

PI in rural China is characterized by two features. First, rural parents tend to engage in expected forms of PI less frequently than urban parents (e.g. Lu, 2016). For example, research shows that rural parents tend to have less formal education, migrate more often to urban areas for work, and communicate less with teachers (Li et al., 2015). From the teachers' perspective, these parents are likely to be viewed as 'uninvolved', 'hard to reach', or 'not caring' about their children's early learning (e.g. Doucet, 2011). Rural Chinese parents are described in the literature as keeping their distance from teachers, distrusting them and being reluctant to cooperate with them (Wei, 2022). When their children have problems at home, rural parents seem to use directives and commands to control them instead of guiding them. Some parents, for instance, may check their homework regardless of the children's desires, and tell children that what parents want them to do is best and that they should be *tinghua* (respectful, compliant and obedient) (e.g. Fong, 2007). These parents are regarded by teachers as less capable of building a partnership between school and family and getting involved in their children's learning process (Xie and Postiglione, 2016).

Research shows that rural parents tend to have less formal education, migrate more often to urban areas for work, and communicate less with teachers . From the teachers' perspective, these parents are likely to be viewed as 'uninvolved', 'hard to reach', or 'not caring' about their children's early learning.

Second, implementing PI policy in rural areas of China poses a challenge. Guidance on the establishment of primary, secondary and kindergarten parent committees suggests that each pre-school should establish a parent committee. This committee would participate in pre-school management, work with teachers for children's education and communicate with teachers. Although a few parent committees have been established, many parents have never heard of them in rural pre-schools (Wei, 2022). Schools and teachers are likely to provide few formal and routine channels for rural parents to get involved in schools (Xie and Postiglione, 2016). Furthermore, the diversity of families in rural areas should not be overlooked. The number of families of *liushou* children (those whose parents migrate to the cities for work, leaving them behind) is relatively high, and grandparents who are raising the children have difficulty communicating with teachers. Many grandparents cannot use smartphones to receive messages from teachers or engage in activities organized by pre-schools. Multi-child families are common in rural China, and some parents regard PI as a burden. The rise

in divorce rates has increased the risk that no one will take responsibility for children's education and learning. As the majority of teachers do not necessarily come from these communities, they may have limited knowledge of the children's families and rural communities (Wei, 2022). Moreover, the poor quality of education in rural areas can lead parents to lack trust in teachers.

Research questions and methods

This study focuses on how parents in rural China perceive PI. Specifically, we examine two interrelated research questions: How do parents perceive PI in early learning at home, and what do parents do at home for children's learning?

The study was carried out in Dong, a rural town with a population of 39,000 located in Hebei Province. We chose to conduct focus groups because our aim was to reveal parents' knowledge and allow them to articulate perspectives that might transcend taken-for-granted assumptions. The focus group method captures parents' voices and has gained momentum in research on relationships within the family (Rodriguez et al., 2011; Tobin, 1992). It is also appropriate for studies exploring tacit, uncodified and experiential knowledge, as well as participants' opinions and meaning-making (Hopkins, 2007).

To recruit the parent participants, we first visited the local pre-schools and met parents and teachers several times over a period of ten days, usually when the parents' activities were scheduled and when they picked up their children at the pre-school gates. During the fieldwork we explained the study's purpose to the parents, talked to them firsthand and described the study during informal conversations. With the assistance of teachers, the parents were invited and recruited. We separated parents into groups based on similar socio-economic status (SES) and gender. SES was defined by educational attainment (having at least a high school diploma) and by net annual individual income.

We organized four focus groups (FGs): high-SES mothers (FG1), low-SES mothers (FG2), high-SES fathers (FG3) and low-SES fathers (FG4). Each group was attended by six participants on average. All parents had children between four and six years old (children typically enter formal school at the age of seven in China). All focus groups were conducted in the local dialect; three were held in person and one online using WeChat. The first author, who is familiar with the local dialect, attended all focus groups and was assisted by a second moderator, a local person with experience in conducting focus groups.

Following Breen (2006), we structured the discussion to move from general to more specific topics. All the focus groups followed the same four-part protocol, starting with general questions on parents' aspirations for their children's early

learning and ending with discussing their hopes for their child's learning in the pre-school. Audio recordings were transcribed, and the Chinese transcripts were then translated into English. Subsequently, the English transcripts were coded using thematic analysis (Breen, 2006; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014), which established connections between the themes and clustered them. The analysis concluded with a list of major themes and subthemes accompanied by a brief, illustrative data extract.

Results

Emphasis on free development

Parents in the study tended to have high educational expectations for their children. They hoped their children would be 'promising', 'talented' and 'have a bright future'. Many parents wanted their children to 'have a higher education degree'. However, during early childhood, almost all parents recognized the significance of 'free development'.

'Free development' meant that some parents spent limited time 'accompanying children and taking care of them', and children could grow up in a relatively free environment, which is in line with what Lareau (2003) described as the

During early childhood, almost all parents recognized the significance of 'free development'.

'accomplishment of natural growth' model. The study found that sample parents who struggle to spend time together with the child are all low-SES parents. But the term also meant that some parents respected children's interests and nature and would not force children to follow what they think should be done. Moreover, because parents did not believe in deciding the future for their children, some chose to nurture children without much restriction. As a high-SES father stated:

Now society is changing too fast. Considering the fast development of society, we (as parents) should keep thinking. For example, I was interested in film production and computers. At that time, I thought I would buy a professional camera first, so that my children could practise using it when they were free. But then I gave up this idea. You can't restrict your child's thinking using parents' thoughts now. When you need it in the future, you can visit some experienced people in the society to seek for advice. For now, let him try more and let him choose freely. (FG3)

In the eyes of the father, 'free development' is expressed by prioritizing the children's interests and giving them opportunities to choose. Although it is confirmed that all parents in our sample emphasized children's free development,

the sample parents implemented this in different ways, and not all parents recognized the significance of their role in offering activities for their children to try. It may be no coincidence that the parents in our sample who had difficulty taking responsibility for being involved in children's 'free development' were all from the lower-SES group.

After school, we spend little time accompanying the child. Usually, he runs for fun on the street of the village himself or with other children. We are not involved much. (FG4)

My child is also fangyang (free-range). We, as parents, are just responsible to see her and to limit her TV-watching. (FG2)

These quotations suggest that some low-SES parents in our sample seemed to equate free development with *fangyang* and tended to provide fewer resources, including material and financial resources, to support their children's early learning. In contrast, some high-SES parents were involved in daily educational activities, providing their children with opportunities for extracurricular activities but not imposing any particular ones.

The use of guanxi

The centre of *guanxi* is the familial tie or social network. *Guanxi* in PI can be categorized as the use of relatives, other parents with children in the same class, friends and colleagues (Li et al., 2022). Parents use *guanxi* as a form of social capital that provides access to resources they can draw upon as needed for children's learning. All the parents in our sample talked about using kinship networks, partly because familial ties are the most important *guanxi* relations for PI.

The parents in our study noted that they usually exchanged information with their relatives about their children's performance in pre-school and discussed their children's academic plans with them.

When my niece comes to my house, I perceive it as an opportunity to further develop his [her son's] social skills. I will tell him that he should share toys with his cousin and he should take care of his little sister. (FG1)

The parents in our study noted that they usually exchanged information with their relatives about their children's performance in pre-school and discussed their children's academic plans with them. When confronted with a need, low-SES parents would strategically make use of the kinship network to create social connections with their children's teachers.

Some parents choose to make their children have extra-curricular classes. Many of us do not know whether [they] should have it. It is really helpful to listen to teachers' opinions and to know the pre-school's ideas. So, I told my sister and asked her to enquire about her best friend, who is my child's teacher. (FG2)

This does not mean that high-SES parents have no need to use *guanxi* to seek help from teachers, but it suggests that they are more often able to be involved in their children's ECEC themselves, as compared to low-SES parents who draw on external social support.

It is noteworthy that the lower-SES parents in our study would extend their *guanxi* networks to access information from higher-SES people, strategically using *guanxi* from higher-SES people for their child's learning opportunities; this contrasts with the finding that families in rural areas may have poorer *guanxi* networks and are often disadvantaged (Xie and Postiglione, 2016).

I heard from my friend that there is a social activity, and seats are very limited. I would do everything I can to include my child in it. I would figure out who I can find to seek help and whether it is OK if I give more money. Finally, my friend helped me. (FG3)

I often talk with a few mothers whose children are in the same class with my child. Their support and recognition, sometimes, are more comforting. Sometimes we will organize some activities together for contributing to children's learning. (FG2)

Our findings suggest that parents are not passive recipients in their children's education but adopt strategies to widen and improve their *guanxi* network for their children's educational benefit.

Supervising homework

A recurrent role of the parents in the sample was supervision of their children doing homework. Pre-school teachers usually design parent-child homework, practice-related homework and experience-based homework to involve parents (Li, 2022). The parents in the sample perceived supervising homework as important for PI, and usually put homework ahead of their children's free time.

After pre-school, I often tell the child the rule. Only after finishing homework, can he play. (FG3)

The homework is not too much and it is from the teacher. It is definitely beneficial for children's learning. (FG1)

Acquiring good habits of doing homework can benefit children's learning in primary school. It is important. (FG1)

I often accompany him to finish his homework. I remembered the teacher asked him to learn to write Chinese words. He was so impatient. I wrote with him, so he could finish the writing homework. (FG4)

Clearly parents' perceptions of children's homework shaped children's behaviours. Rural parents in our sample tended to think pragmatically about homework as a means of 'preparing children for primary school' (FG1), 'preventing the consequences of their children doing poorly' (FG2) and helping reduce (or even close) their 'lagging behind the rest' due to their social, economic and family background (FG2). The pragmatic way in which parents thought about supervising homework may lead us to conclude that rural parents do trust schools and teachers' judgement about their children's learning. Our sample parents were afraid their children would fall behind and were therefore eager to complement their learning in pre-school.

Higher- and lower-SES parents in our sample seemed to communicate with their children differently when supervising their homework. This was in line with previous studies in the USA (Hart and Risley, 1995; Lareau, 2003). Higher-SES parents in our sample tended to negotiate with their children and make room for them to express themselves. Some parents focused on guiding their children to decide how to do the homework. Some of them perceived parent-child communication as an opportunity to develop children's communication skills, instead of imposing what parents thought was best. By contrast, lower-SES parents in the study tended to be more authoritarian. They rarely reported children's critical thinking skills when doing homework. One mother, a worker in a textile factory, had never heard about critical thinking skills and did not know how to cultivate them. She had difficulty making her child listen to her and simply told the child, 'You should be quiet when doing homework' (FG2). When children asked questions, the lower-SES parents would respond and tell their children how to do the task, but typically did not prolong the discussion with guiding questions to foster independent thinking.

Differing appreciation of play-based learning

A pivotal finding in our study was the difference in high- and low-SES parents' appreciation of play-based versus academically based learning. The desire for more explicit emphasis on academically based learning was expressed by many lower-SES parents. They believed that this could keep their children's focus on the development of academically oriented skills such as reading and mathematics.

The pre-school highlights the importance of play-based learning and practice. In general, there is less academically based learning. (FG2)

I will teach some knowledge to my child at home in case he will be left behind in primary school. (FG2)

I think it is better to teach some academic knowledge in pre-school and make children ready for primary school because it is an exam-oriented education. (FG4)

Some parents developed strategies for involvement in their children's learning at home. One of the common strategies was the creation of a good physical environment. All the parents thought a correct mix of nutrition was the foundation for their children's growth and learning. Not all the sample parents could equally apply this, however, one reason being that the mothers were apparently more willing to provide nutritionally balanced diets than were the fathers. Some parents decorated rooms in their home with pictures of bilingual (Chinese and English) letters, numbers, common animals and fruits. Parents often bought storybooks and picture books so that their children could read and describe the pictures.

With respect to play-based learning, high-SES parents said that they would talk to their children, explain the meaning of activities organized by them and notice when they play. These parents tended to organize their children's time

Some parents decorated rooms in their home with pictures of bilingual (Chinese and English) letters, numbers, common animals and fruits.

and combine play- and academically based learning after consulting them on their preferences. Lower-SES parents seemed to use simpler words to stop their children from playing, and required children to do their homework, as one excerpt illustrates:

I think much playing is a waste of time. If I find him playing too much and beyond the amount of time, I will stop him without negotiation. He is too young to distinguish what is good and bad for him. (FG2)

All the parents in the sample preferred to have rules about the amount of time their child could spend playing, especially electronic games. They believed that spending too much time on these games could easily become addictive and harmful for early learning.

Discussion

This study aims to analyse parental involvement in children's early learning at home in rural China. There are some limitations to the study. The differentiation of rural parents by gender and SES may have produced a selection bias that could have resulted in biased data. The sample parents with a migration background were under-represented and the number of rural parents is small. Despite these shortcomings, the study makes some contributions to this topic.

Consistent with the emerging literature, nearly all parents in this study valued their social networks as a resource. Specifically, they tended to use familial ties – or guanxi – for their children's learning information and chance of educational opportunities.

This study suggests that the sample parents tended to be involved in the free development of children, but that there are very different viewpoints depending on parents' SES. Most high-SES parents generally viewed children as co-constructors in their own learning and provided more activities and opportunities for children's free selection. Many low-SES parents tended to be less involved in overseeing their children's educational development and adopted so-called free-range parenting, since they had less time and could not afford extra activities for their children. Consistent with the emerging literature, nearly all parents in this study valued their social networks as a resource. Specifically, they tended to use familial ties – or *guanxi* – for their children's learning information and chance of educational opportunities. This is in line with the work of Luo (2011), who found that, in general, Chinese parents tended to choose partners for instrumental exchanges, such as in social or economic exchange relations, with whom they enjoyed a degree of familiarity. In the study, this involved the parents' utilization of *guanxi* networks. The findings demonstrated that the *guanxi* networks of lower-SES parents are far more likely to include friends and colleagues than are those of their higher-SES counterparts, since *guanxi* networks tend to be homogeneous in social class (Horvat, Weininger and Lareau, 2003). We also found that some lower-SES parents in this study reach out to their relatives to help deal with teachers. However, further research is needed to determine whether there are social class and gender differences in the use of *guanxi* for children's learning.

Most parents in this study viewed supervising homework as a way to prepare children for primary school and to complement teachers' work. According to prior research (e.g. Fox, 2016; Liang et al., 2022), the importance of homework

and extended learning is associated with promoting PI in school and at home, and with children's academic success. Like other researchers (e.g. Cui, Valcke and Vanderlinde, 2016), we found that some rural parents were satisfied with the teacher's homework and had particularly positive attitudes towards teachers, whom they viewed as authoritative educational experts. Consequently, they tended to trust teachers and follow the teachers' advice, in compliance with pre-school standards. Most high-SES parents tended to regard supervising homework as an opportunity to negotiate with their children and make room for developing their communication and critical thinking skills. Some high-SES parents viewed homework supervision as an opportunity not only to refine a skill but also to nurture values including diligence, persistence and concentration. They seemed to believe that learning experiences arise through the children's interactions with people and the world around them (Diamond, Reagan and Bandyk, 2000).

Almost all parents in this study were concerned with their child's academically based learning, which is consistent with the finding that Chinese parents seem to focus more than other parents on systematic teaching of children at home (Huntsinger and Jose, 2009). This study indicates that most parents highlight a supportive environment for children's learning at home and learning activities organized by parents, and accords with the finding that creating an academically oriented home atmosphere is important to achieve certain educational goals (Jeynes, 2010).

Regarding play-based learning, we found that most high-SES parents tended to combine academic and social skills learning in children's play activities, which is not necessarily in line with some research findings, such as Cheng and Stimpson (2004) and Fung and Cheng (2012), who found that Chinese parents seem to focus only on academic learning in children's play. In today's Chinese classrooms, free play still seems to be regarded as unimportant, as it is often used purely instrumentally by teachers to achieve learning and teaching objectives (Wu, Fass and Geiger, 2018). In some kindergartens in Western countries, teachers practise the concept of free play, which many low-SES Chinese parents tend to view as unrelated to learning. Moreover, parents may have culturally different conceptions and understandings of play and learning, particularly learning at play (Brooker, 2011; Grieshaber and McArdle, 2010). This study suggests that parents do not always share a common cultural background or SES, and not all parents want the same things. Listening to and dialoguing with parents helps understand their perceptions and contributes to reciprocal relations between parents and teachers.

Funding

This work was supported by the National Office for Education Science Planning of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (Grant number AKA210019).

References

- Anderson, K.J. and Minke, K.M. (2007) 'Parent involvement in education: toward an understanding of parents' decision making', *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(5), pp. 311–323.
- Arndt, A.K. *et al.* (2013) 'Supporting and stimulating the learning of socioeconomically disadvantaged children—perspectives of parents and educators in the transition from preschool to primary school', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(1), pp. 23–38.
- Breen, R.L. (2006) 'A practical guide to focus-group research', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 30(3), pp. 463–475.
- Brooker, L. (2011) 'Taking children seriously: an alternative agenda for research?', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(2), pp. 137–149.
- Castro, D.C. *et al.* (2004) 'Parent involvement in Head Start programs: the role of parent, teacher and classroom characteristics', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19(3), pp. 413–430.
- Cheng, P.W.D. and Stimpson, P.G. (2004) 'Articulating contrasts in kindergarten teachers' implicit knowledge on play-based learning', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 41(4–5), pp. 339–352.
- Cui, Z., Valcke, M. and Vanderlinde, R. (2016) 'Empirical study of parents' perceptions of preschool teaching competencies in China', *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2), pp. 1–7.
- Dearing, E. *et al.* (2006) 'Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy: longitudinal associations between and within families', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), pp. 653–664.
- Diamond, K.E., Reagan, A.J. and Bandyk, J.E. (2000) 'Parents' conceptions of kindergarten readiness: relationships with race, ethnicity, and development', *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(2), pp. 93–100.
- Doucet, F. (2011) 'Parent involvement as ritualized practice', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42(4), pp. 404–421.
- Durand, T.M. and Perez, N.A. (2013) 'Continuity and variability in the parental involvement and advocacy beliefs of Latino families of young children: finding the potential for a collective voice', *School Community Journal*, 23(1), pp. 49–79.

- Epstein, J.L. (1995) 'School/family/community/partnerships: caring for the children we share', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), pp. 701–712.
- Fong, V.L. (2007) 'Parent-child communication problems and the perceived inadequacies of Chinese only children', *Ethos*, 35(1), pp. 85–127.
- Fox, K.R. (2016) 'Homework as a family literacy practice: what counts as best practices for children deemed as high risk for academic failure due to socioeconomic status', *School Community Journal*, 26(2), pp. 215–236.
- Fung, C.K.H. and Cheng, D.P.W. (2012) 'Consensus or dissensus? Stakeholders' views on the role of play in learning', *Early Years*, 32(1), pp. 17–33.
- Grieshaber, S. and McArdle, F. (2010) *The trouble with play*. London: Open University Press.
- Gross, D. et al. (2020) 'What is parent engagement in early learning? Depends who you ask', *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(3), pp. 747–770.
- Hart, B. and Risley, T.R. (1995) *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Brookes.
- Hopkins, P.E. (2007) 'Positionalities and knowledge: negotiating ethics in practice', *ACME: an international journal for critical geographies*, 6(3), pp. 386–401.
- Horvat, E.M., Weininger, E.B. and Lareau, A. (2003) 'From social ties to social capital: Class differences in the relations between schools and parent networks', *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(2), pp. 319–351.
- Huntsinger, C.S. and Jose, P.E. (2009) 'Parental involvement in children's schooling: different meanings in different cultures', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(4), pp. 398–413.
- Jeynes, W.H. (2007) 'The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: a meta-analysis', *Urban Education*, 42(1), pp. 82–110.
- Jeynes, W.H. (2010) 'Religiosity, religious schools, and their relationship with the achievement gap: a research synthesis and meta-analysis', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 79(3), pp. 263–291.
- Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal childhoods: class, race, and family life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Li, C. (2022) *Research on the current situation of 'homework in kindergarten' – take Fujian Province as an example*. Fujian Normal University.
- Li, J. et al. (2015) 'Poor parents: the survey reports for migrant parents' education understanding, education expectations and education participation', *Educational Science Research*, (01), pp. 5–18.

- Li, X., Liu, Q. and Guo, Y. (2019) 'The development and prospect of the collaborative education of kindergarten, family and community in China during the 40 years of reform and opening-up', *Studies in Early Childhood Education*, (02), pp. 12–20.
- Li, Y. *et al.* (2022) 'Parental Involvement in early childhood education and care: exploring parents' perspectives in rural China', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 31(3), pp. 343–368. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2022.2098995>.
- Liang, E. *et al.* (2020) "If they have more work, they learn more": parents' views of their children's learning experiences and homework in Pre-K settings', *Early Years*, pp. 1–16.
- Lu, T. (2016) *Effect of preschool children in rural areas factors of parental involvement*. Harbin Normal University.
- Luo, J.D. (2011) 'Guanxi revisited: an exploratory study of familiar ties in a Chinese workplace', *Management and Organization Review*, 7(2), pp. 329–363.
- Manz, P.H., Fantuzzo, J.W. and Power, T.J. (2004) 'Multidimensional assessment of family involvement among urban elementary students', *Journal of School Psychology*, 42(6), pp. 461–477.
- Meng, Q. (2020) *Rural social work in China: developing indigenised knowledge for rural social work practice*. Ghent University.
- National Bureau of Statistics of China (2018) *People's living. China statistical yearbook 2018*. China Statistic Press. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexch.htm>.
- Nichols, S. *et al.* (2009) 'Parents resourcing children's early development and learning', *Early Years*, 29(2), pp. 147–171.
- Park, S. and Holloway, S.D. (2013) 'No parent left behind: predicting parental involvement in adolescents' education within a sociodemographically diverse population', *The Journal of Educational Research*, 106(2), pp. 105–121.
- Rodriguez, K.L. *et al.* (2011) 'Culturally responsive focus groups: reframing the research experience to focus on participants', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(4), pp. 400–435.
- Stewart, D.W. and Shamdasani, P.N. (2014) *Focus groups: theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Stylianides, A.J. and Stylianides, G.J. (2011) 'A type of parental involvement with an isomorphic effect on urban children's mathematics, reading, science, and social studies achievement at kindergarten entry', *Urban Education*, 46(3), pp. 408–438.

- Tobin, J.J. (1992) *Re-made in Japan: everyday life and consumer taste in a changing society*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wei, F. (2022) 'A historical investigation of the changes in the relationship between family and school in China's rural areas in the past century', *Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 61(2), pp. 173–187.
- Wu, S.-C., Faas, S. and Geiger, S. (2018) 'Chinese and German teachers' and parents' conceptions of learning at play – similarities, differences, and (in)consistencies', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(2), pp. 229–256.
- Xie, A. and Postiglione, G.A. (2016) 'Guanxi and school success: an ethnographic inquiry of parental involvement in rural China', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(7), pp. 1014–1043.



Chapter 10

Creating 'play invitations' from open-ended materials in the Philippines: Family involvement in literacy development during infancy

Josephine Louise F. Jamero and Maria Theresa Z. Mora

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Infant Development Programme for Remote Learning (IDP-RLP) of the Child Development Center at the University of the Philippines had to be creative to convert its services into a virtual platform. IDP-RLP was converted into a parent education and support programme. The goal was to guide families to care for their infants during the quarantine and to enrich their relationships through meaningful family routines. Since the quarantine began in March 2020, the programme has served two cohorts, one of six and one of seven families, with 3- to 6-month-old infants. Families with infants were guided to use 'play invitations' to support the development of their children. These were supplemented with kits for family play (KFP), a collection of safe, economical and sustainable open-ended materials chosen to encourage families to build literacy routines beginning in infancy. Such open-ended materials include playdough, blocks, fabrics, pigments and objects from nature such as stones, twigs, water and sand that children can use in a multitude of ways as they create characters, scenes and stories in their play.

The cohorts were composed of working middle- to upper-middle-income families. Some parents worked as professionals in business, medicine, consultancy, or academia, while others chose to be homemakers. The Center primarily serves as a laboratory school for the families of the university faculty and staff, but slots were also given to non-university families. The cohorts resided neolocally (i.e. not in the couple's natal households), or at some point resided out of necessity with the mother's family of origin.

Literature on family involvement and open-ended materials for literacy development

Studies have shown that literacy development is a social process, and certain adult-child interactions in the early years, such as reading together, making inferences and relating narratives to experiences, can support this. It has been recognized that literacy competencies are acquired well before formal schooling, and families have been identified as the social unit that can provide time and resources to socialize young children for literacy (Lawhon and Cobb, 2002, p. 117). Parents and other family members are instrumental in providing the basic foundations for listening, speaking, reading and writing. The social interactions within families provide fertile ground for fostering foundational literacy skills. Programmes that encourage this, such as intergenerational literacy or family literacy programmes, view the parent-child relationship as a critical venue for promoting interactions with literacy resources (Kreider, 2013, p. 3).

Although the importance of the parent-child relationship in shaping a child's brain development is widely recognized, many programmes fail to utilize this to promote the well-being of both parent and child (NSCDC, 2004). Literacy activities such as listening, observing, speaking, reading and writing can be incorporated into parent-child interactions to enhance a child's skills. Simple activities, such as oral storytelling and meaningful conversations, are examples of literacy routines (Lawhon and Cobb, 2002; Kreider, 2013). Consistent with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, reinforcing the role of parent-child relationships for cognitive and language development may benefit children even in their earliest years.

***Simple activities, such as oral storytelling
and meaningful conversations, are examples
of literacy routines.***

When designing programmes focused on the relationship between parents and children, it is important to consider both the developmental stage and the cultural background. Cultural sensitivity is a critical element in designing effective intergenerational literacy programmes (Kreider, 2013, p. 6). The literature presents several suggestions for designing culturally appropriate programmes. First, play is an instrumental tool for encouraging literacy in young children, as it comes naturally to them. However, educators are advised that play needs to remain child-centred even when it is used to achieve specific learning outcomes (Roskos and Christie, 2001, p. 2). Second, cultural appropriateness can be achieved by tailoring programmes to cultural norms as well as teaching and learning styles. For instance, a review of literature on Filipino Indigenous peoples revealed that oral tradition plays a significant role in the transfer of knowledge (ECIP, n.d., p. 116).

Literacy programmes in the Philippines should therefore incorporate oral along with print-based resources. Other cultures have similar specific features. Manners (2019), for example, differentiates the use of open-ended materials in Western and Japanese cultures. Although Western cultures tend to use these materials to explore shape, texture and size, Japanese people use them to promote mental balance, perseverance and motivation through repetitive tasks.

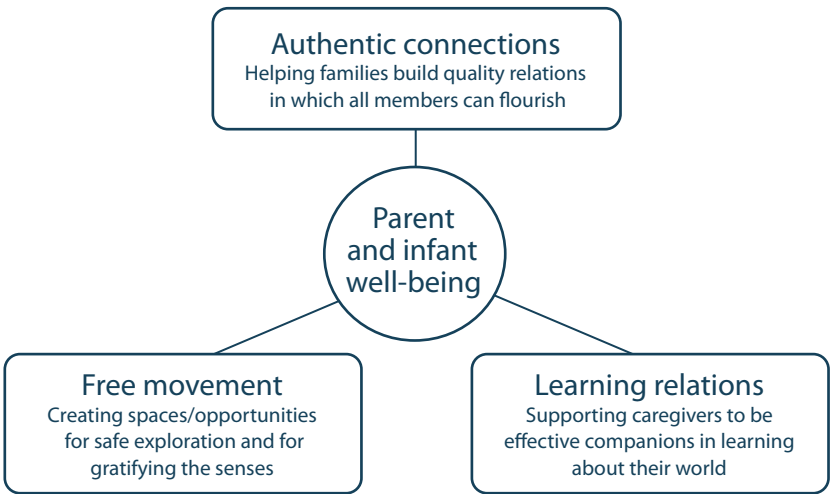
Lastly, the literature highlights some applications of open-ended materials that can create developmentally and culturally appropriate literacy programmes for young children. Scholars have raised some concerns about using play for learning tasks without regard for how children naturally use play in their daily lives (Roskos and Christie, 2001, p. 64). For example, Lawhon and Cobb (2002) argue that the use of literacy objects and resources in dramatic play, such as chalkboards and signs, envelopes and stamps, magazines and play money, can build children's literacy competencies. Manners (2019; pp. 105–112) further suggests that 'apparatuses' or resources similar to open-ended materials can be used to extend opportunities for learning. The resources Manners refers to were developed by Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Pikler (*ibid.*). Even though open-ended materials were not explicitly used by these proponents to promote literacy competencies, they are potential alternative resources that can be compatible with cultures with strong oral traditions. Based on this understanding, IDP-RLP integrated the creative use of open-ended materials, guiding parents to create literacy routines from the earliest years in ways that were consistent with the Filipino socio-cultural context.

Overview of IDP-RLP and literacy development

IDP-RLP was transitioned into a virtual programme in August 2020 to continue serving families with infants during the lockdown. The authors adapted the programme for families with younger infants (3 to 6 months old) and co-taught the weekly sessions for two years. This entailed regular conferences with the parents, weekly meetings with the group of parents, monitoring the development of the children through documentation (narrative reports, individual children's logs), and co-rating the developmental checklists with the families. Although the programme was open to all families, regardless of their residency and socio-economic background, the majority of families were based in Metro Manila. Though a few families spent a part of the year in other regions of the country, they continued participating in the programme. Parents from the first and second cohorts included mothers and fathers who had completed tertiary or graduate degrees. However, the parents' employment status and educational attainment were not criteria for admission to the programme.

Mallory and New (1994) advocated anchoring early childhood programmes, especially those intended for intervention, in theory. Based on families' anticipated needs, we used Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory (Mallory and New, 1994, pp. 325–327; Cole et al., 1978, pp. 79–104) as the theoretical base to understand and serve the group's collective learning and development. IDP-RLP was designed for families to thrive even as they were separated from their common social groups by the quarantine. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory accentuates the significance of the adult-child relationship in learning. Relationships take centre stage, as learning and development are seen to occur through the child's active engagement with others (Kreider, 2013, p. 5). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is, according to Vygotsky, the level between what a learner can accomplish independently and what a learner can do with the help of a more knowledgeable guide (Cole et al., 1978, pp. 86–90). This zone is the venue for parents to support their child's learning and it inspired the framework and resources developed for IDP-RLP. Building on the view that competencies can be built through meaningful interactions within a socio-cultural context, we perceived parents as critical partners in supporting literacy development, starting in their child's infancy.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for IDP-RLP



IDP-RLP engages mothers and fathers to play with their infant. Before implementing activities that focus on competencies, the programme first guides parents in building authentic connections with their infants through play. Parents are taught to use 'play invitations' to create opportunities for shared play (see *Figure 2*). They are instructed to use specific objects within their infant's reach as a way of inviting their child to play. The authors emphasized that play is initiated by the parents: playing and interacting with objects becomes their way of inviting

their infants to engage in a shared activity. To illustrate, a popular play invitation in both cohorts was 'The Gift of a Name'. The families celebrated the first gift that they gave their child – its name – by painting it on paper. The infants were placed on their parents' laps or spent their 'tummy time' near the area where parents were painting the name. For most of the infants, this was the first time they were able to interact with paint. Some joined in the activity by tapping on the paper, grabbing the brushes, or spreading the paint on the paper or even on their body. Throughout the activity, parents were taught how to respond to their infants' participation and were encouraged to describe what they were doing with their infants. Eight weeks were spent making play invitations that build authentic connections and help parents discover their emerging role. The following weeks were devoted to play invitations that encouraged the free movement of infants, and building the learning relations between the parent and child.

Families reported that reading books to infants was more challenging than they expected.

Parents met weekly through community sessions. They shared their experiences with each play invitation. Feedback from the first cohort revealed that preparing materials was becoming challenging. Parents working from home found it difficult to procure materials and arrange them for play invitations. The team addressed this by adopting an idea that arose in a meeting with one family. This family asked if it would be possible to send ready-to-use materials to their homes. Consequently, the educators planned and assembled the first Kits for Family Play (KFP). Working with a limited budget, the team was careful to use materials that were sturdy enough for multiple uses, reasonably priced and safe for infants.

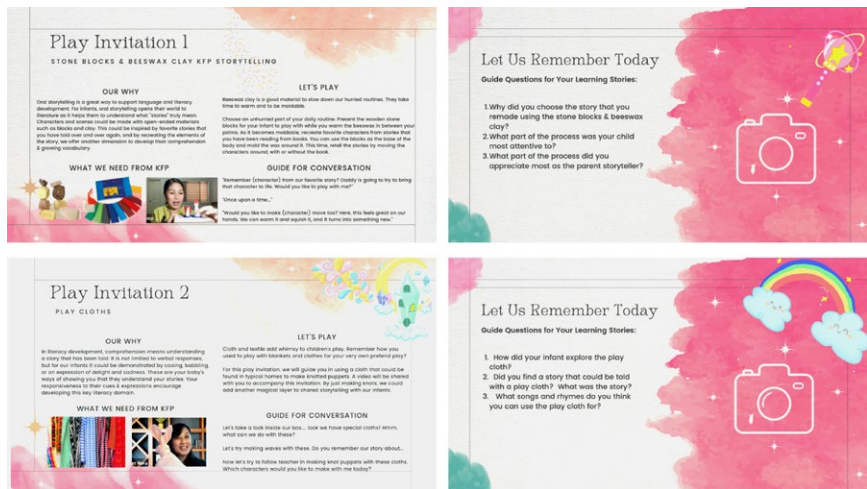
The team also responded to the concerns expressed by families about their attempts to support literacy development at home. Families reported that reading books to infants was more challenging than they expected. Thus, the first 'Never-ending Storytelling Kit' was assembled. It included open-ended materials that can supplement storybook reading, such as beeswax clay, block crayons, colours and pigments, colourful fabrics, wooden blocks shaped like stones, and beanbag dolls for making characters and scenes. The team also demonstrated that the open-ended materials can be used without print resources through oral storytelling sessions. Families recreated characters and scenes from stories and reported that their infants interacted with the materials. The play invitations included in the KFP gave families examples of how to use open-ended materials for creative storytelling. Parents were taught to encourage active contributions from their infants in the storytelling process. Families from both cohorts said that using the open-ended materials for oral storytelling helped build their literacy routines.

Evaluating the use of open-ended materials for family literacy routines in IDP-RLP

This evaluation is based on the implementation of KFP for the seven families in the second cohort, served from September 2021 to May 2022. Mothers (n=7), fathers (n=7), infants (n=7) and one sibling of an infant participant (n=1) participated in the weekly sessions. The second version of the Never-ending Storytelling Kit was distributed to the families in December 2021. The open-ended materials in this kit were similar to the first version, but with several improvements (e.g. play cloths were replaced with traditional fabric, bean bags were made by a professional seamstress). The play invitations were also improved, by including oral storytelling with water and beeswax clay characters, including oral storytelling with knotted play cloth characters, and showcasing onomatopoeia in stories by recreating sounds using blocks, stones and bottles.

Another parent noticed that other parents were very creative in making characters for stories. They saw how others combined the wooden stone-shaped blocks and the beeswax clay to make characters, and this inspired them to try it too.

Every play invitation was accompanied by a guide for conversation and reflection questions for the parents' weekly 'learning stories', through which the development of children was documented. Further revisions included improving ways of introducing play invitations to meet families' needs more effectively. Some families were less engaged when the original method of delivering play invitations as homework was used. An alternative was tried, namely delivering the weekly play invitations as a pre-recorded demonstration. However, what worked best was the third method, which was engaging in play invitations together as a group during the weekly community sessions. The educators prepared live demonstrations and families were given time to try the activity together and share their insights with the group afterwards. Among the three approaches to introducing play invitations, all seven families said that they preferred the weekly community sessions. One parent observed, 'It was helpful doing it with other fellow parents and learning from them', while another said, 'Let's do this together! We are pushed to do this because if it were just us doing this at home ourselves, we might have either forgotten to do them [activities] or found ourselves too tired to do it'. Another parent noticed that other parents were very creative in making characters for stories. They saw how others combined the wooden stone-shaped blocks and the beeswax clay to make characters, and this inspired them to try it too. The parents seemed to appreciate the ideas of their peers and gained new ideas for using the open-ended materials.

Figure 2. Examples of play invitations using open-ended materials

The parents also remarked that the community sessions alleviated their doubts regarding their ability to support their infants' development. One family said that in the beginning they were uncertain about how they could support the development of their son. They found the activities most helpful because they understood what their child was learning and their role as parents in the process. Another participant gave a similar response: 'We know that we lacked activities for story time. We have yet to practise. We need to make an effort especially now that he is at the stage where he wants to talk.' The feedback from parents is consistent with the findings of Weigel and Bennett (2006, p. 359) that the more parents feel they can support their child's early literacy development, the more likely they are to engage in related activities like reading to their children and teaching them how to read. This was further confirmed by responses from two more participants about the importance of the community activity.

This keeps us honest with our objectives for her [child's] development. This is aligned with what we want for her...without the community, our accountability for what we would like for her development could have lessened.

We are more intentional when we do it in class. We really block off our schedules [Friday mornings] for this class. This is much easier compared to when we had to do the activity during the week before the class.

At the midpoint evaluation, families had no further recommendations for improving the KFP and still preferred the community sessions out of the three methods for introducing play invitations.

To further ensure this method's responsiveness to parents' needs, feedback was collected after every session and during the individual family conferences, which were held in April 2022. Six play invitations were implemented before feedback was sought from individual families. Parents reported that out of the open-ended materials included in the KFP, their infants responded the most to the wooden stone-shaped blocks, bean bags and pigments. Their infants also used the open-ended materials for unstructured play. Apart from using them for play invitations, parents also presented the materials for free exploration, even without being prompted by the teachers. During the unstructured play, parents reported that their children favoured the materials that produced different sounds by shaking, tapping and banging.

Play invitations included songs composed by the undergraduate practicum students.

By early May 2022, the next KFP had been sent to the families. The 'Quirky Kit' (see *Figure 3*) was intended to extend the options for families as they support the development of foundational child development competencies. Since the quarantine eased around this time, the team thought about how to promote development through outdoor activities: the second KFP included materials that can be used outdoors, such as rhythm sticks, bamboo rainmakers sourced from Palawan, bug boxes, large sidewalk chalks and felt books with a transparent pocket (as shown in *Figure 3*) where families can collect things that their infants find interesting during their time outdoors. Play invitations included songs composed by the undergraduate practicum students. The second set of open-ended materials gave families more options for guiding infants in naming objects, listening to sounds and familiarizing themselves with their home languages. Literacy was also integrated with numeracy, science, arts, music and movement through the play invitations. It emphasized how one subject-matter area can be integrated with others and how the domains of development are interrelated.

Figure 3: The felt book included in the Quirky Kit

After the implementation of all 12 play invitations, a 10-item questionnaire was administered to gather more information about the families' experiences with the KFP. The questions ranged from parents' perceptions of the materials to their recommendations for the community sessions. Parents reported that they appreciated the inclusion of safe and natural materials, especially those that were difficult for them to procure. They reported that the materials were safe to use with minimal supervision during free play time. One mentioned that she wished she had thought of the felt book and bug box for outdoor play sooner. The play invitation called 'The Gift of a Name' was favoured by many parents. This was the only play invitation that was reused from the first cohort, since it was most representative of the programme's framework. For many, this activity, in which they introduced paint to their infants, became even more meaningful because it showed how even a single word could carry a family's wishes for their child.

The play invitation called 'The Gift of a Name' was favoured by many parents. This was the only play invitation that was reused from the first cohort, since it was most representative of the programme's framework.

One parent described how his son would look at the painting whenever they called his name. Another said, 'It's fun to do this together as a family. It's a good reminder of the meaning and significance of our daughter's name.' Questionnaire responses also indicated that the open-ended materials were easy to use. Although the use of beeswax clay needed to be explained in several workshops, families made comments like 'I appreciated that they are open-ended and can be used in a variety of ways.'

The community sessions helped the families to understand the uses of some of the materials. For example, the beeswax clay needs to be moulded by an adult because it requires dexterity that infants have yet to develop. Families were asked to present the clay as moulded figures during oral or book storytelling. In the community sessions the team explained why this material was selected: it keeps its form without drying and it can be used repeatedly for a long time. Beeswax clay can be remelted to remove impurities, which allows years of use and makes for a more economical and sustainable alternative to ordinary modelling clay. Communicating and demonstrating the purpose of open-ended materials seemed to encourage families, as illustrated by one comment: 'In terms of difficulty there was none. We just found the storytelling kit a bit challenging to use at first because we had little experience doing effective storytelling. But it helped us develop the needed skill and get his [child's] attention.'

Data were also gathered about how well families understood the concepts behind literacy development in the earliest years. Their responses included the values of play and exploration in literacy, the child's readiness for engagement, and the use of simple materials for development. They reported that they learned how significant play and connection could be for a child's learning. Regarding their child's readiness, one father wrote, 'We learned that foundational literacy...for our child has already started without us knowing or thinking about it. We are thankful how these activities are purposeful in teaching these things in a fun manner. Because of this, we are trying to be more intentional and engaged every time we do an activity with our son.' The parents also described how they used open-ended materials to support development:

We learned that simple, regular activities and items contribute greatly to learning these subjects. It is important to be mindful and purposive about our daily activities to help with her development.

The lessons also opened our minds to the fact that there are a lot of alternative activities we can do for E that can help his overall development. Most of the activities we did are something that his dad and I did not experience as children. So, learning about these activities is such a great help for us.

We also learned that props...help us make repetitive activities seem more varied and more interesting for L. We realized that communication is important in our child's learning, and that communication can be achieved... especially with different materials from our KFP.

Ideas for improving the community sessions were offered by the parents in the survey. For ease of use, they said that the play invitations could be written with simpler instructions. Parents also noted that members of their extended families had expressed interest in participating after listening in to community sessions.

Recognizing potential and future refinements

The potential of KFP and open-ended materials in the Philippines and beyond

As mentioned earlier, most literacy programmes in the Philippines and in other countries have three features in common: they use books or print materials, they are delivered starting in pre-school years, and they are implemented by school professionals directly with the children. Some initiatives were documented on the use of manipulatives (blocks, clay, water, beads) for literacy activities in pre-school. However, as noted in the study by Omega and Alieto (2019), such materials were not explicitly used to support the development of specific domains of literacy, but were more in line with the typical use of open-ended materials for competency development, being embedded within unstructured play. Although unstructured play is valuable, direct instruction for specific literacy competencies needs to be more intentional.

Even though books will always have a significant value in building foundational literacy competencies, they should not be viewed as the only resource, especially in socio-cultural contexts where print texts are limited and orality is endemic.

In the Philippines, the selection of storybooks for children is limited, especially outside the cities. The present generation of parents may have grown up with limited access to storybooks in their homes and schools. Although the role of families in literacy is recognized in research, the literature mostly describes programmes that support parents' role through book- or print-based resources. Not only is this true in Western programmes such as the Home Literacy Bags (Barbour, 1998) and Family Literacy Bags (Dever and Burts, 2009), but also in local programmes such as the Sa Aklat Sisikat Program (2009), Every Child a Reader Program (2014), Basa Pilipinas (2013-2018) and The Literacy Hub (2021). These programmes focus on the use of print resources and are delivered during the primary education years. Strategies for literacy development that focus on the use of print materials in primary years are challenging because print resources are insufficient and the acquisition of foundational skills begins before school entrance. Even though books will always have a significant value in building foundational literacy competencies, they should not be viewed as the only resource, especially in socio-cultural contexts where print texts are limited and orality is endemic.

Studying the use of open-ended materials as a resource for literacy development may be beneficial in countries whose context is similar to the Philippines. Although the families in the two cohorts mostly came from the educated middle class, they still encountered challenges when reading books to their infants. Parents provided books and tried shared reading activities, but their infants seemed uninterested and unready. As a result, they discontinued book reading routines and did not try alternative literacy activities. This finding is consistent with other programmes reviewed, where family involvement in early years literacy activities relied heavily on print materials. From the data gathered, the team concluded that parents seemed to associate literacy development with book-related tasks. By introducing families to the KFP designed with open-ended materials, parents began to recognize that literacy routines are multimodal, and can include listening, speaking, reading, writing, touching, singing and other modes.

Some research has examined programmes for infants' literacy development. Mitchell (2005) combined home visitation with book distribution for disadvantaged families and found some parental attitude shifts regarding book exposure and oral language. However, this initiative was also centred on print materials. In contrast, the development of the play invitations and KFP may begin to bridge gaps among initiatives for children's first two years of life. It is a prototype for programmes that use open-ended materials as an alternative or supplement to books while directly supporting specific literacy competencies, that can be delivered from infancy onwards, and that actively involve families in delivering the programme to their children.

Cost and sustainability

The team prioritized low cost and sustainability in producing prototypes not only for families with infants but also for those with children up to five years old. This increased the possibility of disseminating the KFP to more Filipino families with different socio-economic status. Each kit roughly costs between US\$20 and \$35. Programmes that serve numerous children and use local government funds might initially perceive this as expensive: Valido (2021) quoted Director Danguilan of the Philippine Center for Population and Development:

In a poor Filipino household, a mom would always choose food for the family over books for her child. That's why we hope that our local government units will expand their maternal and child health services through the integration and promotion of early literacy to support parent-child relationships.

Although the initial investment in KFP may be relatively high by Philippine standards, the estimated period of use may justify the cost. The selected open-ended materials can last for three to five years of constant use by a child. Even the pigments, which were the only consumable material in the KFP, were of high

Even at its current cost, keeping in mind low cost, sustainability and even ecology in the design process guarantees that the KFP can be used by families for at least three years, and can even be shared or passed on to younger siblings.

enough quality to last for more than a year's worth of community sessions. The pigments can also be dried, so that they are portable and can last even longer. The team prioritized quality and made sure that the materials were safe and appropriate for infants. Plans for improving the kits include producing new open-ended materials, and the team is currently exploring local manufacturers that can execute new designs. Even at its current cost, keeping in mind low cost, sustainability and even ecology in the design process guarantees that the KFP can be used by families for at least three years, and can even be shared or passed on to younger siblings.

To further enhance the KFP, two ideas are proposed. One is to make it part of a lending programme like other school-based or adult literacy initiatives. As families move on to higher levels of school, the KFP can be passed on to the younger group. The other is to identify substitute raw materials like cardboard and tree branches, to lower costs further. These have been wonderful materials for encouraging creativity among children. With help from professional industrial designers, paper- and wood-based materials could be manufactured. Structural soundness will remain a priority, and the possibilities for play invitations can become endless.

Refinements and opportunities

Feedback from the families opened conversations about extending the uses of open-ended materials beyond community sessions. Parents' responses showed that the materials were being used for unstructured play outside sessions. The team had to re-emphasize that these materials are meant for literacy routines at home. This led them to discuss changing the focus of the implementation. Instead of presenting the potential uses of each open-ended material to support literacy

domains, the community sessions would focus on one literacy competency at a time (e.g. vocabulary building or phonological awareness), followed by demonstrations on how to use the material to support the competency. With this simple reversal, the IDP-RLP can better serve its function as a parent education programme. Parents will be educated about literacy concepts while learning about options for using the materials to support the development of these specific competencies.

Currently, the team is considering several opportunities for play invitations and open-ended materials for the third cohort. The ideas were reinforced by the implementation of three KFPs developed for children aged 2 to 5 years in December 2021.

First, virtual programmes such as IDP-RLP need to be documented, so that unexpected circumstances such as further quarantines due to the pandemic or extended suspension of face-to-face classes due to natural disasters (e.g. flooding, earthquake, volcanic eruptions) can be addressed competently and rapidly.

Later projects can include families with children at risk for significant delays in literacy development, such as those whose children cannot attend care and education institutions due to inaccessibility and/or poverty.

Second, the KFP is only the beginning of many initiatives for promoting literacy routines in families. Opportunities to extend the programme to families from disadvantaged backgrounds can be added, paving the way for refining the KFP's cultural appropriateness. Later projects can include families with children at risk for significant delays in literacy development, such as those whose children cannot attend care and education institutions due to inaccessibility and/or poverty. Exploring the ecologically sound production of locally sourced open-ended materials has begun and creating avenues for indigenization (creating content with Indigenous peoples and communities) and livelihood programmes (cooperatives as production centres) are being considered for the coming years.

Third, KFP can become a part of programmes to benefit families within the child's first thousand days, as promoted by the Filipino government. This may be implemented in conjunction with government-initiated online parenting websites or smartphone applications. Disseminating the use of KFP in this way can significantly extend the reach of the IDP-RLP and of the research project beyond small cohorts of families.

Lastly, this project embodies the team's advocacy for accentuating creativity and imagination as key components for supporting literacy routines. Involving families from the earliest years can promote the perspective that developing literacy competencies can start before pre-school and can be achieved through play.

References

- Barbour, A. (1998) 'Home literacy bags promote family involvement', *Childhood Education*, 75(2), pp. 71–75. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.1999.10521986>.
- Cole, M. et al. (1978) *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dever, M.T. and Burts, D.C. (2009) 'An evaluation of family literacy bags as a vehicle for parent involvement', *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 172(2), pp. 359–370. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430212721>.
- Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (no date) *Indigenous peoples education: "from alienation to rootedness"*. Available at: <https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v11/13Indigenous%20Peoples%20Education%20-%20Philippines.pdf> (Accessed: 4 November 2021).
- Kreider, H. (2013) *Promising practices for engaging families in literacy*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Lawhon, T. and Cobb, J. (2002) 'Routines that build emergent literacy skills in infants, toddlers, and preschoolers', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30(2), pp. 113–118.
- Mallory, B. and New, R. (1994) 'Social constructivist theory and principles of inclusion: challenges for early childhood special education', *Journal of Special Education*, 28(3), pp. 322–337. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002246699402800307>.
- Manners, L. (2019) *The early years movement handbook*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Mitchell, C. (2005) *Enhancing parent-child literacy interactions in disadvantaged families with infants and toddlers*. Concordia University.
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) *Young children develop in an environment of relationships: Working Paper No. 1*. Available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/wp1/> (Accessed: 12 May 2022).
- Omaga, J. and Alieto, E. (2019) 'Teaching literacy through play: perspective from Filipino early childhood teachers', *Science International (Lahore)*, 32(3), pp. 477–481.

- Roskos, K. and Christie, J. (2001) 'On not pushing too hard: a few cautionary remarks about linking literacy and play', *Young Children*, 56(3), pp. 64–66.
- Valido, C. (2021) *Ang unang aklat: early literacy in a child's first 1,000 days*, *Rappler*. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/opinion-first-book-early-literacy-child-first-thousand-days/> (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Weigel, D., Martin, S. and Bennett, K. (2006) 'Contributions of the home literacy environment to preschool-aged children's emerging literacy and language skills', *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(3–4), pp. 357–378. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430500063747>.

Section 5

FILL in Europe and
North America



Chapter 11

Enriching the Turkish home literacy environment with digital picture books

Burcu Sarı Uğurlu and Adriana G. Bus

Introduction

Research has shown that digital picture books with well-designed enhancements, such as music, a virtual camera moving through the illustration, and details in motion, can foster children's enthusiasm for reading and serve as a foundation for developing literacy skills. Children living in countries where books are not the primary means of sharing stories can be given opportunities to engage in book reading through digital book libraries. This is especially true in the stage before formal reading instruction begins. This chapter asks whether access to digital picture books can promote reading experience and contribute to the development of the early literacy skills needed to benefit from reading instruction at school. We will describe an example of a free digital book library in Türkiye and discuss the pros and cons of the books in supporting children's learning. Suggestions for potential improvements are proposed, based on this digital book reading research.

Enriching the home literacy environment with digital picture books

Families' socio-economic status continues to be one of the best predictors of children's school success, even when children have access to the same schools (Perry et al., 2018). A frequent explanation is that socio-economic status affects basic skills, particularly language and literacy development, via important cultural practices in the home environment (e.g. Borairi et al., 2021). Listening to picture books is considered one of the cultural practices with the most impact, as demonstrated by numerous studies (e.g. Dickinson et al., 2012). In print-saturated cultures, where print materials are readily available and widely used, books have the potential to provide a greater language input compared to other language-related family activities. According to Logan et al. (2019), it is estimated that

children in the USA who are exposed to four or five typical picture books daily during their first four years will hear approximately one million words more than children who do not have this exposure. Apart from the greater word supply, the language in books is more complex and variable and offers better preparation for reading than language in other activities (Montag, 2019).

Access to children's books may be limited for many parents, and even when it is available they may not fully grasp the advantages of books in comparison to other activities that strongly engage their children but offer lesser benefits. For instance, there is no doubt that television shows and YouTube videos can put children in touch with stories. However, the language used to tell the story differs dramatically. Word choice and grammar are much simpler in films and videos than in picture books (Bus and Hoel, 2023). Moreover, when parents have access to books, the effectiveness of book reading is also contingent on the quality of parental guidance, which is closely linked to the educational level of the parents (Baydar et al., 2014; Ekerim and Selçuk, 2018).

Digital books may be helpful because children can read them without a mediator. These books mostly include a voice-over to read the text and features that guide children's visual attention or provide additional explanations, making the activity less dependent on the qualities and willingness of mediators.

Due to an increasingly multimodal repertoire, print-based book reading is no longer the only family literacy practice (e.g. Lynch and Prins, 2022). This chapter discusses a new way to stimulate book reading in families where it is rare, namely by providing access to digital picture books. Digital books are cheaper than paper books and can be easily and freely accessible to a large number of families. Another advantage is that digital book reading is less dependent on the presence of a literate parent, grandparent, or older sibling who can read books to young children (e.g. Lynch and Prins, 2022). Reading books to young children may seem easy since most are eager to hear stories. However, not all adult caretakers or older siblings feel competent and willing to read stories to young children (Justice, Logan and Damschroder, 2015). In those cases, digital books may be helpful because children can read them without a mediator. These books mostly include a voice-over to read the text and features that guide children's visual attention or provide additional explanations, making the activity less dependent on the qualities and willingness of mediators.

Digital books often include visual and auditory enhancements (Bus, Takacs and Kegel, 2015). For instance, a virtual camera may zoom in on the details mentioned in the narrative, thus helping children connect the pictures and the narration. These enhancements are akin to the ‘scaffolding’ often employed when adults read books with children, such as pointing at specific details in the pictures in order to direct their attention towards significant events that impact the protagonist and the storyline. In other respects, the digital enhancements may not be as effective as adult guidance; reading together can enrich the quality of the parent-child relationship through shared enjoyment of the story (e.g. Munzer et al., 2019).

Here we explore an initiative in Türkiye that encourages the use of digital books in households where reading printed books is uncommon. This initiative involves setting up a free digital library for children, easily accessed through smartphones and tablets. In addition to examining the strengths and weaknesses of the platform and potential improvements, we look at initial findings concerning the utilization of such platforms and the factors that may encourage young children to visit them routinely, either with or without parental guidance.

Creating the Digital Children’s Book Library in Türkiye

Since 2008, the National Broadcasting Channel (TRT) in Türkiye has been working on creating age-appropriate media content for young Turkish children. They first started a TV channel just for children that supported their healthy social and cognitive development. In 2021, they announced that they had developed an app, the Digital Children’s Book Library, in response to the discovery that only children from high socio-economic status families in Türkiye have sufficient access to books. Among Turkish families with a 3-year-old, 67 per cent do not have more than 3 books for their child (Development Analytics, 2017). A Reading Culture Survey (OKUYAY, 2019) revealed that 39 per cent of the respondents never read a book to their children during pre-school. Only 35 per cent of the participants reported regularly buying books. About half of the participants (53 per cent) found the price of books too high. Even though 52 per cent reported having a library near their home, 63 per cent never visited it. Concern about these low figures becomes more pronounced given that the majority of 3-year-olds receive care at home, with only 14 per cent attending pre-school, according to a report by MoNE (2022).

Wealthier countries could also benefit from an app like the Digital Children’s Book Library. Neuman’s (2013) research shows that many less advantaged families in a high-income country like the USA have little access to books. For example, in a 10-year study targeting 2 Philadelphia neighbourhoods she found an enormous gap between children living in a disadvantaged area (Badlands) and those in

more prosperous circumstances (Chestnut Hills). The children from Badlands had significantly less access to children's books through bookstores and libraries compared to those from Chestnut Hills, leading her to ask whether the American dream of equality of opportunity is 'slipping away'.

Parents may lack the personal experience with reading that would help them feel comfortable reading a children's book and employing strategies to make a written story engaging and understandable for a young child.

Apart from limited access to books, parents may feel that reading aloud is burdensome, which prevents them from developing a reading routine with their young child. The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which analyses adults' proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in over 40 countries, estimated that 45.7 per cent of the adult population in Türkiye has a low reading proficiency level, meaning that they can only read brief texts on familiar topics (OECD, 2016). For these parents, the language in children's books can be so challenging that they do not enjoy sharing a story with a young child (Justice et al., 2015). Furthermore, parents may lack the personal experience with reading that would help them feel comfortable reading a children's book and employing strategies to make a written story engaging and understandable for a young child.

Digital book reading in developing countries: An example from Türkiye

The TRT (Turkish National Broadcasting Channel) app provides a range of children's books primarily authored by Turkish writers and published by Turkish publishers. The app is designed to work seamlessly on popular operating systems, such as Android and IOS, and can be easily downloaded from both the Google Play Store and Apple Store. It is entirely free to download, making it accessible to all users. It offers more than 200 picture books for 3- to 7-year-olds. Apart from storybooks, the app also contains concept books about numbers and shapes, which are popular with infants and toddlers (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda and Mendelsohn, 2020). Readers do not need continuous internet access to use the app; they can download it without advertising and read the books offline on mobile phones or tablets. (Further details can be found on the digital library's website at www.trtcocuk.net.tr/trt-cocuk-kitaplik.)

The books in the Digital Book Library are designed to mimic the appearance of printed picture books. Each one includes a sequence of spreads with illustrations and text. However, digital books possess unique characteristics: notably, they have a narrator who reads the text aloud, adding intonation and emphasis to enhance the dramatic effect of the story. Furthermore, each page incorporates interactive elements that allow users to engage with the pictures (e.g. Christ et al., 2019).

As depicted in *Figure 1*, hotspots are represented by circles positioned in close proximity to or around objects within the picture. While the narrator is reading, these circles start flashing. By touching these designated spots, brief actions within the picture are triggered, such as a character's mouth moving as if speaking, the opening of a door, or the sudden appearance of flowers, stars, or other objects. A meta-analysis conducted by Furenes, Kucirkova and Bus (2021) indicates that while not all hotspots contribute to comprehension, they can be valuable for conveying background knowledge or providing additional information (see also Lynch and Prins, 2022).

Figure 1. Screenshots of the plain book spread



Figure 2. Screenshots of the book spread with all hotspots activated



For instance, *Figure 1* shows a scene from a story in which the main character, Atakan, is excited about going fishing with his father. Father and son will leave after breakfast on a Sunday morning. Atakan has been looking forward to this moment for a long time. The scene includes five hotspots the reader can activate (see the white circles in *Figure 1*).

Figure 2 displays the same spread as *Figure 1*, but with all hotspots activated. When the reader touches or clicks above the blue bag on the left page, the fishing rod becomes visible; the breakfast appears by touching or clicking on the table. The hotspots on the characters make the mother's head move up and down, Atakan's head turns from right to left, and the father's arms move up and down as if drinking tea. The hotspots that elicit background knowledge (e.g. the fishing equipment or the breakfast ingredients) may support story comprehension (Furenes, Kucirkova and Bus, 2021). Other hotspots (e.g. the mother's head moving) do not seem so informative and might be distracting rather than contributing to children's understanding.

Missed chances in the Digital Children's Book Library

In several respects the Digital Children's Book Library looks promising and may spark a love of book reading and regularly listening to stories in young children. Over five million individuals in Türkiye have downloaded the digital book library since 2021, and it is estimated that children have read more than 50 million digital books (TRT Haber, 2023). However, alongside this success, some areas have been identified for improvement. The first author of this chapter conducted an in-depth analysis of 60 randomly selected digital books from the app, targeting

Over five million individuals in Türkiye have downloaded the digital book library since 2021, and it is estimated that children have read more than 50 million digital books.

the youngest children. Content analysis was employed to assess the alignment of hotspots with the story. To gauge the consistency of the hotspots with the story, a two-point scale system was utilized. Initially, the researcher selected 3 random pages from each of the 60 books and examined the level of consistency for each hotspot on these pages. For example, as depicted in *Figure 2*, head movements of story characters were deemed irrelevant hotspots and assigned 0 points. Hotspots such as showcasing the fishing rod and breakfast table, which were mentioned in the text and relevant to the story, received two points. Additional hotspots that

were relevant to the story but not explicitly mentioned in the text were assigned a score of one point. Ultimately, it was discovered that almost half of the hotspots (49 per cent) in the digital books were irrelevant and not connected to the story in any way.

On examining this subset of the 60 digital books, we encountered multimedia features that may require fine-tuning.

- The presence of flashing circles while listening to the voice-over may prove distracting. Instead of fully engaging with the narrative, children might become preoccupied with anticipating the outcome of touching the hotspot.
- The hotspots have the potential to activate relevant background knowledge, as exemplified in *Figure 2*, by providing factual information, such as fishing equipment or breakfast ingredients, which may enhance story comprehension. However, hotspots rarely assist children in grasping more intricate story elements, such as empathizing with the characters' emotions (e.g. Atakan's impatience to go fishing).
- Many hotspots offer redundant information, for instance the body and head movements of the characters in *Figure 2*. Some hotspots serve a purely decorative purpose or emphasize the obvious, adding details like stars blinking in the sky. App designer Christiaan Coenraads warns against such additions, stating, 'No need to explain that a red rose is red' (C. Coenraads, personal communication, 16 June 2021).
- Clicking on the music note (see *Figure 1*, upper left corner) starts optional classical background music unrelated to the story events. As per the modality principle (Mayer, 2014), the presence of background music can pose challenges for children, by making it hard to clearly discern individual words in audio narration. This can result in difficulties in accurately retaining pronunciation in memory, hindering the establishment of connections between how the word sounds and its meaning. This can impede vocabulary expansion during reading, as demonstrated by Sari et al.'s study (2019), which identified a negative correlation between the presence of music or other sounds when mixed with the voice-over and word learning. Music can interfere with hearing the narration, as noted by Bus, Takacs and Kegel (2015). Due to the music, children may perceive the words' pronunciation in the oral narrative less well and may fail to store the sounds in their memory, thus complicating their learning of new vocabulary (Sari et al., 2019).

Increasing the efficacy of the Digital Children's Book Library

Especially when children read digital books without adult guidance, automatic or interactive enhancements in the books can serve as a crucial substitute for adult support during joint reading, such as when adults point at details synchronized with the narration. Adults direct children's visual attention towards vital elements in the text and illustrations, assisting them in selecting the essential information needed to comprehend the story. Adults can provide guidance in other ways, helping children integrate the core information and make sense of the events. For example, they may hint at relationships or facilitate guided discovery (e.g. Dore et al., 2018).

In the same way, auditory features, such as sounds or music, and visual features, such as zooming in on details in pictures, incorporated into the digital versions of picture books, attract children's attention to essential information and can provide hints for integrating the information. Such automatic enhancements have been shown to support the comprehension of stories among Turkish children (Sarı et al., 2019). In an experiment conducted with 4- and 5-year-olds, the results revealed an effect size slightly below half a standard deviation ($d = 0.49$), indicating that when the book includes such enhancements, children are more successful in representing the motives and emotions of characters during a prompted retelling. In the literature on multimedia learning, the effects of such enhancements are attributed to multimedia learning principles such as segmentation, temporal contiguity and self-explanation (Mayer, 2014).

Auditory features, such as sounds or music, and visual features, such as zooming in on details in pictures, incorporated into the digital versions of picture books, attract children's attention to essential information and can provide hints for integrating the information.

The digitized version of a Dutch picture book, *Little Kangaroo* (Van Genechten, 2005), incorporates automatic enhancements that direct children's attention towards vital details. For instance, in the original paper version, one of the final spreads illustrates Little Kangaroo cheering from Mama Kangaroo's pouch while she observes the giraffes galloping across the vast plain. In the digital version, the camera zooms in on Little Kangaroo cheering, accompanied by the text expressing her fondness for the giraffes. However, she also experiences ambivalent feelings, as expressed by the line, 'In Mama's pouch, she knew

every little corner.’ In the digital adaptation, this sentiment is illustrated by her disappearing into the pouch, accompanied by pleasant music in the background.

The enhancements in the digital adaptation of this picture book not only guide attention towards the crucial elements in the picture and text but also highlight the ambivalence of Little Kangaroo, which serves as the central theme throughout the story. Despite finding the outside world captivating, as in the exhilarating sight of the running giraffes, Little Kangaroo still prefers to be nestled in Mama Kangaroo’s pouch. Through a deliberate sequence – zooming in as she cheers and immediately transitioning to her vanishing into the pouch – the digital version highlights this stark contrast, prompting readers to look for an explanation for her inconsistent behaviour. These additions align with the self-explanation principle (Mayer, 2014).

Probably the most valuable features are interactive ones integrated into the storyline. For example, in a digital book from the United States, *The Monster at the End of This Book* (Callaway Digital Arts, 2010), the main character, Grover, does not want to reach the end of the book because the title says there is a monster there. So, he tries to prevent readers from turning the pages by tying them up with string, building blocks and so on. In *Figure 3*, if the reader does not unknot the string or pull down the blocks by tapping the screen, the story does not continue. This type of content-related control may help the reader empathize with the main character’s actions and feelings, which may deepen their understanding (Bus, Roskos and Burstein, 2020; Kucirkova, 2019). We have high expectations of enhancements with empathy-building potential, as realized in this book.

Figure 3. A screenshot from *The Monster at the End of This Book*, illustrating how Grover keeps the reader from turning the page



Effects of a Digital Children's Book Library on book-reading habits

Numerous global initiatives have emerged to tackle the problem of limited access to children's books and physical libraries in regions where such resources are scarce. Prominent examples include WorldStories, African Storybook, Global Storybooks and BookDash. However, beyond the praiseworthy endeavours of these organizations, there is a need to further investigate their impact on print exposure and how it influences children's language and literacy development. For instance, we lack knowledge about whether the availability of a website or an app with a selection of digital books affects the amount of time spent reading, the number of books children read per week, how often they revisit the same books, and whether it fosters the development of a reading habit. Additionally, digital books, with their voice-over and built-in comprehension support, may alter the dynamics of the reading process; for instance, some children may engage in more independent reading through this digital platform rather than by sharing reading with parents.

A Dutch municipality has implemented one of the few initiatives in this area, providing immigrant families in the Netherlands who have children aged four to five, including those of Turkish descent, with free access to digital books through kindergarten facilities. Book reading is not a regular activity in these families, partly due to the predominance of Dutch picture books which may make parents feel uncomfortable and less inclined to engage in reading. Although there are notable differences between this immigrant group and parents residing in Türkiye, the Dutch experience with a digital platform can provide valuable insights into the potential impact of digital book platforms on book-reading habits. In this study (Bus, Broekhof & Vaessen 2023), access was provided to 10 digital books over a six-week period. Among a significant number of families, access to the digital books was a strong motivating factor for reading. Approximately one-third of the children displayed an impressive level of engagement, reading a median number of 38 picture books during the six-week period.

The findings also revealed that approximately one-third of the participants did not access the digital book platform at all. This could be attributed to parents' lack of familiarity with mobile educational apps as effective learning tools, or to the negative associations of increased screen time among children. These factors may have contributed to their reluctance to encourage their children to use the platform, despite strong recommendations from the kindergarten teacher. Since access to digital books does not guarantee their usage, it is important to investigate strategies that promote platform utilization among families who are hesitant to engage with it. Here we note various strategies that

can be employed to encourage the utilization of the book platform, including the implementation of ‘gamification’ of the sort observed in the Turkish library. Lastly, we propose some techniques for enhancing parental involvement.

Gamification and stimulating parental involvement

The Digital Children’s Book Library integrates gamification elements, providing an extra incentive for children to engage with the platform. For example, in the Atakan story depicted in *Figure 1*, a labyrinth game opens up after completing the story. The reader can guide Atakan by dragging him across the screen, aiming to reach the boot he caught while fishing. Other books in the library offer interactive activities such as puzzles, memory games, number sequence completion and similar engaging experiences.

In order to select the ‘go to the game’ option, children must answer three multiple-choice questions correctly, primarily focusing on events in the story (e.g. How many fish did Atakan catch? What did Atakan’s parents do with the boot that Atakan brought home?). The reward of playing a game in this context is not linked to reading the book itself but rather to successfully answering the questions. This diverges from the intention of utilizing games as a motivation for book reading.

When teachers prompt parents to read the same books at home to support their children’s learning, it may spark a desire among parents for their children to engage with digital books.

One of the advantages of the book platform is that the same books are accessible both at home and in the ECE centres and schools, thereby facilitating parental involvement in book reading. For instance, teachers can encourage parents to read the same books at home that they are using in the ECE Centre or school. This collaboration could naturally encourage regular visits to the platform at home. When teachers prompt parents to read the same books at home to support their children’s learning, it may spark a desire among parents for their children to engage with digital books. This in turn can foster the development of a consistent habit of reading digital books at home, either independently or with parental guidance. Further research is necessary to substantiate these hypotheses.

Parents may require support in developing skills to guide their children while reading books. Some researchers propose using screen media assistants, such as popular TV characters, to help parents employ dialogic reading strategies, including questioning, commenting and labelling (Revelle et al., 2019; Troseth et al., 2020). For example, in the United States Troseth and colleagues (2020) developed a tool called *Read with Me, Talk with Me* to encourage parents and

facilitate more conversations between parents and children during book sharing. However, existing research does not offer conclusive evidence that providing suggestions for parents or incorporating characters who pose questions enhances the frequency and quality of book reading experiences (Revelle et al., 2019)

Conclusion

Digital picture books show promise as a potential alternative or complement to traditional paper book reading for many families. Particularly when these digital books include evidence-based enhancements, a digital library has the potential to substantially augment children's exposure to reading and print literacy. This serves as a valuable initial step towards developing literacy skills. The digital format can be a crucial safety net for young children, particularly in families where book reading is not an established tradition and other forms of storytelling take precedence (Neuman, 2009). However, even when digital books are freely available and easily accessible, families may require assistance in incorporating digital book reading into their daily routines. Further experiments are necessary to determine the most effective methods for promoting the use of the Digital Children's Book Library in home settings. The library will offer families valuable opportunities to explore creative methods for increasing their children's exposure to books and fostering print literacy. It may be particularly effective when families collaborate closely with ECE centres and schools.

References

- Baydar, N. *et al.* (2014) "'It takes a village" to support the vocabulary development of children with multiple risk factors', *Developmental Psychology*, 50(4), pp. 1014–1025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034785>.
- Borairi, S. *et al.* (2021) 'A mediation meta-analysis of the role of maternal responsivity in the association between socioeconomic risk and children's language', *Child Development*, 92(6), pp. 2177–2193. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13695>.
- Bus, A.G., Broekhof, K. and Vaessen, K. (2023) 'Free access to multilingual digital books: a tool to increase book reading?', *Frontiers in Education*, 8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1120204>.
- Bus, A.G. and Hoel, T. (2023) 'Digital picture books: opportunities and utilities', in S.Q. Cabell, S.B. Neuman, and N.P. Terry (eds) *Handbook on the science of early literacy*. New York: Guilford.

- Bus, A.G., Roskos, K. and Burstein, K. (2020) 'Promising interactive functions in digital storybooks for young children', in K.J. Rohlfing and C. Müller-Brauers (eds) *International perspectives on digital media and early literacy: the impact of digital devices on learning, language acquisition and social interaction*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, pp. 7–26.
- Bus, A.G., Takacs, Z.K. and Kegel, C.A. (2015) 'Affordances and limitations of electronic storybooks for young children's emergent literacy', *Developmental Review*, 35, pp. 79–97. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2014.12.004>.
- Callaway Digital Arts (2010) 'The monster at the end of this book (version 3.3) [mobile application software]'. Available at: <http://itunes.apple.com>.
- Christ, T. *et al.* (2019) 'Kindergartener's meaning making with multimodal app books: the relations amongst reader characteristics, app book characteristics, and comprehension outcomes', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 47, pp. 357–372. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.01.003>.
- Development Analytics (2017) *Türkiye'de 0-6 yaş arası çocuğun durumu [The situation of children aged 0–6 in Türkiye]*. İstanbul: Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı. Available at: <https://www.acev.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Türkiyede-0-6-Yaş-Çocuğun-Durumu.24.10.17.pdf>.
- Dickinson, D.K. *et al.* (2012) 'How reading books fosters language development around the world', *Child development research*, pp. 1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/602807>.
- Dore, R.A. *et al.* (2018) 'The parent advantage in fostering children's e-book comprehension', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 44, pp. 24–33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.02.002>.
- Ekerim, M. and Selcuk, B. (2018) 'Longitudinal predictors of vocabulary knowledge in Turkish children: the role of maternal warmth, inductive reasoning, and children's inhibitory control', *Early Education and Development*, 29(3), pp. 324–341. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2017.1407607>.
- Furenes, M.I., Kucirkova, N. and Bus, A.G. (2021) 'A comparison of children's reading on paper versus screen: a meta-analysis', *Review of Educational Research*, 91(4), pp. 483–517. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321998074>.

- Justice, L.M., Logan, J.R. and Damschroder, L. (2015) 'Designing caregiver implemented shared-reading interventions to overcome implementation barriers', *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 58, pp. 1851–1863. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1044/2015_JSLHR-L-14-0344.
- Kucirkova, N. (2019) 'Children's agency by design: design parameters for personalization in story-making apps', *International Journal of Child-Computer Interaction*, 21, pp. 112–120. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcci.2019.06.003>.
- Logan, J.A. et al. (2019) 'When children are not read to at home: the million word gap', *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, 40(5), pp. 383–386. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1097/dbp.0000000000000657>.
- Luo, R., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. and Mendelsohn, A.L. (2020) 'Children's literacy experiences in low-income families: the content of books matters', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(2), pp. 213–233. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.263>.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Mayer, R.E. (2014) 'Cognitive theory of multimedia learning', in R.E. Mayer (ed.) *The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 43–71.
- MoNE (2022) *5 yaş grubunda okullaşma oranı %90'a yükseldi [Schooling rate in the 5-year-old group increased to 90%]*. Available at: <https://www.meb.gov.tr/5-yas-grubunda-okullasma-orani-90a-yukseldi/haber/25245/tr>.
- Montag, J.L. (2019) 'Differences in sentence complexity in the text of children's picture books and child-directed speech', *First Language*, 39, pp. 527–546. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723719849996>.
- Munzer, T.G. et al. (2019) 'Differences in parent-toddler interactions with electronic versus print books', *Pediatrics*, 143(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2012>.
- Neuman, S.B. (2009) 'The case for multimedia presentations in learning', in A.G. Bus and S.B. Neuman (eds) *Multimedia and literacy development: Improving achievement for young learners*. UK: Routledge, pp. 44–56.
- Neuman, S.B. (2013) 'The American dream: slipping away?', *Educational Leadership*, 70(8), pp. 18–22.

- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2016) *Skills matter: further results from the survey of adult skills*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/turkey/Skills-Matter-Turkey.pdf>.
- OKUYAY (2019) *Türkiye'nin Okuma Kültürü Araştırması [Reading Culture Survey in Türkiye]*. Available at: <http://okuyayplatformu.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/okuma-kulturu-arastirmasi.pdf>.
- Perry, R.E. et al. (2018) 'Socioeconomic risk and school readiness: Longitudinal mediation through children's social competence and executive function', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01544>.
- Revelle, G.L. et al. (2019) 'Technology support for adults and children reading together: questions answered and questions raised', in J. Kim and B. Hassinger-Das (eds) *Reading in the digital age: young children's experiences with E-books*. New York: Springer, pp. 103–132.
- Sarı, B. et al. (2019) 'A randomized controlled trial to test the efficacy of digital enhancements of storybooks in support of narrative comprehension and word learning', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 179, pp. 212–226. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2018.11.006>.
- Troseth, G.L. et al. (2020) 'An enhanced eBook facilitates parent-child talk during shared reading by families of low socioeconomic status', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 50, pp. 45–58. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.02.009>.
- TRT Çocuk Kitaplık (2021) 'Atakan babasıyla balık tutmaya gidiyor [Atakan goes fishing with his father] (app)'. Available at: <http://play.google.com>.
- TRT Haber (2023) 'TRT Çocuk Kitaplık' 5 milyon indirmeyi aştı ['TRT Children's Library' has exceeded 5 million downloads]. Available at: <https://www.trthaber.com/trtden-haberler/trt-cocuk-kitaplik-5-milyon-indirmeyi-asti-758.html>.
- Van Genechten, G. (2005) *Kleine Kangoeroe [Little Kangaroo]*. Clavis.



Chapter 12

Small is beautiful, or not?

The impact of family literacy programmes in a multilingual, small island state

Charles L. Mifsud

Introduction

Malta is a multilingual island nation in the Mediterranean Sea, where the two official languages, Maltese and English, co-exist with the many languages of migrants and refugees. The National Literacy Strategy for Malta and Gozo (2021) outlines the way forward with regard to literacy policy planning and implementation. The National Literacy Agency of Malta is tasked with implementing this strategy. One of the main remits of the Agency is to implement a number of family literacy programmes with the multilingual population. The programmes are offered to a broad range of families in a wide range of contexts.

I have been involved in literacy education in Malta for the last three decades. I am a professor of literacy education at the University of Malta, and I spearheaded the drawing up of the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo for 2014–2020 and for 2021–2030. I was involved in setting up the Malta National Literacy Agency in 2014 and have been active in its governance since then. As such, I have a firsthand view of family literacy programming and policy in Malta.

This chapter presents four studies of the impact of family literacy programmes on children and parents in Malta. The results from the first study showed how a family literacy programme can effectively support parental education when parents are shown how to do literacy work with their children. The second study demonstrated that the programme was successful in eliciting children's individual responses to stories and books and promoted their connectedness to stories. The third study focused on families with low socio-economic status. The fourth study investigated the role of e-books in engaging bilingual families in shared reading at home.

The importance of family literacy programmes

An early start in literacy learning is essential for young children to gain higher levels of competence and to support their overall academic progress. By starting early, learning can occur over a longer period, ensuring more long-lasting results in language learning and an enhanced capacity to learn more languages. In early literacy programmes we need to consider issues of equity, quality, consistency and continuity. These can be supported through appropriate pedagogical processes that are age-specific, vigorous and measurable.

The aims of family literacy programmes include providing support for children's language and literacy development and academic success; demonstrating to parents how they can support their children's literacy practices; and providing adult education for parents (e.g. Paratore and Yaden, 2011). Family literacy programmes that focus on the needs of children have been found to benefit both children and parents (Brooks et al., 2008; Sims, Bubalo and Lewis, 2012). Parents learn to support their children's learning. They place greater value on education and learning and gain a deeper understanding of school systems. They become more interested in developing their own literacy skills and form social and supportive networks that are maintained as their children move through the school. The programmes also provide parents with opportunities to progress to further education and training (Swain, Brooks and Bosley, 2014; Carpentieri et al., 2011). Other research shows that family literacy equips parents to become co-readers and co-writers with their children (Schechter and Ippolito, 2008), to understand the importance of engaging in literacy activities with their children, and to become more inclined to support their children (Primavera, 2000). However, programmes may also have varied and inconsistent effects, and the outcomes are not always positive (Lynch and Prins, 2022).

In multilingual settings like Malta, educators must decide which language to use in family literacy programmes. There is evidence that using families' first language is pedagogically appropriate (Moll and Diaz, 1987), especially for learners with limited literacy (Auerbach, 1993). This approach offers important cognitive, psychological and social foundations for development, including eventual acquisition of English (or another target language) (Cummins, 1986; Fillmore, 1991; Garcia, 1993). When teachers are proficient in the students' native language/s, they can explain fine points of the target language and support further development of native language skills. By using home languages to talk about and demonstrate family literacy activities, participants learn the value of maintaining them.

In Maltese family literacy programmes, techniques like translanguaging and language mediation, where one language is used to support understanding in another language, are promoted. Teachers find such techniques to be of benefit

to students in multilingual contexts (Dockrell et al., 2021). Here the families are encouraged to use all the languages in their repertoire to support the acquisition and learning of the target language/s and maintenance of their home language/s (e.g. Quintero and Huerta-Macias, 1990). Paratore (1994) describes classes taught by a team, some of whom spoke the dominant native languages of the students. This configuration allowed interaction across language groups as well as native language support in small groups. Language choices should reflect the linguistic abilities of the participants, acknowledge their strengths, and use their native language/s as a base for target language development. Regardless of the population served, participants should feel that their home language is a valuable, appropriate resource for developing their children's literacy. In a study of bi/multilingual families in Cyprus, for example, Karpava (2021) found that there was a close relationship between the family type, family language policy (FLP), the home language environment, and the development of children's language and literacy skills.

The Maltese linguistic and educational context

The Maltese islands have a long history of multilingualism. Maltese is the home language of the majority of the population, which is reflected in education. In most schools more than 90 per cent of students consider Maltese their home language (MEDE, 2016). The sociolinguistic situation is one of plurilingual repertoires with languages at different points on the bilingual continuum

English is the language of higher education, widely used by professionals and valued for its instrumental value and prestige. Maltese is the national language, the mother tongue of most of the population, and associated with national identity.

(Council of Europe, 2015). The notion of a continuum of use illustrates the complex linguistic behaviour of Maltese speakers who are multilingual in Maltese, English and other languages to varying degrees. Language use and socio-economic status are closely linked. English is the language of higher education, widely used by professionals and valued for its instrumental value and prestige. Maltese is the national language, the mother tongue of most of the population, and associated with national identity. In countries like Malta, the school population receives some form of multilingual education (García, 2008). The languages of schooling are available in the wider out-of-school environment, and learners are in contact with Maltese, English and other languages. In such cases of

‘societal multilingualism’ (Sebba, 2010), multilingualism is present at the level of social organization beyond the individual or nuclear family. Language use is also determined by the prevailing ideologies in the community. Current educational policy in Malta promotes multilingual education in all schools.

The National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo (2014) focuses on the range of literacy skills required to ensure competence in Maltese and English, which are taught in primary schools, and other languages like Italian, French, Spanish and German, which are taught in secondary schools alongside Maltese and English. To develop multilingual skills, where learners can switch freely

Immersion can help children to acquire language spontaneously. There is evidence from research in various countries that second language immersion programmes are effective for children of different abilities.

between Maltese, English and other languages, learners need specific learning opportunities that will help to ensure proficiency in the target languages. They should also have access to learning materials in these languages to engage in meaningful tasks within a range of subject-specific contexts as appropriate. The Literacy Strategy supports multilingualism and seeks to ensure that it is fully embedded in the education system. Most of the family literacy programmes are offered in both Maltese and English, though there is an attempt to avoid mixing the two languages. The principle is one of immersion in each language. Immersion can help children to acquire language spontaneously. There is evidence from research in various countries that second language immersion programmes are effective for children of different abilities (Genesee, 1992). However, situations do arise where code-switching is required, depending on the home language background of the children involved.

Family literacy programmes in Malta

Launched in 2000, the first family literacy programme in Malta (Centre for Literacy, 2000) aimed to help put parents in a better position to support their children’s literacy development (Milton, 2000). Family literacy was also at the top of the agenda of the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo (MEDE, 2014). There are five main family literacy programmes:

- *Aqra Miegħi* (Read with Me) programme for parents/guardians and children aged 0 to 3;

- *Seher l-Istejjer* (The Magic of Stories) family group reading sessions for children aged 4 to 7;
- *Gost il-Qari* (The Pleasure of Reading) for 8- to 11-year-olds and their parents;
- *Klabb Nahla* (Bee Club) after-school intervention for 6- and 7-year-old students experiencing literacy difficulties, and their parents;
- *Nwar* (Blossoms) after-school programme for 8- to 11-year-olds experiencing literacy difficulties, and their parents.

Studies of the effectiveness of family literacy programmes in Malta have examined their impact on parents and children, and how the parents became more involved in their children's literacy development (Galea, 2018); the extent to which these programmes included families with lower socio-economic status (Falzon Cutajar, 2018); the quality of children's responses to stories and books (Scicluna, 2019); and the role of e-books in engaging bilingual families in shared reading at home (Mifsud, Georgieva and Kucirkova, 2021).

Here we describe two of the main, more popular family literacy programmes in Malta, and some of the relevant evaluation studies.

The *Aqra Miegħi* (Read with Me) programme

The *Aqra Miegħi* (Read with Me) programme is intended for children aged 0 to 3 and their parents. The four main aims are: 1) to promote a love of reading and enhance children's imagination through fun, and stimulate play activities with the involvement of parents or caregivers, 2) to promote oracy skills and concepts about print, 3) to educate parents about the benefits of sharing books with their children, and 4) to demonstrate to parents how to share books with their children daily and in a fun way (MEYR, 2021). Sessions are conducted in Maltese or English and take place in the morning or the evening to accommodate working parents. During the one-hour session, the animator reads a book interactively, sings nursery rhymes, and carries out other fun activities related to the alphabet, numbers and colours. Reading sessions are held in over 60 sites, including libraries, childcare centres and residential homes for children in out-of-home care. About 4,000 children (31 per cent of the population of 0- to 3-year-olds in Malta) and their parents, mainly mothers, have participated in *Aqra Miegħi* sessions (Falzon Cutajar, 2018).

Falzon Cutajar (2018) investigated the participation of families from low-SES backgrounds in *Aqra Miegħi*, particularly the barriers that hinder participation in early family literacy programmes and what can be done to encourage these families to participate. In this study, low-income families in which both parents had completed primary education or less were considered to be of low socio-

economic status. The study adopted a mixed-method design. Thirty-three mothers from a low-SES background participated in a survey questionnaire. Six of these mothers, whose children had discontinued the programme, were interviewed about their attitudes towards literacy for young children and what prevented their participation in the programme.

The data indicated that the mothers recognized the importance of literacy for access to education and social mobility. They had relatively high educational aspirations for their children, including completing secondary school and even going on to post-secondary level. However, they believed that life pressures (e.g. health issues, family problems, caring for family members with disabilities, low socio-economic status, hectic daily life routines) leave no time for additional activities, and participation in literacy programmes is not the highest priority for them. For instance, one middle-aged mother lamented that both she and her husband had to take on extra jobs to maintain the family financially, which gave them less time and energy to oversee their children's educational progress. Both parents returned home very tired and could not attend parents' and other school meetings. Difficulty in reaching the centres and lack of awareness of what the programme entailed also prevented lower-SES mothers from participating.

The *Seħer l-Istejjer* (Magic of Stories) programme

The *Seħer l-Istejjer* (Magic of Stories) programme aims to promote the love of reading among 4- to 7-year-old children and their parents, and to demonstrate how parents can effectively share books with their children (MEYR, 2021). The sessions are held in over 50 centres around Malta and Gozo, with almost 5,000 children participating annually (Scicluna, 2019). The one-hour weekly sessions are conducted in Maltese or English by an animator, who is recruited and trained by the National Literacy Agency. The session begins by introducing the storybook through a review of the front and back covers. Then the animator reads the story, seeking to prompt and engage the children throughout. Following the animated book reading, children and parents engage in post-reading activities such as quizzes, drama, literacy games and sensory activities. Since the programme is mainly provided in local libraries, families are also encouraged to borrow books from their library.

The animators are provided with books and other resources for these sessions. During regular, continuing professional development meetings, animators are encouraged to share ideas and resources. To promote quality control, qualified tutors observe and evaluate the sessions. Feedback based on their observations, with appropriate recommendations, is presented to the session animator and the programme coordinator and then discussed.

The programme sessions provide many opportunities for children and parents to use Maltese or English. Each session is assigned a fixed time, language (Maltese or English) and animator, so that the children come to associate the language used during the session with the animator, location and time. The same language is maintained throughout the programme.

Although the families believe in the value of literacy for the future development of their children and have high aspirations for them, they still find it difficult to participate in these programmes. Barriers to participation included lack of a better understanding of the value of the programmes, and 'struggling with life' to ensure an adequate income. The local studies, by Falzon Cutajar (2018) and Scicluna (2019), have made a number of proposals to increase the impact of family literacy programmes, including: conducting home visits as outreach to vulnerable families; building increased trust and confidence in the programmes; increasing investment in staffing and training of qualified professionals in social issues; ensuring the right environment, increased resources and support in the reading centres; maintaining programme consistency; adopting more multilingual approaches; providing reading sessions at alternative times (e.g. evening, weekend); and keeping the group size small to ensure effective interaction.

Storybook reading techniques used by the session animator, such as questioning and using actions, sounds, different tones of voice and props, helped the children to engage with and respond to the stories.

The qualitative research study by Scicluna (2019) examined children's responses to stories during the group reading sessions. Four children aged five to seven (three boys and one girl) were observed during three Maltese storybook reading sessions at one site. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who attended regularly (out of 300 children), because of their greater familiarity with the session format and setting. Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews were conducted with the session animator and with the mother of each child after each session. The findings showed that the child participants offered personal responses throughout the session and further explored the story that was read to them. Storybook reading techniques used by the session animator, such as questioning and using actions, sounds, different tones of voice and props, helped the children to engage with and respond to the stories. The activities held before, during and after the storybook reading created stimuli that increased the children's responses to the stories. The interplay of the contributions from all the participants in the story-telling session – the children, animator and mothers – and the stimuli generated by the story augmented the children's responses during the group reading sessions.

During the family literacy sessions, specific importance is attached to preparation for the session, regular attendance and the modelling of effective reading habits. The use of language mediation is promoted, especially in the multilingual context of Malta. Language mediation refers to the use of two or more languages by teachers and learners to facilitate language learning (Cenoz and Gorter, 2015).

The follow-up activities played an important role in the children's responses to stories. They used their prior or newly acquired knowledge, made connections to other stories, and asked questions when responding to the storybooks. The pre- and post-reading activities, coupled with the children's connectedness to books through personal reactions, were the predominant factors that allowed for such responses. When the children became distracted, the animator guided them to re-engage through verbal prompts, rearranging their seating, and changing the pace and mood of the story.

The mothers were eager to assume an active role during the session to elicit their children's response. They intervened to support their children to respond and to refocus when they seemed distracted. They also discussed with and asked questions of the animator in order to become more confident in their own storybook reading techniques. The mothers added their own interpretations to their child's responses to stories. These responses were influenced by the children's sense of connectedness to the story, the animator's engaging storybook reading techniques, the mothers' support and the planned development of the session.

The data showed that most of the mothers believed the programme had increased their awareness of how to become involved in their children's literacy.

Galea (2018) analysed the impact of the same family literacy programme on the children and the mothers. A mixed-method research methodology was used to gather data. The data sources included observations of 8 weekly programme sessions, a survey of the 15 mothers of the children participating in the programme, interviews with 6 of the mothers, reflective diaries written by 3 mothers about the reading sessions with their children at home, and interviews with the programme animator and coordinators.

The data showed that most of the mothers believed the programme had increased their awareness of how to become involved in their children's literacy. They perceived the animators as role models, who helped them to build their confidence in doing literacy work with their children. They believed they were reading more regularly with their children at home as a result of the skills and confidence they had attained through the programme. For many of the mothers,

this involved a change in their daily routine, but they recognized that this was important for their children. The mothers observed that their children who attended the programme were showing more accelerated reading progress compared to their older siblings. They even adopted the practice at home of asking children questions at the end of the story, as demonstrated by the animator, to stimulate listening skills and develop the imagination. The mothers appreciated how important literacy skills were for their children's development and future. They modelled their home reading sessions on those demonstrated during the programme, introducing creative activities, music and other resources to engage their children and keep them motivated. They appreciated that the programme sites were accessible and had the necessary space, resources and appropriate ambient temperature. They preferred centres with a congenial environment where they were welcomed and provided with the required support.

Having books at home affected the mothers' motivation to read with their children. Most of the high-SES families bought books from bookshops, whereas lower-SES families preferred to borrow from libraries. Usually, the books were chosen by the mothers with the children, based on the front cover, images, topic and genre. The illustrations in the book were understood to be important, as the mothers recognized that these had a stronger impact than the text on young children (Katz and Chard, 2000).

In view of the increasing pervasiveness of digital technologies in households (Mifsud and Petrova, 2017; Zaman and Mifsud, 2017), family literacy programmes also ensure their effective use. Mifsud, Georgieva and Kucirkova (2021) documented the unique value of e-books in engaging bilingual families in shared reading at home. Analysis of the participant videos, questionnaires and semi-structured interview data revealed positive engagement by the participating families, substantiated with three main themes from the participants' interview reports: balanced use of e-books and print books, the importance of nurturing the child's independence with e-book use, and the unique value of e-books for the child's learning, especially in terms of repetition.

Conclusion

Research on family literacy programmes in Malta suggests that parents have high aspirations for their children and recognize that they play an important role in their child's educational path. The studies of the *Seħer l-Istejjer* (The Magic of Stories) programme (Galea, 2018; Scicluna, 2019) show that it is important to elicit meaningful responses to stories from the children, and for them to be supported by the parents and the educators in doing so. Designers and organizers of family literacy programmes need to ensure the continued engagement of children

and parents in the programme. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and given their exposure to recurring images of war on the media, literacy learning activities and stories in particular may offer children and others rare opportunities for connectedness and personal reactions to a number of issues. The programmes can promote parents' appreciation of the importance of literacy for their children and ability to better support their literacy development.

Families from low-SES backgrounds continue to face barriers to participating in family literacy programmes. Low-SES parents usually have to work more hours, and they may require employment and income support. More effective partnerships between educational programmes and social service providers are also needed, requiring concerted efforts among stakeholders such as sharing resources, helping to reach and meet families' needs, and ensuring programme stability and continuity (Unger, Cuevas and Woolfolk, 2007). Having staff from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who adopt a multilingual approach

Lynch and Prins (2022) contend that educators can counteract stereotypes of parents in poverty and acknowledge their knowledge, capabilities and material conditions.

may render the programme more attractive to families who speak other languages than the local ones (Greenberg, Adams and Michie, 2016). In addition, home visits could function effectively as outreach to low-SES families, particularly those who lack transport or have young children at home. These visits could provide personalized parental support, increasing the level of trust and confidence in the service provision (Avis, Bulman and Leighton, 2007). They could also serve as a valuable recruitment strategy for the literacy programmes.

Families from low-SES backgrounds were particularly sensitive to disruptions due to their life circumstances, which resulted in inconsistent attendance or dropout. Consistency and continuity in a programme are crucial for parental engagement (Forehand and Kotchick, 1996), since they help foster a relationship of trust with the educator. Lynch and Prins (2022) contend that educators can counteract stereotypes of parents in poverty and acknowledge their knowledge, capabilities and material conditions.

The mothers recognized that the animator's role is crucial for programme success. Programme animators need more continuous professional education, both in teaching reading and interpersonal skills. Additional resources are required for the literacy programme to be more varied, interactive, animated and appealing for less motivated families.

Most of the parents in the literacy programmes were mothers. The engagement of more male staff may make the programmes more attractive to boys and fathers (Lloyd, O'Brien and Lewis, 2003). Staff need to be trained on how to work with fathers, encourage more of them to participate and make them feel more welcome. Lynch and Prins (2022) recommend that organizers should build on fathers' interests, including cultural and social practices. Gadsden (2012) suggests providing books of interest to fathers, and assisting them in where to start in the process of building children's literacy learning.

Multilingual approaches are required to promote active and inclusive learning in multilingual settings. Bilingual reading strategies have proven effective in this regard (Garcia, 2014). Enabling children to interact using all their linguistic resources, including their home languages (Anderson, Anderson and Sadiq, 2017), can enhance their oral skills and their engagement in learning activities. For example, interactive storybook reading based on culturally relevant stories told in both the home language and L2 can support vocabulary development across languages (Catibusic-Finnegan, 2017). Further research is needed on multilingualism in family literacy programmes in Malta and beyond. We need to investigate to what extent teachers are supporting translanguaging and language mediation, and the effectiveness of these strategies. We need to encourage multilingualism and diversity in the face of linguistic imperialism and powerful globalization forces.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the easier accessibility of e-books compared to print books, although this is true for some families more than others. The parents who participated in the Mifsud, Georgieva and Kucirkova (2021) study viewed digital books as a suitable and engaging supplement for reading with their children. They were keen to support their children's independent reading with digital books and saw them as uniquely valuable for their bilingual reading practices at home. Future studies may look at how more e-books can be incorporated into the daily reading activities of diverse families. Research involving participants from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds may reveal a larger range of attitudes and reading patterns with children's digital books. It would also be interesting to further investigate the language choices and preferences of families when reading e-books in different languages.

Malta has experienced considerable societal change. The population has increased by 20 per cent in recent years, largely due to the influx of foreign workers who have made their home there. Although there is much work to be done to continue adapting the educational system to meet these changes, and to develop bilingual family literacy programmes, which will in all likelihood be increasingly needed, we believe that there is reason for optimism. We need to continue building on the positive experiences and the success stories.

References

- Anderson, J., Anderson, A. and Sadiq, A. (2017) 'Family literacy programmes and young children's language and literacy development: paying attention to families' home language', *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3–4), pp. 644–654. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1211119>.
- Auerbach, E.R. (1993) 'Re-examining English only in the ESL classroom', *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(1), pp. 9–28.
- Avis, M., Bulman, D. and Leighton, P. (2007) 'Factors affecting participation in Sure Start programmes: a qualitative investigation of parents' views', *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 15(3), pp. 203–211. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2006.00673.x>.
- Brooks, G. et al. (2008) *Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: a review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally*. NRDC. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267683370_Effective_and_inclusive_practices_in_family_literacy_language_and_numeracy_a_review_of_programmes_and_practice_in_the_UK_and_internationally.
- Carpentieri, J.D. et al. (2011) *Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development*. London: NRDC, Institute of Education. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000211070>.
- Catibusic-Finnegan, B. (2017) *Supporting multilingual children's literacy development: MLM-make literacy meaningful*. Available at: <http://euliteracy.eu/supporting-multilingual-childrens-literacy-development>.
- Cenoz, J. and Gorter, D. (eds) (2015) *Multilingual education: Between language learning and translanguaging*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Centre for Literacy (2000) *Literacy news updates: news item no. 1*. Available at: <http://www.um.edu.mt/pressreleases/2000/literacynews.html>.
- Council of Europe (2015) *Language education policy profile: Malta*. The Language Policy Unit, Council of Europe. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/language-education-policy-profile-malta/16807b3c39>.
- Cummins, J. (1986) 'Empowering minority students: a framework for intervention', *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, pp. 18–36. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.56.1.b327234461607787>.
- Dockrell, J.E. et al. (2021) 'Teaching and learning in a multilingual Europe: findings from a cross-European study', *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 37, pp. 293–320. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-020-00523-z>.

- Falzon Cutajar, M. (2018) *Maltese families and their participation in Aqra Miegħi (Read with Me) family literacy programme. Are those with low socioeconomic status attending too?* University of Malta.
- Fillmore, L.W. (1991) 'When learning a second language means losing the first', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6(3), pp. 323–347.
- Forehand, R. and Kotchick, B.A. (1996) 'Cultural Diversity: a wake-up call for parent training', *Behavior Therapy*, 27, pp. 187–206. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2016.11.010>.
- Gadsden, V.L. (2012) 'Father involvement and family literacy', in B.H. Wasik (ed.) *Handbook of family literacy*. Routledge, pp. 151–165.
- Galea, M. (2018) *Analizi dwar l-impatt tal-programm 'Seħer l-Istejjer' fuq il-ġenituri u t-tfal [Analysis of the impact of the 'Seher l'Stijjer' program on parents and children]*. University of Malta.
- García, D.A. (2014) *Benefits of using reading strategies in elementary bilingual classrooms*. University of Texas–Pan American. Available at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd/928.
- García, E. (1993) 'Language, culture, and education', in L. Darling-Hammond (ed.) *Review of research in education*. American Educational Research Association.
- García, O. (2008) *Bilingual education in the 21st century: a global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Genesee, F.H. (1992) 'Second/foreign language immersion and at-risk English-speaking children', *Foreign Language Annals*, 25(3), pp. 199–213. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1992.tb00529.x>.
- Greenberg, E., Adams, G. and Michie, M. (2016) *Barriers to preschool participation for low-income children of immigrants in Silicon Valley: part II*. Urban Institute. Available at: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/76991/2000586-Barriers-to-Preschool-Participation-for-Low-Income-Children-of-Immigrants-in-Silicon-Valley.pdf>.
- Karpava, S. (2021) 'The effect of the family type and home literacy environment on the development of literacy skills by bi-/multilingual children in Cyprus', *Languages*, 6(2), p. 102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages6020102>.
- Katz, L.G. and Chard, S.C. (2000) *Engaging children's minds: the project approach*. Praeger.
- Lloyd, N., O'Brien, M. and Lewis, C. (2003) *Fathers in Sure Start*. The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) Team, Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues, Birkbeck, University of London.

- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429352805>.
- MEDE (Ministry for Education and Employment) (2014) *A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo*. Available at: <https://nla.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/A-National-Literacy-Strategy-for-All-in-Malta-and-Gozo.pdf>.
- MEDE (Ministry for Education and Employment) (2016) *A language policy for the early years in Malta and Gozo*. Ministry for Education and Employment. Available at: <https://nla.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/A-Language-Policy-for-the-Early-Years-in-Malta-and-Gozo.pdf>.
- MEYR (Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation) (2021) *The National Literacy Agency – Annual Report 2021*. Available at: <https://nla.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-National-Literacy-Agency-Annual-Report-2021.pdf>.
- Mifsud, C.L., Georgieva, R. and Kucirkova, N. (2021) 'Parent-child joint reading of digital books in bilingual families in Malta', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 109. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101844>.
- Mifsud, C.L. and Petrova, R. (2017) *Young Children (0-8) and digital technology. Report for the EU Joint Research Committee of the European Union*. Ministry for Education and Employment. Available at: https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/314400/YoungChildrenandDigitalTechnology-TheNationalReportforMalta.pdf.
- Milton, J. (2000) *The Senglea family literacy programme*. Malta: Faculty of Education, University of Malta.
- Moll, L.C. and Diaz, S. (1987) 'Change as the goal of educational research', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 18(4), pp. 300–311. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1987.18.4.04x0021u>.
- Paratore, J.R. (1994) 'Parents and children sharing literacy', in D.F. Lancy (ed.) *Children's emergent literacy: from research to practice*. Praeger.
- Paratore, J.R. and Yaden, J.D.J. (2011) 'Family literacy on the defensive', in D. Lapp and D. Fisher (eds) *Handbook of research on teaching the english language arts*. Routledge, pp. 90–96.
- Primavera, J. (2000) 'Enhancing family competence through literacy activities', *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 20(1–2), pp. 85–101. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1300/J005v20n01_07.

- Quintero, E. and Huerta-Macias, A. (1990) 'All in the family: bilingualism and biliteracy', *The Reading Teacher*, 44(4), pp. 306–312.
- Schechter, S.R. and Ippolito, J. (2008) 'Parent involvement AS education: activist research in multilingual and multicultural urban schools', *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 5(1), pp. 163–183. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2008.10411693>.
- Scicluna, G. (2019) *Children's responses to narrative during group reading sessions*. University of Malta. Available at: [N/A](#).
- Sebba, M. (2010) 'Societal bilingualism', in R. Wodak, B. Johnstone, and P.E. Kerswill (eds) *The SAGE handbook of sociolinguistics*. SAGE, pp. 445–459.
- Sims, G., Bubalo, R. and Lewis, P. (2012) *The impact of family learning programmes on raising the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults*. Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales). Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14629/>.
- Swain, J., Brooks, G. and Bosley, S. (2014) 'The benefits of family literacy provision for parents in England', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 12(1), pp. 77–91. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X13498335>.
- Unger, D., Cuevas, T. and Woolfolk, T. (2007) 'Human services and cultural diversity: tenuous relationships, challenges, and opportunities ahead', in B.S. Trask and R.R. Hamon (eds) *Cultural diversity and families: expanding perspectives*. SAGE.
- Zaman, B. and Mifsud, C.L. (2017) 'Editorial: young children's use of digital media and parental mediation', *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 11(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2017-3-xx>.



Chapter 13

Exploring parental beliefs and practices of family literacy: A Greek study of parents of pre-school children

Chrysoula Tsirmpa and Nektarios Stellakis

Introduction

The family plays a very important role in children's literacy, because it is the first environment in which children come into contact with spoken and written language. Children acquire their first literacy knowledge, skills and attitudes by participating in authentic communication situations which build the basis for school-related learning to read and write (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998).

Although all families have opportunities to develop the language and literacy of their children, substantial differences may exist based on socio-economic, cultural and personal factors (Saracho, 2016). Consequently, when children start school, they bring different literacy experiences and beliefs, which may influence their success (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019).

The existing literature emphasizes the role of the family in children's literacy and the positive results of family literacy programmes (FLPs), yet the field of family literacy has received no policy attention nor much research interest in Greece. There is no dedicated policy for enhancing the literacy of pre-school children and supporting their parents in this process. A few research studies in Greece focus on FLPs that highlight parents' need for training in literacy issues and the effectiveness of these interventions for parents and children (Nikoloudaki, 2019; Ntola, 2018; Tasiouli, 2010). These studies have been carried out in the context of postgraduate research with limited policy impact and an incomplete picture of the situation in Greece.

This chapter explores parental beliefs and practices of family literacy with respect to pre-school children. It attempts to fill the existing research gap and

to serve as the foundation for effective collaboration between early childhood educators and families on the design of relevant FLPs. The results will identify specific policy implications for Greece.

The family culture and environment: Foundation for literacy development

Children's literacy development is a dynamic, multifaceted and social process that begins at birth and affects them throughout life (Saracho, 2016; Perry, 2012). It is in the family environment that the early and lasting foundations of literacy are laid. Parents play a decisive role in creating an environment that nurtures literacy learning (Heath, 1983; Lynch and Prins, 2022). Not all parents apply the same practices in the same way, to the same extent or with the same means; the result is a variety of experiences, beliefs and learning (Taylor, 1983).

According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Mullis et al., 2012; Teale, Whittingham and Hoffman, 2018), specific factors are associated with the establishment of a more or less favourable context for enhancing children's literacy. These factors include the family demographic characteristics and parents' literacy beliefs and practices; structural factors, such as community wealth and access to public libraries and affordable, high-quality pre-schools, are also crucial, but beyond the purview of this chapter. Demographic characteristics such as education, occupation and income (i.e. socio-economic status) seem to contribute differentially to family literacy development. Educational attainment, especially of the mother, is mainly linked to parents' beliefs about literacy, home literacy practices and parents' expectations about their children's acquisition of literacy skills. Furthermore, the type of profession and income level affect whether parents can afford to provide a rich learning environment for children, including access to books and writing materials (Djonov, Torr and Stenglin, 2018.)

Many studies which adopt the 'education-occupation-income' definition of parental SES, since a higher level of education often leads to a better-paid profession (Sirin, 2005), have shown that higher-SES parents tend to play a more active role in their children's education and have higher expectations of them (Saracho, 2016). Research from the USA suggests that they collaborate more often with the school (and in ways the school expects), know more about the education process, and provide children with the kinds of literacy and language interactions and opportunities that are valued in schools (Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2003; Prins and Toso, 2008). High-SES parents often talk with children using more complex syntactic structures, and vocabulary that includes rarer words (Djonov, Torr and Stenglin, 2018). They thus make it easier for children to cope with formal education, which is usually an extension of their family culture (Hoff, 2013). By contrast, parents with low SES often appear to have limited knowledge of school

procedures and expectations, literacy abilities, or financial resources to invest in a rich home learning environment (Christenson and Reschly, 2010), and believe that school is primarily responsible for children's education (Terlitsky and Wilkins, 2015). They tend to engage less in literacy activities with children, due to their primary focus on basic material needs and because they perceive teachers as better equipped to teach literacy (Lareau, 2003). When engaged in literacy activities, they tend to focus on practices related to techniques of decoding the written language (Djonov, Torr and Stenglin, 2018), and sometimes have lower educational expectations for children (Neuman, 2006).

The way lower-SES parents talk with children often focuses on their behaviour rather than involving them in extended, reciprocal conversations (Lareau, 2003). They tend to use a more limited vocabulary and less complex syntactic structures (Hoff, 2013). Burchinal and Forestieri (2011) argue, however, that children in families with similar SES still have different daily literacy experiences: it appears that the culture of the family (Heath, 1983) and the beliefs and behaviour of parents are more influential than demographic factors. In this context, parents' and children's literacy practices and the quality and degree of interaction between them during these practices (e.g. questions and interactive discussions) seem to be of great importance (Baker and Scher, 2010).

Research on parents' beliefs about literacy has identified two broad parental groups: one that displays a holistic view of literacy development and adopts a 'constructivist' approach, which encourages children to read for understanding, and one that tends to value a skills-based approach.

Parents may demonstrate entrenched and socially constructed perceptions of the way a person becomes literate (Weigel, Martin and Bennett, 2006) and interacts with written texts (cultural capital) (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). In accordance with their beliefs about literacy (and available resources), parents engage their children in specific literacy activities at home, which often have lasting effects on their literacy development and reading motivation (Boomstra et al., 2013). Research on parents' beliefs about literacy has identified two broad parental groups: one that displays a holistic view of literacy development and adopts a 'constructivist' approach, which encourages children to read for understanding, and one that tends to value a skills-based approach (Sonnenschein et al., 1997). Evans et al. (2004) argue that the latter group of parents focus on the mechanics of reading, as they encourage children to learn through graphophonemic instruction such as letter knowledge and phoneme-grapheme correspondence.

Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006) examined mothers' beliefs about literacy and identified two profiles. They argued that 'facilitative' mothers play a more active role in their children's education and provide a literacy-rich environment to align with school expectations, whereas 'conventional' mothers believe that schools are primarily responsible for teaching children, and are less likely to get involved in home literacy practices, citing various reasons (e.g. resources of space, time, availability of books).

Literacy practices that take place in the family environment include the ways parents, children and other family members use written language in everyday life (Morrow, 1995). Family literacy practices can be informal or formal (Senechal and LeFevre, 2002). When informal (e.g. reading books, discussions), the primary purpose is the pleasure of reading and learning, and initiation into written language and reading comprehension; when formal (e.g. letter-word writing) it aims at learning to decode written language. Informal literacy practices are mainly associated with the development of oral language and vocabulary, as well as with children's motivation for reading (Krijnen et al., 2020), while formal ones are linked with decoding skills (Hannon, 2018). Inoue et al. (2020) argue that literacy development occurs when formal practices are accompanied by informal ones.

Methodology

This study examined the interrelationship between parents' literacy beliefs and practices in the context of preschoolers' literacy development in Greece. The study posed three questions:

- What are parents' beliefs about their children's literacy?
- What are their family literacy practices and how do they relate to parents' beliefs about literacy?
- What demographic factors differentiate parental beliefs and practices of family literacy?

In the 2017/18 academic year, we conducted a mixed-method research study in 13 state kindergartens in the city of Pyrgos in western Greece. This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, in two phases, a quantitative component followed by a qualitative one (Creswell, 2014).

In Phase 1 of the research, the sample consisted of 147 parents of pre-school children who responded to the survey. These parents had children aged 5 who were attending the 13 kindergartens. Out of the total sample in Phase 1, 89.8 per cent were mothers. The majority of parents (92.5 per cent) were married, and most had two children (56.6 per cent). Most fathers were 41 years old or older (53.1 per cent), while the largest group of mothers were between 36 and

40 years old (38.1 per cent). The parents' educational background and SES were examined separately, because in Greece higher educational attainment is not always associated with higher SES. Nearly half of the fathers (45.9 per cent) and mothers (47.9 per cent) had at least a high school certificate. The majority of fathers (56.8 per cent) and mothers (69.2 per cent) worked in professions such as farmer, hairdresser and carpenter, while the remainder had professions such as teacher, doctor and lawyer. Hasan (1989) categorizes the former as low-autonomy professions and the latter as high-autonomy.

The parents' educational background and SES were examined separately, because in Greece higher educational attainment is not always associated with higher SES.

The sample for the second, qualitative phase included 20 mothers: we used survey responses to categorize mothers as facilitative or conventional and then randomly selected 10 mothers from each group. The focus on mothers was decided following Bryman's (2016) insight that selecting a homogeneous sample helps control the effect of gender as an extraneous variable, and because mothers are also more involved in their children's education. We conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate the quantitative survey findings in more detail, with the ultimate aim of cross-referencing the findings and increasing the validity and reliability of the research.

Two questionnaires were administered in Phase 1. The first questionnaire, the Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI) (DeBaryshe and Binder, 1994), was translated and adapted to the Greek context (Tsirmpa, Stellakis and Lavidas, 2019) to explore parental beliefs about reading books to preschoolers and their role in their children's education. The second questionnaire was an adaptation of the Stony Brook Family Reading Survey (SBFRS) (Weigel, Martin and Bennett, 2006), which measured literacy practices in the family environment. For both questionnaires, we acquired the necessary permission from the authors via email. The analysis of the data was carried out through the specialized software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which makes it possible to utilize all propositions/variables, their transformation and the comparative relationship of the variables between them (O'Connor, 2000).

In Phase 2, data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews and analysed using content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The interviews were conducted at schools, approximately a month after the completion of the questionnaires and at a time arranged by the mothers. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were audiotaped for later transcription and analysis. The interview questions explored mothers' beliefs about literacy (e.g.

how children learn to read) and family literacy practices (e.g. shared reading, exposure to screens). We conducted all the interviews as planned, but after the first six to seven interviews, data saturation occurred. The mothers’ responses did not reveal any new information, so we did not conduct additional interviews with the mothers of each group (Bryman, 2016).

Results

The analysis of the quantitative data shows that the parents are divided into two groups. For these two groups, the terms ‘conventional’ and ‘facilitative’ were adopted from Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006), whose research results are in line with the results of the present study. *Table 1* presents the descriptive statistics of the four discrimination variables of PRBI for the two groups (Tsirmpa, Stellakis and Lavidas, 2021). Out of 147 participants, the majority (96) are categorized as conventional.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of four discrimination variables between two clusters (N=147)

	FACILITATIVE (N1=51)				CONVENTIONAL (N2=96)			
	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD
F1(+)	2.80	3.93	3.54	.25	2.41	3.87	3.11	.27
F2(-)	1.00	2.29	1.36	.27	1.00	2.57	1.86	.39
F3(+)	2.67	3.90	3.31	.32	2.17	3.50	2.84	.33
F4(-)	1.00	2.50	1.67	.44	1.50	3.22	2.26	.34

F1 (Knowledge base): whether children acquire moral orientations or practical knowledge from books.

F2 (Resources): whether limited resources are an obstacle to reading.

F3 (Reading instruction): the appropriateness of direct reading instruction.

F4 (Teaching efficacy): views on parents’ role as teachers of school-related skills.

Conventional and facilitative parents express different beliefs about literacy and the way someone becomes literate, and are engaged in different literacy practices (*Table 2*). In particular, conventional parents, who constitute the majority of the sample (65.3 per cent), believe that the school should primarily be responsible for teaching literacy to their children. These parents engage less often in literacy practices with their children, and express a lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy in supporting their children’s literacy development at home. In contrast, facilitative parents (34.7 per cent) demonstrate more supportive attitudes

towards children's literacy. They believe that they play an important role in their children's education and that they can help them do better in school. These parents also interact more often and engage in various ways with their children's learning, by providing them with a learning environment rich in stimuli.

Table 2. 'Facilitative' and 'conventional' parents' responses to the SBFRS

	FACILITATIVE					CONVENTIONAL				
	N	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD	N	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD
*1. How often do you or a family member read a picture book to the child?	51	2.0	4.0	3.63	.56	96	1.0	4.0	3.14	.82
*2. How often does your child ask you to be read to?	51	2.0	4.0	3.61	.57	96	1.0	4.0	3.22	.88
*3. How often does your child look at books by himself or herself?	51	1.0	4.0	3.65	.63	96	1.0	4.0	3.41	.80
4. How often does your child draw pictures?	51	2.0	4.0	3.84	.42	96	1.0	4.0	3.74	.70
*5. How often do you or another family member sing or recite rhymes to your child?	51	1.0	4.0	3.51	.78	96	1.0	4.0	3.11	1.06
*6. How often do you or another family member tell stories with your child?	51	1.0	4.0	3.59	.70	96	1.0	4.0	3.00	.92
7. How often do you or another family member play games with your child?	51	3.0	4.0	3.88	.33	96	1.0	4.0	3.84	.51
8. How often do you go to the library with your child?	51	1.0	3.0	1.41	.64	96	1.0	3.0	1.33	.61
*9. How many minutes did you or another family member read to the child yesterday?	51	1.0	4.0	2.71	.90	96	1.0	4.2	2.40	1.06
*10. About how many picture books do you have in your home for your child's use?	51	2.0	5.0	3.92	.98	96	1.0	5.0	3.32	1.16
11. How often does your child watch educational television programmes?	51	2.0	4.0	2.94	.81	96	.5	4.0	2.75	1.04

	FACILITATIVE					CONVENTIONAL				
	N	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD	N	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD
*12. At what age did you or another family member begin to read to your child?	51	1.0	5.0	3.49	1.21	96	1.0	5.0	2.69	1.28
*13. How many minutes per day do you spend reading (not counting time spent reading with your children)?	51	1.0	5.0	3.29	1.03	96	1.0	5.0	2.79	1.35
*14. How much do you enjoy reading?	51	1.0	4.0	3.37	.69	96	2.0	4.0	3.18	.66
15. How often does your child see his/her parents writing on a weekly basis?	51	1.0	5.0	3.51	1.39	96	1.0	5.0	3.20	1.4

* Statistically significant differences at the $\alpha=0.05$ level

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8: a. Almost never, b. 1–2 times a month, c. 1–2 times a week, d. Almost every day

9: a. 0 min, b. 1–10 min, c. 11–20 min, d. More than 20 min

10: a. 0–2, b. 3–10, c. 11–20, d. 21–40

11: a. Almost never, b. 1–2 times a month, c. 1–2 times a week, d. Almost every day

12: a. 0–6 months, b. 7–12 months, c. 13 months–11/2 years, d. 11/2 years–2 years

13: a. Almost not at all, b. 2–15 min, c. 16–30 min, d. 31–60 min

14: a. Not at all, b. A little, c. Enough, d. Very much

15: a. Never, b. 1–2 times, c. 3–4 times, d. 5–6 times

Demographically, facilitative parents have statistically significant higher levels of education than conventional parents ($\chi^2(2) = 6.853, p = 0.033$), especially at the postgraduate/PhD level (facilitative: 15.7 per cent; conventional: 4.2 per cent). Concerning SES (occupation and income), 58.8 per cent of facilitative parents work in high-autonomy professions, compared to 47.9 per cent of parents in the conventional group. Nevertheless, no statistically significant difference was found between the two categories of parent. This means that the parents' SES may be a factor of family environment differentiation, but it is of lower importance than their educational status.

The majority of the conventional mothers seem to believe that children learn reading mainly through letter knowledge and writing words.

The semi-structured interviews with 10 mothers from each group support the descriptions of the 2 different parental categories that we identified in the quantitative data (Tsirmpa, Stellakis and Lavidas, 2021). When asked about the ability to learn to read, most mothers in both the conventional and facilitative categories replied that they have not really paid attention to the process. All mothers referred to a variety of practices (e.g. reading books, writing letters/ words) that they believe are useful for children learning to read and that develop their literacy. Although these practices are common to both mothers' categories, mothers attached differing degrees of importance to these practices and implemented them differently. The majority of the conventional mothers seem to believe that children learn reading mainly through letter knowledge and writing words. These mothers primarily focus on decoding because they believe that if children can decode, reading is also conquered, and for this reason they often have their children write and copy letters.

Now I have gotten some extracurricular booklets with the 'alpha' (letter) written on it, to copy it accompanied by some images. (C9)

Compared to mothers in the conventional category, most facilitative mothers believed that their children learn to read through exposure to reading. For these mothers, children should find informal practice of and exposure to reading pleasant. For example, one mother stated that 'the contact with reading, with books' (F4) is very important, because it motivates children to love reading. Another mother remarked that children should understand that 'it is a pleasant activity ... I believe that later on she will seek it herself' (F5).

Not all parents considered reading books to and with children equally important; consequently, their reading frequency and style and the types of book they read with their children differed. Facilitative mothers started reading to children from a very young age and continue to read to them almost daily, 'Usually in the evening before going to bed' (F5), and some also read during the day. By contrast, the conventional mothers reported reading to their children once or twice a week, citing reasons such as lack of time or children's indifference to this practice at home as reasons for not reading more often.

We read about once or twice a week ... on the weekend when we are mainly at home, and have more time. (C4)

The conventional and facilitative mothers also read to their children in different ways. Most conventional mothers reported that they did not usually pose any questions (i.e. engage in dialogic reading) when they are reading to the children. However, they reported answering their children's questions. These mothers justified this attitude in various ways:

He is negative; he doesn't want me to ask him questions. If he asks, he wants me to explain to him what he asks. (C7)

... due to lack of time, I may not do this. (C2)

In the rare cases when conventional mothers did ask questions, they reported that they are mainly closed-ended, and they usually posed them at the end of the reading, aiming to check whether the child has understood the story content. One of the mothers described a typical question, asking 'Who the hero was, what he/she did, why he/she did it, where he/she went, such type of questions' (C6). By contrast, all the facilitative mothers reported almost always posing questions, mostly during reading. Their questions were both closed- and open-ended; examples include 'How she can view each person...' (F1) and previewing, for instance looking at the cover page to 'make guesses about the content of the book' (F7).

***Since parents can act as reading models
for children, mothers were asked if they
read for pleasure themselves.***

As for the types of books the mothers usually read with and to children, all reported reading fairy tales. However, the interview data suggest that facilitative mothers provide their children with a greater variety of fairy tales, while conventional mothers tend to provide them with the classic ones.

Although reading with the child is a source of pleasure for all mothers, the reasons are different. Whereas conventional mothers appear to focus primarily on the knowledge and skills that children acquire through reading, the facilitative ones emphasize both the emotional value and the pleasure of reading through which the parent-child bond is strengthened.

Since parents can act as reading models for children, mothers were asked if they read for pleasure themselves. It seems that reading books is a source of pleasure for almost all mothers, but the frequency of reading differs. Facilitative mothers seem to read more often than conventional ones. The facilitative mothers also recalled experiences from their childhood, and reading habits such as visiting the library or reading with their parents.

When I finish a book, I always buy the next one... I try [to read] every day, yes. (F8)

In contrast, most mothers in the conventional group stated that they liked reading, but they seemed to read rarely, mainly due to lack of time and family and professional obligations.

I like it, but [I do] not [read] very often, because generally I don't have time. (C7)

When asked about the children's exposure to the screen, all mothers shared similar experiences, since every home had a television, computer and tablet or mobile phone. However, the conventional mothers tended to report more screen time for their children. Facilitative parents reported setting limits on exposure time and supervising their children during the use of digital media.

One hour each day, the most, up to there, usually in the afternoon. (F6)

Yes, yes, I keep an eye on him, I don't hover over him all the time, but every 10 to 15 minutes I take a look at him to see what he does. (F3)

Mothers in both categories reported that their children use television and digital media primarily for entertainment and much less as a learning tool.

He either plays games or watches kids' programmes on YouTube. (C7)

She usually watches fairy tales, kids' programmes and she listens to music. (F5)

All the mothers agreed that television contributes to children's language development, since 'There are many words that he has assimilated and uses them unexpectedly' (F6). However, mothers also stressed that the parent's role in guiding the child is important in order to avoid dependency and the negative effects of a screen on children.

Limitations, recommendations and conclusion

Since this study did not include fathers in Phase 2, their beliefs about literacy and how these beliefs affect their literacy practices with their children remain unknown. Furthermore, the data for this study were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Observations of literacy practices at home could have helped minimize response and self-report biases among the study participants (Lavidas and Gialamas, 2019). Despite these limitations, the results of this study help raise new questions for both research and practice.

Overall, the study findings are consistent with previous studies from Greek and international perspectives (Debaryshe and Binder, 1994; Iflazoglu Saban, Altinkamis and Deretarla Gul, 2018; Kardasi, 2014; Lynch and Prins, 2022). All the parents in this study are involved in a variety of literacy practices with children, but there is a difference in their type, frequency and implementation. Based on the results, we categorized parents into two groups that exhibit different beliefs

and practices with respect to children's literacy. The two groups differed in their educational levels: parents in the facilitative group had statistically significant higher levels of education. Nevertheless, this is not a factor that differentiates facilitative from conventional parents. Rather, the most important factor seems to be the parents' beliefs about literacy, which influence family literacy practices and the ways and the context in which they are implemented.

The majority of parents seem not to realize that the pre-school age is so important for literacy development and that as parents they play a significant role in this.

In particular, parents in the facilitative group, who generally had a higher level of education, played a relatively more active role in their children's education, perhaps because they had the necessary knowledge and skills to help the children. They adopted more supportive attitudes towards children's literacy, contributing to its emergence. These parents were more often involved in informal literacy practices, which are usually aligned with what takes place at school (Lareau, 2003). By contrast, parents in the conventional group, who predominantly had a lower level of education, exhibited many of the same beliefs about their children's literacy, such as that school is primarily responsible for teaching it. This may happen not because of indifference, but because of a lack of knowledge, skills, or time (Heller, 2019; Lareau, 2003). These parents, who constitute the majority of the sample, were less often involved in home literacy events with children, and when they were involved, they put more emphasis on decoding skills or the mechanics of reading.

The findings indicate that the majority of parents seem not to realize that the pre-school age is so important for literacy development and that as parents they play a significant role in this. This highlights the need for information and guidance for parents on how they can enhance children's literacy through simple daily activities at home. Literacy should also be based on practices that already take place at home, not on school practices adopted by parents. Pre-school teachers should engage parents in activities that demonstrate how literacy is developed in pre-schools and how parents can help children at home, so as to foster continuity between these learning environments.

The findings of this study highlight the need for designing family learning programmes. Since such programmes are not widespread in Greece, a targeted strategy for programme development, designed in collaboration with various institutions (universities, schools, etc.), can contribute to children's literacy knowledge and skills. These programmes should be offered primarily for parents with pre-school children, since that is when the foundations for literacy are laid.

References

- Baker, L. and Scher, D. (2010) 'Beginning readers' motivation for reading in relation to parental belief and home reading experience', *Reading Psychology*, 23(4), pp. 239–269.
- Boomstra, N. *et al.* (2013) 'Parent reading beliefs and parenting goals of Netherlands Antillean and Dutch mothers in the Netherlands', *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(11), pp. 1605–1624.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1990) *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage.
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Burchinal, M. and Forestieri, N. (2011) 'Development of early literacy: evidence from major U.S. longitudinal studies', in S.B. Neuman and D.K. Dickinson (eds) *Handbook of early literacy research*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 85–96.
- Christenson, S.L. and Reschly, A.L. (2010) *Handbook of school-family partnerships*. New York: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. (2014) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- DeBaryshe, B.D. and Binder, J.C. (1994) 'Development of an instrument for measuring parental beliefs about reading aloud to young children', *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 78, pp. 1303–1311.
- Djonov, E., Torr, J. and Stenglin, M. (2018) *Early language and literacy: review of research with implications for early literacy programs at NSW public libraries*. Sydney, NSW: State Library of NSW and Department of Educational Studies Macquarie University.
- Evans, M.A. *et al.* (2004) 'Beginning reading: the views of parents and teachers of young children', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(1), pp. 130–141.
- Hannon, B.A.M. (2018) 'The contributions of informal home literacy activities to specific higher level comprehension processes', *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 6(12), pp. 184–194.
- Hasan, R. (1989) 'Semantic variation and sociolinguistics', *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 9(2), pp. 221–275.
- Heath, S.B. (1983) *Ways with words: language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heller, R. (2019) 'More than one way to grow up: an interview with Annette Lareau', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(7), pp. 31–36.
- Hoff, E. (2013) 'Interpreting the early language trajectories of children from low-SES and language minority homes: implications for closing achievement gaps', *Developmental Psychology*, 49(1), pp. 4–14.

- Ifrazoglu Saban, A., Altinkamis, N.F. and Deretarla Gul, E. (2018) 'Investigation of parents' early literacy beliefs in the context of Turkey through the Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI)', *European Journal of Educational Research*, 7(4), pp. 985–997.
- Inoue, T. *et al.* (2020) 'Home literacy environment and early literacy development across languages varying in orthographic consistency', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(1923), pp. 1–11.
- Kardasi, B. (2014) *Investigating the attitudes-perceptions of parents of 3–4-year-old children and family literacy practices*. University of Patras.
- Krijnen, E. *et al.* (2020) 'Exploring a refined model of home literacy activities and associations with children's emergent literacy skills', *Reading and Writing*, 33(4), pp. 207–238.
- Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal childhoods: class, race, and family life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lavidas, K. and Gialamas, V. (2019) 'Adaptation and psychometric properties of the short forms Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale with a sample of Greek university students', *European Journal of Education Studies*, 6(8), pp. 230–239.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Miles, M. and Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Morrow, L. (1995) 'Family literacy: new perspectives, new practices', in L. Morrow (ed.) *Family literacy connections in schools and communities*. Newark: International Reading Association, pp. 5–10.
- Mullis, I.V.S. *et al.* (2012) *PIRLS 2011 international results in reading*. TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center.
- Neuman, S. (2006) 'The knowledge gap: Implications for early education', in S.B. Neuman and D. Dickinson (eds) *Handbook of early literacy research*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 29–40.
- Nikoloudaki, E. (2019) *Evaluation of parental involvement in preschool education in order to improve learning outcomes in literacy and physical activity*. University of Crete.
- Ntola, K. (2018) *A family literacy program for parents of preschool children to promote reading aloud at home: design, implementation and evaluation*. University of Patras.
- O'Connor, B.P. (2000) 'SPSS and SAS programs for determining the number of components using parallel analysis and Velicer's MAP test', *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 32(3), pp. 396–402.

- Perry, K.H. (2012) 'What is literacy? A critical overview of sociocultural perspectives', *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 8(1), pp. 50–71.
- Prins, E. and Toso, B.W. (2008) 'Defining and measuring parenting for educational success: a critical discourse analysis of the parent educational profile', *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), pp. 555–596.
- Saracho, O. (2016) 'Literacy in the twenty-first century: children, families and policy', *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3–4), pp. 630–643.
- Senechal, M. and LeFevre, J. (2002) 'Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: a five-year longitudinal study', *Child Development*, 73(2), pp. 445–460.
- Sirin, S. (2005) 'Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: a meta-analytic review of research', *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), pp. 417–453.
- Sonnenschein, S. *et al.* (1997) 'Parental beliefs about ways to help children learn to read: the impact of an entertainment or a skills perspective', *Early Child Development and Care*, 127(1), pp. 111–134.
- Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. *et al.* (2019) 'Early home learning environment predicts children's 5th grade academic skills', *Applied Developmental Science*, 23(2), pp. 153–169.
- Tasiouli, G. (2010) *Organizing a family literacy program by including parents' needs*. University of Patras.
- Taylor, D. (1983) *Family literacy: young children learning to read and write*. London: Heinemann.
- Teale, W., Whittingham, C. and Hoffman, E.B. (2018) 'Early literacy research, 2006–2015: a decade of measured progress', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 20(2), pp. 169–278.
- Terlitsky, A.B. and Wilkins, J. (2015) 'Characteristics of family literacy programmes that improve child literacy, behaviour and parenting skills', *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 10(2), pp. 121–158.
- Tsirmpa, C., Stellakis, N. and Lavidas, K. (2019) 'Parent reading belief inventory: adaptation and psychometric properties with a sample of Greek parents', *Educational Role of Language Journal*, 1(1), pp. 132–144.
- Tsirmpa, C., Stellakis, N. and Lavidas, K. (2021) 'Beliefs of parents of preschool children about literacy: facilitative and conventional approaches', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 29(4), pp. 519–538.
- Weigel, D., Martin, S. and Bennett, K. (2006) 'Mothers' literacy beliefs: connections with the home literacy environment and pre-school children's literacy development', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 6(2), pp. 191–211.
- Whitehurst, G.J. and Lonigan, C.J. (1998) 'Child development and emergent literacy', *Child Development*, 69(3), pp. 848–872.



Chapter 14

Family literacies in a political moment: Newly arrived mothers and children in the United Kingdom and the affective entanglements of literacies with place, space and the body

Mary-Rose Puttick

Introduction

At the heart of this chapter is a set of multi-layered, affective relations, which together characterized an English as a Second Language (ESL) family literacy class in Birmingham, UK, set in a particular historical and political moment in 2017–2019. The class was made up of a core group of five women from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds, from Afghanistan, the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Albania, with their children aged two to four; a researcher-volunteer teacher; a refugee community organization (Trinity Centre, a pseudonym) and its wider staff and service users; a classroom; and a combination of material objects. In this chapter I analyse the family literacies that emerged in visual, spatial and affective forms during a two-year, two-sited, participatory pedagogical ethnography, which formed part of my doctoral research (Puttick, 2021), for which the Trinity Centre was one setting and a Somali community centre the second.

My doctoral research focused specifically on the mothers in the settings and the way they directed the ESL family literacy content; this chapter has the same focus. I seek to expand thinking about how understandings and practices of family literacies are necessarily fluid and responsive to wider political contexts. This includes family literacies that take account of interactions between humans, as well as ‘intra-actions’ (Barad, 2009) between human and non-human forms, such as toys, objects and classroom furniture. Haraway’s (2016) concept of ‘sympoiesis’ or ‘making-with’ helps me to analyse family literacies as making-with, and

making-through, multiple human and non-human connections and experiences, which are always part of a relational system and in a process of becoming. Throughout my research activity, the women, children and myself at the Trinity Centre cultivated an open and experimental family literacy teaching and learning space in relation, or sympoiesis, to a particular time and locality, constituted in part by the flux of the women's migration status and the circumstances attached to this.

Establishing the family literacy context

Since the mid-1970s, post-compulsory education provision in the UK has undergone increasingly neoliberal policy changes, reflecting shifts throughout the world. In adult and community education this has resulted in increased expectations that individuals will pay for courses, and an education system that serves economic interests by prioritizing functional and employability skills (e.g. Bowl, 2017). As a result of the increased neoliberalization of education, policy-makers have prioritized instrumental outcomes, such as workplace skills and standardized test scores, over personal outcomes, such as the social support that family literacy programmes often generate for marginalized groups (Prins, Toso and Schafft, 2009). Yet despite its marketization and neoliberal policies and pressures, adult education in all its forms maintains a significant role in social and political organization, participation and empowerment, and in transforming relations of power and knowledge through practices in the classroom (Clancy et al., 2022).

The starting point for my doctoral research was the UK government-funded adult education and family literacy professional context I had previously worked in for several years, teaching family literacy in schools. In the UK, government-funded family learning over the last 20 years has split into 2 predominant strands: family language, literacy and numeracy (FLLN), and wider family learning (WFL). The central aims of government-funded FLLN programmes include developing parents' and children's language, literacy and numeracy skills and supporting parents to help their children's learning (Cara and Brooks, 2012).

Although there are many benefits of school-based family literacy, my previous teaching practice had exposed colonial roots of practices that I believe mobilized rigid, unhelpful definitions of both the family and literacy and that positioned families from migrant backgrounds in negative, deficit-based terms (Puttick, 2021). An example of such positioning is the way that some schools 'target' particular groups of parents due to perceived deficits in their literacy and/or parenting skills, which can lead them to frame parenting negatively (Wainwright and Marandet, 2013). The school-based family literacy curriculum of my previous practice was tied to an autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1984), which imposed Western conceptions of literacy on parents and undervalued or minimized culturally diverse literacies.

My previous practice also exposed the lack of flexibility for accommodating the transient living conditions of families from asylum-seeking backgrounds, conditions often beyond their control. For example, due to attendance and progression targets attached to government funding, individuals who could only attend sessions occasionally could not be accommodated, and access was denied for people seeking asylum who had been in the UK less than six months, even if they had a child at school (Puttick, 2021).

The school-based family literacy curriculum of my previous practice was tied to an autonomous model of literacy, which imposed Western conceptions of literacy on parents and undervalued or minimized culturally diverse literacies.

In response to some of the issues resulting from the neoliberalization of education I had previously identified, I wanted to explore a different context of family literacy provision: the UK's 'third sector', which is not tied to government-funding regulations but politicized in a different way. In the UK, the third sector includes NGOs, charities and community groups, and comprises a multitude of activities, advocacy and activism, 'filling gaps where capacity exists' (Mayblin and James, 2019, p. 376). By locating my research within this sector, I aimed to illuminate understandings of family literacy, led by mothers from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds, that could potentially be overlooked and/or undervalued in school-based family literacy provision.

A political moment

I first visited the Trinity Centre shortly after the 2016 UK-European Union (EU) referendum, an event that divided the British people and led to a marginal majority voting for leaving the EU, an event now widely known as 'Brexit'. I started volunteering at the charity in different roles to root my experience and understanding of a small, third-sector organization. Throughout this time, I could see the rapidly changing activities and advocacy at the centre in response to political changes, which were themselves attached to the types of activity that were funded.

The UK's official leaving date from the EU (31 December 2020) occurred five years later, while I was writing my doctoral dissertation. Preparation for this event had exerted persistent force during this period and was synchronized with the rise of far-right parties and unexpected presidential changes across Europe and the West as a whole. The symbolic divisions resulting from Brexit across the UK, and its wider implications, coincided with what appeared to be a general rise

in anti-migrant rhetoric in public discourse, exemplified by a deeply problematic process of ‘migrantification’ (Forkert et al., 2020). Migrantification refers to the way people are ‘made into migrants’ by governments, the media and members of society: the category of ‘migrant’ is actively constructed ‘as a process of creating a new social identity that is demeaned and constrained by official processes’ (ibid., p. 12). Constraints on people seeking asylum in the UK include being unable to access paid employment and government-funded adult education courses, in accordance with the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) rule attached to this status.

Interwoven throughout this chapter are some of the ‘affective literacies’ that emerged at the Trinity Centre, captured through journal entries and photographs to elucidate what happened during the participatory study.

Interwoven throughout this chapter are some of the ‘affective literacies’ that emerged at the Trinity Centre, captured through journal entries and photographs to elucidate what happened during the participatory study. In defining affect, I draw on the reference by Dernikos et al. (2020, p. 5) to ‘an event that forces you to be(come) affected, to feel some-thing’. Here I focus on affective literacies to highlight the way literacies make people feel – an overlooked yet important aspect of the subject. I propose some key takeaways for family literacy in an increasingly politically precarious world, challenging the potentially exclusionary and harmful positionings of families with complex migration trajectories.

A sense of the centre

For a relatively small building, the Trinity Centre offered a multitude of activities for individuals and families. During the period of my research, these included food and clothing support; new baby and mother clinics; employment support clinics such as job-search support; an immigration and housing advice clinic; a community café; and several language-based learning activities, such as ESL (Puttick, 2021). The main ESL classes at the centre were funded by a larger charity, but the ESL family literacy class was an unfunded, standalone class. However, the mothers in my class were given the opportunity to take an ESL-speaking exam during the two years I taught; two of them did so, and both later went on to join the ESL class once their children were of school age.

Our family literacy classroom was a spacious room, but was crammed with furniture due to limited space elsewhere in the building: tables and chairs were stacked against most walls, and there were other objects you would not normally see in a teaching and learning space, such as a supermarket shopping trolley, used when the large downstairs hall was turned into a weekly food bank.

Additionally, staff members would use a small, windowless office built inside the classroom for advice sessions about the asylum process, so people would sometimes wander in and out during the class. The centre manager usually popped in at the start of the class each week to greet the families. Overall, this made for a communal, convivial atmosphere, yet it also felt private and peaceful once we closed the door.

Low (2016) draws on the concept of affect and metaphors such as ‘affective atmosphere’ and ‘affective climate’ in considering encounters with ‘spaces and environments that are designed to affect us politically and influence our deepest feelings’ (p. 145). My journal extracts over one week in May 2018 capture fluctuations in the affective atmosphere of the same space on two different days. On Mondays we had our family literacy class upstairs in the building, while the immigration and housing advice clinic took place in the hall below. On Fridays, the hall was transformed into the weekly community café, and on another day of the week was used as a foodbank. (All participant names in the chapter are pseudonyms.)

When Besjana and her daughter arrived to class today she was noticeably upset and told me she was having problems with her accommodation. She is currently living in emergency temporary accommodation for refugees with shared communal living spaces and she walks a long distance to come to class. I suggested she speak to the advice clinic in the hall below and went downstairs with her to speak to the advisors. There was a long queue of people in the hall and outside into the corridor and a ticket system in place to organize people. In the hall, tables had been set up with an advisor at one end and a chair for clients at the other, with dividers in between to give a degree of privacy. I sensed a tension in the atmosphere as people waited to share their immigration- and housing-related challenges. Keje, one of the advisors, gave Besjana a ticket and explained she would be waiting a while. Much later, Besjana came back upstairs with her young daughter and Ajola, one of the volunteers who speaks Albanian. Besjana was seemingly more relaxed and Ajola explained that they had managed to telephone the accommodation provider on behalf of Besjana who said they would investigate the issues further. (Journal notes, 7 May 2018)

I called in to the Centre today to drop off some donations from the university. It was the first time I'd seen the Friday community café in action. The hall was full of people, both clients of the centre as well as members of the local community. I sensed joy in the room with laughter, conversations in multiple languages, and people communicating animatedly through body language and gestures. I recognized some of the regular visitors to the Centre and saw some of the staff members spread out at different tables that had been set up

in a café style. I noticed Besjana across the room with her daughter and it felt strange for a moment seeing her in a different context. She was sitting at a table with a group of women, they were chatting and eating together. She saw me and waved with a smile on her face. She beckoned me over and I went and joined them all for a cup of tea. I was delighted to see this other social side of the Centre where everyone came together. I got the sense that external worries were put aside for this hour together where the main focus became solely to enjoy food together and one another's company. (Journal notes, 11 May 2018)

The journal extracts highlight how the different arrangements of furniture and people within the same space signified different advocacy and social-based literacy practices. Smith's (2018) research shows how changing arrangements of the books in the children's section of a library shaped the literacy events and practices that happened there. Similarly, each spatial arrangement in the hall at Trinity was accompanied by an affective atmosphere, with emotions and energies that became part of the experiences attached to the literacy practices. The organizational nature of Trinity, as a refugee charity, shaped the character of the family literacy programme over the two years, and showed that, whatever advocacy and wider social support the women were connecting with outside the class, became important inside the class too.

The family literacy programme

At the Trinity Centre, I took over the family literacy class from another volunteer and, with the support of interpreters chosen by the women, I explained to them that our class had no set curriculum, that I wanted them to guide the direction of the classes as far as possible and lead understandings of what family literacy means to them. My approach was inspired by the work of bell hooks and how she worked to bring voice and agency into her classrooms, particularly with groups of women: 'We must learn from one another, sharing ideas and pedagogical strategies ... we must be willing to deconstruct this power dimension, to challenge, change, and create' (hooks, 1989, p. 52). I shared this quote with the women and the interpreters because it encapsulated the spirit of what I hoped our participatory family literacy space would become.

While there was a core of four women in the class from the start (Hiwan, Farzana, Besjana and Shirin), other women and children would often join us, sometimes for only one class or sometimes for a few months. For example, a Kurdish mother, Aza, joined the class in late 2018 and then became a part of the core group until the end of the research. At the start, I asked the women, with the help of interpreters at the centre, what they hoped to get out of the classes. Their main priority was to learn enough English to be able to communicate in everyday situations, including language to help them with school, health and migration-related issues.

One of the centre's advice staff, Hassan, regularly made advice videos for his clients that used predominantly picture sequences and few words. One, for example, was about some of the housing issues Besjana had spoken about. Occasionally, I invited Hassan to call in to the class to show the women his latest video and answer their questions as a way of supporting their confidence in accessing advice.

Photograph 1. Screenshots from Hassan Salman's housing advice video



Our classes always involved synergy between the women's and children's worlds outside the classroom and the environment of the centre: vocabulary instruction was always connected to their immediate needs, concerns and hopes, and visual literacy was always central to teaching and learning. The children also became active in this process and would sometimes sit with their mothers and point to the pictures, speaking the words in multiple languages. The women and children were always celebrated as 'readers' of the images and encouraged to make connections with what they could see to wider contexts outside the classroom, since 'visuals have a starting point in people's everyday experience' (Rowsell, McLean and Hamilton, 2012, p. 447). The visual literacy approach represented an important route into reading text with their children, as well as being a valuable intergenerational multilingual activity that did not prioritize text.

We made it part of our weekly routine to finish each class with a story chosen by one of the mothers or children and told in the women's first languages (Pashto, Dari, Kurdish Sorani, Albanian). Some stories came from books in the classroom (a small selection in dual languages and some wordless picture books), while others were oral. One week, for example, Shirin taught us a Pashto poem with the support of her eldest daughter at home (Puttick, 2023). In addition to these core elements, our programme also evolved into arts-based mapping activities, games and storytelling through objects over several months, all of which the children participated in.

Liminal living and literacies

I draw on the anthropological terms 'liminality' and 'limbo' to refer to the instability people seeking asylum encounter in their living conditions, and

to represent the state of being in between legal and other statuses. A report from the Refugee Council (2021) uses the phrase 'living in limbo' to refer to the extensive backlog of asylum cases in the UK, with people waiting several months or years longer than the targeted six months for a decision on their claim – a situation that two of the Trinity mothers were also experiencing.

In addition to my affective journal recordings of our family literacy class, the women and I decided together to include symbolic objects as an additional representation of their experiences of motherhood in the UK, drawing on the 'artifactual literacies' work of Pahl and Rowsell (2010). Four women brought physical photographs as at least one of their identity artefacts (see *Photograph 2*). I was struck by the way they had all interpreted the literacy event in this way. Each woman was noticeably eager to show the photographs to the group. They all laid the photographs on one table, without my prompting, and it looked like a family photo board. As we had agreed in advance, the women then spoke about their artefact in their first language, I recorded them and later had it translated. Following the recording, the women also shared something about their artefact in English, with the two Kurdish speakers and the Pashto and Dari speakers helping each other.

The mothers' dialogues attached to their photographs all appear to indicate two strong inclinations: a desire to introduce members of their family and put a face to the family members they often spoke of, and the marking of important life events such as birth, marriage, death, journeys and education. These events appear to be universal but have diverse cultural meanings and are conceptualized differently across borders (Puttick, 2021).

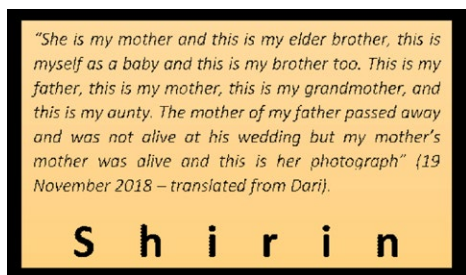
As the mothers in turn spoke about their photographs, I felt an emotional affect taking over the space. This was partly because I felt honoured that they wanted to share aspects of their lives with me, but also because many of them cried as they spoke about family members who had died or whom they had not seen for an extended period. Ahmed (2013, p. 7) refers to 'in-between' emotions attached to objects: 'emotions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects'. In this way objects can be seen to hold our personal histories and understandings of the world.

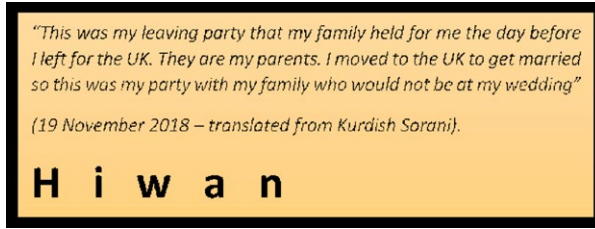
I was aware of how my interpretations and 'felt intensities' (Leander and Ehret, 2019; p. 2) about the photographs were also shaped by what I already knew about aspects of the mothers' migration experiences and journeys. This knowledge was itself influenced by my engagement with literature on families from forced migration experiences, such as the break-up of the original families and the formation of new imagined families (e.g. Erel, 2013), and the challenges

potentially faced by those seeking asylum, such as temporary housing (Mayblin and James, 2019). In looking at the Albanian mother Besjana's photograph, for example, I read the image in the knowledge that she was a single mother who had been trafficked and was now seeking asylum, with a daughter born in Croydon, the location of the UK Border Force where people are held while awaiting their initial asylum interview on arrival in the UK.

When Aza talked about her photographs, she was emotional; I could tell that this was related to the sad loss of close family members and the loss of her previous life. In the weekly classes, she always talked about not having a passport anymore and how she had 'lost her status', a sentiment that perhaps became even more poignant when her Kurdish friend in the class, Hiwan, gained British citizenship during this time. Hiwan had been attending British citizenship classes at the Trinity Centre since I had first met her, and we had a celebration for her after her citizenship award ceremony in May 2019. The following month, Trinity's monthly newsletter featured a photograph and interview with Hiwan (*Photograph 3*). Her change in citizenship status later gave her the freedom to access courses at the local college.

Photograph 2. A family photo board





Photograph 3. Hiwan's British citizenship ceremony



The connection I made between this and Aza's personal history, which accompanied my interpretation of her identity artefacts, speaks to Aza's problematic state of liminality: she was still waiting for a decision on her asylum claim, and communicated her fear about this on a number of occasions. The emotions expressed by Aza were common in the classes, and sometimes triggered feelings in the other young mothers, as they did for me.

What these photographs show, then, is that as objects they contain 'an abundance of sticky emotions binding people, things, moods and contexts' (Kuby and Rowsell, 2017, p. 288). In the family literacy space, the photographs appeared to symbolize ties between life and death, spaces past and present, and (non-) citizenship status. What makes the mothers' words more intense for me is that I knew about the present space of limbo from which some of them spoke, a space that was regulated, constrained and uncertain as they waited through the long process of claiming refugee status. This context perhaps detached them even further from the sense of home, belonging and family that the photographs induced.

Children's agency within the family literacy space

The Trinity classroom space became one in which the children had freedom to play with toys that they may not have had at home. Over time I became familiar with the toys that the children were willing to share, toys that became individual favourites, and toys that would occasionally provoke battles. Over the weeks that the mothers shared their artefacts, the children were fascinated and listened to each mother in turn before looking closely and feeling each object. We asked the children if they would like to choose an object from the room to share. Aza's son, Fadil, always spent a long time in each session climbing on the large toy horse in the corner and brushing its hair. He immediately ran over and pulled it across the room, hugging it. We asked him some questions about the horse, some of which his mother translated into Kurdish (Puttick, 2021).

Photograph 4. Fadil's artefact



I realized that I was now looking at Fadil's choice of toy as an artefact that connected to his meaning-making and belonging in the space. Whenever I visit the centre now, several years later, and see the horse, I immediately picture Fadil and smile, remembering the joy that he showed when he played with it. As Pahl and Rowsell (2010) also observe, it appeared that the toys would forever embody for the children their experience of that space, that time, that group of people, and thus would always be imprinted in their memories through their tactility and affective dimensions.

Smelling family literacies

In today's class, Hiwan brought in another artefact and all of us sat together with the children in a circle as she prepared to share it. As she opened the box a strong, spicy and familiar aroma filled the room. She then lifted out a beautiful necklace made of cloves and beads. All of the women recognized the item, but I had never seen one before and was in awe of its intricacy. Everyone in the room became animated as it was passed around. Hiwan spoke first in Kurdish about her object, telling us the Kurdish word for clove '*qirnefil*' and then writing it in the Arabic script. Speaking to Aza in Kurdish, Hiwan then shared some details in English and explained that she had made this herself and together they told us how they wear it for special occasions and for cooking special meals.

Fatimata, a mother from Guinea-Bissau who started coming to the class only last week with her six-month old baby, was so excited when she saw the necklace and told us of her grandmother giving her a clove necklace when she was a young child, adding that in her community this was a tradition. Farzana and Shirin said that women also wear the clove necklace in Afghanistan and told us a little about its association with the 'Kuchi' people, Pashtun nomadic people. (Journal notes, 16 December 2018).

Photograph 5. Hiwan's clove necklace



Pedagogically, the artefacts embodied memories and mobilized our family literacy classroom into a space for acknowledging important aspects of the women's lives from previous times and places. The smell of the clove necklace appeared to evoke a shared collective knowledge among the women about cultural and intergenerational practices and associations with home that had

been transported from Iraqi Kurdistan, Afghanistan and Guinea-Bissau into our class in Birmingham. The scent also created an opportunity for a shift in agency, away from traditional teacher-student roles (Puttick, 2021).

Pedagogically, the artefacts embodied memories and mobilized our family literacy classroom into a space for acknowledging important aspects of the women's lives from previous times and places.

In line with Haraway's (2016) notion of sympoiesis, we were making a space together in which the smell of the cloves, the people in the photographs and the places where they were taken, the journeys of the objects, and the memories attached to them, had become part of a set of relations that made up our family literacy space in this political moment. The combination of these tangible aspects, along with the emotions and affect they evoked, produced forms of family literacy that appeared to contribute to a sense of belonging in the group and the space that might have been absent in other outside spaces.

Future thinking for family literacy

This chapter has aimed to explore some of the activities and relationships that developed in an ESL family literacy class during a challenging time in UK political history. The initial purpose of the classes, as chosen by a group of mothers from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds, was to learn survival English to support them as they navigated a new locality. This focus was complemented by wider advocacy and social support that the women accessed at the Centre, which made the family literacy model we created expansive, holistic and part of a bigger whole. The third-sector context gave us a freedom to be responsive in the moment to immediate needs outside the classroom, needs that were themselves tied to the evolving nature of the UK political climate for people seeking refuge.

It was important that the classes accommodated mobility, with many mothers and children participating only fleetingly, something that would not have been possible for school-based, government-funded provision. The Trinity space welcomed flux rather than turning it away, an aspect that it is vital that funding bodies recognize so that people experiencing transience in complex conditions continue to have access to literacy education with their children. I argue that an emergent flux-based pedagogical approach is a necessary facet of third sector-based family literacy, and should be supported. This adaptive approach was not detrimental to lifelong learning opportunities: during the two years of the class, two women achieved an ESL speaking qualification and later transitioned into the ESL class, and one woman passed her British citizenship test and went on to continue her studies at a mainstream adult education centre.

The way that the mothers led the family literacy practices in sensory directions, including smells, was shown to be an important route to group connectedness and compassion, making people who could only attend a small number of sessions feel a sense of belonging. Consequently, I would argue that sensory literacies are an important component of third-sector family literacy programmes, as an intergenerational resource that celebrates family and cultural histories and as supportive of the agency of groups who are marginalized in the wider society. Lastly, affective literacies and the family literacy spaces they are part of have significant pedagogical dimensions, which can be used to transform practice in innovative ways in politically volatile times.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2013) *The cultural politics of emotion*. London: Routledge.
- Barad, K. (2009) *Meeting the universe halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bowl, M. (2017) *Adult education in neoliberal times: policies, philosophies and professionalism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cara, O. and Brooks, G. (2012) *Evidence of the wider benefits of family learning: a scoping review*. London: Department for Business Innovation & Skills.
- Clancy, S. et al. (2022) 'Politics, power and participation', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 54(1), pp. 1–3.
- Dernikos, B. et al. (eds) (2020) *Mapping the affective turn in education: theory, research, and pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Erel, U. (2013) 'Kurdish migrant mothers in London enacting citizenship', *Citizenship Studies*, 17(8), pp. 970–984. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2013.851146>.
- Forkert, K. et al. (2020) *How media and conflicts make migrants*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Haraway, D.J. (2016) *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- hooks, b. (1989) *Talking back: thinking feminist, thinking black, vol. 10*. Boston: South End Press.
- Kuby, C.R. and Rowsell, J. (2017) *Early literacy and the posthuman: pedagogies and methodologies*. New York: Routledge.
- Leander, K.M. and Ehret, C. (2019) *Affect in literacy learning and teaching: pedagogies, politics and coming to know*. London: Routledge.

- Low, S. (2016) *Spatializing culture: the ethnography of space and place*. London: Routledge.
- Mayblin, L. and James, P. (2019) 'Asylum and refugee support in the UK: civil society filling the gaps?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(3), pp. 375–394.
- Pahl, K. and Rowsell, J. (2010) *Artifactual literacies: every object tells a story*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Prins, E., Toso, B.W. and Schafft, K.A. (2009) "'It feels like a little family to me": social interaction and support among women in adult education and family literacy', *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(4), pp. 335–352.
- Puttick, M.-R. (2021) *Reimagining family literacy: co-creating pedagogies with migrating mothers in third sector spaces*. Birmingham City University.
- Puttick, M.-R. (2023) "'Covert activism": a refugee third sector learning ecology for social change', in J. Robbins and A. Rogers (eds) *Adult learning and social change in the UK: national and local perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Refugee Council (2021) *Living in Limbo: a decade of delays in the UK asylum system*. Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Living-in-Limbo-A-decade-of-delays-in-the-UK-Asylum-system-July-2021.pdf>.
- Rowsell, J., McLean, C. and Hamilton, M. (2012) 'Visual literacy as a classroom approach', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(5), pp. 444–447.
- Smith, H.V. (2018) 'Cooking the books: what counts as literacy for young children in a public library?', *Literacy*, 52(1), pp. 31–38.
- Street, B.V. (1984) *Literacy in theory and practice*, vol. 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wainwright, E. and Marandet, E. (2013) 'Family learning and the socio-spatial practice of "supportive" power', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(4), pp. 504–524.



Chapter 15

Hope and agony: Maintaining Chinese as a heritage language in the United Kingdom

Jinyao Chang and Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen

Introduction

Over the past 10 years there has been a growing interest in how transnational families establish their family language policy (Curd-Christiansen, 2009), in which literacy development in the heritage language plays an important role (Curd-Christiansen, 2013). Although cases of the classic three-generation model of language shift and language loss in multilingual and multicultural societies have been widely reported around the globe (e.g. Canagarajah, 2011; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013), intergenerational transmission of family literacy practices has also been addressed recently (Lynch and Prins, 2022).

Our study was guided by the conceptual framework of family language policy (FLP). While past research has been conducted on first-generation Chinese speakers in the UK (Li Wei, 2007; Zhu, 2008), little research has focused on how second- and third-generation Chinese immigrant families (sequential bilinguals: see e.g. Rumbaut 1994, 1997) maintain their heritage language (HL), especially with respect to family literacy practices. This chapter explores the differences between the first and second generations' attitudes towards and expectations of developing Chinese literacy. It also looks at differences between their strategies in teaching Chinese, as the families negotiate linguistic and cultural values in the process of transmitting and developing Chinese as a heritage language (CHL).

Developing heritage language: Family language policy and literacy practice

Heritage language (HL) is defined as the ancestral language of immigrants, used by them and their children (Montrul, 2019). Although immigrants have migrated from one part of the world to another, they continue to use their home language to communicate with others who speak the same language in both home and host countries. They also use the language at home with their children (second generation) and grandchildren (third generation) because they consider the HL

an important aspect of their identity and culture. However, because of limited access to and input from the HL, as well as the powerful influence of the host society through formal education, the second and third generations of immigrants do not have strong command of the HL. They often struggle to communicate with their parents and relatives and may not be able to read and write in their HL (Montrul, 2019). This also occurs among 1.5-generation immigrants (those who migrate between the ages of 6 and 12), who were children when they immigrated and who often experience varying degrees of HL attrition (Remennick, 2017). Most 1.5 and second generations become dominant mainstream language users, and the third generations tend to become monolingual mainstream language users (Piller and Gerber, 2018). Chinese is not exempt from this pattern of language shift.

The accelerated language shift could result from the informal context of HL learning, in which the formal language use and development of literacy are given less emphasis. HL development involves its 'intergenerational transmission' (Baker, 2011, p. 49). Since 'natural intergenerational transmission' is key to language maintenance (Spolsky, 2012), the family is placed 'at a central position as a key prerequisite for maintaining and preserving languages' (Schwartz and Verschik, 2013, p. 1). FLP is 'a deliberate attempt at practicing a particular language use pattern and particular literacy practices within home domains and among family members' (Curdts-Christiansen, 2018, p. 420). Like any language policy (Spolsky, 2012), FLP also consists of three interrelated components: language beliefs (language ideology) – how family members perceive particular languages; language practices – de facto language use, what people actually do with language; and language management – what efforts they make to maintain the language.

An important factor in promoting the development of literacy skills is for parents to provide a rich literacy environment in the home, with adequate access to resources and materials in the home language.

Studies of FLP show that family literacy is a way for parents, children and members of the extended family to learn and use literacy informally both at home and in the community, usually as part of their daily routines (Lynch and Prins, 2022). In some families, first-generation immigrant parents, especially those with an East Asian background, have been observed to have high expectations that their children will develop literacy skills in both the HL and the societal language (Curdts-Christiansen, 2009). However, differences in cultural and educational background between the first- and second-generation immigrants may lead to significant differences in their attitudes towards their children's education, which may also be reflected in their attitudes towards HL learning.

In the UK, Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia (2018) studied families with three different HL backgrounds. Their findings show that an important factor in promoting the development of literacy skills is for parents to provide a rich literacy environment in the home, with adequate access to resources and materials in the home language. Depending on family structures, as well as parental impact and cultural beliefs about childrearing, children's HL development may also be mediated by their larger family, in particular grandparents (Anderson, Anderson and Sadiq, 2017; Gregory, Long and Volk, 2004; Jarrett, Hamilton and Coba-Rodriguez, 2015). In Canada, for example, Curdt-Christiansen (2013) investigated how multilingual families enact literacy in myriad ways to support and facilitate the socio-cultural practices of literacy in multiple languages, as well as the implicit role that grandparents play and the often imperceptible influence they exert on the children's process of becoming literate. Family structures (who is included in 'family'), childrearing responsibilities (who is responsible for taking care of young children) and models of learning (how learning happens, with varying degrees of communalism) vary both across and within cultures. For example, the Bangladeshi British families in Gregory's (2004, p. 99) study exhibited a 'communal approach to teaching and learning' in which the whole family and community were considered responsible for children's education. Differences in cultural practices can lead to different HL literacy practices and attitudes towards HL learning.

A profile of the Chinese communities in the UK

The Chinese are one of the largest and oldest immigrant groups in the UK (Zhu and Li, 2020); currently about 800,000 people of Chinese origin live there (ONS, 2021). Research has shown that Chinese immigrant families tend to place a high emphasis on the value of education for their children, leading to great willingness to make financial sacrifices, including paying for private lessons, engaging in extra-curricular activities and providing better working conditions to ensure their children's academic success (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009, 2020; Francis, Archer and Mau, 2009). As opposed to most of the first generation, who worked in catering-related businesses after arrival in the UK (Zhu, 2008), the majority of the 1.5 and second-generation work in finance or other high-paying jobs, many of them occupying important business, academic, or professional positions. Their migration, education and professional experiences play a vital role in their FLP decision-making about how far they want to develop their children's HL speaking and literacy.

The study

Focusing on CHL ideologies and literacy support in three families with first-generation grandparents and 1.5-generation parents, our study was guided by two research questions: What are parents' attitudes to and ideologies about developing their children's Chinese language? and, based on the two generations'

expectations of their children’s Chinese language development, what are their literacy practice efforts in different contexts?

This study was conducted with three families of different Chinese origins (families A, B and C). They have three characteristics in common. First, unlike most 1.5-generation immigrants in other contexts, all three families had lived in different Chinese-speaking and non-Chinese-speaking countries or regions before moving to the UK. Second, the first-generation grandparents are actively involved in maintaining the third-generation CHL. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the grandparents of families A and C remained in mainland China and Taiwan, respectively, until they could resume their travel to and from the UK. Third, the children can to some extent communicate in Chinese and have taken or will take the school exam (GCSE) in Chinese language in the UK. To ensure anonymity and avoid participant identification, we replaced participants’ names with pseudonyms.

Table 1. Profiles of participating families

FAMILY	GENERATION	NAME	AGE	LANGUAGES	SPOUSE L1	LANGUAGE AT HOME	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION/INDUSTRY	BIRTHPLACE	SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
A	1st	Mrs Huang	>70	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin	BA	Retired	Taiwan Spouse: Mainland China	Taiwan/The Netherlands/UK, among Mandarin speakers
	2nd	Kylie	40	English, Mandarin, German and Dutch	English	English, Mandarin with her parents	MA	Management	Taiwan, Spouse: UK	Taiwan/The Netherlands/mainland China/US/UK, among English/Mandarin/German speakers
	3rd	George	10	English, Mandarin		English	Primary school	Student	UK	UK, among English speakers
		Jayden	8	English, Mandarin		English	Primary school	Student	UK	UK, among English speakers
B	1st	Mrs Hua	>70	Cantonese, Mandarin	English	Mandarin	Secondary school	Retired	Mainland China Spouse: UK	Mainland China/UK, among Cantonese/Mandarin/English speakers

FAMILY	GENERATION	NAME	AGE	LANGUAGES	SPOUSE L1	LANGUAGE AT HOME	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION/INDUSTRY	BIRTHPLACE	SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
	2nd	Rebecca	53	Cantonese, English, Mandarin	English	English	BA	Shop manager	Mainland China Spouse: UK	Mainland China/ Hong Kong/ Singapore/ Australia/US/ UK, among Cantonese/ Mandarin/English speakers
	3rd	Helen	17	English, Mandarin		English	Secondary school	Student	Singapore	Mainland China/ Singapore/ Australia/ UK, among Cantonese/ English/ Mandarin speakers
		Stella	14	English, Mandarin		English	Secondary school	Student	Singapore	Mainland China/ Singapore/ Australia/UK/Italy, among English/ Mandarin speakers
		James	13	English, Mandarin		English	Secondary school	Student	Singapore	Mainland China/ Singapore/ Australia/UK, among English/ Mandarin speakers
C	1st	Mr Chen	>70	Mandarin Shaoxing dialect and Shanghai dialect	Chinese	Mandarin Shaoxing dialect and Shanghai dialect	BA	Retired	Mainland China Spouse: Mainland China	Mainland China/ Hong Kong/The Netherlands, among Mandarin Chinese/ English speakers
	2nd	Jane	45	English, Mandarin, Cantonese	Hong Kong	Cantonese, English	MA	IT worker	Mainland China Spouse: Hong Kong	Mainland China/ Hong Kong/ Australia/UK, among English/ Mandarin/ Cantonese speakers
	3rd	Justin	13	English, -Cantonese, Mandarin		Cantonese, English	Secondary school	Student	Hong Kong	Hong Kong/ Australia/UK, among English/ Cantonese speakers

Family A is a transnational family. The grandparents, Mr and Mrs Huang, were born and brought up in mainland China and Taiwan, respectively. They moved from Taiwan to the Netherlands with their elder daughter, Kylie, who attended an English international school. Kylie is proficient in English, Mandarin, Dutch and German. After high school, she went to a British university and then worked in mainland China, the USA and the UK. Subsequently, she settled in London and married a British spouse, with whom she had two sons, 10-year-old George and 8-year-old Jayden.

In the transnational Family B, the grandmother, Mrs Hua, was born and brought up in mainland China. After marrying her second husband (British), she lived between China and Britain and settled in the UK. Her daughter, Rebecca, attended secondary school and university in the UK and worked in mainland China, Hong Kong and the USA for several years. She has lived in mainland China, Singapore and Australia with her British husband and three children, Helen (17), Stella (14) and James (13), but eventually the family settled in the UK.

In Family C, the grandfather, Mr Chen, went from mainland China to the Netherlands to study and work and then returned to Shanghai where he lived until his retirement. His daughter, Jane, went to a boarding school in Australia with her brother and then to a university there. She has worked in Australia and Hong Kong, where she married her Chinese husband from Hong Kong. Her son, Justin, was born and brought up in Hong Kong until he was seven years old. Subsequently the family moved from Hong Kong to London, where they settled down.

***Interviews explored topics related to attitudes
towards developing Chinese language and literacy.
Observations focused on literacy environments
and literacy resources in the families.***

This chapter draws on an ethnographic case-study approach to explore the rich linguistic and cultural practices of these transnational/immigrant families in the UK. Multiple home visits were carried out over a six-month period, and three sets of data were collected: 1) semi-structured interviews (with six parents and three grandparents), 2) participant observations (home visits and observations), and 3) recordings of literacy practice sessions. Interviews explored topics related to attitudes towards developing Chinese language and literacy. Observations focused on literacy environments and literacy resources in the families. Literacy practice sessions included eleven recorded conversations about learning Chinese, storytelling and homework sessions, which lasted from 2 to 60 minutes.

Because of space limitations, we have drawn on illustrative data to present the literacy resources that parents provided for their children, the first and second generations' broader perceptions of the Chinese language, and the structured and unstructured literacy activities in which they engaged their children.

Findings

Chinese literacy resources

Literacy resources are one of the most important aspects of a rich literacy environment. In all three families, our observational data included different types of resource related to literacy learning.

In Family A, Kylie provided her two sons with a variety of children's books, including 妈妈和我在一起 (*Mom and I Together*), 我开始学汉语了 (*I Begin to Learn Chinese*), 我的汉语我的家 (*My Chinese, My Family*), 我要买 '飞机' (*I Want to Buy an Airplane*) and 我想做律师 (*I Want to be a Lawyer*). Referring to the large supply of books, Kylie said, 'Although we speak mostly English, we have lots of Chinese books – geography, history, culture . . . and comics . . . So not only did my family buy them for the kids, but we also borrowed them from the libraries in some Chinese supplementary schools.' In addition to these printed resources, the children also had digital resources and apps in which they could access different types of literacy genre, including stories, idioms and poems.

Books are also abundant in Family B. Rebecca's three children have a little library containing books such as 简爱 (*Jane Eyre*), 三国演义 (*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), 一只叫凤的鸽子 (*A Very Special Pigeon*) and 皮皮鲁总动员-皮皮鲁分身记 (*The Pipi Lu series: Pipi Lu Does Everything*). Her daughters like Chinese poetry and stories very much. They can read independently with the help of a Chinese dictionary and Google translation. Commenting on the provision of Chinese books for children, Rebecca said:

I never stopped working on my children's Chinese. They have had a lot of books since childhood. Their grandmother and I bought a lot of books for them. These are all from Singapore. After I brought the books here, I said they took up space and should be given away, but they argued not to, instead, they started reading the books now.

Unlike the children in Family A and B, Justin in Family C had only one book in Chinese, 老夫子漫画 (*Old Master Q Comics*). But he watched a variety of Chinese shows, including a Chinese food and travel show.

These varieties of literacy resource may demonstrate parents' conscious decisions about developing their children's literacy, as reported in various studies (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia, 2018; Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2014). Both Kylie and Rebecca were conscious of their children's language environment because of their interethnic marriages. Jane's boarding-school experience may have led her to pay less conscious attention to home literacy resources, even though she and her husband are both of Chinese origin.

Adults' attitudes towards and ideologies about CHL maintenance

Much research into FLP has demonstrated that language ideology is the driving force underlying families' decisions about which language to maintain and which to let go (Curd-Christiansen, 2016). Our data revealed an unwavering consensus among all parents about developing their children's CHL. However, their attitudes towards and beliefs about the Chinese language varied.

In Family A, Kylie identified ethnicity and education as the two reasons for her children to learn and maintain CHL. She noted that although her children are of mixed race, and were born and brought up in the UK, she considered their Chinese ethnicity as part of their identity. In her words, 'some Chinese parents want their children to learn Chinese, not only to give them pride in being Chinese but also to show them the importance of understanding Chinese culture'. For her, to become Chinese it is vital that the children learn Chinese and have a good understanding of Chinese culture. Her conviction is in line with many studies in HL education (e.g. Lynch and Prins, 2022). To support his wife and children, her husband also took Chinese lessons. He said, 'Because my wife speaks Chinese, we need to learn Chinese.'

For her, to become Chinese it is vital that the children learn Chinese and have a good understanding of Chinese culture. Her conviction is in line with many studies in HL education.

From an educational perspective, Kylie believed that learning another language boosts brain power. Her own experience of multilingualism and her children's excellent academic performance led her to believe that maintaining CHL was the right pathway towards bilingualism: 'My kids are at the top of their class in school, so they have enough brain power to learn Chinese on top of their studies... There is no school available (because of the COVID-19 lockdown), so they have a lot more time to study Chinese.' Kylie observed her children's smooth transition from an English-dominated education system to a Chinese and English

translanguaging home education system. This reinforced her conviction that bilingualism does not have a detrimental effect on children's learning. This has also been observed by researchers who found that during the pandemic, children not only spent more time with their parents but were also more exposed to their HL (Hardach, 2020).

In Family B, Rebecca also wanted her children to understand Chinese culture and be proficient in Chinese. She explained, 'For Chinese, I am totally able to help him. If one day he left for university and his Chinese is still not well-developed, then I will feel that I have not done my duty.' Similar views have been reported in other studies (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Zhang, 2010), which show that Chinese parents tend to feel highly responsible for their children's HL and educational development. Rebecca believed that learning Chinese needs to include a high level of proficiency in literacy:

The level I can help them reach is to be able to communicate, to be able to [take] A-Level in Chinese, to talk to people and say I have A-Level in Chinese. No matter what [Chinese] is for, job or qualification, you can write 'proficiency, not perfection in Chinese'. At the very least, [they] can write that they have a [certain] level, no need to write perfection, but with proficiency in Chinese.

To Rebecca, developing the HL is more than just passing on a language that children can speak and understand; it is important to develop a degree of literacy. Her determination has changed her husband's attitude since they moved to the UK: as he remarked, 'I thought before that Chinese was difficult for the kids, but then I began thinking it would be good for them to learn one more language'.

In Family C, like Kylie and Rebecca, Jane also believes that culture is an important aspect of CHL maintenance: 'I feel that having one more language means having one more cultural background. Only by understanding Chinese culture can children communicate smoothly and not be misunderstood.' But unlike Family A and B, Jane believed that oral communication skills were more important than literacy skills. Her husband confirmed that 'we speak English, some Cantonese and Mandarin at home, but Justin needs to speak Mandarin to communicate with more Chinese. It's good for him'. For both parents, oral communication was sufficient for Justin as an HL speaker. Jane acknowledged that she did not have the patience to teach her son Chinese literacy (reading and writing) at home, nor did she want to burden him too much.

Although Jane considered that developing the HL was inseparable from learning the culture, she also emphasized the competitive edge that Chinese could bring to Justin in the future workplace: 'If he can speak Chinese, he can have the opportunity to work in Hong Kong or mainland China, which is an additional opportunity'.

Expectations and literacy practices

Raising bilingual children has become the goal of many parents in recent years. Within a family, however, there may be different expectations for children's HL between generations, leading to different literacy practices.

In Family A, Kylie helped her two sons read one or two stories on *AI Reading*, an app for native Chinese children to develop reading comprehension through Chinese stories and characters. Acknowledging her limitations in Chinese simplified characters,⁷ Kylie said, 'I'm more proficient in English. I don't know a lot of simplified characters and what the poems mean. And it takes a lot of time to explain these to them, so I correct their pronunciation and intonation.' Kylie knew that the correction may seem harsh and 'overdoing it', but she believed that strict corrections laid the foundation for building basic literacy skills and developing reading fluency and automaticity in Chinese.

Mrs Huang, the grandmother, who is a retired teacher of Chinese, disagreed with such practices. From her perspective, 'The boys don't get a chance to practise or talk to anyone. When I read with them on the app, I want to explain the meaning of the words first. But at the same time, I don't want to disharmonize the relationship between us by overdoing my role as a teacher.'

According to Mrs Huang, it is important to teach 'proper' academic Chinese. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, she had given each child extra Chinese tutorials, including GCSE tuition and checking Chinese supplementary school homework as well as AI reading stories.

Rebecca was a serious teacher who expected her children not only to speak with the correct tones and pronunciation but also to write well.

The data in this study illustrate the different expectations of the two generations, as well as highlighting the potential role of grandparents as HL teachers and socialization agents (Curd-Christiansen, 2013; Ren and Hu, 2013).

In Family B, when it came to teaching Chinese to the children, the roles of Rebecca and her mother, Mrs Hua, were the opposite of Family A's. Rebecca was a serious teacher who expected her children not only to speak with the

7 The Chinese writing system has two types of character, classic and simplified. In Taiwan and Hong Kong classic characters are used, whereas in mainland China and Singapore simplified characters are used.

correct tones⁸ and pronunciation but also to write well. In one excerpt, she is working with Stella on her composition (M: mother; S: Stella).

M: [reading S's writing] I admire my mother. She was born in 1969 and lives in England . . . You should write this word bigger, how could your teacher read such a small character? Mum is 165 centimetres tall. Should be height, right? It's informal to say '165 centimetres tall' (in Chinese). You can't write '165 high'. Write 'her height is 165 centimetres'.

S: [modifying the sentence]

M: [checking her sentence] It's not height, it's 'Mother's height'.

S: [adding one more character before 'height']

M: Yes, that's the way to go. [Reading] With long black hair. You should write 'black' first, (then) long hair.

S: [repeats while writing in her notebook] . . .

This activity clearly showed Rebecca's role as a conscientious teacher of literacy. She corrected every error without any compromise. Her mother, on the other hand, behaved like a caring grandmother who did not teach directly. When communicating with the children through social media, she deliberately wrote in Chinese. She believed that learning Chinese should take place in social interactions, saying:

For example, on Mother's Day they (children) made me a card. I WeChat (Chinese social media app) them, I wrote in Chinese, 'My darling, thank you for your well-made card. The characters are also beautifully written!' I want them to read more Chinese. . .

I never say a word of English in front of them. Rebecca doesn't teach them anything about our wonderful culture and etiquette. I hope they learn more. . .

The examples above illustrate the two generations' different perceptions and methods of teaching HL. While Rebecca emphasized formal classroom pedagogy, Mrs Hua believed in the power of cultural socialization through implicit learning. Although they had conflicting expectations of how HL should be learned, the data reflected their concerted efforts to develop children's literacy in Chinese.

In Family C, Justin's Chinese became weaker after moving to the UK. It has become challenging for him to communicate frequently and fluently with his grandparents, his mother Jane explained, so she decided to enrol him in weekly private Chinese

8 Mandarin is a tonal language with many homophones, which means that the pitch or intonation of a given Chinese word will often decide its meaning.

tutoring and helped him with his Chinese homework. During these homework sessions, she used English instead of Chinese to help him. When encountering complex characters and sentences, instead of asking Justin to read and translate them into English, she read to Justin to stop him from making mistakes.

Far away, in mainland China and Hong Kong, Justin's grandparents kept communicating with him by sending Chinese texts and emojis in their WhatsApp and WeChat family groups. Although both generations believe that learning Chinese is important, communication between family members is more important than the specific languages used. The grandfather, Mr Chen, said, 'It's good that (Justin) can speak Chinese, and it doesn't matter if he can't. I also speak mixed languages. Sometimes I speak Mandarin if I want to, and I do the same with his mother.' To Jane and Mr Chen, multilingualism is inevitable in the family, since all its members have a rich linguistic repertoire. The danger is that unless he continues to learn and use Mandarin, it could disappear from Justin's language repertoire, as is already indicated by his weak oral Chinese.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has studied three transnational Chinese families, two interethnic and one Chinese ethnic, regarding their attitudes towards and expectations of their children's CHL and literacy development. The study reveals several commonalities and differences.

First, all three families have positive attitudes towards Chinese language development, reflected in their ideological beliefs that learning Chinese can help children connect with their cultural heritage and reinforce the formation of their ethnic identity. This view of language-identity linkages is consistent with the observation of Francis, Archer and Mau (2014, p. 213) that "'races" labelled as "Chinese" are expected to exhibit "Sinicness"⁹ constructed in imaginary communities', particularly by 're-producing/producing Chinese'. In the adults' view, such 're-producing Chinese' is inseparable from cultural socialization through language use and communication. As Francis, Archer and Mau (2014, p. 214) put it, 'it seems to be assumed that ... as "Chinese" ... there is an obligation to learn or speak Chinese'. Thus, this social assumption of a language-identity bond imposes a parental obligation to ensure that children learn Chinese.

However, despite the commonalities in their positive views of learning Chinese, the focus on developing Chinese skills and the literacy resources provided for the children vary. In Family A and B, literacy skills are emphasized in addition to oral communication. The mothers and grandparents are conscious of the children's HL development, resulting in their active involvement in their children's

9 'Chineseness' or something characteristic of or peculiar to the Chinese.

literacy practices. The fact that both families are intermarried could have been a determining factor in their conscious decision to develop their children's HL, so that a strong foundation in Chinese could provide the children with a resource for understanding their mixed-race background. In Family C, literacy resources are rare

***In all three families the first generation
(grandparents) plays a key role in the
children's HL development.***

and Chinese language use and literacy practices are inconsistent. Although both parents are ethnic Chinese, they do not see literacy skills as a vital component of HL development. The emphasis on developing only oral communication skills could be partly due to the grandparents' satisfaction with communicating with Justin in different languages and by different means (voice messages and emojis), and partly because of their 'pure' ethnicity. The latter may be related to their unconscious awareness of the fact that because they are Chinese and live in China, the Chinese language will not disappear. If so, the ethnic composition and current location of family members across different generations will have influenced the parent generation's perspectives and expectations of the third generation's HL.

Second, in all three families the first generation (grandparents) plays a key role in the children's HL development. This supports recent studies that give growing recognition to grandparents in their role as heritage language 'teachers', literacy mediators and cultural socialization agents (Curdtt-Christiansen, 2013; Ren and Hu, 2013).

Regarding the 'teaching roles', our data reveal nuances in the grandparents' active participation. Mrs Huang in Family A highlighted formal literacy in HL development, explicitly taking on the teacher's role. Mrs Hua in Family B believed in implicit learning through language socialization, and consequently tried to create a natural environment for children to read and learn Chinese. Mr Chen in Family C considered communication more important than the language itself, and as a result his expectations for Justin's HL were moderate.

This chapter demonstrates that HL development is complex, and that HL literacy practices are constantly changing and being negotiated in the process of children's identity formation and their linguistic ecology. Much remains to be learned about the relationship between family literacy practice in third-generation children and their HL environment. Future research may focus more on mixed-marriage second-generation families who exhibit different levels of investment in CHL maintenance and culture at home, in order to understand their concerns, aspirations and expectations in relation to their own experiences of HL maintenance and development.

References

- Anderson, J., Anderson, A. and Sadiq, A. (2017) 'Family literacy programmes and young children's language and literacy development: paying attention to families' home language', *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3–4), pp. 644–654. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1211119>.
- Baker, C. (ed.) (2011) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Canagarajah, S. (2011) 'Translanguaging in the classroom: emerging issues for research and pedagogy', *Applied Linguistics Review*, 2(1), pp. 1–28.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. (2009) 'Invisible and visible language planning: Ideological factors in the family language policy of Chinese immigrant families in Quebec', *Language policy*, 8(4), pp. 351–375.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. (2013) '潜移默化 – Implicit learning and imperceptible influence: syncretic literacy of multilingual Chinese children', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 13(3), pp. 348–370. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798412455819>.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. (2016) 'Conflicting language ideologies and contradictory language practices in Singaporean multilingual families', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(7), pp. 694–709.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. (2018) 'Family language policy', in J.W. Tollefson and M. Pérez-Milans (eds) *The Oxford handbook of language policy and planning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 420–441.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. (2020) 'Educating migrant children in England: language and educational practices in home and school environments', *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 14(2), pp. 163–180. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2020.1732524>.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. and La Morgia, F. (2018) 'Managing heritage language development: opportunities and challenges for Chinese, Italian and Pakistani Urdu-speaking families in the UK', *Multilingua*, 37(2), pp. 177–200.
- Francis, B., Archer, L. and Mau, A. (2009) 'Language as capital, or language as identity? Chinese complementary school pupils' perspectives on the purposes and benefits of complementary schools', *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(4), pp. 519–538.
- Francis, B., Mau, A. and Archer, L. (2014) 'Speaking of identity? Learning Chinese in diasporic communities: many pathways to being Chinese', in, pp. 203–218.

- Gregory, E. (2004) '“Invisible” teachers of literacy: collusion between siblings and teachers in creating classroom cultures', *Literacy*, 38(2), pp. 97–105.
- Gregory, E., Long, S. and Volk, D. (2004) *Many pathways to literacy: young children learning with siblings, grandparents, peers and communities*. London: Routledge.
- Hardach, S. (2020) 'In quarantine children pick up parents' mother tongues', *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/10/parenting/family-second-language-coronavirus.html>.
- Jarrett, R.L., Hamilton, M.B. and Coba-Rodriguez, S. (2015) '“So we would all help pitch in”: the family literacy practices of low-income African American mothers of preschoolers', *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 57, pp. 81–93.
- Li, W. (2007) 'Chinese', in D. Britain (ed.) *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 308–324.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Montrul, S. (2019) 'How learning context shapes heritage and second language acquisition', in M. Dressman and R.W. Sadler (eds) *The handbook of informal language learning*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 57–74.
- ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2021) *Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021*.
- Piller, I. and Gerber, L. (2018) 'Family language policy between the bilingual advantage and the monolingual mindset', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(5), pp. 622–635. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1503227>.
- Remennick, L. (2017) 'Generation 1.5 of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel and in Germany', in L. Isurin and C.M. Riehl (eds) *Integration, identity and language maintenance in young immigrants: Russian Germans or German Russians*, pp. 69–98.
- Ren, L. and Hu, G. (2013) 'Prolepsis, syncretism, and synergy in early language and literacy practices: A case study of family language policy in Singapore', *Language Policy*, 12, pp. 63–82.
- Rumbaut, R.G. (1994) 'The crucible within: ethnic identity, self-esteem, and segmented assimilation among children of immigrants', *International Migration Review*, 28(4), pp. 748–794.
- Rumbaut, R.G. (1997) 'Paradoxes (and orthodoxies) of assimilation', *Sociological Perspectives*, 40(3), pp. 483–511.

- Schwartz, M. and Verschik, A. (2013) 'Achieving success in family language policy: Parents, children and educators in interaction', in M. Schwartz and A. Vershnik (eds) *Successful family language policy: parents, children and educators in interaction*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 1–20.
- Sénéchal, M. and LeFevre, J.A. (2014) 'Continuity and change in the home literacy environment as predictors of growth in vocabulary and reading', *Child Development*, 85(4), pp. 1552–1568.
- Spolsky, B. (2012) 'Family language policy – the critical domain', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 33(1), pp. 3–11.
- Zhang, J. (2010) 'Parental attitudes toward Mandarin maintenance in Arizona: an examination of immigrants from the People's Republic of China', *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 7(4), pp. 237–269.
- Zhu, H. (2008) 'Duelling languages, duelling values: Codeswitching in bilingual intergenerational conflict talk in diasporic families', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40, pp. 1799–1816.
- Zhu, H. and Li, W. (2020) 'Translanguaging, identity, and migration', in J. Jackson (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*. London: Routledge, pp. 234–248.

Section 6

FILL in Latin

America and

the Caribbean



Chapter 16

Exploring the role of information and communication technologies in family and intergenerational literacy and learning in the Caribbean

Arlene Bailey

Introduction

FILL is key to parental and family involvement in education, as well as to the achievement of the SDGs, in particular SDG 4 – ‘Ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning for all’ (World Education Forum, 2015). In the Caribbean, the importance of family learning and literacy has been highlighted over the years, for example through the Family Learning Programme (Caribbean Child Support Initiative, 2010). Such programmes focus on various areas: for example, the Insights in Jamaica programme gives attention to temperament and behaviour and works with children, parents and teachers (Hardacre and Kinkead-Clark, 2019). The programmes also involve various forms of collaboration and motivation; for example, the Cash Transfer Plus programme is linked to the national Family Learning Programme in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (UNICEF, n.d.; 2022).

As Caribbean societies work towards the attainment of the SDGs, the role of information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) is a key component, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (2022, p. 6) states that ‘Lifelong learning is key to overcoming these global challenges and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals’. UIL (2022) emphasizes the potential benefits of technologies for facilitating education and lifelong learning through intergenerational approaches in family and community spaces, and the need to support vulnerable groups with focused initiatives to provide open access to digital resources and skills.

Lynch and Prins (2022) point out that the concept of family literacy is multifaceted: 'It refers both to how families learn and use literacy in their daily lives and to intergenerational programs or activities that seek to enhance parents' and young children's educational, language, and literacy development and/or to foster parental involvement in education' (p. ix). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have played a role in intergenerational learning, as younger and older people interact to navigate and assist each other within the digital space. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the transition to digital tools to support a range of social, economic and educational activities, including online, remote and blended teaching and learning. ICTs, digital access and digital literacies were important facilitators of the different forms of learning, both supporting the transition and revealing the digital divide and challenges to be overcome (Kaiper-Marquez et al., 2020). A UNESCO Education Sector issue note (2020, p. 1) states that 'In the context of distance and online education, the family more than ever constitutes a learning space, in which parents and caregivers act as primary guides to support their children's learning at home.' Access to digital content and devices can support the continuation of FILL, which will help to mitigate the COVID-19 'slide' and learning loss that has resulted from the pandemic (Angel-Urdinola, Stolt and Miorelli, 2021; Loop News, 2022; McLean and Clymer, 2021). In addition, digital skills are part of an integrated approach to literacy, including life skills to support education for sustainable development, job skills and lifelong learning (Zholdoshalieva et al., 2021).

Existing and new initiatives to enhance ICT access, skills and usage have been implemented at the regional, national, community and individual levels in the Caribbean.

As ICT usage has increased, the generation gap in usage, as well as intergenerational interactions that have helped to bridge the gap and enhance media and digital literacy and inclusion, have been observed by researchers and have become issues for public discussion. Existing and new initiatives to enhance ICT access, skills and usage have been implemented at the regional, national, community and individual levels in the Caribbean. Family and intergenerational interactions involving ICTs have been supported by individual or home-based access to devices, community access points such as libraries and community centres that have provided devices and internet connectivity, and by public Wi-Fi hotspots.

This chapter explores FILL as a result of, and a support for, the increased utilization of ICTs in several spheres of educational, social and economic activity in the Caribbean, particularly in response to the pandemic. Through content analysis of news articles, online posts, project reports and academic literature, it

discusses how older and younger generations – parents, caregivers and children – interacted with each other and with the supporting technologies to improve learning and capabilities. It analyses informal intergenerational learning practices across Caribbean countries, as adults and children navigated online learning platforms as well as work from home and remote schooling policies implemented as a result of the pandemic. Societal implications and the role of ICTs and social networks as the Caribbean works towards the achievement of SDG 4 are also discussed. The next sections discuss related literature, followed by an overview of the methodology, analysis and discussion of themes and implications for research, policy and practice.

Literature overview

Parental involvement in education supports children's literacy levels (Yildirim and Roopnarine, 2017). In response to the emergence of the pandemic, stakeholders, including parents, caregivers and children, collaborated to adapt to and support remote and online teaching and learning, given available resources (Bleeker and Crowder, 2022). With the need for their increased involvement in children's activities, parents sought to balance the challenges of coordinating work obligations with additional responsibilities at home (UNESCO, 2020). Some of the challenges facing parents were lack of familiarity with the subject-matter and insufficient availability of time and resources, including electronic devices to support multiple users in the home (Azevedo et al., 2020). Parker and Alfaro (2021) also noted that some 'teachers are parents too', which faced them with multiple roles in managing their online classes as teachers and online schooling for their children. Participatory approaches in the design of FILL programmes also assisted in empowering parents through their involvement in the programmes (Hardacre and Kinkead-Clark, 2019; Thompson et al., 2022). In some cases, supporting technologies were utilized, such as the introduction of the bank card to support the cash transfer programme and collaboration with the national Family Learning Programme in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (UNICEF, n.d.).

In Jamaica, the Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) noted that voice technologies were sometimes used by teachers to support parents with lower literacy levels in outlining learning activities for their children (CAPRI, 2021). Some students were able to assist their parents in reading the material sent from the school. Vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities or students with special needs may not have had the required technologies or assistance at home to support continued learning during the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). UNICEF (2020) highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on migrant children in Trinidad and Tobago, and efforts to increase parental involvement in children's learning, including facilitating the use of Equal Place, an online platform to support learning when physical child-friendly spaces were unavailable.

In Jamaica and the wider Caribbean, community access points and community telecentres for internet and other technology support had been supporting intergenerational interactions for some time, as younger people helped older relatives or community members navigate online spaces, or older people assisted younger ones with technical knowledge or life skills (Bailey and Ngwenyama, 2010). With the pandemic and limited access to community spaces, there were increased initiatives to provide community Wi-Fi hotspots and support household access to the internet through mobile devices. These initiatives were implemented by government agencies across the region, including Universal Service Funds, organizations providing e-learning support, and collaborations with the private sector and NGOs.

Fulfilling SDG 4 requires multidisciplinary approaches and collaboration, as well as exploring how to sustain and expand initiatives to achieve the SDGs given the global crisis resulting from the pandemic. The rapid rollout of ICT initiatives to support remote working, distance or online learning, e-government, e-commerce and telehealth facilities has also revealed gaps in access, skills and usage, including varying levels of digital and broadband connectivity and access and usage gaps related to socio-economic status, age and geographic location.

This report described initiatives to provide devices, content, training and support for teaching, learning and research capabilities, including internet access for schools and households with limited resources.

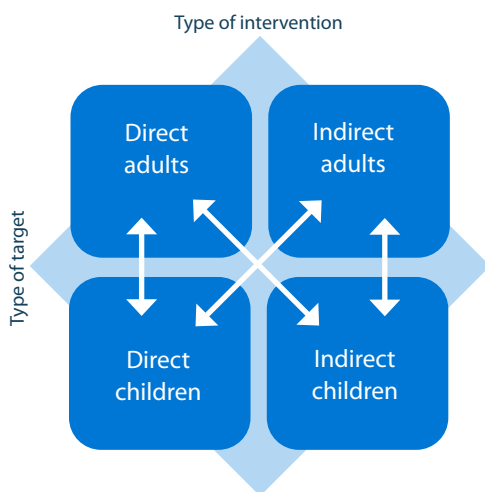
Since ICTs contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, it is necessary to take account of equity and digital and social inclusion in the provision of services (ECLAC, 2021). Recent comprehensive assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on socio-economic development in the Caribbean, and the implications for the SDGs, have highlighted the integral role of ICT4D (UNDP, 2021).

Antigua and Barbuda, in a 2021 Voluntary National Review (VNR) report on the SDGs, emphasized reducing inequalities through programmes focusing on increasing access to and support with utilizing technology and improving technological readiness (Government of Antigua and Barbuda, 2021). This report described initiatives to provide devices, content, training and support for teaching, learning and research capabilities, including internet access for schools and households with limited resources.

Nickse (1993, p. 52) outlines a typology for family and intergenerational literacy programmes (*Figure 1*). The typology includes interactions between adults and children both within and outside the family, with direct and indirect interactions related to literacy and learning. In this chapter, the typology is extended to

informal interactions – activities outside programmes, initiated either by participants or externally – which result in family or intergenerational learning. Type 1 interactions (Direct adults/Direct children) connect related adults and children, such as when parents and children read together. Type 2 interactions (Indirect adults/Indirect children) connect adults and children who may not be related, such as participants in community- or school-based programmes. Type 3 interactions connect adults alone, with follow-up interactions with children, while Type 4 interactions connect children alone, with follow-up interactions and literacy and learning benefits with their parents.

Figure 1. Typology of FILL interventions and targets



Source: Nickse, 1990, p. 52.

Method and context

This chapter is based on a systematic review of news articles and resource materials regarding FILL in the Caribbean and the utilization of ICTs, with particular focus on the situation arising from the pandemic. I conducted online searches using a combination of terms (family literacy, family learning, parent, literacy, technology, parent/teacher, computer/laptop, internet, intergenerational, COVID-19, Caribbean and names of specific countries). The subsequent review explored FILL activities and the ways in which ICTs supported the initiatives or were needed to support the interactions or implementations.

The use of manual content analysis was a feasible approach for the review given the manageable number of resulting articles and the importance of the socio-cultural contexts being explored (Lewis, Zamith and Hermida, 2013). The review of

online news sources provided an illustration of the coverage of FILL-related topics in the media (Azevedo, Demombynes and Ning Wong, 2023).

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic represents a timeframe in which there were increased opportunities and support for family interactions and FILL in the Caribbean.

Provisions and measures taken by Caribbean countries to support online and other distance learning during the pandemic are shown in *Figure 2* (Bleeker and Crowder, 2022).

Figure 2. Overview of education measures taken by ECLAC member countries during the COVID-19 pandemic

COUNTRY	SUSPENSION OF CLASSES	PROVISION OF TOOLS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING	DISSEMINATION OF ICT EQUIPMENT TO LEARNERS	PROVISION OF BROADBAND SERVICES TO LEARNERS	MAINTENANCE OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES	PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
Antigua and Barbuda	X					
The Bahamas	X	X	X			
Barbados	X	X	X	X		X
Belize	X	X	X		X	
Cuba	X	X				
Dominica	X	X				X
Dominican Republic	X	X	X		X	
Grenada	X	X				X
Guyana	X	X	X	X		X
Haiti	X	X				X
Jamaica	X	X	X	X	X	X
Saint Kitts and Nevis	X				X	
Saint Lucia	X	X				
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	X	X				
Suriname	X	X				
Trinidad and Tobago	X	X	X	X		X

Source: Bleeker and Crowder (2022), p. 16.

Findings

Activities

The analysis revealed that FILL involved parents and children learning effective ways to plan educational activities and learn together for extended periods. Families searched the internet for instructional videos on various subjects, including arts, crafts, cooking and games, in online and in-person forms. These activities supplemented both the formal curriculum and informal learning, particularly in the initial stages of the pandemic when schools were physically closed and learning transitioned to online alternatives (George, 2020).

For example, the Caribbean Institute for Health Research (CAIHR) developed a parent manual to guide play and language learning activities for parents and young children. The manual also included suggestions as to how the content could be delivered using ICTs such as radio, phone calls and social network applications, including WhatsApp and text messaging (CAIHR, 2020).

In Dominica, the Early Learners Programme, supported by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), implemented an interactive programme for students and parents. Through monthly in-person parent sessions, teachers provided parents with learning activities to share with children at home. The parents were also exposed to the activities that students would normally experience at school. The programme in its initial format has formally ended across the region. One of the key outputs was reading material, locally produced by a range of authors from different age groups, for use in intergenerational learning and literacy. Technology has been used to conduct the online assessments and future participation in activities related to the original programme.

Access to devices and online content

The lack of devices was a key challenge reported by some families. To provide support for obtaining digital devices, initiatives from government and non-governmental organizations across the Caribbean sought to identify the needs of schools, parents and students in online learning (Phillips, 2021). Some governments introduced programmes to assist with internet access at home or via community Wi-Fi hotspots (e.g. UNDP, 2023). In other cases, family members shared devices, especially when parents and children were working or studying remotely. The literature highlights the role of parents in navigating the new online platforms and helping children to adjust to online learning.

A range of ICT responses to the pandemic accelerated support for distance/e-learning for students in Caribbean countries. The design and implementation of these initiatives varied and evolved based on factors such as demographic characteristics, geographic location, resource availability and sustainability. For example, some initiatives focused on the provision of community access points with on-site assistance from community members, while others focused on the provision of individual tablets. Initiatives included the distribution of digital devices, online platforms for educational material (including synchronous or asynchronous class sessions), provision of curriculum content on television or radio, and support for household internet access (ECLAC, 2021). Responses have also included the establishing of free Wi-Fi hotspots to facilitate internet access (Jamaica Information Service, 2022). With the return of in-person school interactions, there were renewed commitments to establish additional community access points to support internet access and homework assistance needs.

Existing partnerships with local organizations supported efforts to provide remote learning during the pandemic.

Some programmes have been initiated through existing partnerships or new collaborations with members of the Caribbean diaspora. In Dominica, long-term partnerships take a ‘whole-of-society’ approach, resulting in sustainable ICT4D initiatives which are supporting different dimensions of the SDGs. In St Lucia, some diasporic groups have donated tablets and refurbished computers (OECS, 2021). Given the rapid deployment, usage skills have been primarily acquired in practice, illustrating that FILL approaches can assist with computer skills and the use of these skills to support educational, social and economic activities.

Existing partnerships with local organizations supported efforts to provide remote learning during the pandemic. For example, an ICT4D initiative in Haiti provided tablets to support education and ICT training courses for women. As part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives, local technology companies in Haiti donated devices and supported efforts to improve connectivity (Koppikar, 2020).

Tablets continue to be provided by a range of stakeholders to enhance education and sustainable development, for example in the coordination of Adopt-A-School programmes in the region, with themes pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development such as No Child Left Behind and One Tablet or Laptop per Child. ‘Bring your own device’ initiatives have also been established. In St Vincent and the Grenadines, a supplementary programme was launched by the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission to provide internet access to students who had received tablets from the government but did not have internet access at home (SVG National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, 2021).

Prioritizing support for the most marginalized and vulnerable communities during the pandemic became even more critical. In this regard, development partners have provided support, focusing on the SDGs that are furthered through the initiative. For example, the International Organization for Migration in Trinidad and Tobago provided tablets to both citizens and migrant children, noting the importance of enabling the participation and inclusion of migrants in the education system (IOM, 2022).

Assistance for vulnerable people is key, particularly people with disabilities. In Dominica, for example, the International Telecommunications Union donated assistive ICT devices for people with disabilities. In Trinidad and Tobago, provisions for students with special needs included accessible content through features of the learning platform, as well as guidance, counselling and special education officers to support students and their parents (Bleeker and Crowder, 2022).

Parental involvement in supporting family learning

The findings of this study reveal that many parents adopted wider online teaching and learning roles during the pandemic lockdowns. Family learning took place as parents and children worked together on completing lessons and assignments. For example, a school in Dominica created individualized learning plans for students, with support from parents who dedicated time each day to work through the material (Mélange, n.d.). In Guyana, parents played key roles as intermediaries in guiding the curriculum (Solomon and Clancy, 2021). Parents in the hinterlands would go to the schools for guidance, refresher sessions and instructional workshops with the teachers on core subject areas. They would then seek to transfer this knowledge through lessons at home with their children (Solomon and Clancy, 2021). The STEMGuyana organization embarked on helping parents and students with English, mathematics and science in Grades 1 to 10 through an online ‘parent academy’ (Village Voice News, 2022). Its ‘Parents learn then teach’ activities were supported by the members of the Guyana diaspora who acted as remote tutors. STEMGuyana collaborated with some development partners, the private sector, government agencies and parents to establish ‘learning pods’ for students, with online access as well as technical and instructional support.

The Department of Youth Affairs’ Literacy Programme in Antigua provides teachers and students with literacy resource materials and activities. During the pandemic, they had a special focus on providing resources to parents for learning at home. The programme continues to seek to identify volunteers as well as provide financial support for tutors and access to online learning platforms.

The Early Readers Pilot Programme in Grenada, in partnership with Literacy Links and stakeholders including local and overseas collaborators, focused on parental and community involvement in developing family literacy and learning and facilitated both online and on-site activities during the pandemic (Now Grenada, 2021).

In Jamaica, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, through the National Parenting Support Commission, has built on an earlier pilot programme, 'Literacy is a Family Experience', to roll out a literacy programme for parents in seven parishes. The programme recognizes and echoes UNESCO's (2020) observation that the home is now a learning space, and that parental skills and involvement are necessary to assist with children's educational development and support learning in cases where internet access is limited. The programme, in partnership with the National Literacy Programme, operates both online and through Parent Places, a physical location.

As face-to-face classes resumed and students returned to school, parents were also called upon to assist with the transition.

All these examples illustrate elements of the typology shown in *Figure 1*. The guidance given by teachers to parents on how to assist their children represents Type 3, indirect with parents. The interaction between parents and children reflects Type 1, family and intergenerational learning. When parents, teachers or other adults assist children in their community, this illustrates Type 2, intergenerational learning.

Feelings of loss by both parents and children, including loss of routine, school social connections, and familiar modes of learning and interaction, may have affected literacy and learning for some of the students in the current cohort who experienced the lockdowns and adjustments to online schooling during the pandemic (Ghent, 2020). In Trinidad and Tobago, Moms for Literacy has been focusing on providing carefully customized reading programmes for children over the years and was able to expand online during the pandemic and to provide emotional support (Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2022). The 'Moms' Approach to Reading' programme is directed at students, parents and teachers, and is aligned with UNESCO's 2022 International Literacy Day Theme of 'Transforming Literacy Learning Spaces' (Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2022).

As face-to-face classes resumed and students returned to school, parents were also called upon to assist with the transition. In Jamaica, for example, where a number of teachers migrated to accept teaching opportunities overseas and

retired teachers resumed classroom teaching, parents were asked to assist with sensitizing their children to the important role and contribution that retired teachers could make in the classroom (Ferguson, 2022a, 2022b).

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the role of ICTs in formal and informal modes of FILL. The pandemic accelerated the need for navigating online spaces and revealed the critical role of family support in school-related and out-of-school learning activities. The programmatic examples from the literature have implications for further enhancement and support of FILL through research, practice and policy.

Although the Caribbean region has drawn on its resilience to cope with the pandemic and embark on recovery, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has warned that ‘The implementation of the 2030 Agenda is at stake and decades of progress in human development are at risk of being reversed if more attention is not given to supporting Caribbean countries in their pursuit of sustainable development’ (Barbados Government Information Service, 2020). The technological challenges have been emphasized by stakeholders, along with the need for ICTs to support development initiatives for achieving the SDGs and to overcome social, economic and environmental challenges.

Enhancing awareness of FILL programmes and localizing the SDGs will continue to be important in Caribbean societies. The SDGs continue to provide targets for increased connectivity, accessibility and inclusion to support FILL, as well as digital learning spaces, while mitigating inequities so that the vulnerable are not left behind, as the world works towards achieving sustainable development.

References

- Angel-Urdinola, D., Stolt, D. and Miorelli, R. (2021) ‘Regional priorities for skills and technical education in the Eastern Caribbean states amid COVID-19’, *World Bank Blogs*. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/regional-priorities-skills-and-technical-education-eastern-caribbean-states-amid-covid>.
- Azevedo, J. *et al.* (2020) *Simulating the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on schooling and learning outcomes: a set of global estimates*. World Bank Group. Available at: <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/798061592482682799/covid-and-education-June17-r6.pdf>.

- Azevedo, J., Demombynes, G. and Ning Wong, Y. (2023) 'Why hasn't the pandemic sparked more concern for learning losses in Latin America? The perils of an invisible crisis', *World Bank Blogs*. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/why-hasnt-pandemic-sparked-more-concern-learning-losses-latin-america-perils-invisible>.
- Bailey, A. and Ngwenyama, O. (2010) 'Bridging the generation gap in ICT use: interrogating identity, technology and interactions in community telecentres', *Information Technology for Development*, 16(1), pp. 62–82.
- Barbados Government Information Service (2020) *Attention must be paid to issues facing Caribbean*. Available at: <https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/attention-must-be-paid-to-issues-facing-caribbean/>.
- Bleeker, A. and Crowder, R. (2022) *Selected online learning experiences in the Caribbean during COVID-19*. Santiago: ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) Sub-regional Headquarters for the Caribbean.
- CAIHR (Caribbean Institute for Health Research) (2020) *CAIHR researchers share parent manual for playing with toddlers while at home during lockdown*. CAIHR, University of the West Indies. Available at: <https://uwi.edu/caihr/media/pg-parentingmanual.php>.
- CAPRI (Caribbean Policy Research Institute) (2021) *Time out: the impact of COVID-19 on education*. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep56939>.
- Caribbean Child Support Initiative (2010) *Statement: Caribbean needs to embrace family learning as we celebrate International Literacy Day*. Available at: <https://dominicanewsonline.com/news/homepage/news/educationyouth/statement-caribbean-needs-to-embrace-family-learning-as-we-celebrate-international-literacy-day/>.
- ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2021) *Building forward better: action to strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Santiago: ECLAC. Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46696/1/S2100124_en.pdf.
- Ferguson, A. (2022a) *Mixed reactions to call for retired teachers to return to school*. Available at: <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20220831/mixed-reactions-call-retired-teachers-return-school>.
- Ferguson, A. (2022b) *JTA on board with recruiting retired teachers*. Available at: <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20220823/jta-board-recruiting-retired-teachers>.

- George, E. (2020) *Coping with COVID-19 for parents at home*. Available at: <https://antiguaobserver.com/coping-with-covid-19-for-parents-at-home/>.
- Ghent, I. (2020) *Helping parents support their children during online learning*. Available at: <https://tt.loopnews.com/content/helping-parents-support-their-children-during-online-learning>.
- Hardacre, C. and Kinhead-Clark, Z. (2019) 'Authentic family learning: reconceptualizing intergenerational education initiatives in Jamaica and England through cross-cultural conversation', *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 44(5), pp. 85–102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs00019336>.
- IOM (International Organization for Migration) (2022) *IOM Distributes 200 Tablets to At-Risk and Migrant Children*. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-distributes-200-tablets-risk-and-migrant-children>.
- Jamaica Information Service (2021) 'Hundreds Of Students to Receive Tablets Donated by the Diaspora', 16 February. Available at: <https://jis.gov.jm/hundreds-of-students-to-receive-tablets-donated-by-the-diaspora/>.
- Kaiper-Marquez, A. et al. (2020) 'On the fly: adapting quickly to emergency remote instruction in a family literacy programme', *International Review of Education*, 66(5), pp. 691–713.
- Koppikar, P. (2020) *Technology development in Haiti*. Available at: <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/technology-development-in-haiti/>.
- Lewis, S.C., Zamith, R. and Hermida, A. (2013) 'Content analysis in an era of big data: a hybrid approach to computational and manual methods', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(1), pp. 34–52.
- Loop News (2022) *Caribbean educators discuss learning loss, recovery after COVID*. Available at: <https://jamaica.loopnews.com/content/caribbean-educators-discuss-learning-loss-recovery-after-covid>.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- McLean, E.L. and Clymer, C.D. (2021) *What we learned yesterday will guide us today: how family literacy programs can address the COVID-19 slide*. Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614552.pdf>.
- Mélange (n.d.) *Achieving learning success through parent collaboration (on the Caribbean Island of Dominica)*. Available at: <https://melangeandco.com/achieving-learning-success-through-parent-collaboration/>.

- Nickse, R. (1990) *Family and intergenerational literacy programs: an update of 'The Noises of Literacy'*. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED327736.pdf>.
- Nickse, R. (1993) 'A typology of family and intergenerational literacy programs: implications for evaluation', *Viewpoints*, 15(3), pp. 4–40.
- Now Grenada (2021) *Pilot literacy programme strengthens early-childhood capacity*. Available at: <https://nowgrenada.com/2021/07/pilot-literacy-programme-strengthens-early-childhood-capacity/>.
- OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) (2021) *OECS partners with USAID and Spirit of America to provide Saint Lucian students with tablet devices*. Available at: <https://pressroom.oecs.org/oecs-partners-with-usaid-and-spirit-of-america-to-provide-underprivileged-saint-lucian-students-with-tablet-devices>.
- Parker, M. and Alfaro, P. (2021) *Education during the COVID-19 pandemic: access, inclusion and psychosocial support - leaving no caribbean child behind*. ECLAC. Available at: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/education_during_the_covid-19_pandemic.pdf.
- Phillips, N. (2021) *School to go fully virtual from September 20*. Available at: <https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/school-to-go-fully-virtual-from-september-20/>.
- Solomon, A. and Clancy, J. (2021) *How COVID-19 has reshaped education in Guyana's hinterland*. Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network. Available at: <https://www.cijn.org/how-covid-19-has-reshaped-education-in-guyanas-hinterland/>.
- SVG National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (2021) *Internet for tablet programme*. Available at: <https://www.ntrc.vc/internet-for-tablet-program/>.
- Thompson, C. *et al.* (2022) 'The initial engagement and experiences of Caribbean educators with the reality of COVID-19: exploring the educational planning implications', *Educational Planning*, 29(2), pp. 7–25.
- Trinidad and Tobago Guardian (2022) *Moms for Literacy celebrates 29 years of service to T&T on World Literacy Day*. Available at: <https://guardian.co.tt/article/moms-for-literacy-celebrates-29-years-of-service-to-tt-on-world-literacy-day-6.2.1542941.b7eb94d769>.
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2022) *Lifelong learning opportunities for all, medium-term strategy 2022–2029*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380778>.

- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2021) *Socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 and policy options in Jamaica*. Available at: https://www.jm.undp.org/content/jamaica/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/socio-economic-impact-assessment-of-covid-19-and-policy-options-.html.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2023) *GOJ (Government of Jamaica) and UNDP expand community Wi-Fi access under J\$53.5 million project*. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/jamaica/press-releases/goj-and-undp-expand-community-wi-fi-access-under-j535-million-project>.
- UNESCO (2020) *Unlocking the potential of family and intergenerational learning*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373512>.
- UNICEF (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on migrant Children in Trinidad and Tobago*.
- UNICEF (2022) *Cash Transfer Plus in St. Vincent and the Grenadines*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/stories/cash-transfer-plus-st-vincent-and-grenadines>.
- UNICEF (n.d.) *Country office annual report 2022 Eastern Caribbean area*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/135876/file/Eastern-Caribbean-Area-2022-COAR.pdf>.
- Village Voice News (2022) *STEMGuyana recruits parents for learning pods 'parent academy'; learn a lesson, then help your child*. Available at: <https://villagevoicenews.com/2022/06/26/stemguyana-recruits-parents-for-learning-pods-parent-academy-learn-a-lesson-then-help-your-child/>.
- World Bank (2020) *Pivoting to inclusion: leveraging lessons from the COVID-19 crisis for learners with disabilities*. World Bank Group.
- World Education Forum (2015) *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. UNESCO, World Education Forum 2015 and Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656>.
- Yildirim, E.D. and Roopnarine, J.L. (2017) 'Paternal and maternal engagement across six Caribbean countries and childhood outcomes', *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 53, pp. 64–73.
- Zholdoshalieva, R. et al. (2021) *Integrated approaches to literacy and skills development: examples of best practice in adult learning programmes*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378051>.



Chapter 17

Challenging epistemic exclusion: Creating a space for understanding Caribbean family literacy practices

Zoyah Kinkead-Clark and Charlotte Hardacre

Introduction

The Caribbean's unique cultural identity is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, linguistic and geographical factors. One of the most notable features of the region is its diverse language landscape, which is the result of centuries of colonialism, slavery and migration (Bryan, 2004; Nero and Stevens, 2018; Siegel, 2010). The use of Indigenous and Creole languages, such as Jamaican patois, within families helps to preserve linguistic diversity and cultural heritage and plays an important role in defining cultural identity (Smalls, 2018; Williams, 2020). However, there have been frequent attempts to understand these distinct Caribbean practices through a Eurocentric lens, which has led to dismissal of local knowledge, epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and the creation of a narrative that is not representative of the region's reality (Smith-Christmas, 2018; Hardacre and Kinkead-Clark, 2019).

This chapter argues for the importance of understanding family literacy practices in the Caribbean, and particularly in Jamaica. These practices reflect the region's complex cultural heritage and are a symbol of its resilience and strength (Hardacre and Kinkead-Clark, 2019; Roopnarine and Jin, 2016). First, we identify the distinctive factors that shape everyday family literacy practices within the region and trace the development of family literacy in Jamaica. We illuminate the plurality of family literacy and its forms and features, primarily in order to challenge the epistemic exclusion and lack of visibility of practices that arise in many low- and middle-income countries, including in the Caribbean (Berryman, Lawrence and Lamont, 2018). Second, we emphasize the need for culturally responsive forms of family learning that appreciate and recognize existing literacy practices, rather than utilizing family learning as a tool to address

social issues including poor parental practices and anti-social behaviour (Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). Lastly, we call for epistemic inclusion, suggesting a more democratic approach to knowledge about what forms of family literacy are legitimate. By recognizing and valuing these everyday practices, we can preserve their distinctly Jamaican character and challenge the epistemic exclusion that sustains the legacy and impact of colonialism on Caribbean societies. This is particularly relevant in a postcolonial context where hierarchical structures continue to entrench inequalities for contemporary Jamaican families. Ultimately, a socially situated understanding of family literacy can reduce the epistemic exclusion of everyday family literacy practices.

Epistemic exclusion

Family literacy practices in Jamaica, as in low- and middle-income countries, have often been overlooked by policy-makers and researchers, despite the potential for such practices to positively influence literacy development (Schneider, 2018). Although family literacy is increasingly recognized as important in international policy and research, many assumptions about it are derived from Western, middle-class perspectives (Marcella, Howes and Fuligni, 2014; Anderson and Anderson, 2021). This is particularly problematic in the case of Jamaica, where everyday literacy practices, such as the use of Jamaican patois, are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the society, yet have been historically marginalized in education policy. For example, standard English is deeply privileged as the language of school and business.

We suggest that this exclusion is the legacy of prioritizing knowledge that arises from positivist, Eurocentric and colonialist sources (Auriacombe and Cloete, 2019; Joseph, 2015). This hierarchical approach has been framed variously as epistemologies of ignorance (Mills, 2012), epistemicide (De Sousa Santos, 2011), epistemological exclusion (Stuart and Shay, 2018) and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). The essential concept is that different peoples' knowledge is valued differently, resulting in unfair or unequal treatment that leads to broader social injustice. One mechanism of this injustice is the so-called 'evidence-based' approach, where what is selected for tracking and monitoring reveals biases against practices such as singing, song-writing and oral storytelling, to the detriment or exclusion of everyday Jamaican family literacies.

The establishment of the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC) in 2013 in Jamaica is a clear example of how evidence-based approaches can lead to an interventionist agenda (Hardacre et al., 2022). The NPSC instituted 'Parent Places' in primary schools throughout Jamaica to help families support their children's learning more effectively. The impact of this initiative was

measured primarily by monitoring absenteeism and dropout rates (Hylton and Hylton-Fraser, 2022). Though seemingly successful in one sense (the rates of absenteeism and dropout were reduced), such initiatives can make families feel under surveillance, corroding trust between parents and schools (Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). Such forms of tracking seldom include accompanying data to capture families' perspectives, which could explain high absenteeism and low retention.

Moreover, although national primary school completion rates and national adult literacy rates are regularly reported, there is a lack of monitoring and evaluation of culturally responsive strategies for family learning and literacy. These strategies have been proven to enhance family-school partnerships (Coleman, 2013; Roofe, 2018). Despite the government's recognition of the need to address the impact of colonialism, as indicated in the Ministry of Education and Youth's report on educational reform in Jamaica (Patterson, 2021), there has been limited progress in implementing qualitative evaluations of strategies that prioritize culturally responsive approaches; the focus has predominantly been on quantitative data collection, specifically related to predetermined outcomes such as attendance, retention and examination results (Hylton and Hylton-Fraser, 2022).

Approximately 90 per cent of Jamaican young people speak patois, but are only tested against universal standards of language and literacy.

Standardized tests such as Jamaica's Grade Four Literacy Test are the predominant means to determine and measure literacy. Such assessments are written in standard Jamaican English and therefore require students to complete the assessment in standard Jamaican English. Approximately 90 per cent of Jamaican young people speak patois (Devonish and Carpenter, 2007), but are only tested against universal standards of language and literacy. This can devalue competency in mixed language literacy, isolate students from their family and social contexts, and obscure the true picture of students' abilities. However, to date government officials have shown little interest in using alternative ways to measure literacy or in including informal family literacy practices as a type of literacy (Hardacre et al., 2022). One possible solution is to complement these measures with more culturally responsive approaches and assessments of family literacy that value and build on the diverse ways that literacy is practised in Jamaica (including storytelling, music and patois), rather than seeking to impose external norms and expectations that align with the colonial roots of standard Jamaican English. This shift in perspective is essential for the development of educational policies that truly reflect and support the diversity of literacy practices in Jamaica.

In summary, the under-recognition of family literacy practices in Jamaica and other low- and middle-income countries, despite their potential impact on children's and adults' literacy development, constitutes a larger issue of epistemic injustice. The marginalization of everyday literacy practices, such as the use of Jamaican patois, in education policy is the result of privileging knowledge derived from Eurocentric sources. This approach to knowledge leads to epistemic exclusion and the establishment of evidence-based approaches that can unintentionally perpetuate surveillance and erode trust between families and schools. Standardized tests and tracking methods fail to capture the nuanced features and complex forms of literacy practices of Jamaican families. A socially situated and culturally responsive approach that values and builds on these practices is necessary to develop educational policies that support the diversity of family literacy practices in the region. It is essential to recognize and address the epistemic injustice that underlies the exclusion of Jamaican family literacy practices from education policy and research.

Tracing family literacy from plantation to backyard

According to Coates (2012), plantation owners deliberately and systematically prevented enslaved people in Jamaica from becoming literate. Enslaved people were kept illiterate as a means of control and exploitation by the plantation owners, who saw education as a threat to their economic interests, since an educated enslaved population was more likely to challenge the status quo and demand their rights (Schneider, 2018). As with other West Indian countries, enslaved people were brought to Jamaica through the triangular trade, and numbered over six hundred thousand (Beckles, 2019). However, withholding conventional forms of literacy – reading and writing in English – could not prevent enslaved people from participating in other, equally powerful forms of literacy.

According to Stanley-Niaah (2010), literacy practices expressed in the form of music and dance have a strong connection to power and dominance in Jamaica. Across the Caribbean, from slave ships to modern dance halls and street dances, they have been used to share stories and histories and to shape identities. Enslaved people used oral traditions, such as stories and songs, to share tales about their homeland, faith, beliefs and experiences. Even today, storytelling remains an important part of the Jamaican family, with notable public figures like Louise Bennett (Miss Lou), Leonnie Forbes and Amina Blackwood-Meeks continuing the tradition. These public figures recognize storytelling as a spiritual and familial event and a form of resistance to power and dominance (Allen, 2017; Smart, 2019). Through the family, the value of storytelling, song and dance is transmitted from one generation to the next, creating a cycle of family literacy that enriches the cultural heritage of the community and the nation. Family literacy is crucial for preserving cultural identity and promoting the continuation of important traditions.

While orality, music and dance are important ways to encode and transmit shared history and experiences within and beyond the family unit in Jamaica, Aljoe (2004) warns against generalizing the experiences of enslaved people across the Caribbean and emphasizes the individuality and distinct character of the various islands and groups. Nevertheless, the advent of mass media has created more opportunities for connecting experiences across the islands: for example, many families sat together in front of their radios and listened to Miss Lou using patois to recite poems, share stories and sing. From 1965 to the 1980s Miss Lou hosted a Jamaican daily variety show called *Ring Ding*, the first locally produced children's programme in the Caribbean to be broadcast on television. At the time, watching *Ring Ding* with Miss Lou was a tremendously significant familial event. According to Morris (2014), beyond the obvious aim of entertaining children and their families, *Ring Ding* was an opportunity for families and the wider community to participate in a cultural experience in patois, the everyday dialect and language most people used.

[I]n the 1960s Jamaica was experiencing political turmoil, as the country struggled to define its identity and assert its independence. This period was marked by a growing consciousness of race and the need for social justice.

Ring Ding was first broadcast on television in 1968, six years after Jamaica's independence from Britain. At this time there were no specific educational programmes for families. Although *Sesame Street*, the popular American children's programme, premiered four years after *Ring Ding* and was also shown on local television, it did not have the same ability to bring Jamaican families together. This was especially significant given the social climate of the time. Before independence, the country was subjected to colonial policies that favoured the ruling class, perpetuating social and economic inequalities. Family policies and the educational system reflected these disparities. Furthermore, in the 1960s Jamaica was experiencing political turmoil, as the country struggled to define its identity and assert its independence (Thame, 2014). This period was marked by a growing consciousness of race and the need for social justice. During this time there was a sense of pride in Jamaican culture and an increasing recognition of the importance of preserving and celebrating the island's particular identity (Brissett, 2018). This cultural awakening also exposed the disparities in education between the ruling class and the majority Black population, including low literacy rates and a lack of emphasis on education for most Black people in Jamaica. The culturally responsive learning experience provided by *Ring Ding* was crucial in promoting alternative literacy practices rooted in the familial, cultural and social

identities of Jamaicans. It popularized the characters of local stories such as Big Boy, Annie Palmer, Rolling Calf and Bredda Anansi, a trickster spider, the last of which was itself inspired by the Ghanaian Ashanti tribal story character (Ellington, 2016). Such examples helped Jamaican and other Caribbean younger generations connect their roots and histories across lands and oceans.

By the 1970s there was a steady shift towards making conventional forms of print literacy central to Jamaican family learning practices. Following the 1970 census, which revealed that less than 50 per cent of Jamaican adults were literate, political efforts to change these statistics resulted in a wave of government initiatives. In 1974, the Jamaica Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL) was launched as a country-wide programme aimed at 'eradicating illiteracy' through the provision of reading classes. Efforts to achieve this goal targeted specific demographic groups and geographic areas known to have higher rates of illiteracy. For instance, in his review of adult literacy in Jamaica, Miller (1979) noted that JAMAL classes were predominantly provided in rural communities, factories and inner-city communities.

There is suspicion of top-down initiatives that seek to impose Western values and cultural norms on the local population.

Although JAMAL was aimed at teenagers and young adults aged 15 to 35, many of the people in this age cohort were parents and would often bring their children to their reading classes. This programme provided opportunities for families to sit by their kerosene lamps and bond and read together as part of a government-backed initiative that only a few years earlier would have been unthinkable. Though the demand for JAMAL classes waned over the years, they had a lasting impact on family literacy. However, the most prominent literacy programmes at present focus on promoting children's development of conventional literacy skills, under-utilizing the legacy of JAMAL as a familial activity. Existing literacy programmes exclude embodied and enacted forms of literacy such as playing board games and video games, using social media, creating videos, and creating dances (Leonard, Hall and Herro, 2016).

Across the Anglo-Caribbean, criticism is still directed at initiatives such as JAMAL, which aim at improving family and community literacy but are perceived as paternalistic and steeped in the region's history of plantocracy and slavery (Hylton and Hylton-Fraser, 2022). The plantocracy, which dominated the island's political and economic structures, saw education as, at best, a tool to prevent social unrest, rather than as a means of improving the lives of the enslaved and free Black population. As a result, there is suspicion of top-down initiatives that seek to impose Western values and cultural norms on the local population (Brissett,

2018). These policies and guidance may be geared towards assimilating families into the dominant Western culture and way of life, rather than empowering local people to preserve their cultural heritage and traditions and pave their own paths towards literacy.

Challenging a social investment perspective of family literacy

Although there is no denying that Jamaica has reaped many benefits from having a highly literate population, everyday forms of literacy are not sufficiently valued. The elevated status of conventional forms of literacy is bolstered by a 'social investment perspective' (Wainwright and Marandet, 2017, p. 213) on policy-making in Jamaica, which positions 'the family' as a productive location for civic improvement. From this return-on-investment approach, literacy is seen to have high economic value, and the acquisition of literacy skills should provide families with improved job prospects and improved ability to access better health care and housing (Kim and Belzer, 2021; Prins et al., 2021). Despite this perspective, which ignores the social and economic conditions that constrain families' circumstances in the first place, literacy initiatives become associated with employability and social mobility, where participants are viewed as units to be optimized (Fine, 2016; Ravitch, 2010).

In this context, programmes such as JAMAL can unintentionally reinforce 'gendered, classed and racialised accounts of family competence and individual value' (Gillies, Edwards and Horsley, 2016, p. 221) despite being intended to work for social justice. The social investment approach is characterized by deficit narratives that frame families as at fault, often without acknowledging the structural inequalities that produce low literacy levels in the first place (Tyler, 2013; Thompson, 2019; Bishop, 2005). The influence of the social investment approach may also restrict what counts as legitimate literacy to encompass only those practices with the potential for boosting social mobility, such as writing and speaking in standard English. This focus leads to more emphasis on formal instruction in phonics, grammar and spelling, marginalizing other family literacy practices such as sharing stories in patois (Hickling-Hudson, 2014; Street, 2003).

The importance and validity of literacy as a social practice

An alternative to the social investment perspective is the socio-cultural view, which sees family literacy as 'activities rooted in a cultural and social context' (Papen, 2005, p. 92), not as a set of discrete and neutral skills to be acquired in pursuit of social mobility goals. From the socio-cultural perspective, family

literacy can be seen as a 'practice dependent on community norms' (Manca, Bocconi and Gleason, 2021, p. 2) which takes multiple forms and is developed through different social activities and interactions. This framework helps family learning practitioners to consider the varied reasons for using literacy and the different meanings individuals ascribe to it, and also reveals how literacy is always contested in relations of power (Street, 2003). This perspective calls for the removal of boundaries and expectations about what literacy is or can be in any given setting or at any specific time. The key question is that of 'whose literacies are dominant and whose are marginalised or resistant' (Street, 2003, p. 77). Such questions are particularly valuable in the post-colonial context where uniform, standard and universalist understandings of literacy are entrenched, and where the dominant understanding is that literacy is 'a ladder that people have to climb' (Papen, 2005, p. 35).

This perspective calls for the removal of boundaries and expectations about what literacy is or can be in any given setting or at any specific time.

The framing of literacy as socially and culturally mediated, and thus power-laden, has been advanced by many scholars over the last half-century, including Freire's (1979) notion of critical literacy and the work of the New Literacy Studies scholars (Manca, Bocconi and Gleason, 2021), among others. Despite such long-standing calls for a radical shift away from the technocratic, Eurocentric and colonial notions of literacy, in Jamaica examples of substantive and far-reaching change are very rare, even though Jamaican school curricula and teacher training programmes are beginning to recognize the importance of helping children connect learning in school with their lived experience within their family, community and broader society (Roofe, 2018).

It is therefore important for family literacy policy-makers and programme providers in Jamaica to look at more applications of culturally responsive pedagogy, such as that embodied in Te Whāriki, the bicultural early years' curriculum that reflects the 'dual heritages of Aotearoa/New Zealand' (Gould and Matapo, 2016). Te Whāriki aims to engender a sense of belonging, and to increase the potential of Māori children and families to actively participate in and contribute to shaping school spaces and encourages a sense of pride in their identity, language and culture (Berryman, Lawrence and Lamont, 2018). The adoption of Te Whāriki pedagogy has established a shared obligation for protecting the Māori language and culture among all the people of Aotearoa, including New Zealanders of British descent (Zhang, 2017). Te Whāriki aims to be integrative, acknowledging the shared history of the island and looking towards constructing a shared future. Although the adoption of Te Whāriki pedagogy

is a positive step, some concerns related to the lack of guidance and support for teachers to effectively implement it have been raised (Blaiklock, 2017). Nonetheless, understanding the design and deployment of Te Whāriki could offer Jamaican policy-makers insights that go beyond calls for culturally responsive pedagogy and plan for a counter-colonial curriculum that advances socially situated understanding and practices of literacy.

Naming impediments and drivers: Towards a socially situated understanding of literacy in Jamaica

In recent years, literacy initiatives in Jamaica have been primarily directed by the government's efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Vision 2030 goals (Brissett, 2018). Although this target-driven approach can restrict how literacy is defined, perceived, practised and accepted, over the past two decades stronger appeals have also been made to minimize the privileging of standard English over Jamaican patois (Mühleisen, 2022). The response to these appeals remains uneven: for example, children who have a strong command of patois may be selected to perform at cultural events while children who have a strong command of standard English are selected for more prestigious events (Bryan, 2010; Kouwenberg, 2011) or to represent the school at a public event. This indicates that the acceptance of socially situated family literacy in Jamaica will be shaped both by both drivers – such as the support of schools and educators – and impediments – such as the dominant cultural attitudes and beliefs that shape and maintain the status quo.

Identifying specific drivers and impediments is a response to epistemic injustice, which can be tackled when people name their conditions as a step towards dismantling harmful structures. By identifying these drivers and impediments in *Table 1*, we recognize the power imbalances in the production and distribution of knowledge about acceptable forms of family literacy (Fricker, 2007). When a hierarchy emerges around language and literacy – as when patois is reserved for cultural events and standard English for mainstream school events – this suggests that not all individuals have equal access to power and decision-making in producing the knowledge and narratives that shape their lives and communities (Robinson, 2000). These hierarchies are based on assumptions such as the belief that children who can switch seamlessly from patois into what is perceived as high-quality standard English are more academically and socially able and offer a better reflection of the school's standards. By exposing these hidden elements, individuals and communities can assert their agency and engage in critical reflection on how power, privilege and oppression inform their experiences and realities (Freire, 1970). We have modelled this process of naming in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Impediments to and drivers of a socially situated understanding of literacy in Jamaica

IMPEDIMENTS	DRIVERS
Education system Teacher training in Jamaica tends to place limited value on socially situated forms of literacy, such as music, dance, storytelling, or the use of patois, because the dominant cultural and educational norms prioritize formal, written forms of literacy in English and devalue the informal, oral traditions and expressions prevalent in local communities and cultures.	Drawing on cultural assets Jamaican cultural assets such as music, dance, storytelling and patois provide a rich tapestry of knowledge, values and experiences that can be used to develop literacy skills in a meaningful and relevant context. Engaging with these cultural forms can also foster a sense of pride and belonging among families, helping to build a supportive community that values literacy development in multiple forms. Incorporating cultural assets into teacher education and training curricula and literacy education can help to bridge the gap between home and school literacies, fostering greater understanding and collaboration between families and educators.
Legacy of colonialism The Eurocentric and homogenizing forces of colonialism led to a loss of cultural identity and knowledge, as well as the dominance of English as a medium of instruction and determinant of literacy and a literate Jamaican person, and the persistent marginalization of non-dominant cultures and literacy practices. For education, this means that standard English is required in classrooms and assessment. It is continually reinforced as the superior language for use in important spaces, while patois is relegated to informal and social spaces. Similarly, practices such as the common entrance exam are markers of an education system that continues to emulate a British approach long since abandoned in the UK, indicating an attachment to traditional educational practices and a reluctance to embrace more progressive models.	Legacy of resistance The historical legacy of resistance to colonial oppression can be used to highlight the power of literacy as a tool for liberation and cultural preservation. This legacy emphasizes the recognition of the cultural context in which literacy practices are situated and the role they can play in shaping individual and collective identities. The learning and use of patois along with English on equal and complementary terms could help redefine what literacy is and who counts as literate. Family literacy programmes grounded in a cultural heritage of resistance have the potential to empower individuals to use literacy as a tool for liberation and self-expression.

IMPEDIMENTS	DRIVERS
Standardized testing in colonial language and literacy Standardized testing and literacy measurement practices tend to focus on a narrow definition of literacy and prioritize certain literacy skills, such as reading and writing in the colonial language, English, over others. This narrow definition of literacy often neglects and devalues the cultural and social knowledge embodied in other forms such as oral storytelling, music, dance and patois. As a result, these forms of literacy are not recognized or valued in educational settings, leading to their social marginalization.	Recognition of other forms of literacy The growing acceptance of the value of localized or Indigenous literacy practices around the world, such as Te Whāriki in Aotearoa/New Zealand, legitimizes the value of culturally specific forms of literacy and knowledge. Bicultural curricula like Te Whāriki acknowledge the significance of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems and seek to integrate these into dominant structures in society at equal levels. Such curricula provide a model that could be adapted to Jamaican students and families and to the specific cultural, political and historical landscape of the island.
Hermeneutic injustice Epistemic injustice includes hermeneutic injustice, the unequal distribution of capacities and opportunities for understanding, interpreting and making sense of one's experiences and the world. Storytellers, for instance, may be accustomed to their cultural practices being marginalized because of the way they are expressed (orally in patois rather than in written English), and may not perceive their experience as one of exclusion or oppression. The exclusion from interpretation can lead to a lack of recognition, understanding and respect for these forms of literacy, as well as acquiescence in the dominant forms of literacy, such as reading and writing in English, within communities (Medina, 2012; Beverley, 2022).	Towards knowledge democracy In the knowledge democracy movement, diverse and inclusive ways of knowing and generating knowledge are valued. Using a knowledge democracy lens, families can see their literacy practices as valuable and worthy of recognition and support, rather than as inferior to dominant or standardized forms. To build a knowledge democracy, grassroots initiatives, including community-led knowledge sharing and literacy programmes, empower individuals and promote diverse forms of knowledge. Simultaneously, structural changes such as educational reforms are needed to position different forms of knowledge equitably.

Table 1 presents our reflections on how family literacy in Jamaica is shaped by social, political and economic structures, and some of the potential opportunities for redefinition and action for more inclusive family literacy. Through similar forms of critical reflection and naming, communities can develop an empowering understanding of their reality and work towards creating a more equitable and just world (Giroux, 1983). The naming of conditions is an essential component of liberatory education for social change (hooks, 1994). In the context of Jamaica, this reflection on socially situated forms of family literacy contributes to expanding narrow definitions of literacy, which could help to reduce the marginalization of local cultures and the erasure of valuable forms of knowledge that are integral to families' literacy practices (Smart, 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter argues for the importance of understanding family literacy practices in Jamaica as historically and socially situated. These reflections are already rooted in Freire's critical literacy and the work of New Literacy Studies. Despite the growing influence of these perspectives on global and national educational discourses, their implementation remains pressing and relevant to Jamaica. We argue that Caribbean educational and cultural practices continue to be examined through and dominated by the colonial legacy and Eurocentric lenses, which produce and reproduce a narrative that does not accurately reflect the region's reality. A socially situated understanding of family literacy could challenge the epistemic exclusion of everyday family literacy practices that sustains the legacy and impact of colonialism

The chapter also provides some examples of literacy practices and events, such as *Ring Ding* and the JAMAL programmes, which could provide a platform for more inclusive, diverse literacy forms and practices. Other examples, such as the Te Whāriki curriculum based on the dual heritages of Aotearoa/New Zealand, offer inspiration and ideas for identifying and creating culturally responsive forms of family learning and literacy. These literacy initiatives should not be used solely as mechanisms to address social issues but also to legitimize and build on Jamaica's existing literacy practices. Overall, the chapter emphasizes the need for knowledge democracy, to challenge the epistemic legacy of colonialism and the hierarchy of knowledge systems, and to promote a broader understanding of forms of knowledge that transcend the ability to read and write in English.

References

- Aljoe, N. (2004) 'Caribbean slave narratives: Creole in form and genre', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3RsMHGb>.
- Allen, R.M. (2017) 'Oral history as autobiography through embodied performance: a look at the narratives of the early twentieth century Afro-Curaçaoan migrants to Cuba', *Auto/Biography Studies*, 32(2), pp. 335–337.
- Anderson, J. and Anderson, A. (2021) "'Biggest thing is saying in English and Punjabi, too": working with immigrant and refugee families and communities in a bilingual family literacy program', *Reading Psychology*, 42(8), pp. 899–927.
- Auriacombe, C. and Cloete, F. (2019) 'Revisiting decoloniality for more effective research and evaluation', *African Evaluation Journal*, 7(1), pp. 1–10.
- Beckles, H.M. (2019) 'Running in Jamaica: a slavery ecosystem', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 76(1), pp. 9–14.
- Berryman, M., Lawrence, D. and Lamont, R. (2018) 'Cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy', *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 1, pp. 3–10.
- Beverley, J. (2022) 'Speak no evil: understanding hermeneutical (in)justice', *Episteme*, 19(3), pp. 431–454.
- Bishop, R. (2005) 'Pathologizing the lived experiences of the indigenous Māori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand', in J. Shields, R. Bishop, and A. Mazawi (eds) *Pathologizing practices: the impact of deficit thinking on education*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 55–84.
- Blaiklock, K. (2017) 'Is New Zealand a world leader in early childhood education? An examination of the empirical evidence in recent reports', *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(3), pp. 38–45.
- Brissett, N. (2018) 'Education for social transformation (EST) in the Caribbean: a postcolonial perspective', *Education Sciences*, 8(4), pp. 197–209.
- Bryan, B. (2004) 'Language and literacy in a Creole-speaking environment: a study of primary schools in Jamaica', *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 17(2), pp. 87–96.
- Bryan, B. (2010) *Between two grammars: research and practice for language learning and teaching in a Creole-speaking environment*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Coates, C.O. (2012) 'Educational developments in the British West Indies: a historical overview', *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3rlyU9J>.

- Coleman, M. (2013) *Empowering family-teacher partnerships building connections within diverse communities*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2011) *Epistemologies of the south*. Boulder: Paradigm.
- Devonish, H. and Carpenter, K. (2007) 'Towards full bilingualism in education: the Jamaican bilingual primary education project', *Social and Economic Studies*, 56(1/2), pp. 277–303.
- Ellington, T.N. (2016) 'The origin of Anansi the spider', (International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3RrwbGp>.
- Fine, M. (2016) 'Participatory designs for critical literacies from under the covers', *Literacy Research*, 65(1), pp. 47–68.
- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Fricker, M. (2007) *Epistemic injustice: power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gillies, V., Edwards, R. and Horsley, N. (2016) 'Brave new brains: sociology, family and the politics of knowledge', *The Sociological Review*, 64(2), pp. 219–237.
- Giroux, H.A. (1983) *Theory and resistance in education: a pedagogy for the opposition*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.
- Gould, K. and Matapo, J. (2016) 'What's in a philosophy statement? A critical discourse analysis of early childhood centre philosophy statements in Aotearoa/New Zealand', *He Kupu*, 4(3), pp. 51–60.
- Hardacre, C. et al. (2022) 'Socially just, authentic research with families in Jamaica, Australia and the UK', in *Negotiating Families and Personal Lives in the 21st Century*. Routledge, pp. 156–172.
- Hardacre, C. and Kinkead-Clark, Z. (2019) 'Authentic family learning: reconceptualizing intergenerational education initiatives in Jamaica and England through cross-cultural conversation', *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 44(5), pp. 85–102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs00019336>.
- Hickling-Hudson, A. (2014) 'Striving for a better world: lessons from Freire in Grenada, Jamaica and Australia', *International Review of Education*, 60(4), pp. 523–543.
- hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

- Hylton, K. and Hylton-Fraser, K. (2022) 'An evaluation of the "every child can learn, every child must learn" mantra's alignment with educational policies in Jamaica', *Equity in Education & Society*, 1(1), pp. 163–181.
- Joseph, A.J. (2015) 'The necessity of an attention to Eurocentrism and colonial technologies: an addition to critical mental health literature', *Disability & Society*, 30(7), pp. 1021–1041.
- Kim, J. and Belzer, A. (2021) 'Return on investment for adult basic education: existing evidence and future directions', *Adult Education Quarterly*, 71(4), pp. 356–372.
- Kouwenberg, S. (2011) 'Linguistics in the Caribbean: empowerment through creole language awareness', *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 26(2), pp. 387–405.
- Leonard, A.E., Hall, A.H. and Herro, D. (2016) 'Dancing literacy: expanding children's and teachers' literacy repertoires through embodied knowing', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 16(3), pp. 338–360.
- Manca, S., Bocconi, S. and Gleason, B. (2021) "'Think globally, act locally": A glocal approach to the development of social media literacy', *Computers & Education*, 160, p. 104025.
- Marcella, J., Howes, C. and Fuligni, A.S. (2014) 'Exploring cumulative risk and family literacy practices in low-income Latino families', *Early Education and Development*, 25(1), pp. 36–55.
- Medina, J. (2012) *The epistemology of resistance: gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and resistant imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, H. (1979) *Adult-Literacy education in Jamaica*.
- Mills, C. (2012) 'White ignorance', in S. Sullivan and N. Tuana (eds) *Race and epistemologies of ignorance*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 13–38.
- Morris, M. (2014) *Miss Lou: Louise Bennett and Jamaican culture*. Oxford: Signal Books.
- Mühleisen, S. (2022) 'Talking about creole: language attitudes and public discourse in the Caribbean', in B. Migge and S. Gooden (eds) *Social and structural aspects of language contact and change*. Berlin: Language Science Press, pp. 264–283.
- Nero, S. and Stevens, L. (2018) 'Analyzing students' writing in a Jamaican Creole-speaking context: an ecological and systemic functional approach', *Linguistics and education*, 43, pp. 13–24.

- Papen, U. (2005) *Adult literacy as social practice: more than skills*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Patterson, O. (2021) *The reform of education in Jamaica, 2021 report*. The Jamaica Education Transformation Commission. Available at: <https://moey.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/JETC-REPORT-2021-SEPT.-16E-.pdf>.
- Prins, E. et al. (2021) 'Family literacy', in L.R. Merriweather et al. (eds) *The handbook of adult and continuing education*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, pp. 205–213.
- Ravitch, D. (2010) *The death and life of the great American school system: how testing and choice are undermining education*. Philadelphia: Basic Books.
- Robinson, C.J. (2000) *Black marxism: the making of the black radical tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Roofe, C. (2018) 'Why can't everyone pass? Context responsive teaching and learning in urban primary schools', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 26(3), pp. 449–482.
- Roopnarine, J.L. and Jin, B. (2016) 'Family socialization practices and childhood development in Caribbean cultural communities', in J.L. Roopnarine and D. Chadee (eds) *Caribbean psychology: indigenous contributions to a global discipline*. NYC: American Psychological Association, pp. 71–96.
- Schneider, R. (2018) 'Black literacy and resistance in Jamaica', *Social and Economic Studies*, 67(1), pp. 49–65.
- Siegel, J. (2010) 'Bilingual literacy in creole contexts', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 31(4), pp. 383–405.
- Smalls, K.A. (2018) 'Languages of liberation: digital discourses of emphatic blackness', in N. Avineri et al. (eds) *Language and Social Justice in Practice*. London: Routledge, pp. 52–60.
- Smart, C.A. (2019) 'African oral tradition, cultural retentions and the transmission of knowledge in the West Indies', *IFLA journal*, 45(1), pp. 16–35.
- Smith-Christmas, C. (2018) '"One Cas, Two Cas": exploring the affective dimensions of family language policy', *Multilingua*, 37(2), pp. 131–172.
- Stanley-Niaah, S.N. (2010) *Dancehall: from slave ship to ghetto*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- Street, B. (2003) 'What's "new" in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice', *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2), pp. 77–91.

- Stuart, K. and Shay, M. (2018) 'Countering epistemological exclusion through critical-ethical research to support social justice: methodological comparisons between Australia and the United Kingdom', in V. Reyes et al. (eds) *Educational research in the age of anthropocene*. Hershey: IGI Global, pp. 188–210.
- Thame, M. (2014) 'Disciplining the nation: considering the privileging of order over freedom in postcolonial Jamaica and Barbados', *Social and Economic Studies*, 63(2), pp. 1–29.
- Thompson, C. (2019) 'Jamaica's neoliberal agenda and trickle-down economics? – Part 2', *Jamaica Observer*. Available at: <https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2019/03/20/jamaicas-neoliberal-agenda-and-trickle-down-economics-part-2/>.
- Tyler, I. (2013) *Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain: revolting subjects*. London: Zed Books.
- Wainwright, E. and Marandet, E. (2017) 'Education, parenting and family: the social geographies of family learning', *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), pp. 213–259.
- Williams, A. (2020) 'The validity of patois: an analysis on the linguistic and cultural aspects of Jamaican patois', *Caribbean Quilt*, 5, pp. 72–80.
- Zhang, Q. (2017) 'Emergent literacy as sociocultural practice: how well do New Zealand parents fit with Te Whāriki?', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 17(1), pp. 69–91.



Chapter 18

The study of children's household and community contexts as the basis for an intercultural and bilingual early literacy programme

Celia Renata Rosemberg, Alejandra Stein, Florencia Alam, Maia Julieta Migdalek and Gladys Ojea

Introduction

This chapter presents a project that combines language research and educational interventions intended to ensure inclusive, high-quality education for Argentinian children. The project focused on families living in extreme poverty, including urban marginalized populations in Buenos Aires, and Qom (Toba) Indigenous groups living in semi-rural and rural communities in the Chaco province in northern Argentina.

In the city and suburbs of Buenos Aires, 64.2 per cent of the children live in households below the poverty line (ODSA, 2021); this rises to 69 per cent in the Chaco province (ISEPCI, 2021). Poverty is even higher in Indigenous communities, of which the Qom (pronounced 'kahm') ethnic group is one of the largest. Housing for urban marginalized populations (*villas de emergencia*) lacks basic amenities. Similarly, living conditions for Qom children are in most cases very precarious. They live in rural or semi-rural communities in the Chaco province or in settlements comprised of families who have migrated to big cities such as Buenos Aires looking for work (Messineo, 2003). Qom is spoken by half of the community members aged five or older. The families living in rural communities are in general bilingual, but for children in migrant communities Spanish is the first, dominant language, although sometimes they learn Qom to some extent.

Beyond the cultural and linguistic differences, the structural impoverishment and precarious living conditions for both groups of children and their families create extreme vulnerability and inequity, which is reflected not only in housing, health and nutrition but also in education. Children's caregivers themselves have had limited educational opportunities; in most cases they have only completed basic education or attended school for a few years. In most households there is limited use of writing and no storybooks are available for the children nor, in general, is any other written material.

The educational trajectories of many of these children are marked by numerous hurdles that mainly reflect difficulties in learning to read and write in primary education. Evidence from studies in other populations (e.g. Weizman and Snow, 2001) indicates that these difficulties are associated with a series of skills and abilities that children need to develop at a very young age. These abilities, critical to literacy, include not only the acquisition of specific information about the written system (the names of the letters and phoneme-grapheme correspondences), but also the early development of particular conceptual and linguistic skills – the mechanisms for vocabulary acquisition, phonological processing and concept elaboration, as well as the use of complex textual processes such as establishing relationships and making inferences. These abilities also include the use of diverse strategies in a decontextualized form of discourse that does not rely on the situational context to be interpreted and can therefore be more easily transferred to written language (Simons and Murphy, 1988; Collins and Michaels, 2011). These developments require not only a certain socio-cognitive base but also support from cultural partners (adults and older children) that relates children's experiences to the tools and activities in their culture (Tomasello, 2003; Nelson, 2007).

Educational actions and materials are rooted in children's daily lives and aim to widen their opportunities for vocabulary and discourse development and literacy learning.

Research from the last 30 years, mainly framed in the socio-cultural perspective of human development (Vygotsky, 1967), reveals that the activities in which children are involved from birth affect the social relationship networks in which they participate (e.g. Rogoff, 1993) and the 'funds of knowledge' they learn (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005). The activity systems also affect how language or languages are used in everyday interactions, the style of discourse in which children are socialized (Simons and Murphy, 1988), and the quantity and diversity of the vocabulary to which they are exposed (Rowe and Weisleder, 2020).

With this in mind, and based on family literacy research and programmes (e.g. Hanemann, 2015; Wasik and Herrmann, 2004) carried out with different populations all over the world, we designed a collaborative project with families, communities and teachers to promote children's learning. The project seeks to bridge the gap between schooling and communities, and contributes to understanding and improving literacy situations in the participating households. The development of an early literacy programme that addresses linguistic and socio-cultural differences between the participant communities necessitated examining the activity systems that shape children's daily lives in each community (Cole and Engeström, 2007).

Educational actions and materials are rooted in children's daily lives and aim to widen their opportunities for vocabulary and discourse development and literacy learning. Therefore, the project involves extensive fieldwork, consisting of audio- or video-recorded observations of the children's daily lives in their households and communities. The project also entails documentation of the activities, funds of knowledge, learning strategies, interactional patterns, language variants and uses in which these children are socialized (Rosemberg et al., 2015), as well as the analysis of the quantity and quality of the linguistic input to which they are exposed early in life.

The following sections describe the socio-cultural and linguistic environments that characterize the children's experiences, and how we used them in the intercultural and bilingual early literacy programme as an anchor to enhance children's linguistic development, literacy acquisition and knowledge. We also describe and reflect on the collaborative work with the community members and the Spanish and Qom native teachers, with whom we have created a series of intercultural and bilingual educational materials to promote the acquisition of Spanish and Qom as first or second languages. These include the ethnographic storybooks *En la casa de Oscarcito* [At Oscarcito's house], *En la comunidad qom Daviaxaïqui* [In the Qom Daviaxaïqui community], *Dany* and *Dany na'aqtaquec, na'qaatqa, relatos, tolhomtes* [Dany: Stories], and the software application *Huo'o na cuentos* [There are stories]. Lastly, we illustrate how these educational materials are used in children's households and community day care centres.

Young children's everyday environments: Activities, interactions and language experiences

From infancy, children's interactions with adults and older children, along with the objects, activities, and shared knowledge and language of the community, forge their developmental path (Nelson, 2007). The early activities in which children participate differ in rural, urban and suburban environments (Rogoff, 1993). As Rowe and Weisleder (2020) have pointed out, children's experiences

vary between communities as well as between families within the same community. Home-based activities also depend on the number of people residing together, adults' educational background, the presence of older siblings attending school, and the variety of objects available for children to play and learn with. The ebb and flow of everyday household activities condition the language children are exposed to, the quantity and type of interlocutors in conversations (children or adults), the quantity of the speech directed to the child (child-directed speech), and the speech that they hear among other participants (overheard speech).

This project focuses on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Argentinian children in situations of extreme vulnerability. These children tend to hear fewer words in child-centred social activities, such as book-sharing, organized play or adult-child conversations (Rosemberg et al., 2020). Household density is very high, since households are generally composed of extended families, including many children and adults, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and others, all of whom are frequent interlocutors in children's conversations. In urban and semi-urban areas where vulnerable families (non-Indigenous or Indigenous migrants) live, children have on average 10 interlocutors in interactional situations, and in rural communities the average may be even higher. By comparison, in non-vulnerable areas of the city this average is five (Stein, Menti and Rosemberg, 2021).

In bilingual households in the rural Indigenous communities, approximately 60 per cent of the utterances are produced in Qom and 40 per cent in Spanish. Child-directed speech, which represents 35 per cent of the total utterances produced, exhibits the same proportions.

Children's early language exposure is significant for their linguistic development (Weisleder and Fernald, 2013). Children from urban or suburban vulnerable populations in Argentina usually hear a great many words, but only 31 per cent of the utterances are directed to them (Stein, Menti and Rosemberg, 2021). In bilingual households in the rural Indigenous communities, approximately 60 per cent of the utterances are produced in Qom and 40 per cent in Spanish. Child-directed speech, which represents 35 per cent of the total utterances produced, exhibits the same proportions. In all these households, 65 per cent of the language that children hear is used among the other household members (overheard speech). In Indigenous communities in suburban areas, children interact a great deal with other young children, and compared to non-Indigenous populations a greater proportion of the language they have access to (child-directed and overheard) comes from these interactions. Non-Indigenous children hear more speech produced by adults than by other children (Alam, Ramírez and Migdalek, 2021).

The benefits of overheard speech, multiparty and child-to-child interactions for language development among children from suburban populations and native communities are currently being studied (Sperry et al., 2019) in the context of the controversy generated by the ‘language gap’ hypothesis (Hart and Risley, 1995; Golinkoff et al., 2019). This hypothesis maintains that child-directed speech, particularly maternal speech, predicts children’s language development. Although Weisleder and Fernald (2013) and Shneidman et al. (2013) have provided some evidence that the quantity of child-directed (not overheard) speech is related to later vocabulary development, their analyses did not take account of the diversity of the words to which the children had access, nor the ebb and flow of the interactions in which they were embedded. Examining these aspects of children’s language experiences is relevant to experimental findings that indicate that children are keen observers of third-party interactions and are able to monitor overheard conversations to learn word meanings (Akhtar, 2005; Arunachalam et al., 2013).

The intercultural and bilingual family literacy programme

The early family literacy programme was designed and implemented in 2004 with funding from private donations, foundations and government support.¹⁰ The project adapts its design to specific groups and collaborates with different types of social organization, such as community day care centres, after-school clubs, community kitchens and kindergartens. Initially, we had access to the communities through our academic and educational networks. After a short time, other communities that came to know about our work requested the programme. It was also implemented within the framework of several governmental departments concerned with childhood education in Buenos Aires and Chaco.¹¹ To date, 6,240 children and their families have participated directly in the educational activities. Approximately 60,000 other children, whose day care and kindergarten teachers participated in the children’s language development and family literacy training workshops, indirectly benefited from the programme.

The programme’s design has three theoretical dimensions, two of which address human development and learning processes in the framework of socio-cultural

10 One of the largest contributions came from Elke Rottgardt and Horst Schroth through the Care Foundation (Germany). CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas) and SECyT (Secretaría de Ciencia y Técnica), the two scientific government organizations in Argentina, have supported the project over the years. The project has also received funding from the Finnish and Swiss embassies in Argentina, Arcor Foundation, Save the Children (Spain), OMEP (Organización Mundial para la Educación Preescolar), Navarro Viola, OEI (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos) and UNICEF.

11 The programme was also implemented in Entre Ríos Province (2007–2014) with funding from the Ministry of Education and Arcor Foundation.

perspectives (Vygotsky, 1967). First, the programme draws upon the communities' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005), the types of play and activities in which children participate, and the objects available for them to learn with, in order to promote the acquisition of reading, writing, diverse vocabulary and discourse forms. The second dimension concerns the language(s) of the community and the characteristics of the environments in which children are socialized, in order to be able to anchor the teaching situations in the patterns of interaction that organize children's daily exchanges with adults and other children. The programme also capitalizes on the specific ways of teaching and learning frequently used in the community, all of which are taken into account when designing the activities. The third dimension is focused on the linguistic and cognitive processes involved in literacy acquisition. The programme integrates global and analytical approaches, requiring specific skills and abilities; it aims to promote bottom-up processes, such as phonological awareness, word recognition and transcription, as well as top-down processes that foster comprehension and production of written text (e.g. Tunmer, Herriman and Nesdale, 1988).

The programme seeks to promote parents' and older siblings' involvement in creating home-based opportunities for young children's language and print literacy development.

Three core concepts also characterize the programme. The first is interculturality, which is addressed by connecting the skills that children have acquired in their early experience to learning new abilities and less familiar concepts. Second, interaction and conversation serve as the matrix of learning: all the activities are designed to be carried out in collaboration with adults and older children. Lastly, the development of children's linguistic potential involves generating situations to enhance the language or languages spoken by the families and the wider community; since Indigenous children master Spanish and Qom to differing degrees, bilingual or second-language teaching strategies are employed.

On the basis of these theoretical dimensions and core concepts, the programme seeks to promote parents' and older siblings' involvement in creating home-based opportunities for young children's language and print literacy development. Activities are based on intergenerational learning practices that are rooted in all cultures. This involves collaboration with communities on three projects: the design of learning activities, the development of ethnographic children's storybooks and digital early literacy materials, and the implementation, follow-up and assessment of the programme.

Learning activities

The programme activities sought to enhance the development of children's discourse, diverse vocabulary, phonological aspects of language, and early writing and reading abilities. Oral discourse production is promoted through the narration of personal experiences, giving instructions for games and planning future activities. The activities aimed to teach the use of a discourse style that could be understood independently of the situational context. In dialogic story reading, children participate in extensive conversations about the stories and are also invited to read parts of the text. Writing the texts is mainly carried out by the adults or older siblings, while the younger children contribute to talking about the content, dictating, and writing some words, when they are able to.

Although all the activities enhance learning diverse words, some vocabulary activities – labelling, describing, comparing, categorizing and so on – engage different cognitive and linguistic abilities.

Lastly, phonological activities such as rhymes, songs and sound games are used to enhance children's phonological awareness. This, together with learning the alphabet, allows them to infer phoneme and grapheme relationships, and learn to write and read words.

Ethnographic children's storybooks and digital early literacy materials

In collaboration with community members and Spanish and Indigenous teachers, we developed ethnographic storybooks based on the observations collected during fieldwork. Selected events from the audio- and video-recorded observations of children's daily lives were fictionalized and turned into storybook episodes. This makes them truly ethnographic, not just books that refer to local issues, knowledge and concerns. They present the children's viewpoints on their reality, their interests and the language(s) of their communities.

Ethnographic reading books try to represent the children's subjective experiences and thus allow them to learn that writing can function as an external support system to represent information, ideas and emotions. The process of reading also serves as a means of accessing knowledge produced in other social and cultural groups. Through reading, children can access diverse worlds of meaning. To show this, knowledge and objects from the child's culture are interwoven with other knowledge and other cultural norms, seeking to present an intercultural perspective. For Qom children the books are bilingual, and for monolingual children, many of whom speak non-standard Spanish, the books are bi-dialectal: that is, the narrator uses a standard dialect while the book's characters employ their community's linguistic variation in the dialogues. Since the characters in the

story are real children from the community, the child can identify with them and feel as if they themselves are the story's protagonists, reaffirming their individual, socio-cultural and linguistic identities. In this regard, ethnographic reading books are qualitatively different from other reading books: they aim to reposition children in the foreground of teaching and learning.

En la casa de Oscarcito is a series of 12 short books that narrate episodes of the daily life of a 4-year-old boy who lives in an urban, marginalized neighbourhood. The ending of the ethnographic narrative leads to a story that goes beyond the child's reality. The books also include games and other learning activities intended to promote children's literacy skills development. *En la comunidad qom Daviaxaiqui* is a series of three bilingual Qom-Spanish books with the same format as *En la casa de Oscarcito*, but based on the daily life of children from the migrant semi-urban Qom Indigenous community. Children from this community, and from most of the urban and semi-urban Indigenous Qom communities, are Spanish speakers, while most of their parents and grandparents are bilingual Qom-Spanish speakers. In addressing this issue, these books promote language revitalization, since they introduce Qom as a second language simultaneously with Spanish, through short stories and vocabulary activities. The picture storybooks *Dany* and *Dany: Na'aqtagec, Na'qaatqa, Relatos, Tolhomtes* are designed to teach Qom and Spanish as second languages. They are based on the observations of the daily life of Daniel, a bilingual child from a rural area in Chaco.¹² Some images of *En la casa de Oscarcito* and *En la comunidad qom Daviaxaiqui* are included in the Appendix.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools and community centres were locked down, we audio-recorded the stories in the series *En la casa de Oscarcito*, *En la comunidad qom Daviaxaiqui* and *Dany* to continue our work with participating families. We sent the recordings, together with digital, interactive, pre-designed literacy games, to the families through WhatsApp. The literacy activities, which the parents video recorded and sent to the research team, demonstrated the interest of the children in the stories and games and the participation of the whole family in these activities. This pilot study with digital activities led us to design an application: *Huo'ona cuentos* [There are stories]. This app has three paths, each with a character taken from our ethnographic observations: 1) Spanish as first language, for monolingual Spanish children, 2) Spanish as second language, for children whose first language is not Spanish, and 3) Qom, for children learning the language. Each of these paths includes stories and literacy activities, designed in collaboration with teachers and community members.

¹² Parents and communities were asked whether they agreed to mention the real names of the children and adults included as characters in the stories. We respected their decision; they approved the final versions of the texts and, in most cases, they co-authored the books.

Programme implementation in family and community settings¹³

The proposals designed to widen children's opportunities for vocabulary and discourse development and literacy learning are implemented mainly through workshops with families and community members. The workshops adopt different approaches tailored to the setting and the population.

The interaction between diverse family members during reading and writing activities at home is conceived as a key strategy to promote children's development and to allow the families to 'assume ownership' of reading and writing.

One approach consists of training workshops for families of 3- to 5-year-old children – 12 per year – organized in community kitchens, pre-schools and kindergartens in their neighbourhoods. The child's mother, father, grandparent or older sibling participates in the workshops. In each workshop, families are given one book from the *En la casa de Oscarcito* series. The book is read and the best strategies for promoting a certain aspect of linguistic development are discussed. Programmes designed to promote early literacy in low SES populations generally focus intervention strategies on the mother–child dyad, aiming to modify how mothers collaborate with their children during reading and writing activities (Britto, Fuligni and Brooks-Gunn, 2006). Instead, our programme provides general orientation on the importance of certain activities for different aspects of linguistic development but does not impose strict guidelines. In line with Lynch and Prins's (2022) proposals, the interaction between diverse family members during reading and writing activities at home is conceived as a key strategy to promote children's development and to allow the families to 'assume ownership' of reading and writing. The fact that no specific instructions are provided allows the families to use the books and implement the activities according to their own interactional patterns. Our aim was to strengthen family and intergenerational literacy and learning.

During the implementation, a researcher visited the children's households and recorded some literacy activities. The subsequent analysis by Stein and Rosenberg (2012) revealed that the extended family structure and children's participation in extensive social networks facilitated the activities. In some of the families, the adult read the book while several children (siblings, cousins, neighbours) listened,

¹³ The design of the project is adjusted in each context of implementation, considering the requirements of our partners and the particular needs of the children and the communities involved. The project title was tailored for each implementation in collaboration with our partners, in order to reflect the specific identity that the project assumed.

dramatized, or answered questions about the story. In other families where adults had low literacy levels, the story was read by an older child who attended basic or secondary school, as in the following exchange in Pablo's household:

Pablo¹⁴ (4 years old) listens to a story read by his 11-year-old brother Nicolás.

Pablo's mother and his sister Elena (5 years old) are also present.

Mother: Leéles el cuento hijo. Ahí comienza (señala una página del libro). Del zorro y la gallina. [Read the story, son. There it begins (points to a page of the book). About the fox and the hen.]

Nicolás: (Reads) 'Rosita era una gallina muy gorda que vivía en el gallinero de una granja. Un día, la gallina Rosita salió de paseo. Un zorro hambriento la vio la salir, quiso comérsela y la siguió...' [Rosita was a very fat hen who lived in a chicken coop on a farm. One day, Rosita went for a walk. A hungry fox saw her leaving, felt like eating her and followed the hen....]

Mother: Esta es la gallina y este es el zorro (señala los dibujos del cuento). [This is the chicken and this is the fox (points to the pictures of the story)].

Nicolás: (Reads) 'Como el zorro quería atrapar a la gallinita, tuvo que saltar para pasar por encima del cerco y cayó arriba de un hormiguero lleno de hormigas. Las hormigas, muy enojadas, picaron muy fuerte al pobre zorro. El zorro se levantó corriendo y se alejó muy rápido.' [Since the fox wanted to catch the little hen, he had to jump over the fence and fell on top of an anthill full of ants. The ants, very angry, stung the poor fox very hard. The fox jumped up and ran away very quickly.]

Mother: Se escapó de las hormigas que le picaban. [He ran away from the ants that were biting him.]

Ana: Como me escapo cuando Juan me quiere atrapar. [As I escape when Juan wants to catch me.]

Paul: ¡Sí! [Yes!]

In this exchange, the mother, while not herself reading, distributed the children's tasks ('Read the story, son'). The elder boy read the story while the little children made comments that account for their involvement and comprehension of the narrative.

The analysis showed that the literacy situations were not homogeneous, but rather varied across families: they adopted different modalities regarding adult

14 The names of participants in verbal exchanges were changed to preserve anonymity.

interventions, the activities performed, how participants followed the instructions in the books, and the children's performance based on the stories (Stein and Rosemberg, 2011). The different kinds of interaction and structuring of the situations entailed distinct learning opportunities for the children. The study of the impact of the literacy sessions generated by the programme showed that they provided children with an enriched lexical input compared to the vocabulary that these children were exposed to in their daily lives (Rosemberg, Stein and Borzone, 2011). Additionally, the results of a pre-test–post-test study showed that children who participated in the programme performed better in vocabulary and writing abilities than children from a control group (Rosemberg, Stein and Menti, 2011).

The older children are trained in eight workshops: they read the stories that they will later read to the younger children, discuss strategies to keep small children's attention and interest, and work on formulating different kinds of question.

In the Qom migrant community on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, the older children have an important role in younger children's socialization. In order to capitalize on the way that interactions between children of different ages can support early literacy development in younger children and also generate meaningful reading and writing situations in which the older children develop a deeper understanding of the writing system, we carry out a specific activity – *De niño a niño* [From child to child] – community literacy tutoring workshops for children (Rosemberg and Alam, 2013). Through these workshops, we also seek to improve older children's abilities as readers and writers. The older children are trained in eight workshops: they read the stories that they will later read to the younger children, discuss strategies to keep small children's attention and interest, and work on formulating different kinds of question. They also reflect on the vocabulary in the texts and how to explain the meanings of unknown words to a young child. Tutors are encouraged to narrate personal past experiences linked to the texts and to provide decontextualized descriptions of objects and scenes that appear in the book. Each tutoring session takes place a week after the training. Each older child reads one of the *En la casa de Oscarcito* or *En la comunidad qom Daviaxaiqui* books to a pre school-aged child, and completes the activities and games suggested in the book. The following excerpt is part of such an activity:

After reading the story, tutors and tutees carry out various activities.

Tutor: (Reads) '¿Qué partes le faltan a Malevo? Escribe los nombres.' [What body parts from Malevo are missing? Write the names.]

Tutor: '¿Esto qué es?' (points to an illustration in the book) [What is this?]

Tutee: 'Un perro.' [A dog.]

Tutor: 'Un perro. ¿Qué le falta acá?' (points to illustration) [A dog. What is missing here?]

Tutee: 'La oreja.' [The ear.]

Tutor: 'Poné la o, a ver.' (guides the hand of the tutee) [Put the o, let's see.]

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the families and their children became very isolated, with little contact with educational institutions. We converted the face-to-face workshops into a series of recommendations and materials used to promote interactive family literacy activities at home. They were part of the audio-recorded stories and digital, interactive, pre-designed literacy games sent via WhatsApp. The exchange presented below was video-recorded in a bilingual Qom-Spanish household in Chaco province, where a child, his mother and his uncle were carrying out the Qom literacy activities in digital format after listening to a story from the *En la comunidad qom Davaixaiqui* series.

Audio recorded story: 'Aso potai ye aviaq.' [The anteater is in the bush.]

Mother: 'Aso potai.' [The anteater.]

Uncle: 'Potai.' [Anteater.]

Child: 'Potai.' [Anteater.]

Mother: 'Ye aviaq.' [The bush.]

Child: '(Y)e aviaq.' [The bush.]

Uncle: 'mj (asiente)' (nods his head).

Mother: 'Después.' [Afterwards.]

Audio recorded story: 'So nsoqolec ñi'iyā aso potai cha'aye aso potai huo'oi sou naache logoraiqa.' [The boy was scared of the anteater because he has long claws.]

Mother: 'Ñi'iyā.' [was scared.]

Child: '(Cha'a)ye (a)so...' [because the...]

Mother: 'Nna'ache.' [claw (makes the gesture of an attacking claw with her hand).]

Child: '(Nna')ache.' [claw (imitates the mother's gesture).]

Uncle: 'Muy bien.' [Very good.]

In this exchange, the child's mother and uncle highlight some fragments of the recorded story by repeating or reformulating them. The child participates in the narration by repeating his mother's words, expanding her utterances and imitating her gestures. In this way, the child also contributes to the development of the text's meaning.

Final considerations

The intercultural and bilingual family early literacy programme draws on empirical research on children's home and community environments. It capitalizes on children's primary socialization experiences and considers the community funds of knowledge, uses of language, vocabulary, and ways of learning and participating in daily activities as the starting point for the design of ethnographically based literacy materials and learning activities, both the literacy tutoring sessions and the family workshops. These activities and instruments (Cole and Engestromm, 2007) mediate some of the child's earliest experiences with reading and writing and generate a micro-context of interactions in the household environment that enhances literacy development.

In Argentina, the macro-context of social policies that affect children's sanitary, living and safety conditions and their early learning opportunities (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1993) need to be improved for greater social and educational equity. Meanwhile, as shown in this chapter, it is also viable to collaborate at the micro-level (households, families) in designing and offering programmes that broaden children's learning opportunities. Like other programmes that stress the socio-cultural nature of literacy practices (see Lynch and Prins, 2022), the family literacy workshops, child-to-child tutoring sessions and home-based literacy activities that we created in the programme, do not seek to impose participation structures and cultures common in other social groups. Rather, our programme involves all family members, beyond the nuclear family, and is anchored in families' and communities' existing funds of knowledge and interaction patterns. Evidence collected in this project indicates that these educational activities widen the quantity and diversity of vocabulary, discursive repertoires and print literacy experiences to which children have access, and at the same time reclaim and recognize cultural and linguistic diversity within families and communities. In so doing, this project contributes to children's and families' empowerment.

References

- Akhtar, N. (2005) 'The robustness of learning through overhearing', *Developmental Science*, 8(2), pp. 199–209. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2005.00406.x>.
- Alam, F., Ramírez, L. and Migdalek, M. (2021) 'Other children's words in the linguistic environment of infants and young children from distinct social groups in Argentina', *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, 44(2), pp. 269–302.
- Arunachalam, S. *et al.* (2013) 'Doing more with less: verb learning in Korean-acquiring 24-month-olds', *Language Acquisition*, 20(4), pp. 292–304.
- Britto, P.R., Fuligni, A.S. and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2006) 'Reading ahead: effective interventions for young children's early literacy development', in D.K. Dickinson and S.B. Neuman (eds) *Handbook of early literacy research*, vol. 2. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 311–332.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. and Ceci, S.J. (1993) 'Heredity, environment, and the question "How?": a first approximation', in R. Plomin and G.E. McClearn (eds) *Nature, nurture & psychology*. American Psychological Association, pp. 313–324.
- Cole, M. and Engeström, Y. (2007) 'Cultural-historical approaches to designing for development', in J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (eds) *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 484–507.
- Collins, J. and Michaels, S. (2011) 'The importance of conversational strategies in the acquisition of literacy', in *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*. 1980, pp. 142–156.
- Golinkoff, R.M. *et al.* (2019) 'Language matters: denying the existence of the 30-million-word gap has serious consequences', *Child Development*, 90(3), pp. 985–992. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13128>.
- González, N., Moll, L.C. and Amanti, C. (eds) (2005) *Funds of knowledge: theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Erlbaum.
- Hanemann, U. (2015) 'Lifelong literacy: some trends and issues in conceptualising and operationalising literacy from a lifelong learning perspective', *International Review of Education*, 61(3), pp. 295–326.
- Hart, B. and Risley, T.R. (1995) *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Brookes.

- ISEPCI Instituto de Investigación Social Económica y Política Ciudadana [Institute for Social Economic Research and Citizen Policy] (2021) *Informe indicador familiar de acceso a la alimentación [Family Access to Food Indicator Report]*. Available at: <https://isepci.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/INFORME-IFAL-FINAL.pdf>.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Messineo, C. (2003) 'Del Gran Chaco al Gran Buenos Aires. Programa participativo de capacitación y fortalecimiento de la lengua y la cultura toba en una comunidad indígena urbana (Derqui, Argentina)', in *Memorias del I Congreso de Idiomas Indígenas de Latinoamérica*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin.
- Nelson, K. (2007) *Young minds in social worlds: experience, meaning and memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- ODSA (Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina) (2021) *Nuevos retrocesos en las oportunidades de desarrollo de la infancia y adolescencia. Tendencias antes y durante la pandemia COVID-19*. Report. Available at: <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/12060/1/nuevos-retrocesos-oportunidades.pdf>.
- Rogoff, B. (1993) *Aprendices del pensamiento*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Rosemberg, C.R. et al. (2015) *Los entornos lingüísticos de niños pequeños en Argentina [Language Environments of Young Argentinian Children]*. CONICET.
- Rosemberg, C.R. et al. (2020) 'Nouns and verbs in the linguistic environment of Argentinian toddlers: socioeconomic and context-related differences', *First Language*, 40(2), pp. 192–217.
- Rosemberg, C.R. and Alam, F. (2013) 'De niño a niño: un programa de niños tutores en alfabetización', *Didac*, 61, pp. 76–80.
- Rosemberg, C.R., Stein, A. and Borzone, A.M. (2011) 'Lexical input to young children from extremely poor communities in Argentina: effects of a home literacy program', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(1), pp. 36–52.
- Rosemberg, C.R., Stein, A. and Menti, A.B. (2011) 'Orientación Educativa sobre el vocabulario y el acceso a la alfabetización: evaluación del impacto de un programa de intervención en las familias y la escuela', *Orientación y Sociedad*, 11. Available at: http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?pid=S1851-88932011000100003&script=sci_arttext&tlng=pt.

- Rowe, M.L. and Weisleder, A. (2020) 'Language development in context', *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, 2, pp. 201–223.
- Shneidman, L. et al. (2013) 'What counts as effective input for word learning?', *Journal of Child Language*, 40(3), pp. 672–686. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000912000141>.
- Simons, H.D. and Murphy, S. (1988) 'Estrategias en el lenguaje hablado y en la aptitud de leer', in J. Cook-Gumperz (ed.) *La construcción social de la alfabetización*. Madrid: Paidós, pp. 213–233.
- Sperry, D.E., Sperry, L.L. and Miller, P.J. (2019) 'Reexamining the verbal environments of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds', *Child Development*, 90(4), pp. 1303–1318.
- Stein, A., Menti, A.B. and Rosemberg, C.R. (2021) 'Socioeconomic status differences in the linguistic environment: a study with Spanish-speaking populations in Argentina', *Early Years*, pp. 1–15.
- Stein, A. and Rosemberg, C.R. (2011) 'Alfabetización temprana en poblaciones urbano marginadas. La familia como contexto de oportunidades', *Revista IRICE Nueva Época*, 23, pp. 9–22.
- Stein, A. and Rosemberg, C.R. (2012) 'Redes de colaboración en situaciones de alfabetización familiar con niños pequeños. Un estudio en poblaciones urbano marginadas de Argentina', *Interdisciplinaria Revista de Psicología y Ciencias Afines*, 29(1), pp. 95–108.
- Tomasello, M. (2003) *Constructing a language: a usage-based theory of language acquisition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tunmer, W.E., Herriman, M.L. and Nesdale, A.R. (1988) 'Metalinguistic abilities and beginning reading', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23(2), pp. 134–158.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1967) 'Play and its role in the mental development of the child', *Soviet Psychology*, 5(3), pp. 6–18.
- Wasik, B.H. and Herrmann, S. (2004) 'Family literacy: history, concepts, services', in B.H. Wasik (ed.) *Handbook of family literacy*. Mahwah: Erlbaum, pp. 3–22.
- Weisleder, A. and Fernald, A. (2013) 'Talking to children matters: early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary', *Psychological Science*, 24(11), pp. 2143–2152.
- Weizman, Z.O. and Snow, C.E. (2001) 'Lexical output as related to children's vocabulary acquisition: effects of sophisticated exposure and support for meaning', *Developmental Psychology*, 37(2), pp. 265–279.

Appendix

Figure 1. Storybook from the series *En la casa de Oscarcito* [At Oscarcito's house]



Figure 2. Storybook from the series *En la comunidad qom Daviaxaiqui* [In the Qom Daviaxaiqui community]



Figure 3. *Huo'na cuentos* app [There are stories]





Chapter 19

Intergenerational appropriation of technologies in the context of collaborative writing activities in Mexico

Patricia Valdivia and Judy Kalman

Introduction

In Mexico, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI is the Spanish acronym) (2021) estimates that 2.4 million older adults (defined by the Mexican government as at least 60 years old) are not fluent readers or writers and that, in a society where people constantly interact with digital technologies, their knowledge of written language is insufficient for using digital devices and software easily. In response, the United Nations (2021) has called on governments to provide older people with opportunities to access digital culture in order to secure their participation in social, economic and cultural activities. The Institute for Adult Education in Mexico (INEA, 2022) designs literacy programmes promoting adult education and social participation. Although these programmes effectively reduced illiteracy to 4 per cent by 2018 (INEA, 2018), there is still a need to create opportunities for older learners to explore and use digital technologies for everyday purposes.

For us, it is clear that what is called illiteracy is a complex phenomenon tied to the historical exclusion of specific social sectors in Mexico (Indigenous peoples, women, Afro-Mexicans), the unequal distribution of social goods (such as education, health, employment and general well-being) and the unjust allocation of public funding. For any programme to be successful, educational authorities will have to mend this history and consider the diversity of social contexts, coordinate between the actors (officials, instructors and the adult population), and design a pedagogical approach that encourages an integrated appropriation of literacy and digital technologies (Rodríguez, Couturier and Jiménez, 2020; Schmelkes and Street, 2015). A recurring obstacle in official adult education programmes is that institutions propose programmes from a compensatory or

remedial perspective, replicating formal schooling for children (Kalman et al., 2018). Too often, these proposals focus more on measurable, isolated skills than on constructing situated practices and knowledge through the authentic use of reading and writing, including in digital environments.

Studies of intergenerational practices (IGP) recognize the value of involving different generations in social practices to promote the exchange of knowledge and experience between younger and older learners (Méndez and Castro, 2011; Vieira and Sousa, 2016). Some studies (Lave, 2019; Lynch, 2011; Vieira and Sousa, 2016) suggest that this is best achieved by leaving the site of the school and identifying spaces and practices where young and old interact with, around and through literacy and the digital. Furthermore, Kalman et al. (2018) point out the importance of seeing reading, writing and the uses of digital technologies embedded in contexts of talk and as a means of participating in situated social practices rather than as an end in itself. Although many studies focus on how family members help children learn to read and write, others describe how children become brokers for their parents' needs in the realms of literacy and digital technologies (Henze, 1992; McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Lynch and Prins, 2022).

In this chapter, we analyse two literacy activities within one family. First, we analyse their engagement in a collective book-writing project and examine how they mediate each other's participation and facilitate learning. Second, we examine how the children mediate their mother's efforts to learn to use her cell phone. Our data come from a more extensive study that centres on how people use digital technologies in precarious conditions, and the adjustments and arrangements they construct to participate in social and digital practices.

Here we move away from the structured school spaces and activities commonly at the centre of attention in family literacy research (Lynch and Prins, 2022), to show the relevance of studying everyday family activities as scenarios where people learn and appropriate literacy and digital culture. Our work contributes to studies that conceive daily life as an arena where knowledge is built through participating in social activities (Lave, 2019) and to studies of family intergenerational learning and literacy (FILL), by understanding how different family members contribute to each other's learning through coexistence, interaction and mutual support (Elfert, 2008; Hanemann, 2020; Hanemann et al., 2017; Lynch and Prins, 2022; UIL, 2017).

Theoretical aspects: Reading, writing and digitality as social practices

This chapter conceptualizes both literacy and digital culture as social practices. We understand that reading, writing and digital technologies are part of historical

processes that vary from setting to setting and depend on the social, political and cultural contexts in which people use them (Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Kalman, 2003b; 2003b; 2004); at the same time, they result from and are immersed in multiple power relations (Street, 1984; 2009). From socio-cultural theory, we know that reading, writing and using digital technologies go beyond acquiring decontextualized skills. Reading and writing are situated practices immersed in communicative processes that establish and maintain relationships with others and participate in valued cultural practices (Heath, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Digital devices and software are only one of the available environments for literate activities.

*From socio-cultural theory, we know that
reading, writing and using digital technologies
go beyond acquiring decontextualized skills.*

Research shows how people relate to various texts and to different people – friends, neighbours and relatives – during daily activities (Heath, 1983; Lynch, 2011). These studies show that written culture is not limited to a few spaces, but that literate and digital appropriation processes are broader and more complex. People use semiotic and digital resources to act in the social world according to their interests, purposes and intentions (Kress, 2010) in complex social relationships. Social practice theories posit that technological, material, geographical, social and institutional elements are entangled, giving rise to the features and specificities of situated activities (Hopwood, 2016; Schatzki, 1996). From this point of view, people use literate and digital resources to participate in authentic activities, and social environments influence the types of experience people engage in (Lynch, 2011).

We approach appropriation by conceiving of learning processes as situated in time and place. Other participants, artefacts and resources mediate learning. Appropriation processes arise when people give meaning to their actions and artefacts while participating in a purpose-driven activity (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Through their actions, they transform their existing knowledge and build new understanding (Hernández and López, 2019; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2008). To address these complexities, we need to study what people do with texts (Blommaert, 2008) and with digital artefacts (Rendón and Kalman, 2017) in their daily lives, in order to identify their literacy and digital practices, the knowledge put into play, and the relationships they establish with others and with technologies.

Tláhuac: A resource-constrained environment

Understanding how people appropriate different aspects of digital and literate culture requires examining the local conditions where people relate to and use reading, writing and digital artefacts in their daily lives (Blommaert, 2008). From 2017 to 2019 we studied a family of photographers and cultural promoters from Tláhuac, a region in the process of urbanization to the southeast of Mexico City. Official information estimates that most of Tláhuac's population has basic electricity, water, underground sewers, internet, digital television and fixed or mobile telephony (INEGI, 2016). Despite these claims, the population continually reports shortages of clean drinking water and electricity and unreliable internet connectivity.

Tláhuac brings together many people living in poverty; just under half of the population has a basic education, only a third attended secondary school, and barely a fifth has gone beyond high school (INEGI, 2016). In addition, 2.5 per cent of the inhabitants did not attend school as children, and the illiteracy rate of people over 15 years of age is 2.4 per cent (Delegación Política de Tláhuac, 2015) compared to 2.1 per cent in Mexico City as a whole.

We encountered and built rapport with our research subjects by 'hanging out' and being present as part of entering our study context.

Local poverty, weak infrastructure and little or no schooling make Tláhuac an environment with limited resources (Ravi, Ismail and Kumar, 2021). The population has low income, extensive mobility problems, limited access to digital devices, and difficulties accessing resources, services and social practices such as filling out forms, registering for school, or receiving public benefits.

We encountered and built rapport with our research subjects by 'hanging out' and being present (Agar, 1973) as part of entering our study context. Following our guidelines for selecting participants, we sought out people who used digital technologies and/or participated in literacy practices in their daily activities. We struck up conversations with people in public places where we observed their activities from afar, and spent time with our participants in the context of '*saludar*' (greet), '*convivir*' (be together) and '*acompañar*' (accompany) – all culturally acceptable forms of establishing a relationship and collaboration in our local context.

Among several people who participated in this study of everyday digital practices was Lolita, whom we met on the Plaza outside the elementary school in Tláhuac. Lolita sold children's books, laid on the ground in an improvised stand, offering

them to passers-by. For this chapter, we focus on the literate and digital activities of Lolita's family, which formed part of their shared book-writing project. We focus on several events where the parents and children collaborated and mediated activities for each other. Analysing these events required an in-depth study of each member's words and actions, according to their purposes and situation (Dyson and Genishi, 2005). In a previous work, Valdivia (2021) described the cultural, social, economic and material conditions that converge in their context. Here we briefly describe each family member:

- Lolita¹⁵ is 58 years old. She attended primary school but did not continue past the sixth grade. Not going on to junior high school was very common for women of her generation. At one point, she enrolled in a training programme for pre-school teachers, a certificate programme that did not require anything beyond an elementary education.¹⁶
- Alberto, 72, Lolita's husband, is a photographer. He studied journalism at the National Autonomous University of Mexico but never completed his degree. He is a self-employed photographer and writer who promotes Tláhuac's local culture and that of other traditional neighbourhoods in Mexico City through his photographs, videos and writings. He has a small photographic studio on one side of the Plaza.
- Andrea, Jade, Elena and Gis are Lolita and Alberto's daughters. Andrea is the eldest; she likes to draw and has a daughter whom Lolita looks after. Jade, 33 years old, studied sociology at the National University but did not complete the final requirements for her degree. She runs a community kitchen and is studying nutrition at the Open and Distance University of Mexico. Elena is a photographer and offers her services through Facebook. Their youngest sister, Gis, 25 years old, enjoys painting and knitting; she sells clothing, shoes and soap through Facebook. She recently completed high school.

We gathered data using a qualitative and ethnographic framework (Blommaert, 2008; Street, 2009; Taylor and Bogdan, 1992). From these data, we constructed analytical categories from the family's point of view. Our analytical goals were to understand their innovations, adaptations and appropriation of digital technologies, and their specific experiences with reading and writing print and digital texts, in the context of local meanings, conditions and possibilities. We used an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1994) to observe their activities, participate in various situations, and converse with Lolita, Alberto, Jade and Gis. We also conducted semi-structured interviews centred on their

15 To respect the decision of each informant, in some cases we use pseudonyms.

16 Lolita used the term 'maestra' to describe this programme, but because she did not have a secondary school certificate, we believe it was for a teacher's assistant.

educational backgrounds, daily uses of digital technologies, reading and writing, efforts to learn how to use technologies, and approaches to accomplishing this. We audio- and video-recorded our dialogues with their consent, protecting their confidentiality. Our data include field notes, photographs and videos of their activities. We transcribed the interviews and organized them in OfficeExcel® (Kalman, Valdivia and Rendón, 2020). We used this programme to identify the main events in which family members mediated one another's learning by using literacy and digital technologies.

Alberto writes a book with his family's help

In one event, we describe how Lolita's family participates in a collective project. Each one puts their knowledge and know-how into play (Lewis, 2016) and supports other family members in their shared book project. This effort culminated in October 2005 when Alberto Barranco et al. (2005) published the book entitled *La alegría de la muerte y el dolor de la vida. Día de muertos en Tláhuac* (The joy of death and the pain of life: The Day of the Dead in Tláhuac).

Alberto's book describes the traditional Day of the Dead celebration in his family's community. He brings together people's narratives (Coles, 1989) and the local histories of artefacts related to the Day of the Dead celebration, explaining their histories and use (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012). The book's written texts are accompanied by numerous photographs and drawings representing the Day of the Dead. In the first part, the authors provide geographical and historical data on Tláhuac. They then describe the meaning of the Day of the Dead, detail how people live and relive their communities' traditions, and elaborate on the artefacts, symbols and signs they use. The book's final sections include interviews with long-time residents, stories, some traditional verses called *calaveras literarias*¹⁷ written by Alberto, Lolita and their daughters, and local proverbs and sayings. The book contains multimodal representations including drawings, texts, symbols and images (Kress, 2010).

Writing a book is a highly literate activity. It requires knowledge of a particular textual genre, one which articulates a set of formal communicative characteristics that make it recognizable to others. In addition, each textual genre requires specific acts and different resources and actions (Blommaert, 2008). Producing a book demands the execution of multiple actions to sustain the production process and put knowledge into play to succeed in publication. Although literary production may have certain general characteristics, in reality the book publication process

17 As part of the Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico, people compose *calaveras*, humorous literary verses that refer to the Grim Reaper collecting friends, family members and public figures.

is situated: the uses of artefacts and technologies change, and are organized according to the means, people, knowledge, purposes, geographical environments and social conditions present at any one time and place (Lave, 2019).

Furthermore, writing a book requires time, physical and intellectual effort, and material and technological resources (Blommaert, 2008). In Alberto's case, he was not the only one invested in writing; his entire family got involved in producing the book. The family described how the writing took place at a time when digital technologies were just becoming available. In preparing materials for the book, Alberto conducted multiple interviews with the Tláhuac community and recorded the conversations on cassette tapes and videos in VHS format. He knew how to do this, and considered it essential for creating his text, and he also knew many people in his community from whom he could gather information about Tláhuac. He also knew how to write literary texts and take accurate and artistic photographs. However, he did not know how to use the emerging digital technologies to transform audio and visual data into written texts, to organize files or to create book sections. This is where other family members mobilized their knowledge and know-how about digital devices and software, and became involved in transcribing and organizing data. His daughters employed diverse artefacts in various activities and collaborated to apply their knowledge and familiarity with the production process of moving from audio and visual recordings to written text.¹⁸

*In Alberto's case, he was not the only one
invested in writing; his entire family got
involved in producing the book.*

According to Gis, many of the texts that would be part of the book were handwritten by her father (lines 1047–1050). Given the complexity of his project and the large number of recordings, videos and pictures, Alberto decided to use digital technologies to put his book together. However, he did not know how to use a computer or software, so he asked his daughters for help. Valdivia (2021) has written elsewhere about how Andrea, Jade, Elena and Gis appropriated digital practices and artefacts through the mediation of friends and neighbours. His daughters, aged 9 to 19, transformed Alberto's handwritten materials into digital texts (lines 1051–1054).

18 In our transcriptions, we used an abbreviated version of sociolinguistic coding. In the examples presented in this paper, '|||' indicates overlap in talk; '...' elongated syllables; and '(.)' the researchers' comments.

1047	Sra. Lolita: pero lo escribió	Sra. Lolita: but he wrote it
1048	Investigadora: pero lo escribió en::	Researcher: but he wrote it by::
1049	Sra. Lolita: Él tiene muchos escritos a mano.	Sra. Lolita: He has a lot of handwritten texts.
1050	Gis: Él los escribe a mano	Gis: He writes them by hand
1051	Gis: y mi hermana,	Gis: and my sister,
1052	Gis: yo: ,	Gis: I ,
1053	Gis: todas mis hermanas nos dimos a la tarea	Gis: all my sisters, we took on the job
1054	Gis: de pasarlo a la computadora.	Gis: of typing them into the computer.

Source: Based on an interview with Lolita, 15 March 2018

Gis told us that her father wrote on sheets of paper and in notebooks (lines 1059–1062), but they also had to transcribe Alberto's interviews with local people (lines 1063–1065). The younger sisters transcribed the audio and video recordings by hand; they listened to the audio and watched the videos (line 1067), transforming them into a written format in notebooks (line 1068). Later Jade, Gis's 17-year-old sister (1069, 1070), typed them on the computer (line 1071). Jade was the most experienced with a keyboard, having learned to type at school (line 1070). Lolita and her daughter Gis said book-writing was 'a family job' (lines 1072, 1073). It required each family member to share and put into play their knowledge and know-how.

1059	Investigadora: pero él lo escribió en cuadernos,	Researcher: but he wrote in notebooks,
1060	Investigadora: o en hojas	Researcher: or on sheets of paper
1061	Investigadora: o en qué .	Researcher: or in what .
1062	Gis: En cuadernos y:	Gis: In notebooks and:
1063	Gis: en muchas de sus escritos eran en cuadernos,	Gis: a lot of his writing was in notebooks,
1064	Gis: entrevistas en cuadernos,	Gis: interviews in notebooks,
1065	Gis: y:: algunas en grabaciones	Gis: and:: some in recordings

1059	Investigadora: pero él lo escribió en cuadernos,	Researcher: but he wrote in notebooks,
1060	Investigadora: o en hojas	Researcher: or on sheets of paper
1061	Investigadora: o en qué .	Researcher: or in what .
1062	Gis: En cuadernos y:	Gis: In notebooks and:
1063	Gis: en muchas de sus escritos eran en cuadernos,	Gis: a lot of his writing was in notebooks,
1064	Gis: entrevistas en cuadernos,	Gis: interviews in notebooks,
1065	Gis: y:: algunas en grabaciones	Gis: and:: some in recordings
1066	Gis: entonces mi hermana y yo estábamos muy chiquitas,	Gis: So, my sister and I were very young,
1067	Gis: nos ponía a escuchar las grabaciones	Gis: he had us listen to the recordings
1068	Gis: y pasarlas a una libreta,	Gis: and transcribe them into a notebook,
1069	Gis: y luego mi otra hermana la más grande,	Gis: and then my other sister, the oldest,
1070	Gis: como estudió mecanografía,	Gis: since she studied typing,
1071	Gis: ya de la libreta lo pasaba a la computadora,	Gis: she took the notebook and typed it into the computer,
1072	Gis: o sea que el libro sí fue un trabajo de familia,	Gis: So, the book was a family job,
1073	Gis: en sí todo.	Gis: in everything.

Alberto's daughters mediated the production process for his book (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). They made it easier for Alberto to turn his manuscript into digital files. They helped him participate in other social practices, such as organizing different parts of the book, doing revisions, presenting his work to a publisher and having it published (Kalman, 2003a). In this activity, each family member learned about and identified other forms of written production. They were mediators and learners simultaneously (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

Alberto became familiar with digital formats, technologies and artefacts, while his daughters learned about producing texts. In addition, each member could identify specific knowledge in another family member. Alberto recognized that his youngest daughters managed to write by hand and could listen to his

recordings and transform the audiovisual format into a textual one. At the same time, the youngest daughters accepted their older sister’s ability to operate the computer keyboard effectively, given its similarity to a typewriter.

3099	Gis: Sí porque mi mamá tiene su correo, también.	Gis: Yes, because my mom has email, too.
3100	Gis: Pero ese se lo manejamos nosotras ((ella y sus hermanas))	Gis: But we dealt with that for her ((she and her sisters))
3101	Investigadora: Ah:: ok	Researcher: Ah:: ok
3102	Gis: Bueno, o sea mi mamá dice	Gis: Well, I mean my mom she says
3104	Gis: ‘me envían un correo,	Gis: ‘they sent me an email, or
3105	Gis: es que me pidieron un correo’.	Gis: they asked me for an email’.

Source: Based on an interview with Lolita, 15 March 2018

Lolita: Sending an email

Lynch and Prins (2022) and Rivoir (2019) have pointed out the importance of the family, especially children and grandchildren, as a resource for older people to use digital technologies. As we will see, the dynamics of creating the book together were soon repeated in other family activities. Gis is the principal mediator for her parents; she supports their acquisition of digital technologies and participates in their social activities, including using platforms for communicating with other people or searching for information online. In one of the interviews, Gis mentions that her mother has an email account (line 3099), but Señora Lolita does not use it. For the most part, her daughters manage her account (line 3100). As Gis points out, Lolita knew what an email was, but when she wanted to send one (line 3105) she asked someone else for help (lines 3103–3105).

3026	Investigadora: ¡Ah:: la secretaria!	Researcher: Oh:: the Secretary!
3027	Sra. Lolita: Sí:	Sra. Lolita: Yes:
3028	Investigadora: Tú le lees lo mensajes de whats?	Researcher: you Do you read to her the What’s (App) messages?
3048	Nieta de Lolita: Es que mi mamá ((Lolita)) no sabe usar mucho WhatsApp .	Lolita’s granddaughter: It’s just that my granma ((Lolita)) doesn’t know how to use it a lot WhatsApp .

3465	Gis: Mi mamá ((Lolita)) sí usa su celular	Gis: My mom ((Lolita)) does use her cell phone
3467	Gis: pero nada más sabe llamar,	Gis: but she only knows how to call,
3469	Gis: y contestar.	Gis: and answer.
3474	Gis: Y ella ((nieta de Lolita)) es la que le contesta sus mensajes.	Gis: And she ((Lolita's granddaughter)) is the one who answers her messages.

Source: Based on an interview with Lolita, 15 March 2018

Lolita’s granddaughter reads her WhatsApp messages (lines 3028, 3048); she is like her grandmother’s ‘secretary’ (lines 3026–3027). Lolita could use the cell phone (lines 3465, 3467, 3469) for calls but did not learn how to respond to the messaging services. To answer messages on the messaging platform, her granddaughter helped her type them (line 3474). In this way, the presence of a family member (daughter or granddaughter) enabled Lolita to participate in digitally mediated social activities.

Lolita gradually learned to use her cell phone, incorporating different uses and actions into her repertoire of possibilities. In addition to making calls, she began taking photos of events and family gatherings, using her handwritten phone directory, writing on WhatsApp and viewing her messages. Through the guidance, orientation and observation of her daughters or granddaughter, Lolita began to manipulate the digital device with greater ease until she could incorporate her cell phone and various apps such as WhatsApp, email and camera into her daily activities. Lolita managed to find new uses and give meaning to mobile devices, building new knowledge (Hernández and López, 2019). Throughout this process, her family members were vital to her learning, making it possible for her to use her device for diverse social practices (Kalman, 2003a; Lewis, 2016).

These events illustrate how people of different ages relate to each other in daily activities, put their knowledge into play, and build other knowledge within the framework of their participation. This suggests that it is imperative to incorporate people’s daily lives into educational programmes in meaningful and viable ways for the adult population.

Final thoughts

By participating in literate and digital activities, the members of this family managed to build new knowledge and support each other’s learning. Alberto discovered new ways to produce written texts with different digital artefacts, while his daughters became familiar with the constituents of putting together a book. Lolita familiarized herself with her mobile device and incorporated it

into her daily activities, thanks to her daughters' and granddaughter's guidance and orientation. In this way, parents and children of different ages intertwined the knowledge and know-how needed for collective production, together constructing a shared experience. In addition, each activity had a tangible purpose: Alberto's goal was to publish a book, and Lolita directed her efforts towards learning to use her phone to communicate with others.

This case has lessons for adult and family/intergenerational literacy programmes and research. First, educational content must be linked to people's real-life activities. Studies can make important contributions to understanding the diverse activities people engage in, how they organize their collaborations, and their distribution of knowledge and actions (Lave, 2019). The spontaneous interactions within this family (and others) can inspire ways of organizing learning activities in a programme setting. Mediation between generations is significant: people can listen, observe and learn from others about their daily practices. Second, family and intergenerational programmes can broaden their approach to include

***The spontaneous interactions within this family
(and others) can inspire ways of organizing learning
activities in a programme setting.***

multiple family members and cultural activities beyond school-oriented literacy. As Lynch and Prins (2022, p. 158) point out, researchers and family literacy educators need to 'expand their focus beyond parents and recognize that a network of adults and other children shape children's language and literacy learning'. To this, we add the challenges of designing educational projects that emphasize collaboration among participants and sharing know-how. Research has shown that children can be equal partners and contribute to others' language and literacy learning (McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Lynch and Prins (2022, p. 163) note that children can help their parents 'learn unfamiliar technologies, especially in immigrant families where parents have little exposure to digital devices'.

Authorities, educators and facilitators must recognize how people relate to reading and writing, to digital devices, and to other readers and writers in different ways and settings. When people of varying ages participate in literate and digital activities meaningful to them, they feel highly successful and accomplished. If we can identify how this happens, we can construct and design literacy programmes that will be meaningful for learners and increase the possibility that people pool their knowledge when participating in educational endeavours. Their participation in the social world through literacy will increase as a result.

References

- Agar, M. (1973) *Ripping and running: a formal ethnography of urban heroin addicts*. New York: Seminar Press.
- Barranco, A. et al. (2005) *La alegría de la muerte y el dolor de la vida: Día de muertos en Tláhuac*. México: Comisión de Desarrollo Social.
- Barton, D. and Hamilton, M. (2000) 'Literacy practices', in D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič (eds) *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context*. New York: Routledge, pp. 7–15.
- Blommaert, J. (2008) *Grassroots literacy: writing, identity and voice in central Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- Coles, R. (1989) *The call of stories: teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Delegación Política de Tláhuac (2015) *Programa delegacional 2015-2018 'Tláhuac, por amor y dignidad'*. Available at: <http://www.tlahuac.cdmx.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/PROGRAMA-DELEGACIONAL-TLAHUAC-2015-2018.pdf> (Accessed: 20 May 2022).
- Dyson, A. and Genishi, C. (2005) *On the case: approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Elfert, M. (2008) *Family literacy: a global approach to lifelong learning; effective practices in family literacy and intergenerational learning around the world*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000177753> (Accessed: 20 May 2022).
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1994) *Etnografía: métodos de investigación*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Hanemann, U. et al. (2017) *Learning together across generations: guidelines for family literacy and learning programmes*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248446> (Accessed: 20 May 2022).
- Hanemann, U. (2020) *Familias del aprendizaje: enfoques intergeneracionales para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la alfabetización; estudios de caso seleccionados de:* <http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase>. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373232/PDF/373232spa.pdf.multi> (Accessed: 20 May 2022).
- Heath, S. (1983) *Ways with words: language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henze, R. (1992) 'Literacy in rural Greece: from family to individual', in F. Dubin and N. Kuhlman (eds) *Cross-cultural literacy: global perspectives on reading and writing*. New York: Regents/Prentice Hall, pp. 47–62.

- Hernández, O. and López, M. (2019) 'Apropiación social de tecnologías digitales en un contexto de trabajo informal y precario', *Entreciencias*, 7(19), pp. 67–82.
- Hopwood, N. (2016) 'Sociomaterialism, practice theory and workplace learning', in N. Hopwood (ed.) *Professional and practice-based learning: times, spaces, bodies, things*. New York: Springer, pp. 53–116.
- INEA (Institute for Adult Education in Mexico) (2018) *Programa de alfabetización y abatimiento del rezago educativo 2014-2018: informe de avance y resultados 2018*. INEA. Available at: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/442745/Informe_de_Avances_y_Resultados_2018-INEA.pdf (Accessed: 10 April 2022).
- INEA (Institute for Adult Education in Mexico) (2022) *Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos*. Available at: <https://www.gob.mx/inea/> (Accessed: 17 April 2022).
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) (2016) *Panorama sociodemográfico de Ciudad de México 2015*. Ciudad de México: INEGI. Available at: http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/Productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/inter_censal/panorama/702825082178.pdf (Accessed: 10 April 2022).
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) (2021) *Estadísticas a propósito del Día Internacional de las Personas Adultas Mayores (1° de octubre)*. INEGI Informa. Available at: http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/Productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/inter_censal/panorama/702825082178.pdf (Accessed: 10 April 2022).
- Kalman, J. (2003a) 'El acceso a la cultura escrita: la participación social y la apropiación de conocimientos en eventos cotidianos de lectura y escritura', *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, 8(17), pp. 37–66.
- Kalman, J. (2003b) *Escribir en la plaza*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Kalman, J. (2004) *Saber lo que es la letra: una experiencia de lectoescritura con mujeres de Mixquic*. Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores.
- Kalman, J. et al. (2018) *La relevancia de la alfabetización de personas jóvenes y adultas en América Latina hoy*. Pátzcuaro: CREFAL. Available at: https://www.crefal.org/images/publicaciones/libros/la_relevancia_de_la_alfabetizacion.pdf (Accessed: 17 April 2022).
- Kalman, J., Valdivia, P. and Rendón, V. (2020) 'Examining qualitative data using spreadsheets: constructing analytical narratives around talk, action, and practice', in M. Knobel, J. Kalman, and C. Lankshear (eds) *Data analysis, interpretation and theory in literacy studies research: A how-to guide*. Maine: Myers Education Press, pp. 123–148.

- Kress, G. (2010) *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Lave, J. (2019) *Learning and everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, T. (2016) 'Artifacts as stories: understanding families, digital literacies, and storied lives', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 59(5), pp. 511–513.
- Lynch, J. (2011) 'Print literacy engagement of parents from low-income backgrounds: implications for adult and family literacy programs', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(6), pp. 509–521.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- McQuillan, J. and Tse, L. (1995) 'Child language brokering in linguistic minority communities: effects on cultural interaction, cognition, and literacy', *Language and Education*, 9(3), pp. 195–215.
- Méndez, A. and Castro, I. (2011) 'Aprendizajes intergeneracionales en los surcos de Chile y jitomate: experiencias con niñas, niños y mujeres de familias jornaleras agrícolas migrantes', in *Decisio*, pp. 78–85. Available at: https://www.crefal.org/decisio/images/pdf/decisio_30/decisio30_saber14.pdf (Accessed: 5 May 2022).
- Pahl, K. and Rowsell, J. (2012) *Artifactual literacies: every object tells a story*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ravi, P., Ismail, A. and Kumar, N. (2021) 'The pandemic shift to remote learning under resource constraints', *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 5(CSCW 2), pp. 1–28.
- Rendón, V. and Kalman, J. (2017) "Se quitan el zapato y allí lo meten": consideraciones acerca de la materialidad digital en ámbitos educativos', in O. Hernández, G. Ortiz, and D. Hernández (eds) *Comunicación, educación y tecnologías digitales. Tendencias actuales en investigación*. México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, pp. 49–79.
- Rivoir, A. (2019) 'Personas mayores y tecnologías digitales.: revisión de antecedentes sobre las desigualdades en la apropiación', in A. Rivoir and J. Morales (eds) *Tecnologías digitales: miradas críticas de la apropiación en América Latina*. s.l.: CLACSO, p. 68. Available at: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctvt6rmh6.6> (Accessed: 17 April 2022).
- Rodríguez, A., Couturier, D.P. and Jiménez, R.G. (2020) 'Adult basic education in Mexico: human rights and public budgeting', *Perfiles educativos*, 42(170), pp. 40–59.

- Rogoff, B. (2008) 'Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship', in P. Murphy, K. Hall, and J. Soler (eds) *Pedagogy and practice: culture and identities*. United Kingdom: SAGE. The Open University, pp. 58–74.
- Schatzki, T. (1996) *Social practices: a Wittgensteinian approach to human activity and the social*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schieffelin, B.B. and Ochs, E. (1986) 'Language socialization', *Annual review of anthropology*, 15, pp. 163–191.
- Schmelkes, S. and Street, S. (2015) 'Tres visiones de la educación de adultos en México: los funcionarios, los instructores y los adultos', *Revista latinoamericana de estudios educativos (México)*, 45(3), pp. 181–218.
- Scribner, S. and Cole, M. (1981) *The psychology of literacy*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Street, B. (1984) *Literacy in theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. (2009) 'Perspectivas etnográficas y políticas sobre cultura escrita: el poder de nombrar y definir', in J. Kalman and B. Street (eds) *Lectura, escritura y matemáticas como prácticas sociales: diálogos con américa latina*. Mexico: CREFAL, Siglo XXI Editores, pp. 84–94.
- Taylor, S. and Bogdan, R. (1992) *Introducción a los métodos cualitativos de investigación*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2017) *UIL Policy Brief 9: engaging families in literacy and learning*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000249463> (Accessed: 20 May 2022).
- United Nations (2021) *Día internacional de las personas de edad 1 de octubre*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/es/observances/older-persons-day> (Accessed: 17 April 2022).
- Valdivia, P. (2021) '"Para que se actualicen": procesos de apropiación digital en familia', *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones en Educación*, 12(15), pp. 93–112.
- Vieira, S. and Sousa, L. (2016) 'Intergenerational practice: contributing to a conceptual framework', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 35(4), pp. 396–412.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978) *Mind in society: the development of higher mental process*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. (1991) *Voces de la mente: un enfoque sociocultural para el estudio de la acción mediada*. Madrid: Aprendizaje visor.

Section 7

FILL policy

analysis



Chapter 20

Family and international literacy and learning policies: 12 questions to guide critical policy analysis

Esther Prins, Alexis Cherewka, Carol Clymer and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva

Introduction

This chapter proposes a framework for analysing, revising and developing policies related to family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL). After revisiting the key terms, we introduce critical policy analysis as our analytical framework.

The remainder of the chapter provides guiding questions and elements to include in FILL policies, supported by examples that illustrate these policy elements. While international policy references inform our approach, this chapter primarily draws examples from the USA, where family literacy policies are well-documented. Nonetheless, these examples serve as valuable guides for policy analysis in diverse global contexts.

In countries where FILL programming is sporadic and project-based, a national-level policy may not exist. In other countries, while explicit mention of FILL may be absent, aspects of 'parent(al) education' are integrated into national education sector plans or policies, particularly those concerning early childhood care and education or primary education. Some countries also outline expectations for parental involvement in their children's schooling. Additionally, FILL programmes may also fall under policies addressing immigration, official and minority languages, health and community affairs (see, for example, Shohet, 2012). Thus, this chapter takes an expansive view of FILL and its interconnected policies.

Defining key terms

We want to reiterate that countries often use different terms to describe programmes and policies that pertain to FILL without explicitly naming them as such. These terms include family literacy (and/or learning), two-generation programmes, home learning, intergenerational (or transgenerational) literacy and learning, parental education and parental or family involvement, engagement or participation in children's education. They may also refer to parental or family support for children's education, learning, academic achievement and academic success.

We focus on intentional efforts to assist parents and their communities support children's language, literacy and educational success, while encouraging learning together as a family or community. These efforts are referred to as programmes, even if they are small-scale or short-term. For a programme to qualify as a FILL programme, it should provide parents with information and resources on how to support children's learning and education. In addition, these programmes may offer adult basic or literacy education, educational activities for children and interactive literacy activities where parents and children learn and engage together.

FILL policy encompasses not only formal legislation and agreements but also the contributions of those who shape the policy as it is implemented.

Typically, these programmes focus on younger children (early elementary and below), though sometimes older children are included as well. As a UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, 2017) policy brief states, 'Programmes that provide literacy and general parenting support often emphasize a "whole family" approach to literacy and learning whereby parents (re)discover literacy alongside their (pre)school-aged children' (p. 2). In this context, 'parents' refers to adult caregivers who help raise children and serve as literacy mediators. Our understanding of policy is elaborated below.

Critical policy analysis and its relevance for international FILL

Understanding international FILL policies requires a more expansive view of the term 'policy'. In this chapter, we view policy as a continuous process, from its conceptualization to its enactment. For example, a community organization might partner with the Ministry of Education and multilateral or bilateral agencies to offer a short-term programme for parents and children, funded by these agencies. Such a programme will be shaped by the policies of the

community organization, as well as the decisions of programme providers and educators or facilitators regarding the curriculum and other aspects. Thus, FILL policy encompasses not only formal legislation and agreements but also the contributions of those who shape the policy as it is implemented. This includes multi/bilateral agencies, funders, community-based organizations, programme providers, educators and, in some cases, programme participants.

The framework offered in this chapter builds on critical policy analysis (CPA). Traditional policy analysis views policy as a process that can be predicted and managed (Rist, 1994) and evaluates its effectiveness by studying outcomes to identify, for example, which practices should be adopted and disseminated (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). In contrast, CPA examines both intended and unintended consequences of the policy, questioning whose practices are deemed 'best' and under what conditions they are most likely to occur (ibid.). Diem and colleagues (2014) proposed five guiding topics for CPA that can guide FILL policy analysis:

- Differences between the policy text and actual programme implementation.
- Values and assumptions underlying the problem the policy aims to address.
- Voices included or excluded in policy-making.
- The potential of the policy to reduce or increase inequities.
- The role of marginalized groups and target audiences in shaping policy.

These topics help illuminate how FILL policies are developed and their impact on those who matter most: participating families.

Questions and considerations to guide FILL policy analysis

This chapter offers guidance for both creating a new FILL policy and examining or revising an existing one. When developing a new policy, readers can substitute the word 'should' (i.e. What should a FILL policy include?) This section is divided into two parts: policy content (the 'what') and the policy-making process (the 'how').

Policy content

1. Does a FILL policy exist? If so, is there a single policy or multiple policies that pertain to FILL? Which government unit or units oversee FILL?

Carpentieri et al. (2011) identified the 'lack of a clear policy home for family literacy programmes' (p. 13) in Europe. Likewise, across the world, elements

of FILL are present across policies from various ministries or sectors, including ECCE and primary education, lifelong learning and adult education, employment, health and human services, women's issues, social inclusion, and multiculturalism and immigration, among others.

For example, in the USA, a well-defined FILL policy was established with federal funding for The Even Start Family Literacy Program in 1989. This programme mandated adult education for parents, support for parental involvement in their children's educational development and ECE (Tao, Gamse and Tarr, 1998). Although Even Start was defunded in 2011, similar components have been referenced in other US legislation, such as the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (or AEFLA), as well as several sections of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a US law passed in 2015 that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

In many countries, FILL appears in education policies and sector plans concerning parental support and involvement in children's education. For example, in Ireland, family literacy is referenced in two federal policies: the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion and the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020 (Hegarty and Feeley, 2020). FILL initiatives were implemented to address social exclusion and promote children's education achievement.

Education has historically been the domain of teachers and schools, with parents contributing financially and attending school events or parent-teacher meetings.

School governance policies sometimes stipulate forms of parental involvement both at school and at home (see below). For example, the Kenyan primary curriculum 'emphasizes the role of parents as essential to their children's education and in the success of curriculum implementation' (Muigai, 2018, p. 236), with school boards required to engage parents in assessing school needs. However, education has historically been the domain of teachers and schools, with parents contributing financially and attending school events or parent-teacher meetings. Muigai's analysis underscores the need to increase parental involvement in education. This need presents an opportunity to create a FILL policy that fosters parents' multifaceted support for education and enables adults to pursue their own educational goals.

Mongolia's Education Sector Mid-term Development Plan 2021–2030, for example, identifies parental involvement and training in pre-primary education as critical to improving access and quality in ECCE (MOEAS, 2020). The plan proposes developing training to enhance parents' skills and improve their support for children's learning. These proposed activities are included in the cost projections for the sub-sector programmes.

2. What roles do central and sub-national governments play in creating and overseeing FILL policies?

The government plays a distinct role in establishing and implementing FILL policies, particularly concerning funding. When federal or national policies are in place, states or provinces often have flexibility in their implementation. Conversely, even in the absence of a national policy, states or provinces can still allocate funding for FILL. In the USA, FILL policy is typically established at the federal level by Congress through legislation that includes guidance on implementation and administrative rules. Several pieces of legislation are relevant to FILL. For example, the previously mentioned AEFLA legislation creates:

a partnership among the Federal Government, States, and localities to provide [...] adult education and literacy activities [to assist adults in] becoming full partners in the educational development of their children; [and] lead to sustainable improvements in the economic opportunities for their family (US Congress, 2014, Sec. 202, p. 184).

Although the AEFLA legislation outlines a policy that defines family literacy and the types of activities eligible for funding, states can set their own policies for distributing these funds within the legislation's guidelines. If federal funding is used for FILL, the application process must be competitive. Moreover, states often allocate their own funds to support FILL (Clymer et al., 2017).

In addition to AEFLA, other legislation from the US Department of Education, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, can also be used for FILL programming, particularly through elementary schools. These programmes support literacy services for families in various contexts, including promoting educational equity for Indigenous and migrant students and their families. Furthermore, the Bureau of Indian Education funds the Family and Child Education (FACE) programme, which aims to promote parental involvement in children's education and enhance family literacy among Native American families.

Thus, it is crucial to examine the extent of flexibility sub-national and local government agencies have in implementing policies established at the federal or national level.

3. What does the FILL policy cover or include?

Policies vary in their specificity and what they cover. For instance, a FILL policy that includes programming could encompass funding, requirements for programme content, accountability and performance measures, guidelines, goals, and definitions.

In the USA, AEFLA defines family literacy and specifies the types of activities that are expected, namely adult education, parent education, parent–child interactive literacy activities, and education for children. By framing the purpose of FILL as ‘readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency’ (US Congress, 2014, Sec. 202, p. 186), this policy unfortunately neglects the many other reasons that families participate in programmes. The AEFLA legislation also explains what is meant by ‘adult education’ and ‘English-language acquisition’, outlines which entities can provide services and receive funding, and specifies who can receive services. States must align adult education and language instruction with the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), and eligible participants must be pre-and post-tested using federally approved standardized assessments.

Policies intended to encourage or stipulate parental involvement in school governance or children’s learning may however lack funding or implementation mechanisms. For instance, Malawi’s National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management ‘aims to create an enabling environment and coordinated support mechanisms for parental involvement in provision and management of educational services’ Marphatia et al., 2010, p. 18), yet the policy ‘creates no forum for interaction with district and national-level policy-makers’ (ibid.).

In contrast, Uganda’s 1997 Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy prohibited the collection of school or parent–teacher association (PTA) fees from parents and defined parents’ responsibilities across three domains:

School

- Financial and in-kind contributions for school improvement permitted.
- Monitor and hold schools accountable for income and expenditures.
- Develop relationships with teachers and participate in PTAs.
- Monitor children’s attendance and performance.
- Participate in school programmes and mobilization efforts.
- Home.
- Provide basic necessities such as food, health care, clothing, learning materials and transportation.

- Create a safe, nurturing and disciplined environment to support children's affective, emotional and physical development.
- Balance home responsibilities with time for studying and support learning at home.

Community

- Encourage the local chairperson to support school programmes (ibid., p. 19).

These examples underscore the importance of ensuring that a FILL policy includes the necessary support and mechanisms for effective implementation and enforcement.

4. Who are the policy and government-funded FILL programmes (if any) intended to serve?

Policies may focus on the general population or specific groups, often focusing on families who are marginalized due to factors such as income, geographic location, education level, caste, race/ethnicity, tribe, language, migration status, or other considerations. How do policy-makers determine which groups have the greatest educational needs? And is serving these groups a requirement or a priority?

The Literacy Council of the Northwest Territories – one of three Canadian territories – provided and funded family literacy programmes that incorporated Aboriginal worldviews, cultural practices and languages.

In Canada, the federal National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) considered FILL a funding priority for more than 15 years until the 2000s. Based on the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), the NLS prioritized funding for francophone Canadians and First Nations communities. For example, the Literacy Council of the Northwest Territories – one of three Canadian territories – provided and funded family literacy programmes that incorporated Aboriginal worldviews, cultural practices and languages (Shohet, 2012).

In the USA, adults in federally funded FILL programmes must (a) be at least 16 years old and not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school and (b) demonstrate unmet literacy needs, be English-language learners or be seeking their secondary school equivalency diploma. Many programmes focus on children from birth to eight years old, but some also serve older children. Low-income families, parents with limited formal education and underserved populations such as racial/ethnic minorities, are frequently prioritized. As mentioned above, the FACE programme is exclusively for Native American families.

5. How is FILL funded, if at all?

Options for funding FILL programmes vary. Funding often comes from central, state or local governments; however, programmes usually need to supplement government funding with support from private foundations, non-governmental organizations, fundraisers, private contributions or other sources. In Ontario, Canada, for example, funding was provided by four provincial ministries (Children and Youth Services, Culture, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration) and three federal departments (Human Resources and Skills Development, Citizenship and Immigration, and the Public Health Agency of Canada; Shoheit, 2012).

Family engagement programming is a key element that focuses on culturally and linguistically responsive parent-child relationships to support children's healthy development and school readiness.

In the USA, states receive federal funding to provide family literacy services, within certain guidelines. States have some flexibility in implementing the legislation and allocating funds, leading to considerable variation across states (Clymer et al., 2017). Head Start and Early Head Start are two other federally funded FILL programmes that help prepare the most vulnerable children for success in school and life through early learning, health and family well-being initiatives. Family engagement programming is a key element that focuses on culturally and linguistically responsive parent-child relationships to support children's healthy development and school readiness.

In some countries, international organizations (e.g. the World Bank) or bilateral organizations (e.g. USAID) fund FILL-related programmes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank initiated the Read@Home Program, which delivers 'reading, learning, and play materials in languages children understand to hard-to-reach homes,' along with 'materials and activities to support parents and caregivers to read with their children' (World Bank Group, 2024).

Some private foundations also fund FILL. For example, since 1991, the Toyota USA Foundation has invested more than US\$50 million in the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) to support family literacy programming in the country (NCFL, 2024).

UIL (2017) recommends 'using flexible funding streams and reporting approaches' to promote cooperation among sectors (pre-school, primary school, adult education), institutions and stakeholders (p. 4), acknowledging that 'differing mandates, responsibilities and ways of operating between

governmental departments, ministries or providers' can impede cooperation and funding (ibid.). Flexibility in funding and approaches can help mitigate these barriers.

6. Who is implementing the policy? How are FILL programmes staffed, and what background and training do employees need to have? What kinds of professional development opportunities exist?

Policies determine who can provide FILL programmes and how they are staffed. Programme quality also depends on the quality of staff and their professional development opportunities.

For example, the USA's AEFLA legislation defines who eligible providers are, resulting in a diverse group of organizations and staff implementing the policy. Eligible organizations include local education agencies such as public schools and post-secondary institutions; public non-profit organizations; private, community and faith-based organizations; and other non-profit agencies such as libraries and housing authorities. Each state may have specific staffing requirements, with some requiring a bachelor's degree and others not. Professional development in FILL also varies across states. National organizations such as the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at the Penn State College of Education, NCFL and the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS), as well as states themselves, offer professional development.

In Canada, the Center for Family Literacy in Edmonton, Alberta, was established in 1998 with financial support from the NLS. This centre was tasked with creating a knowledge base and developing certificate course programmes for FILL practitioners in this province, which were offered and certified by colleges (Shohet, 2012).

The availability of online training for FILL providers, educators and parents is increasing. For instance, UIL offers online courses through its platform, the UIL Learning Hub. These courses are designed for providers, educators, parents, and researchers in the field of FILL. The Aga Khan Foundation has also launched an online course focusing on parenting. Along with offering guides for practitioners, research briefs, presentation slides and webinar recordings, the Goodling Institute provided a free online family literacy community of practice in 2022. This community allowed practitioners to discuss various aspects of practice, such as recruitment and retention, as well as fathers' engagement in family literacy. Despite these offerings, there is a need for more targeted training to address programme providers' and educators' specific needs.

When funding for recruiting FILL staff and providing professional development is limited or non-existent, providers should consider using participatory and community-based models. Examples include employing community promoters (e.g. health promoters), peer teachers, or train-the-trainer approaches, all of which have been successful in community development projects.

7. What are the requirements for evaluating programmes and demonstrating their outcomes and benefits? How can you ensure that a wide range of family goals and outcomes are included, not just employment?

Evaluating FILL programmes is complex due to the significant variation in programme design and implementation. These programmes produce a wide range of benefits and outcomes, both intended and unexpected, and these outcomes often become evident only after programme completion (Carpentieri, 2013). Consequently, the simplistic, short-term evaluation frameworks often required by funders seldom align with the multifaceted purposes and goals that families bring to FILL programmes.

In many countries, accountability measures are employed to ensure that FILL programmes use funds efficiently and achieve the stipulated outcomes (Lynch and Prins, 2022). These measures may include, for example, the number of participants served, outcomes for parents and/or children, the instruments or indicators used to measure outcomes, and consequences for not reaching these targets. However, we should also consider who is accountable to whom and for what. Programme staff and funders need to be accountable to families and communities as well.

In the USA, AEFLA holds states accountable by establishing targets for enrolment and performance through the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). States must report on several performance outcomes related to gains in skills, employment and wages, credential attainment, and transition to post-secondary education. Additional information on outcomes related to family literacy – such as parents' increased involvement in their children's schooling, contact with teachers, participation in school activities, more frequent reading to their children, visiting the library, purchasing reading materials, and reduction in public assistance – can also be reported, although these outcomes are optional.

A long-standing critique of accountability in adult education and FILL in the USA is that it prioritizes employment outcomes and test scores, even though employment may not be relevant to parents, and test scores do not adequately capture their achievements (Belzer, 2017; Lynch and Prins, 2022).

Scholars, educators and others have argued that accountability measures should include indicators related to families' everyday life goals, such as obtaining

citizenship, securing a driver's licence, and communicating with children's teachers and health care providers. Expected outcomes should be tailored to the needs of families, the purpose of programmes, and the local and national socio-cultural settings. We also need better ways to gauge how and what children and adults are learning through FILL, using inexpensive and easy-to-use measures. Moreover, participatory approaches are needed to ensure that families shape the evaluation and assessment goals and methods, and that they learn from the results.

8. Is the policy culturally and linguistically appropriate?

Formal family literacy programmes originated in the USA and are primarily implemented in high-income, English-speaking countries. The most prominent models also come from the USA and the UK (see Lynch and Prins, 2022, pp. 99–114 on programme models). Thus, it is crucial to examine whether FILL policies in other countries merely import implementation and measurement practices from high-income countries or align FILL with specific contexts. Each FILL policy should be tailored to the country's conditions, history, material resources and cultural practices (including parenting, education and local/Indigenous forms of knowledge transmission). One dimension to consider is that FILL policies and programmes in higher-income countries typically focus on parents (usually mothers) and the nuclear family. Yet, in many other parts of the world, extended family members and older siblings help raise children and are important literacy mediators (Lynch and Prins, 2022). A culturally relevant FILL policy, then, might include language about family members other than the parents, such as grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, or other community members. In such cases, 'parental involvement in education' would refer to any caregiver, and programmes would welcome caregivers besides parents.

In many countries and cultures reading storybooks is not a tradition. Communities, particularly in rural areas, may not have the resources to acquire or the physical climate or infrastructure to store print or digital literacy materials.

Another example is the types of literacy practices that are recognized and encouraged. In Canada, Ireland, the UK and the USA, children's storybook reading is the archetypal family literacy activity (Anderson et al., 2003). However, in many countries and cultures reading storybooks is not a tradition. Communities, particularly in rural areas, may not have the resources to acquire or the physical climate or infrastructure to store print or digital literacy materials. Thus, a culturally appropriate FILL policy would build on families' daily language and literacy practices and their definitions of literacy.

Another consideration is whether the policy supports multilingualism and learning the official language and native language(s). Translanguaging is an asset-based approach to viewing families' linguistic resources. For instance, in the Netherlands, the Opstap Opnieuw ('Step-up anew') programme, an alternative to the well-known Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), was available in Dutch, Moroccan Arabic, Papiamentu and Turkish, since many families had emigrated from Morocco, Turkey and former Dutch colonies (McElvany et al., 2012).

In Canada, the Official Languages Act supports the use and promotion of minority language rights and bilingualism – English and French – in education and in FILL programmes. In Canada's Northwest Territories, family literacy programmes promote the revival of Indigenous languages and cultures (Shohet, 2012). Similarly, New Zealand family literacy programmes encourage the use of Maori and English (Benseman and Sutton, 2012).

Instead of promoting white, middle-class family literacy practices, the emphasis should be on respecting and building on families' existing practices that contribute to their literacy and learning and expanding their educational opportunities.

In high-income countries, education policies and programmes should consider the unique educational needs and experiences of marginalized and disadvantaged groups such as immigrants, Indigenous communities, and families who live in high-poverty or segregated communities. Instead of promoting white, middle-class family literacy practices, the emphasis should be on respecting and building on families' existing practices that contribute to their literacy and learning and expanding their educational opportunities. It is also important to move away from intervention models that perpetuate colonial ideologies and instead recognize and support the strengths of these communities and families (Anderson et al., 2010; Auerbach, 1995; Crooks, 2017; Reyes and Torres, 2007).

9. How can policy-makers and practitioners make the provision of FILL a community property and a government responsibility?

Mainstream approaches to FILL often place the responsibility for educating young children on parents (usually mothers), regardless of the community conditions in which they are raising children (Prins and Toso, 2008). Consequently, parents (mothers) are sometimes blamed when their children are not 'ready' for school or lag behind their wealthier peers on standardized tests, reading or other measures.

We argue that policy-makers should consider how to create conditions and supports that enable children and their caregivers to learn, pursue education and sustain literacy practices. This is consistent with the UIL (2017) policy brief, which recommends focusing on the creation of ‘rich literate environments’ (p. 3).

Family literacy programmes should develop a reading culture that permeates families’ daily lives. This can be done by helping parents and caregivers improve their skills and confidence to engage and motivate their children to both develop their language and read for pleasure. Developing rich literate environments means not only making easy-to-read, attractive books (also in local languages), ICT tools and media resources available but also encouraging families to take every opportunity to use and develop their new skills. Public campaigns that offer resources, support and reading volunteers to disadvantaged families in the context of family literacy programmes can help make this happen. (ibid., pp. 3–4)

Resources such as community libraries or lending systems, free or low-cost educational resources, and after-school programming can help create these environments.

The policy-making process

10. Which groups or stakeholders need to be involved in creating and refining the FILL policy? Who is missing?

When determining who should be involved, one should consider who will be affected by the policy and who has knowledge about its implementation. Stakeholders include not only policy experts and government officials but also those who implement the policy and experience its effects. Representation should be comprehensive and include national, regional, local and site-specific actors. Examples of FILL stakeholders include:

- education providers (formal, ECCE and non-formal);
- community service and health care providers;
- libraries and librarians;
- school-related organizations, including parent and parent-teacher associations, school management committees, school councils and teachers’ unions (Marphatia et al., 2010);
- adult caregivers and children who participate or want to participate in FILL programmes;
- researchers, policy and advocacy groups;
- policy experts (child, family, adult education and community development);

- government officials from national to local level;
- creative sites where FILL can be offered (e.g. barbershops, laundromats).

Typically, the people with the least power are excluded or consulted as an afterthought. Policy-makers must ensure that the knowledge and experiences of these individuals are included and that their perspectives are not eclipsed by more powerful or higher-status groups and individuals.

11. What mechanisms exist for stakeholders – particularly programme administrators and staff – to inform FILL policy?

To elicit feedback on policy, government entities often use public comment periods, advisory groups or boards, expert panels and, less frequently, participatory planning activities such as search conferences, in which people envision desirable futures for their community (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003). In countries with significant literacy needs, public feedback options should include oral communication methods, such as focus groups, interviews or participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques that utilize drawing, graphing and other visual and oral skills (Chambers, 1997).

In Ireland, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), an independent non-profit, submits written responses to relevant government policy discussions on adult and family literacy and related topics. For example, its 2023 submission to the consultation on the national literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy argued that ‘the family is a key site of literacy learning’ and that family literacy can ‘provide an important intervention into the cycle of educational disadvantage’ (p. 5). NALA also recommended a ‘cross-departmental national policy and action plan on family literacy’ with ‘increased commitment and resources to family literacy’ (p. 8). This thoughtful report demonstrates the value of soliciting public commentary on policy.

However, creating a participatory process does not automatically give all participants an equal voice and influence (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003). Merely bringing people to the table does not erase power dynamics such as deference, persuasion, quiescence or resistance (see Forester, 1989). Thus, policy-makers must be vigilant to ensure that less powerful actors are not silenced or sidelined, whether intentionally or unconsciously.

Finally, policy-makers should avoid using participation merely to legitimize decisions they have already made. Opportunities to participate in policy-making must be genuine, substantive and deliberative. Stakeholders deserve to know that their views and knowledge can influence policy.

12. How are non-state actors involved in shaping FILL policies?

Non-state actors such as corporations, private foundations, powerful individuals (celebrities, billionaires) and other entities, including international donors and organizations, bilateral donors (e.g. foreign governments) and multilateral organizations, wield significant economic, social and political power over policy. For brevity, we focus on corporations and private philanthropic foundations. Emerging concerns about non-state actors' involvement in international education (Monkman, 2022) and other public sectors extend to FILL.

Private philanthropic foundations have played an outsized role in shaping education and development policies internationally. In addition, corporations' poverty alleviation projects may be driven by profit and public relations motives, often benefiting the corporations and not the communities. These private foundations frequently focus on technological solutions, privatizing public goods and producing quick results over simpler, less expensive and potentially more effective solutions and longer-term investments. The former solutions may be ill-suited for communities with limited resources, which may struggle to buy and maintain digital educational technologies that require money, internet access and reliable electricity. Moreover, the money and power of private foundations can pressure policy-makers to follow their agenda (see McGoey, 2016).

***Recipient governments and local policy-makers
should ensure that education remains a public common
good, providing broader social benefits beyond
individual learning outcomes.***

Given the mixed intentions, goals, educational knowledge and records of non-state actors, policy-makers should scrutinize how these entities influence education and FILL policies before deciding what role they should play. These organizations occupy privileged and influential positions in international development partnerships for education (Menashy and Shields, 2017). As such, recipient governments and local policy-makers should ensure that education remains a public common good, providing broader social benefits beyond individual learning outcomes.

In sum, the involvement of non-state actors and other entities in funding education and FILL raises concerns about equity, transparency and power. Their funding processes are often opaque, relying on the applicant's networks, reputation and political capital. Additionally, their heavy focus on employment ('work first') and narrowly defined economic development shapes the direction of FILL policies, programme development, implementation and evaluation. When national governments have low fiscal capacity, unbalanced power relations with non-state actors and other funders are exacerbated.

Conclusion

This chapter presented 12 questions to guide the critical analysis of existing, emerging or future FILL policies. We hope this chapter sparks reflection on how policies can be leveraged to help FILL initiatives and participating families thrive, especially in contexts where material and educational resources are limited and intergenerational literacy and learning practices are complex.

We encourage readers to adapt these questions to their specific socio-economic, cultural and literate environments. Following the principles of critical policy analysis, we urge practitioners, policy-makers and researchers to continuously scrutinize the values and assumptions embedded in policy documents and their implementation, the (un)intended consequences of policies, the groups included or excluded, and how the intended participants can play a substantive role in shaping the policies and programmes intended to benefit them.

References

- Anderson, J. *et al.* (2003) 'Storybook reading in a multicultural society: critical perspectives', in A. van Kleeck, S.A. Stahl, and E.B. Bauer (eds) *On reading books to children: parents and teachers*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 203–230.
- Anderson, J. *et al.* (2010) 'Taking stock of family literacy: some contemporary perspectives', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 10(1), pp. 33–53.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798409357387>.
- Auerbach, E. (1995) 'Deconstructing the discourse of strengths in family literacy', *Journal of Literacy Research*, 27(4), pp. 643–661.
- Belzer, A. (2017) 'Focusing or narrowing: trade-offs in the development of adult basic education, 1991–2015', in A. Belzer (ed.) *Turning points: recent trends in adult basic literacy, numeracy, and language education*. Hoboken: Jossey-Bass (New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education), pp. 11–18.
- Benseman, J. and Sutton, A.J. (2005) *Summative evaluation of the Manukau Family Literacy Project, 2004*. Auckland: University of Auckland and Auckland Uniservices.
- Carpentieri, J. (2013) 'Evidence, evaluation and the "tyranny of effect size": a proposal to more accurately measure programme impacts in adult and family literacy', *European Journal of Education*, 48(4), pp. 543–556.
- Carpentieri, J.D. *et al.* (2011) *Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development*. London: NRDC, Institute of Education.

- Chambers, R. (1997) *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*. Rugby: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Clymer, C. et al. (2017) *Changing the course of family literacy*. University Park: Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED574448.pdf>.
- Crooks, S. (2017) *Family literacy and colonial logics*. University of Toronto.
- Diem, S. et al. (2014) 'The intellectual landscape of critical policy analysis', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(9), pp. 1068–1090.
- Forester, J. (1989) *Planning in the face of power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hegarty, A. and Feeley, M. (2020) *Enabling intergenerational learning: background report on family literacy practices in Irish education and training boards (ETBs)*. Dublin: Solas. Available at: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/ef6de960fb/15047_solas_fet_familyliteracyreport_web.pdf.
- Lynch, J. and Prins, E. (2022) *Teaching and learning about family literacy and family literacy programs*. New York: Routledge.
- Marphatia, A.A. et al. (2010) *Politics of participation: parental support for children's learning and school governance in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda*. London: Institute of Education and ActionAid. Available at: https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/ilops_parents_final.pdf.
- McElvany, N. et al. (2012) 'Family literacy programs in the Netherlands and in Germany', in B.H. Wasik (ed.) *Handbook of family literacy*. New York: Routledge, pp. 339–353.
- McGoey, L. (2016) *No such thing as a free gift: the Gates Foundation and the price of philanthropy*. London and New York: Verso Books.
- Menashy, F. and Shields, R. (2017) 'Unequal partners? Networks, centrality, and aid to international education', *Comparative Education*, 53(4), pp. 495–517.
- MOEAS (Mongolian Ministry of Education and Science) (2020) *Education sector mid-term development plan 2021–2030*. Ulaanbaatar: MOEAS. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2020-12-17-gpe-mongolia-education-sector-medium-term-development-plan-2021-2030.pdf>.
- Monkman, K. (2022) 'Recognizing complexity in our changing contexts: Centering what matters in comparative and international education', *Comparative Education Review*, 66(4), pp. 573–598.

- Muigai, J.W. (2018) 'Parental involvement in primary schools in Kenya as a major strategy for academic success', *European Journal of Education Studies*, 5(3), pp. 237–251.
- NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) (2023) *Submission to the consultation: towards a new literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy*. Dublin: NALA. Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/submission-on-literacy-numeracy-and-digital-literacy-strategy-for-children-and-young-people/>.
- NCFL (National Center for Families Learning) (2024) *Our partners*. Available at: <https://familieslearning.org/partners/>.
- Prins, E. and Toso, B.W. (2008) 'Defining and measuring parenting for educational success: a critical discourse analysis of the parent education profile', *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), pp. 555–596.
- Reyes, L.V. and Torres, M.N. (2007) 'Decolonizing family literacy in a culture circle: reinventing the family literacy educator's role', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 7(1), pp. 73–94.
- Rist, R.C. (1994) 'Influencing the policy process with qualitative research', in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, pp. 545–557.
- Schafft, K.A. and Greenwood, D.J. (2003) 'Promises and dilemmas of participation: action research, search conference methodology, and community development', *Community Development*, 34(1), pp. 18–35.
- Shohet, L. (2012) 'Family literacy in Canada', in B. Wasik (ed.) *Handbook of family literacy*. London: Routledge, pp. 480–505.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2014) 'Cross-national policy borrowing: understanding reception and translation', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 34(2), pp. 153–167.
- Tao, F., Gamse, B. and Tarr, H. (1998) *National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program: 1994-1997 Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service.
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2017) *Engaging families in literacy and learning*. Policy Brief 9. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000249463/PDF/249463eng.pdf.multi>.
- US Congress (2014) *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, HR 803, 113th Congress, Section 202*. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ128/PLAW-113publ128.pdf>.
- World Bank Group (2024) *Brief: Read@Home*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/read-at-home>.

Afterword

Themes and contributions

Esther Prins and Rakhat Zholdoshalieva

This book is the first to focus exclusively on international family literacy. Shifting our gaze to the lower- and middle-income, non-Anglophone countries where most of the world lives helps correct the predominant cultural and geographic focus on informal FILL practices and non-formal programmes in the USA, Canada and the UK (and to a lesser extent, Australia, New Zealand and Western Europe). All but a few of the countries presented in this volume were once colonized. Several authors describe how colonization displaced, eroded and continues to stigmatize traditional language, literacy and intergenerational learning practices, and argue for recovering, legitimizing and building on these practices.

One reviewer of this book manuscript commented, 'Ultimately, the book shows the importance of understanding how family literacy can be practiced differently in different cultural contexts.' Indeed, the text enlarges our understanding of informal family literacy practices and non-formal family literacy programming across the globe, with families and in communities that are often multilingual and have limited material resources. This limitation calls for creative, inexpensive and locally relevant teaching materials, from computer keyboards made of clay for digital literacy learners in rural Uganda to beeswax modelling clay for family play kits in the Philippines. This kind of ingenuity offers a model for FILL educators and planners in other locales.

As formal education expands globally, parents (particularly mothers) are increasingly expected to stimulate children's cognitive development outside school, especially where schools are struggling.

We end by noting that FILL programmes often help parents learn about school systems and support their children's education. Parents and home spaces in formerly colonized countries are increasingly exposed to Western-style educational and communicative practices, which may make families and homes more 'school-like' while also providing access to dominant institutions and linguistic repertoires. Schaub (2023) writes that in the USA there has been 'relentless growth in a culture of schooling that permeates parenting and childhood as never before' (p. xvi), noting that 'parents have invited schooling

into the family' (ibid.). As formal education expands globally, parents (particularly mothers) are increasingly expected to stimulate children's cognitive development outside school, especially where schools are struggling. This collection offers insights and raises questions about the potential benefits and unintended consequences of this trend: How can FILL programmes equip caregivers to understand and navigate the school system and enrich children's learning at home without also displacing informal, culturally-based knowledge, practices and interactions or converting the home into an extension of school?

Adopting Janks's (2010) interdependence model of critical literacy could help FILL programmes manage the tension between these two goals. The first component, power, implies that learners should be helped to understand 'how powerful discourses/practices' – such as the dominance of English, print literacy, or prestige dialects – 'perpetuate themselves' (p. 170). The second, access, entails equipping participants to understand, acquire and use these dominant language(s), discourses, literacies, practices and forms of knowledge (p. 24) and to navigate institutions such as schools. Groups that are marginalized in some ways are often excluded from these resources and institutions. Access is crucial because, as Brandt (2001) has written, 'the literacy that people practice is not the literacy they necessarily wish to practice' (p. 8). The third, diversity, means valuing and incorporating forms of language, literacy, knowing, doing and being that are often invisible or devalued, such as the informal, Indigenous, or traditional literacies and practices discussed in this text. Finally, design creates 'productive power – the ability to harness the multiplicity of semiotic [signs and symbols] systems across diverse cultural locations to challenge and change existing discourses' (Janks, 2010, p. 25). Design is achieved when learners create their own texts and artefacts, especially those that contest how they are positioned in society.

Excluding any of these components creates 'imbalance' (Janks, 2010). For example, access without diversity merely reinforces dominant languages and literacies as the only valued options. Conversely, diversity without access tends to romanticize local knowledge and literacies and perpetuates people's 'marginalization in a society that continues to recognize the value and importance of these [dominant] forms' (p. 24). By incorporating the four components, 'this model enables learners to master (and critique) dominant literacies while also validating their knowledge and literate capabilities, culminating in the production of their own texts' and artefacts (Prins, 2016, p. 310). We believe this model holds promise for helping FILL educators weigh how to incorporate varied literacies, forms of knowledge and practices into programming, and for enabling researchers and policy-makers to understand the school-based and out-of-school literacies present in educational sites, communities and families.

References

- Brandt, D. (2001) *Literacy in American lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Janks, H. (2010) *Literacy and Power*. New York: Routledge.
- Prins, E. (2016) 'Digital storytelling in adult education and family literacy: a case study from rural Ireland', *Learning, Media and Technology*, 42(3), pp. 308–323.
- Schaub, M. (2023) *Motherhood, childhood, and parenting in an age of education: an invited invasion*. New York: Routledge.

Index

A

- accountability 338
- activity systems 294, 295, 305
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) 332, 333, 334, 337, 338
- adult literacy proficiency
in Egypt 109
- Africa 45. *See also* Indigenous African
intergenerational learning
- Afrocentric perspective 62
- apprenticeship 134
- appropriation 313
- Argentina
 - educational conditions in Buenos
Aires and Chaco 294
 - socioeconomic conditions in Buenos
Aires and rural Chaco 293

B

- Bennett, Louise. *See* Miss Lou
- bilingualism 248

C

- Canada
 - family literacy policy 335, 337
 - government funding for family
literacy 336
 - Official Languages Act 340
- Caribbean
 - achievement of Sustainable
Development Goals 269
 - co-curricular and informal activities
for families 265
 - linguistic diversity 275
 - national support for education
during COVID-19 pandemic 264–265

- providing access to technology 262
- providing access to technology for
people with disabilities 267
- technology to support parental
involvement in education 262

China

- education policy 145
- socioeconomic development of 144

Chinese heritage language study

- adult beliefs about Chinese heritage
language maintenance 248–249
- attitude toward children's Chinese
language development 252
- Chinese literacy resources 247–248
- Chinese proficiency 249
- family expectations for children's
heritage language 250–251
- grandparents 246
- grandparents' beliefs about teaching
Chinese heritage language 250
- language and Chinese identity 248
- multilingualism and bilingualism
248
- oral communication 249
- participants 244–246
- role of grandparents in heritage
language development 253

collaborative book writing 316–321

colonial education 53

colonialism

- and education in the Caribbean 280,
286
- and family and intergenerational
literacy and learning 18, 340
- and family literacy 226

colonization 347

- and family literacy 32

community libraries 198, 341

- and family literacy practices 83, 84

- and the Literate Village Project 111, 119
- COVID-19 pandemic
 - adaptation of early family literacy programme 300, 304–305
 - adaptation of the Infant Development Programme for Remote Learning (IDP-RLP) 159
 - and information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) 259
 - and parental involvement in education 261
 - and use of digital educational tools 260
 - co-curricular and informal activities for families 265
 - psychosocial support for Caribbean parents 268
 - support for Caribbean parents 267–268
 - support for education in the Caribbean 264–265
 - technology to support parental involvement in education in the Caribbean 261
- D
- decolonial theory 127, 138
- deficit thinking 226, 281
 - and family literacy programmes 31–32
 - and views of families 144
- Digital Children's Book Library. *See also* community libraries
 - app features 180–181
 - gamification in 187
 - limitations of 180
 - parental involvement in reading 184
 - recommendations for improving 184–185
- digital culture 312–313
- digital literacy 61. *See also* information and communication technologies (ICTs)
 - adult children as mediators for parents 320–322
 - and intergenerational practices 321
 - collaborative book writing 316–320
 - conceptualization 63, 312–313
 - Greek children's media and digital literacy practices 219
 - in the early family literacy programme 300
 - role in intergenerational and lifelong learning 260
- digital picture books
 - advantages of 178
 - benefits of 188, 201, 203
 - effective enhancements 184–185
 - effectiveness of 186
 - effects on children's language and literacy development 186
 - enhancements 179
 - interactive features 185
 - in the Netherlands 186
 - role of adult guidance 184
- E
- early family literacy programme
 - adaptation during COVID-19 pandemic 300–303
 - child literacy outcomes 302
 - design of 297–298
 - development of ethnographic storybooks 299–300
 - development of *Huo'o na cuentos* app 300
 - intercultural and bilingual nature of 297–298
 - involvement of extended family 305
 - learning activities 299

- outcomes of children and families 305
- peer literacy tutoring workshops 303–304
- early language and literacy development
 - among Argentinian children in poverty 296
 - contributing factors 210
 - dialogic reading 299
 - for immigrant children 79
 - foundational skills 294
 - grandparents' role in 253
 - importance of open-ended materials 170
 - in Qom households 296
 - involvement of extended family 301–302
 - language exposure 296
 - language gap hypothesis 297
 - parents' role in 160, 194
 - parents' support for 111
 - phonological activities 299
 - role of adult guidance 184
 - role of storybook reading 177–178
 - use of open-ended materials 161
 - variation in 296
- Early Learners Programme 265
- e-books. *See* digital picture books
- education policy
 - in India 131
 - in Nepal 130
- Egypt
 - women's literacy 109
- elders 34, 45
- English
 - needed to participate in children's formal education 88
 - role in academic success 85
- English as a Second Language (ESL) 225, 228, 237
- epistemic exclusion. *See also* colonialism, colonization
 - and evidence-based educational approaches 278
 - and family literacy in the Caribbean 276–277
 - and language 275, 277, 283
- epistemic injustice 276
 - and hermeneutic injustice 285
- everyday literacy practices 275–276, 286, 312. *See also* literacy practices: informal
- extended family
 - involvement in family training workshops and home literacy activities 301–302
 - involvement in the early family literacy programme 305
 - need to include in programming 322
- F**
- family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL)
 - and accountability 338
 - and professional development 337–338
 - and Western-style schooling 347
 - conceptualization 260
 - designing culturally appropriate programmes 160–161
 - in different cultural contexts 347
 - lack of cultural relevance 18
 - programmes, defined 330
 - recommendations for programming 322
 - typology 262–263
- family and intergenerational literacy and learning policy

- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act 332–334, 337–338
 - and creating conditions for learning, literacy, and education 340–341
 - and identifying stakeholders 341–342
 - and programme evaluation 338
 - concerning programme providers and staffing 337–338
 - critical policy analysis (CPA) of 331
 - cultural and linguistic appropriateness of 339–340
 - defined 330
 - funding for programmes 336
 - in Canada 335–337, 340
 - in Ireland 332
 - in Kenya 332
 - in Malawi 334
 - in Mongolia 333
 - in the United States of America 332–334, 336–338
 - in Uganda 334
 - involvement of non-state actors 343
 - involving stakeholders in 342
 - lack of policy home 331
 - programme models 339–340
 - regarding school governance 332
 - role of central and subnational governments 333
 - scope of 334–335
 - target audiences 335
 - traditional policy analysis of 331
 - Universal Primary Education Policy 334
- family and intergenerational literacy and learning research
 - limitations of 18, 62
- family language and literacy development 83–85
 - involvement of mother and father 86
 - roles of mother and school 88
 - through school 86
- family language, literacy and numeracy (FLLN) 226. *See also* family literacy, family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL)
 - family language policy (FLP)
 - and family literacy among immigrants 242
 - cross-cultural differences 243
 - defined 242
 - importance of home literacy environment 243
- family literacy
 - and colonialism 276
 - and preserving cultural identity 278
 - conceptualization of 81
 - in Jamaica 286
 - reconceptualizing 38
 - school-based 226
- family literacy practices
 - formal and informal 212
- family literacy programme models 18, 36, 96, 237
 - cultural and linguistic appropriateness of 339–340
- family literacy programmes
 - aims of 194
 - as resistance 280–281
 - critiques of 30–31
 - multilingual settings 194–195
 - origins 17, 30
 - parental engagement 202
 - target audience(s) 29–30
- family literacy programmes in Malta
 - Aqra Miegħi* (Read with Me) 197–199

- barriers to participation 199
- design of 201
- engaging fathers 203
- engaging low-socioeconomic status families 202
- impact on children and mothers 200–201
- need for multilingual approaches 203
- overview 196–197
- Seher I-Istejjer* (Magic of Stories) 198–200
- folktales. *See* Indigenous African intergenerational learning: storytelling
- funds of knowledge 295, 298, 305
- G**
- Global South
 - family and intergenerational literacy and learning programmes in 35
- Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy 337
- grandparents 35. *See also* extended family
 - beliefs about teaching Chinese heritage language 250
 - communication with children in Chinese heritage language 250–252
 - in the Chinese heritage language study 246
 - role in children's heritage language development 243, 253
 - role in heritage language development 253
- Greece
 - lack of research and policy on family literacy programming 209
 - need for family literacy programmes 220
- guanxi* 148–149
- H**
- heritage language
 - among 1.5- and second-generation immigrants 241
 - defined 241
- I**
- illiteracy 311
- immigrants
 - Chinese immigrants in the United Kingdom 243
 - Indian immigrants in South Africa 82, 85, 87
- immigrants and refugees 32–33
- Indigenous African intergenerational learning
 - apprenticeship 48
 - before colonization 51
 - communal activities 46
 - critiques of 52
 - elders 45
 - impact of modern schooling on 52–53
 - impact of urbanization on 53
 - initiation ceremonies 49–50
 - storytelling 47, 51, 54
 - survival of 53
 - using technologies to strengthen 53
- Indigenous African intergenerational literacy
 - storytelling 46
- Indigenous cosmologies 36, 37
- Indigenous knowledge 53
- Indigenous learning 36
- Indigenous medicine 135
- Indigenous people
 - efforts to maintain knowledge and identities 37

- family and intergenerational literacy and learning programmes for 333, 340
- Mahadeo Koli 128, 132, 135
- place-based knowing 30, 129, 138
- Qom 293
- Tharu 128, 132, 133
- youth efforts to maintain language and identity 37–38
- Infant Development Programme for Remote Learning (IDP-RLP)
 - adaptation during COVID-19 pandemic 159
 - conceptualization 162
 - conversion to virtual platform 159, 161
 - curriculum and materials 162–163
 - evaluation of Kits for Family Play 164–166
 - future opportunities 172
 - importance of open-ended materials 170
 - Kits for Family Play 159, 163
 - parents' perspectives 164–166
 - participants 159, 161
 - refinements 171
 - sustainability of 170–171
- informal intergenerational literacy and learning
 - among Indigenous people 138
 - as livelihood practices 136–137
 - community learning centres 139
 - conceptualization of 129
 - digital literacy 137
- informal learning, defined 129
- information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D). *See* information and communication technologies (ICTs)
- information and communication technologies (ICTs) 53
 - and intergenerational learning 260
 - and lifelong learning 259
 - in museums 54
 - language preservation apps 54
 - mobile phones 53
 - providing access in the Caribbean 260, 262, 265–267
 - role in family and intergenerational literacy and learning 269
- instructor behaviour. *See* intergenerational digital literacy learning (IDLL) programme: teaching practices
- interdependence model of critical literacy 348
- intergenerational digital literacy learning (IDLL) programme
 - benefits 72–74
 - challenges 73, 75
 - defined 63
 - instructor-learner relationships 68–70, 74
 - interactions among learners 71–72, 74
 - materials 64
 - model 66
 - participants 65
 - partnerships 65
 - teaching practices 67–68
- intergenerational learning
 - conceptualization 62
 - in the Philippines 35
- intergenerational practices. *See also* family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL)
 - adult children as digital literacy mediators 320–321

- and digital literacy 321
- collaborative book writing 316–324
- research on 312
- Ireland
 - family literacy policy 332
- J**
- Jamaica
 - adult literacy rate in the 1970s 280
 - critique of the National Parenting Support Commission 276
 - Jamaica Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL) 280
 - legacy of colonialism in education 280
 - legacy of resistance 280
 - need for culturally responsive, counter-colonial curriculum 282, 286
 - need for culturally responsive education, testing, and family literacy 277
 - social and political climate in the 1960s 279
 - withholding education from enslaved people 278
- K**
- Kenya
 - parental involvement policy 332
- L**
- language gap hypothesis 297
- language-minority families 87
- Latino families 32
- learning outcomes
 - for children 100–104
 - of women 112–114
- Liberia
 - adult literacy rate 96
 - early childhood education policies and enrollment 95
 - history of 94
- Liberian Family Literacy Initiative (FLI)
 - Adult Literacy Programme 98
 - assessing children's learning outcomes 100–104
 - assessing the Adult Literacy Programme 104
 - challenges 99
 - challenges in scaling up 104–105
 - cultural adaptation and appropriateness of HIPPY model 97–98
 - description of 96
 - evaluation 100–104
 - home visiting 97
 - learning through play 98
 - origins 93
 - partnerships 93–94
 - role plays 97
- lifeways 36, 38
- literacy
 - affective 228, 232–233, 238
 - artifactual 232–233, 235
 - as a social practice 81, 129, 281, 305, 312
 - as music and dance 278–279
 - critical 282, 348
 - critique of 281
 - critique of 'social investment perspective' 281
 - cultural models of 81, 86
 - defined 34
 - home literacy practices 87
 - need to decolonize 129
 - recognition of local or indigenous practices 282

- sensory 236
- situated 129, 283, 286
- visual 231
- literacy practices
 - and culture 339
 - hybrid literacy practices 82
 - informal 32–34
 - school-based 32
- literate environment 33
- Literate Village Project
 - benefits 121
 - benefits of women's literacy 116–117, 119, 122
 - curriculum 110–111
 - design of 109
 - evaluation 111–121
 - family harmony 120
 - outcomes of families 118
 - participants' perspectives of 115
 - participants' views on gender 116
 - partnerships 109
 - perspectives of participants' husbands 116
 - target audience 110
 - women- and family-centred approach of 121
 - women's learning outcomes 112, 114–115
- local knowledge
 - in Malawi 33–34
- M**
- Malawi
 - parental involvement policy 334
- Malta
 - linguistic and educational context 195
 - National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 196
 - socioeconomic context of 203
- Mexico
 - adult literacy proficiency 311
 - socioeconomic conditions in Tláhuac, Mexico City 314
- Miss Lou 278
 - Ring Ding television show 279–280
- Mongolia
 - parental involvement policy 333
- mothers' literacy beliefs study
 - book reading 217–218
 - children's screen exposure and digital literacy practices 219
 - conventional vs. facilitative mothers' beliefs and practices 214–215, 217, 220
 - how children learn to read 217
 - mothers as reading models 218
 - participants 212–213, 216
- multilingualism 84, 85, 248
 - and family and intergenerational literacy and learning policy 340
 - in Malta 193, 195, 196, 203
 - in the Caribbean 275
 - in the *Huo'o na cuentos* app 300
- multimodality 179
- N**
- National Education Policy 131
- non-state actors
 - involvement in education and development policy 343
- O**
- oral traditions 45, 133, 160, 278
- P**
- parental beliefs about literacy 211–212
 - facilitative vs. conventional mothers 212

- parental involvement in children's learning 96
 - how schools can foster 88
- parental involvement in early childhood education and care. *See* parental involvement in education
- parental involvement in education
 - and HIPPY programme model 94
 - and the Literate Village Project 111, 116
 - as partnership between parents and teachers 143
 - critique of 347
 - differences between high- and low-socioeconomic status parents in rural China 147–152
 - during the COVID-19 pandemic 261
 - effects on children 143
 - in an immigrant family 83–85
 - in rural China 144–145
 - in Uganda 65
 - involvement of mothers 119
 - need to examine rural Chinese parents' views 144
 - play-based learning 150–151
 - policy 332–334
 - psychosocial support for Caribbean parents during COVID-19 pandemic 268
 - rural Chinese parents' supervision of homework 149–150
 - rural Chinese parents' use of *guanxi* 148–149
 - rural Chinese parents' views of play-based learning 150
 - rural Chinese parents' views on free development 147–148
 - social class differences 210
 - support for Caribbean parents during COVID-19 pandemic 267–268
 - through parent committees in China 145
- parental involvement in education policy
 - in Kenya 332
 - in Malawi 334
 - in Mongolia 333
 - in Uganda 334
- parent-child literacy interactions
 - importance for child development 160
 - support for parents 184
- Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI) 213
- parents
 - as children's teacher 30, 35
 - defined 330
- play-based learning 160
 - in the Philippines 159–162, 164
 - in Trinity Centre family literacy programme 235
- Q**
- Qom
 - child socialisation and early literacy development 303
 - early language and literacy development 296
 - language practices 293
- R**
- religious literacies
 - Buddhist 134
 - Christian Orthodox 33
 - Hindu 133–135
 - in Nepal 33
 - Islamic 33, 84–85, 87, 116
- rural communities 144
 - and challenges for the Family Literacy Initiative 99

- and deficit perspectives 144
- and gender roles in Egypt 116
- and omission from research 144
- and parent involvement in China 144–145
- and Qom people in Chaco, Argentina 293
- in Malawi 34
- in Uganda 62, 63
- S**
- schools 87
 - treatment of minority parents 88
- sociocultural theories of human development 294
- sociocultural theories of literacy 80
- sociocultural theory 162, 313
- South Africa
 - effects of apartheid on children's literacy development 87
 - post-apartheid 88
- storybook reading
 - and culture 339
 - and extended family structure 301–302
 - Greek mothers' beliefs and practices 217–218
 - importance of 177–178
 - mothers' role in 200
 - multilingual 203
 - Seher I-Istejjer* (Magic of Stories) programme 198–200
- storybooks 97
 - bilingual Qom-Spanish 300
 - ethnographic 295, 299–300
 - use in the Philippines 169
- storytelling 163, 168, 231
 - in Jamaica 277–278
 - in the Caribbean 278
- sympoiesis 225, 237
- T**
- tales by moonlight. *See* storytelling
- Te Whāriki early years curriculum 282
- Trinity Centre family literacy programme
 - affective and artifactual literacies 228, 232
 - affective atmosphere 229
 - affective literacy 238
 - children's play 235
 - description 230–231
 - learning through smell 236–238
 - mothers' experiences as asylum seekers 234
 - participants 225
- Türkiye
 - adult literacy proficiency 180
 - need for access to children's books 179
 - Turkish National Broadcasting Channel library app 180
- U**
- Uganda
 - socioeconomic conditions in Northwest 63
 - Universal Primary Education Policy 334
- Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association (URLCODA) 62
 - overview 64
- UNESCO
 - Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) 337
 - Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 62, 75, 259, 262

Sustainable Development Goals
(SDGs) 17, 259, 262, 267, 269, 283

United Kingdom (UK)

asylum seekers 231
Brexit and anti-migrant rhetoric 227
Chinese immigrants 243
neoliberalism and adult education
226

United States of America (USA)

family literacy beneficiaries in federal
programmes 336
family literacy policy 332–334,
337–338
government funding for family
literacy 336

W

Western-style education. *See* colonial
education

wider family learning (WFL) 226.
See also family literacy, family and
intergenerational literacy and learning
(FILL)

women's literacy 136



unesco

Institute for
Lifelong Learning

Family and intergenerational literacy and learning

International perspectives

Family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL) programmes are an effective means of developing and improving the literacy, numeracy and other foundational skills of parents and children, promoting parents' support for children's education, and fostering wider benefits such as self-esteem, supportive social networks, civic participation, and adults' pursuit of further education and learning.

Yet, although intergenerational learning has been happening informally for millennia and family literacy and learning programmes have been implemented across the globe, FILL practices, programmes, models and policies in low- or middle-income, non-Anglophone nations are poorly documented. To date, most of the academic literature has focused on FILL in high-income, English-speaking countries, particularly the USA, Canada and the UK. The literature also lacks a complex understanding of informal family and intergenerational relations and learning, including literacy, as practised around the world.

To address these issues, this collection presents examples of conceptual discussions, policies, research and practices from around the world, but primarily from low- or middle-income, non-Anglophone countries. By presenting geographically diverse perspectives, the book creates possibilities for engaging in discussions and transferring knowledge across linguistic, cultural and national borders. It also contributes to scholarly efforts to show how family literacy, as a concept and practice, is situated in and informed by distinctive historical, social, cultural and political contexts.