Acquisition and Mastery of Oral Language Skills in Enhancing Literacy Development among Young Children in Tanzania: A Study of Parents and Teachers

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Abstract - *Language, both oral and written, is a tool used by a human being in communicating ideas, concepts and sharing experiences in variety of social contexts. It is also necessary in school activities' instructions. The social contexts essential for enhancing children's language are the home and school. It is because of this background that the current study was undertaken to establish how parents' and teachers' interaction constitute an essential ingredient in the development of oral language (OL) skills for children's acquisition of literacy skills at home and in school to facilitate their school readiness. The study conveniently and purposively sampled parents and experienced early grade teachers to share their experiences in the meaningful adult-child interactions and activities important for OL and literacy development. Data analysis for data that were collected through semi-structured interviews and FGDs were subjected to thematic analysis while data through open-ended questionnaires were coded and entered in Microsoft excel spreadsheet before were analysed through the SPSS. The study revealed that friendly, print-rich learning environment, playing activities as well as storytelling are essential in promoting the acquisition and mastery of OL for literacy development and facilitation of communication as well as realisation of better learning outcomes in school among young children. The current study, therefore, suggests that parents and teachers should be involved in providing materials and activities for creating friendly and interactive environments that are necessary for children's positive development in OL for schooling and general life in any social settings.*

Keywords: *Language, literacy, and development*

INTRODUCTION

Researchers [1], [2], [3] in Tanzania similar to foreign studies [4], [5], [6], [7] recognise that literacy and language development to the young children is important for their successful learning in schools. They further inform that language acquisition (oral and written) and literacy development starts at home where the child is raised to continually learn progressively in pre-school where the child is exposed to learning materials until he or she attains the desired level of sophistication in oral language (OL) skills. OL skills which is the focus of this paper, is a key predictor of literacy development and school success [5], [6] [8].

Interaction and communication ability between learners and teachers constitute some of the key indicators of a child's school readiness [9], [10], [11]. Indeed, communication ability contributes to education quality EFA Global Monitoring Report [12], and that children with strong OL skills learn to read and write with greater ease and tend to excel more in school than their peers with less knowledge of vocabulary and language structure [13], [6]. Despite its contribution to the quality of education, language acquisition is one of the most debated issues of human development because of the differing views on whether children are born with or without language skills [14].

The home environment through parents' engagement in singing, reading books, telling stories and playing games help to prepare children ready for school [15], [2], [16]. In other words, the quality of the home environment lays a strong foundation for fostering the quality of children's acquisition and mastery of OL. This is to argue that language acquisition and literacy skills development occur through a strong relationship between parents/caregivers and the developing child [17] in

which familiar songs, rhymes and mother-infant games are essential strategies used in the acquisition of literacy at home [5].

Besides the home, the school context is also vital in this process. Indeed, the preschool settings through teachers constitute useful avenues for strengthening language learning experiences among young children by considering and reinforcing their prior experiences to further develop their OL comprehension [6]. Punkoney [13] contends that children should be treated with respect as conversationalists since they express their thoughts in dialogue. As such, the child should be encouraged to interact with other children of mixed aged in play groups for the child to gain language skills. Other key steps include reinforcing good habits of speech, modelling the child's appropriate language including expression, grammar, and vocabulary, reading frequently and at a lengthy, and helping the child to recognise the relationship between speech and writing through storytelling in both oral and written forms [13]. These are, indeed, ways through which parents and caregivers can nurture language development.

In the school context where learning is formal and more structured, the development of children's early language and literacy skills should be implemented through activities such as the morning circle (news) time that allow for children's personal experiences to be used to promote language skills as well as some early reading skills [18]. Roskos et al. [6] insist that during their childhood, young children should be encouraged to develop in the five primary areas of OL: semantics—meanings for the words they hear and say with others; syntax or grammar—rules of how words are linked together; morphology—how to manipulate the smallest units of meaning in the language called morphemes; phonology—sound structure of language; pragmatics—social uses of language and basic social rules like "goodbye," "please", thanking", and taking turns in a conversation.

The US-based National Early Literacy Panel-NELP [19] synthesised through the scientific research that alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or numbers, rapid automatic naming of objects or colours, writing and phonological memory are key predictors of reading and school success among children aged up to five. The panel found that children who do not acquire and master these skills lag behind their classmates and fail to read and comprehend general issues that are essential in learning. NELP [19] concludes that early

literacy skills involving concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language and visual processing are essential for later literacy achievement at the end of Kindergarten or at the beginning of Grade 1 or standard one as used in Tanzanian educational documents.

The Situation in Tanzania

Specifically, Ngorosho [2] and Wedin [3], acknowledge that both the home and school environments are vital in the promotion of OL. Notwithstanding their interests in the role of the school and home environments in literacy and language development, they did not thoroughly involve parents as principal teachers and preschool teachers to come up with culturally-relevant practices employed to promote OL for literacy development among early learners in Tanzania. It was, therefore, necessary to design a study to scrutinise teachers and parents on a myriad experiences in relation to the development of OL among young children. The importance of this study was based on the reality that most of the children in Tanzania enter primary school with minimal or no basic language skills needed in the learning [20]. Specifically, the study was organised to answer two specific objectives: to determine the parents' and teachers' experiences in developing OL skills among young children; and to establishing values held by teachers and parents regarding the benefits of OL in fostering learning among young children.

Theoretical Understanding of Language and Literacy Development

The current study was informed by Holdaway's [21] theory of Literacy Development, whose key assumption is that literacy development is a natural developmental occurrence which begins in the home as children see their parents read and read out stories to them. Under this theory, parents are treated as models that children emulate as part of their early learning process. The theory identifies four components of literacy development relevant to the current study, which have been summarised by Morrow [22], thusly: children need the opportunity to *observe* literacy behaviours from others; children need to *collaborate* with others who provide encouragement and help with the reading process; children need the opportunity to *practice* alone the skills they have to self-evaluate, make corrections, and enhance their skills independently; and children need

the opportunity of *performance* to share their new reading skills with those who support them.

Holdaway[21] further characterises literacy instruction as the one with a rich home literacy environment, the parent-child interactions of modelling and reinforcement, promoted peer interaction among learners, and use of big books and shared reading techniques in classroom instruction. On the importance of social interactions between child/learner and tutor (parent or teacher or the more knowledgeable child), Holdaway shares similar views with Vygotsky [23] as they contend that social interactions lead to the learner's proficiency in both social and literacy skills [24]. Thus, experienced peers, teachers and adults need to get involved collectively in the process of facilitating the young children's acquisition and development of language and literacy skills.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Sampling

This study deployed a concurrent mixed methods design to collect, analyse, and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study [25] and for the comparison of data provided by the respondents [26]. Parents based in Mbeya City and Kongwa district in Dodoma Municipality with preschool children were conveniently sampled [27] as direct or indirect beneficiaries of the educational programes. Teachers on their side were purposive sampling to maximise the understanding of the phenomenon as they were deemed to have rich experience gained from their teaching and learning processes [25]. The study involved 37 parents took part in this study (Kongwa district- 18, and Mbeya City-19) and 22 teachers (Kongwa district- 10, and Mbeya city 12) the total tally to 59 participants.

Kongwa district was involved in this study because it is one of the two districts that received support from the Children's Book Project (CBP) of Tanzania aimed at improving literacy teaching in the district [28]. Its involvement yielded data necessary for fostering quality teaching and learning of literacy among young learners. Mbeya City, on the other hand, was involved in the study for two principal reasons. First, the community members in the district exhibit individualistic goals characterised by emphasis on affluence, independence, and differences [29]. Second, the district has not benefited extra programmes such as the CBP literacy promotion drive implemented in Kongwa district. Cumulatively, the

respondents from these two study area yielded rich data based on their experiences necessary for developing a wider understanding of the OL for literacy development in preschools. Involvement of the urban context (Mbeya city) and the rural context (Kongwa district) is premised on the fact that literacy practices depend on contexts that can account for divergences [30].

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected concurrently through the use of interviews with preschool teachers, focus group discussions (FGDs) held with parents; and questionnaires administered with both parents and teachers. The questionnaires largely had open-ended questions for exploration purposes. Together these three data collections methods allowed for the triangulation of the data they produced in either from the interview or the FGD. The self-administered questionnaire helped to collect data on the parents' and teachers' engagement in developing children towards the mastery of OL [31], which were corroborated with the meanings derived from quantitative responses [32]. The qualitative data were analysed through the three steps of the thematic analysis technique identified by [33]: the reduction or breakdown of the text; the exploration of the text; and the integration of the exploration. These steps were preceded by transcription of data from the Swahili version into English. Meanwhile, data collected through the open-ended questionnaire were initially entered through the Microsoft excel spreadsheet before were analysed through descriptive Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to gain a holistic understanding of the teachers and parents on their engagement in the development and enhancement of children's OL as a foundation for literacy skills.

Ethical Considerations

The study took cognisance of attendant research protocol to ensure its validity. In this regard, the study paid attention to the ethical issues necessary in conducting fieldwork research. The ethical issues included observed during the conduct of the study include soliciting research permission from the Directorate of Research and Publication of the University of Dodoma, which allowed the researcher to access research sites in Mbeya and Kongwa. During the data collection in the field, the study respondents had to be briefed about the nature of the research before getting their informed consent. They were also assured of confidentiality and privacy in the report so

that there was no identification of what they presented with their personal identity. In short, the study complied with all the ethical requirements of a valid research undertaking.

RESULTS

This study involved 59 participants made up of 22 teachers and 37 parents. Their demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristic of Respondents

Variable	f	%
Sex		
Female	35	59.3
Male	24	40.7
Age(Years)		
18-23	4	6.7
24-29	13	22.1
30-35	23	38.9
36-41	11	18.6
42+	8	13.7
Relation to child		
Parent/ Guardian	37	62.7
Teacher	22	37.3
Education Level		
Primary education	29	49.2
Secondary education	20	33.9
Certificate in ECE	7	11.9
Diploma	3	5.0

Source: Field Data (2015)

As Table 1 illustrates, 37 parents who took part in this study came from the two districts (Kongwa- 18, and Mbeya City-19) under review. Also, 22 teachers participated in the study to bring the total tally to 59 participants. In terms of gender, 35 of the respondents (59.3%) were female whereas 24 (40.7%) were male, with the majority of the participants having attained primary education. Only three of the respondents possessed a diploma in teacher education. The general picture is that the respondents had minimal qualifications but they were literate enough (particularly on the part of parents) to get involved in their children's learning welfare.

Strategies for Enhancing OL Skills

The study was guided by two main objectives, which were to determine the parents' and teachers' experiences in developing OL skills among young children; and to establishing values held by teachers and parents regarding the benefits of OL in fostering learning among young children.

In line with the first objective, Table 2 presents responses collected to determine the strategies that parents could plan and implement to enhance their children's development of OL and Table 3 illustrates the strategies to be implemented by teachers for enhancing OL skills.

Table 2 Parents' Strategies for Developing OL Skills among Young Children; N=37

Strategies	Responses	
	N	Percent
Communication	20	54.1%
Using interactive activities	10	29.7%
Learning materials	3	5.4%
Loving children	4	10.8%
Total	**37**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Data (2015)

More than half of the parents (54.1%) identified communication with the child as important in developing OL skills among young learners before they are enrolled in pre-primary education. They also accorded high consideration (29.7%) to interactive activities involving songs, storytelling, and riddles, whose value they appreciated in developing children's competency in OL skills. On the other hand, a rather insignificant minority (5.4%) deemed the use of learning or play materials boosted the quality of OL learning and acquisition. Loving children also attracted minimal responses (10.8%) as a major activity in this regard.

Table 3 Teachers' Strategies for Enhancing OL Skills among Young Learners

Activity	Responses	
	N	Percent
Drilling the child	11	14.6%
Songs	15	20.0%
Storytelling and riddles	16	21.0%
Learning materials	9	12.0%
Play activities	24	31.5%
Total	**75**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Data (2015)

As Table 3 indicates, teachers identified in descending order play activities (31.5%), storytelling (21.0 %), use of songs (20.0%), drilling the child (14.6%) as are potential activities in advancing OL skills developed by children before they joined PPE. For the teachers, play activities topped the chart

followed by storytelling, use of songs and eventually drilling the child, respectively.

Communication was highly prioritised by parents as a crucial strategy in developing children's aptitude in OL. Parents also insisted on the use of Kiswahili language during interaction with the young children as it is commonly spoken at home and other social spheres close the home environment. Using Kiswahili in communicating, argued the parents, would familiarise the children with the language at home before they use it in pre-primary education. The use of a commonly spoken language was identified to help children learn different basic words. Because of its importance in interaction and future school learning, parents urged other parents to use Kiswahili frequently as they interact with their children for developing them with adequate OL skills. It should be noted here that in Tanzania, Kiswahili is the medium of instruction for majority of the public primary schools (the focus of this study) from pre-primary to the end of the primary education cycle. In the course of interaction, adults should also closely monitor their children's talk and correct them where necessary.

Apart from the use of the commonly spoken language, parents favoured the use of questions to raise children's interests in talking, opening up so that they can express their views. They cited an example of calling a child's name, naming things and objects, instructing the child to fetch/collect objects or things and naming family members. In this regard, the parents argued that engaging children in naming family members would familiarise them with people who matter in their young lives and, hence, develop friendly relationship necessary to foster positive adult-child interactions. They exemplified names of family members important for teaching children as those of the father, mother, and siblings.

The use of interactive activities was also identified to contribute in developing OL skills among young children. In this regard, parents should engage their children in other interactive activities such as discussion on domestic and school related matters. Some of the strategies revealed to be necessary in engaging children were the use of storytelling, songs and riddles which were similarly presented as helpful in developing OL skills among children. These strategies were suggested to entail telling and requiring children to narrate a story or sing common songs. These activities would encourage children to develop listening ability crucial in learning while making them actively talks with others, engage in dialogue which is vital in interactive learning. Play materials such as balls, pictures, and dolls were found by this study to be essential in play and learning events to develop a child's interest in interacting with materials as well as peers and adults.

Whereas the parents did not highly consider the songs, storytelling, play activities and riddles in terms of their effective contribution to developing children's competency in OL, teachers highly considered songs, storytelling and other types of play activities as valuable. The teachers believed that early learners become active when they were engaged with adults/caregivers or experienced peers in these activities. As one of the teachers explained:

> Storytelling is an important strategy in developing children's OL as narrating to children various past events makes them become interested in sharing and hence talk. The narrated stories should be related to domestic activities and animals found in their surroundings. It is as also necessary that teachers use the technique to tell learners about various school activities for them to develop keen interests in learning and love for school (Interview; 27th November, 2015).

One of the teachers noted that storytelling serves various functions to the young learners. She exemplified that, a story could instil confidence in learners, help them learn domestic gender-based roles and help them develop fine and gross motor skills necessary for learning readiness. To the teachers, storytelling as well as songs, play and rhyming are crucial learning strategies that they deploy in enhancing OL skills in preschools. For instance, the teachers argued that, as children were involved in play, particularly the outdoor-based play such as role-play, they were able to learn to communicate their interests and needs to their peers. Indeed, outdoor play activities such as building and moulding were considered by the teachers to foster the development of OL among the young learners because they give children more freedom to explore and experiment than indoor activities.

Both in-door and outdoor play activities were reported as a necessary technique for engaging young learners and making them interact for learning activities. Other activities necessary for developing the learners' aptitude in OL include project work. Engaging projects such as gardening and creating learning materials would make children interact with others and make them learn the value of being co-

operative with their peers. Moreover, project works help the teacher identify stubborn children and find corrective measures to make them co-operative. Furthermore, project work helps to nurture the learners' OL in terms of cleaning the class. Generally, group works help young children acquire socialisation skills such as turn-taking necessary for the attainment of individual as well as group goals and for demonstrating respect to others.

Drilling was another activity which teachers identified to be necessary in advancing the young children's OL skills. The teacher explained that during drilling the young learners could be asked different oral questions about their names and number of their family members, in addition to asking children questions based on a story or riddle narrated to them or they could be required to repeat some words given by the teacher or their peers. Drilling could also require learners to ask for permission when they want to go out or return to the learning environment/class. It was also emphasised by teachers that children should be required consistently to learn and give thanks to their peers and adults for the service or help rendered to them. Also, the young children could be involved in saying sorry to their colleagues when they realised that they had hurt others or their feelings.

Teachers also considered learning materials such as pictures drawn or cards developed as crucial contributors to the enhancement of the OL skills among the young learners. Teachers reported that learning involving the creation or drawing some pictures accompanied by some elaborations is crucial in the development and enhancing OL skills. Television was also found by the current study to be fundamental in making children listen, learn from pictures they see and later describe some events as vividly presented pictorially.

Benefits of the OL Skills to the Early Learners

Data for determining the benefits of developing and advancing OL skills at home and in school contexts in accordance with the second objective of the study were collected using semi-structured self-administered questionnaires and interviews with both parents and teachers. Data analysis revealed varied responses from the parents and teachers on the benefits of engaging young children to acquire OL skills in their earlier stages of development. For instance, Table 4 presents a summary of the parents' responses regarding the importance of early development of children's OL skills prior to their enrolment in for pre-primary education.

Table 4 Parents' Responses on the Benefits of OL Skills to Early Learners

Benefits	Responses	
	N	Percent
Environmental and self-awareness	5	13.5%
Easily learn, inquisitive, confident and creative	24	64.9%
Interact with peers and adults easily	8	21.6%
Total	**37**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Data (2015)

Likewise, teachers held some views on the advantages of developing OL skills among young children. These views have been illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5 Teachers' Views on the Benefits of OL to Young Children

Benefits	N	%
Self and environmental awareness	23	40.4
Able to communicate and develop vocabulary	18	31.6
Learn with confidence and love schooling	16	28.1
Total	57	100.0%

Source: Field Data (2015)

The analysis of the data collected through the use of the questionnaire and interview indicate that both parents and teachers valued OL skills as prerequisites for young learners' development of self and environmental awareness, and help them learn easily and with confidence, as well as make them interact with peers, adults and teachers.

Teachers also noted that when children enrol in pre-primary education with some developed OL skill, they will learn and understand lessons their teachers provide as they would be able to understand the instructional language. The language would as well help the young learners ask and answer questions, where deemed necessary. OL skills would also develop them to be self-confident and be able to express their needs and interests. The expressive language they will have developed can further make the young learners interact and co-operate with others, and develop valuable vocabulary. During the learning process, learners would be able to identify and mention objects found in that particular locality and, thus enabling the teacher to correct any mistake emerging from such learning.

Similar to teachers' views, parents highly associated the OL skills the children developed at home before joining pre-primary education with learners' readiness and preparedness to learn. Parents explained that OL skills helped the children learn

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easily in school and develop a capacity to identify things found in their surroundings and fit them into different contexts. One of the parents argued:

> During the teaching and learning practices, learners would have courage and ability to interact with the teacher through questions and by seeking clarifications. This trend would make learners inquisitive and easily learn other languages (FGD A: 27th November, 2015).

In this regard, the parents further argued that OL is important for an individual child's learning and that it was necessary for experienced young learners to lead and teach fellow children with confidence. The parents explained that this confidence was attributable to the young children's preparedness for learning, the foundations laid down before their joining pre-primary education. Apart from helping others in the learning process, OL skills were found to be necessary prerequisites for fostering interactions between children and adults. Children with OL skills were reported to be highly interactive and they easily shared things and experiences with their peers.

In fact, early development of OL skills among children was also found to benefit teachers. It was established that teachers would easily executed their teaching and learning plans as learners understood the language of instruction. It was also noted that OL skills were helped the teachers in designing appropriate tools for evaluating the young learners. Furthermore, developing children with OL early made teachers easily understand the young learners' problems, their interests and their needs. Indeed, learners with OL skills made things easier for the teachers as they were able to express their concerns and help teachers devise appropriate intervention programmes for their immediate and future learning.

Table 6. Suggestions for Enhancing OL Skills among Early Learners

Activity	N	Percent
Good relationship with children	18	51.4%
Interactive strategies	10	28.5%
Learning materials	7	20.0%
Total	**35**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Data (2015).

When asked to provide suggestions that could help enhance the acquisition of OL skills at the foundational level, the respondents provided varied suggestions which they believed could enhance OL skills and translate eventually into improved literacy skills development. Parents for instance, suggested some activities for teachers to enhance the development of OL skills among young children so that they could learn easily in pre-primary education. Their suggestions have been presented in Table 6.

As Table 6 illustrates, parents suggested that teachers should develop and maintain a good relationship with their young learners for them to feel welcomed and loved. This suggestion received 18 responses (51.4%) from the parents. Parents also said teachers should love and treat their young learners as their own sons and daughters for them to see and feel valued, hence become friends than driving them towards developing avoidance behaviour. In the course of teaching and learning, teachers were also urged to follow up closely the young learners' utterances of words so that they could correct to let them utter these words appropriately and correctly as expected. The parents also suggested that a friendly learning environment would make children love schooling, an important ingredient in meaningful learning. More significantly, the parents suggested that the teachers should use communicative or instructional language at the young children's level of understanding to foster learning and acquisition of OL skills. In this regard, they insisted that Kiswahili should be more frequently used than the vernacular language of the young children so as to familiarise them with the language of discourse in the country's public education system at the pre-primary and elementary levels to ensure they are comfortable in formal schooling.

Parents also called for the use of interactive or activity-based strategies such as songs and storytelling to facilitate learning as such strategies promote the acquisition of OL skills among young children and make them learn various literacy skills such as reading pictures, letters, and articulate numbers. This suggestion was accorded consideration by 28.5 percent of the parents. Such strategies are important in making the learning context more interactive. Also, frequent face-face questions were identified as important for the young learners as they would make them talk or explain issues depending on the teachers' demand.

This suggestion by parents was based on teachers' use of various materials in the learning contexts. Such materials include picture books and cards, which are useful for the young learners when it came to asking questions and providing answers related to their learning. On their part, teachers implored parents to

help their children when at home so that they could utter words correctly and reduce the teachers' efforts in emphasising the same. In this regard, the parents could ask the young children to mention or identify some objects available in their home. The teachers also urged parents to use songs and storytelling for them to help young learners and correct them to ensure they produced inappropriate utterance. They further insisted that the young learner-parent interaction at home should be dominated by commonly spoken/used language in school for the children to learn well in school without feeling alienated in the learning process.

Furthermore, the teachers beseeched the parents to create an enabling home environment with variety of materials for children to play with. These materials could involve pictures of both domesticated animals such as hens, cows, cats and dogs and wild animals to cultivate their interest and steer them towards interacting with these natural wonders. Also, vital was Information and Communication Technology (ICT) materials such as CD with animations, which parents should provide as they helped to develop learners' OL skills and turn them into competent oral speakers. Teachers also indicated the need for parents to teach and drill their young children on giving thanks to both adults and their peers for the service they receive from them, greeting fellows and adults they meet, and should allow children to play with their peers.

DISCUSSION

The findings about OL skills of the current study across both sets of respondents indicate that social interaction is fundamental. Just as foreign studies [15], [13], [34]-[40] have indicated, social interaction through songs, storytelling, play activities, calling child's and family members' names, loving the child, and dialogue does significantly contribute to the development of OL skills among young learners. In concurrence with the findings by [36], [38] [39], the teachers strongly recommended storytelling as the most effective way for developing listening skills to make a child co-creator and to engage him or her in a two-way communication. In this regard, [37] contends that storytelling provides a framework for thinking that allows children to shape their experiences, map experiences and see such pictures in their heads, and imitate what they see and visualise.

The respondents of the current study noted that interaction promotes fluency and learning of new words. Similarly, Farrell and Nessell [41] found that storytelling enhanced fluency, developed both oral

and written skills in communication, vocabulary acquisition, and recalling of what has been presented or encountered. Frost et al. [5] share the view with the current respondents that familiar songs, rhymes and mother-infant games are necessary for OL skills and literacy development among young learners. Moreover, play was considered to be important by parents and teachers participated in the current study, particularly group play. Morrow [40] specifically touts dramatic play as centripetal to improving children's acquisition of concepts through story recollection, production and comprehension. Additionally, Barton [34] asserts that group plays benefit children as they would assign each other roles and actively participate in verbal conversation, hence developing and strengthening their aptitude in OL skills. Furthermore, emotionally secure and active participation which was referred to by respondents in the current study is linked to loving children, another important avenue Frost et al. [5] present as offering the best opportunity for the development of OL among young learners. As opposed to findings emanating from empirical foreign studies, reading aloud as found by Otto [15], Frost et al. [5] and Punkoney [13], for example, was not considered by the current study respondents as one of the most effective strategies for fostering children's acquisition of OL skills. Such reading culture appears to thrive in a print-rich environment Shiel et al. [18], which Tanzania's contexts—both urban and rural—are not.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings presented and discussed in this paper, the study puts forward some key conclusions. First, both teachers and parents seem to hold differing views on the importance of literacy rich environment in promoting OL as Holdaway [21]. Importantly they accorded great importance to the interaction in various forms (communication-talking to the child, calling them by their names, and questioning; interactive activities-story telling, singing with children, holding discussions; and using play activities) all align to the view held by the theorist that interactions between the child and adults is significant in developing child with OL. Secondly, a number of parents and a few of the teachers lack awareness on their critical roles in development of a child's OL skills in the early stages of learning. The third conclusion the study makes is that community sensitisation appears necessary particularly in fostering early child stimulation and ensures the young learners acquire OL skills as early as possible.

This was noted by the researcher as some parents did not establish a stimulating environment at home, which was necessary in enhancing the child's OL skills development. The study also concludes that the cultural contexts (Kongwa and Mbeya city) did not effectively differentiate the respondents' responses with regard to the participation or engagement of parents and teachers in the early development of OL skills among young children as a step towards consolidating literacy development in later years.

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