

Early Parental Support as Predictor of Early Literacy Skills: A Study from Four Administrative Districts in Ghana

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Abstract

This study from four administrative districts in Ghana suggest that early parental involvement in their children's literacy practices is likely to predict better effects on these children in basic reading skills. The benefits of parental involvement and support as predictor of literacy and educational achievement are enormous. They go beyond early academic achievement in pre-school. Early exposure to reading with parents from the homes predisposes children for formal basic literacy instruction. Indeed, early involvement of parents in their child's reading is found to be the number one critical factor contributing positively to language and emergent literacy. Home reading activities in which parents are involved significantly influence achievements in reading as well as in language comprehension and expressive language skills. This report also points to possible link between educational background of parents and children's reading achievement at the pre-school: the higher the parental education background, the higher the level of home involvement predicting children's early achievement in literacy skills.

Keywords: parental involvement, early academic achievement, literacy skills

1. Introduction

It is on record that globally most school aged children spend greater part of their time outside of the school premises (cf. Clark, 1990). The implication is that earlier parental involvement in children's education from the homes is not only more likely to be effective but also predisposes children for the benefits of formal education. Those parental involvements deemed to be most significant are those in which parents work directly with their children in the homes.

Research evidence suggests a positive correlation between family involvement and educational outcome. For example, in a study by Barnard (2004) on the link between parental involvement and high school student success indicated a positive correlation between positive long term effects on children's education and early parental involvement. The association between lack of parental guidance and poor academic achievement, positive correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement as well as the positive association between parental expectations for their children's educational achievement has been amply documented in many research works (Bronstein, Ginsburg, & Herrera, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001).

The above positive association between parental involvement and children's academic achievement notwithstanding, other studies report of negative correlation between the two variables. For example, Balli, Demo and Wedman, (1998) investigated the effects of increased family involvement in homework. The results showed that the level of family involvement with homework is not a significant predictor of student achievement. Another study by Driessen, Smit and Slegers (2005) in examining the effects of family involvement on students belonging to ethnic minority groups concluded that although the majority of schools involved in the study provided extra effort regarding family involvement, the direct effects of that involvement could not be discerned.

Dealing specifically on parental involvement and academic outcome with respect to pre-school, the (UK) National Literacy Trust (2001) in its literature review found considerable number of research work showing parental involvement to be strong predictors of children's attainment scores into pre-school. The frequency with which children play with letters and numbers, parents involvement in teaching of songs and nursery rhymes, the number of times parents read to their children and take them to the library as well as parental attitude and support of their children's education were found to be the determining factors of children's performance on literacy tests.

Studies have established that nearly two out of every five variance in preschool literacy skills in the UK, such as development of vocabulary and conceptual knowledge can also be attributed to variances in home and family characteristics (Storch, & Whitehurst, 2001). Bennett, Weigel and Martin (2002) in their studies on the relationship between family environment and children's language and literacy identified the "family as educators" model to be significantly related to children's outcomes in language and literacy. For example, parental teaching was shown to be related to Woodcock's (1997) Letter-Word identification scores with parent-child reading in preschool seen to be related to grade 1 vocabulary. In short, home practices predict

children's literacy and language development.

In examining the associations between the educational involvement of families during the Kindergarten period in a longitudinal study, Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins and Weiss (2006) measured how children feels about literacy and their achievement from the Kindergarten through to the fifth grade. Results from this study collected when children were in the kindergarten indicated the effect of family educational involvement on feelings about literacy and achievement was moderated by parental education. Thus parental involvement was more positively associated with literacy outcomes for children whose mothers are less educated compared with children whose parents are more educated. Results collected when students entered fifth grade showed that within families, increased school involvement predicts improved child literacy. The results also showed that although there is an achievement gap in literacy performance related to the education level of the mother if family involvement is low, this gap is nonexistent if family involvement levels are high.

2. Statement of Problem

Considerable number of literature on early parental involvement in children's literacy skills support the idea that increased parental/family involvement in children has positive impact on children's educational achievement. Besides, the amount of available literature on family and academic outcome decreases as domains become more specified with respect to other studies on families and children from other cultures outside of Western Europe and North America. As expected, reliable data from other parts of the world particularly from Africa remains minimal emphasizing the need for research from other cultural perspectives. Based on the fact that there are some conflicting reports in the literature some showing a relationship between parental involvement in the homes and children's academic outcome, while others fail to indicate any correlation as well as the paucity of research from other cultural perspectives, this study was undertaken to find out whether or not there is a link between parental involvement and early literacy outcome from the Ghanaian perspectives.

The School Education Assessment (SEA) examination was undertaken in Ghana for the first time in 2006 and was to be repeated in 2008. Almost 515,000 students took part in the assessment in the ten Regions. The Mathematics and English language examinations were administered to pupils in the Primary 2 and Primary 4. The results showed that Primary 2 pupils had difficulty with both listening comprehension and higher order analysis skills, particularly reading comprehension. Pupils had difficulties both in reading as well as responding to questions that required some understanding and abstraction- an indication that ample instructional time was needed in such areas as multiplication, fraction as well as ordinal numbers (see MoESS, 2008; Ghartey, 2010).

Given the fact that available research data in Ghana and in many African nations show learning deficits particularly literacy skills in the primary schools, it is important to find out the early home indicators likely to be the causes of reading difficulty. Besides, when one considers the fact that a lot of attention has been focused of late on early literacy among policy makers

(Roskos & Vukelich, 2006), coupled with the increasing rate of diversity among children population in Ghana due to increasing migration, it is important to examine some critical home predictors that are likely to offer some explanations to the challenge of basic literacy in Ghana.

3. Objectives of Study

Consequent on the above defined problem, the subsequent objectives precipitated this research:

- 1) To investigate the strength of link between early home parental involvement and early phonological awareness in English of selected Ghanaian pre-school children.
- 2) To examine whether or not there is a synergy between parent-child interactions in the home and potential literacy skills for children who come from diverse family background in Ghana.
- 3) To find out whether or not parent-child home interactions at 4 years, three months of age is likely to predict early literacy skills, such as receptive vocabulary for Ghanaian children.
- 4) To investigate the relationship between socio-emotional development from parents, and literacy development especially reading skills.

4. Research Questions

The fundamental research questions that guided this study were the following:

- 1) What is the strength of link between parental involvement and early phonological awareness in English of selected Ghanaian pre-school children?
- 2) Is there is a synergy between parent-child home interactions and emergent literacy skills for children from diverse family background in Ghana?
- 3) Do parent-child home interactions at 4years, three months of age likely to predict early literacy skills such as such as receptive vocabulary for Ghanaian pre-school children?
- 4) What is the relationship between socio-emotional development from parents, and early literacy development especially reading skills?

5. Significance of Study

Considerable progress has been made in Ghana in the last one and a half decades within the context of the Education for All and the Millennium Development goals. Indeed, since 2000, considerably improvement has been made in respect of access to basic education in the ten

regions but learning achievements appear to have stagnated in the last couple of years. For example, poor academic achievement in Ghanaian public basic schools is conspicuous when measured against the level of resources invested from both domestic and donor sources to date. It is estimated that in 2006, a total of US\$1 billion was spent on the education sector and this includes the aggregate of sourcing from government donor agencies as well as other sources (Thompson & Casely-Hayford, 2008).

Performance Report from the Ghanaian Ministry of Education as well as commissioned reports on infrastructure, resources and learning outcomes show that access to basic education in Ghana has improved but still remains uneven. Even though the 2014 report on Trends in Mathematics and Science study ranks Ghana as top on the list in Africa, in the previous years, 2003 and 2007, Ghana performed abysmally behind Algeria, Botswana, Egypt and Tunisia in 2007. (Mitchell Group, 2009). It is in this respect that this study is quite significant. The findings underscore the early parental/home backgrounds that are likely to predict differences children bring to school. The findings of this study therefore will be a useful resource to educationists.

6. Literature Review

Early childhood in this study is understood to be the period from birth to 5 years of age. During this time because the child has basic reflexes and becomes very active and curious, their mastery in vocabulary also tends to increase tremendously. Consequently, their ability to recall the experiences they go through, their ability to sustain attention, count and recognize letters become quite acute. They can develop self-concepts and self-esteem through adult and peer interactions (Kupersmidt, McCabe & Bryant, 2003). Parents who create an enabling environment for their children to play in the homes are more likely to help their children to demonstrate prosocial and independent behavior when in school (Fantuzzo & MaWayne, 2002). Besides when parents not only encourage but indeed participate with their children in such activities as arts and crafts, this contributes to their children's development in literacy skills (Nord, Lennon, Liu, & Chandler (1999).

Lamb-Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple and Peay (1999) make the submission that when parent-child relationships are characterized by nurturing, warmth and responsive attitude in child-centered-activities, positive learning outcomes are fostered. This is because the child develops a healthy sense of belonging which de facto promotes self-esteem as well as well-being and that sensitive-conscious parents contribute to socially competent children who develop better communication skills (Connel & Prinz, 2002). Thus parents who are warm and interact reciprocally with children, contribute to enhancing less stress in the homes and thereby facilitating prosocial behaviors for their children as well as their ability to concentrate (Lamb-Parker et al, 1999).

In this respect children from parental background who come to basic formal reading instruction and are already exposed to orthography and phonology are more likely than children who have had no such exposure to make better progress in reading instruction (Walpole, Chow, & Justice,

2004). Besides, those children who demonstrate significant deficiencies in these areas are at a high risk for reading and writing disability (Catts, Fe, Tomblin & Zhang, 2002).

Consequently, one can hardly ignore the effects of home-based interventions especially parental influence. For example, studies have established that parents who intervene and get involved as intervention agents to young children with speech and language disorders contribute significantly to improving these disabilities. Similar findings also show that working with parents to improve reading habit in the homes especially in emergent literacy intervention has been phenomenal (Girolametto, Pearce, & Weitzman, 1996; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Justice & Ezell, 2002). Research has also underscored the link between adult-child home involvement and letter knowledge and writing activities. It is on record that frequently exposing children to letters enhances alphabet knowledge (Aram & Levin, 2004).

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Sample and Design

This study used the purposive sampling design from an estimated four hundred and forty eight (480) participants: two hundred and forty (240) pre-school children drawn from four (4) kindergarten schools in two (2) out of the ten (10) administrative regions of Ghana: Ashanti: one hundred and twenty (120) respondents from two (2) kindergarten schools in the Kumasi Metropolis and Offinso South Municipality and in the Brong Ahafo region: one hundred and twenty (120) from another two kindergartens from Berekum and Sunyani. Another two hundred and forty mothers (either biological or proxy) of these children were also sampled for this study. In data not tabled here, an estimated 54% of the sample was male. On a 4-point scale (1 = *no high school diploma* to 4 = *college degree*), the average level of maternal education was 2.2 ($SD = 1.1$). An estimated 80% of the sample was identified as Ghanaians, 15% Nigerians and 5% Lebanese. All participants (children and mothers) were identified as having English as second language. These two regions were chosen for this study for three reasons: a) first for easy sampling for the researcher and secondly, the Ashanti region has the highest population density and the highest number of kindergarten and basic schools both public and private in the regional capital, Kumasi. Besides, Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti has a central location: people from North and South, East, and West converge there. The Brong Ahafo region was also chosen because it is one of the fastest growing regions due to its centrality between the perceived deprived North and the perceived affluent South of Ghana and the fact that Sunyani, the regional capital has a considerable number of higher educational institutions.

7.2 Measures

There were two main measures: one on children's literacy skills in phonology, rhyming and emergent literacy and one on parental practices (supports) of children's literacy skills.

7.2.1 On Children

Each of the children was assessed for 2 days; each session lasted about 30 minutes. The

Assessment was undertaken done during the dry season (Fall) and the mid-rain season Children tested during the dry season were also assessed earlier in the mid-rain period (Spring).

Phonological awareness in English: This was measured using the ‘Early Phonological Awareness Profile’ (EPAP1; Dickinson & Chaney, 1997a), with some adaptations. The EPAP tasks had two tasks. The Deletion Detection Task is the easier task of the two and was selected because it was the easiest task we could devise that tapped children’s ability to attend to the sounds of words in addition to their meanings and we wanted to avoid floor effects. For this task, the assessor “directs” a puppet to say certain words and the child judges if the puppet says the words “right” or “wrong.” Words that are “wrong” are those in which an initial or final phoneme is deleted. If a child states that a word is “wrong” then he or she is asked to produce the word correctly. Children were given instructions before the test words and were also given two practice items, as well as being provided with feedback and coaching.

Rhyme recognition: The second assignment was rhyme recognition. Children were to identify words that “have the same sound” or “rhyme.” They were shown pictures of three objects, two of which was rhyme, and told the names of each object. They were asked to repeat the words to ensure that they have correctly labeled each picture and asked to point to or name the two words that “have the same sound” or “rhyme. They also received two practice trials for this task. Those who were able to identify at least five out of eight pairs of rhyming words without any error continued with this task. Children in this assignment were tasked to produce a word that rhymes with it.

Receptive vocabulary: This tasked was tested with an adapted version of Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test—3rd Edition (PPVT-III; Dunn, Dunn, & Dunn, 1997).

Emergent literacy: This was tested using the ‘Emergent Literacy Profile’ (ELP; Dickinson & Chaney, 1997b) and this had of four component tasks: the ability to read environmental print, sensitivity to what is and is not printed language, letter identification and naming, and ability to write one’s name. The first to be tested was children’s ability to decode environmental print and was tested by showing cards that displaying familiar objects containing text (e.g., McDonald’s logo, stop sign) and asking: “What does this say?” After this the second test was on children’s sense of printed language. This was assessed by asking them to distinguish between words and strings of letters or characters that did not make a word. For example, children were presented with a card that contained the text NNNT, W3#NJ, and MILK and were asked “Which one of these is a word?” The third task was the letter identification. , They were asked to name letters that were displayed on cards or to identify letters by the sounds that they made. When a child was unable to name the letter or its sound, then the assessor provided the names of the letters and asked the child to identify the letter by pointing. The combined measures obtained are in Tables 5 and 6 below.

Demographic factors: The age of children was determined chronologically during the administration of the first assessment.

7.2.2 On parental support

Questionnaire designed to measure parental support was divided into several sections: Children's maternal level was measured as follows: where 1 = *no high school diploma*, 2 = *high school diploma*, 3 = *postsecondary education and College degree*.

On Parental educational goals: This was measured using 'Attributes of the Intelligence Scale' (Okagaki & Steinberg, 1993) to assess parental educational goals for their children. In an eight items using Likert's 5 point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The maximum score on this scale was taken as indication of a higher parental educational aspiration for their children. *On Parental practices:* Two measures were used, namely, the Parenting Involvement Scale, an variant of the High School and Family Relationships: Questionnaire for Teachers, Parents, and Students (Epstein, Connors & Salinas, 1993) and Parental Monitoring Scale (Paulson, Marchant, & Rothilsberg, 1998). Both measures were aggregated as means to generate total mean scores for the educational practices of parents.

7.2.3 Conduct of Assessment: When a child was tested by researcher and his assistant and the test matches with the child's level of English as indicated by parents and teachers report the assessment continued.

7.2.4 Analytic Design

In terms of design, the analysis examined the relationships between phonological awareness, rhyme recognition and receptive vocabulary and emergent literacy in English of the selected preschool children on one hand with the following parental support and built-in measures from home background: a) parental educational goals, b) parental practices, c) parental school involvement and d) parental monitoring. All scores on the four parental supports were combined into means and standard deviations. Later a regression was run to link all these parental support with reading and phonological measures having controlled such factors as age of children.

8. Results

The means for the scores on early built-in home background measures (such as parental educational goals, parental practices, parental school involvement and monitoring care services in the home) as in Table 1, shows that children of post-secondary and college degree holders had a mean of 33.13 with a standard deviation of 0.807, children of high school diploma parents, a mean of 23.04 and a standard deviation of 0.755, the mean and standard deviation for children of no high school diploma was found to be 22.01 and 0.668 respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Built-in Home Backgrounds on Parental Practices

Parent education background	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Children of post-secondary and college degree	80	33.13	0.807
Children of high school diploma	80	23.04	0.755
Children of no high school diploma	80	22.01	0.668

To test whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. For the ANOVA test we needed to know whether the variances of the three groups are equal or not so that an appropriate test statistic and Post Hoc test would be selected for the analysis. The Levene's test for equality of variances as in Table 2 indicated that there was a significant difference between the variances of the three groups of children.

Table 2. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
7.059	2	290	.001

That is the test for homogeneity of variances was significant with $F_{(2, 290)}=7.059$, $p<0.05$ (two-tailed). Therefore, the Welch's F was used for the ANOVA test and Games- Howell was used for the Post Hoc test.

Table 3. Robust Tests of Equality of Means

	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	6.168	2	191.925	.000

The robust test of equality of means as seen in Table 3 shows that there was significant differences among the three groups of children in early built-in measures from parents services provided in the home, $F(2, 191.925)= 6.168$ $p<0.05$ (two-tailed).

Again, since the result of the test on equality of means was significant we needed to compare the three groups of children to know where the difference was. Games- Howell test was run and the result is as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Comparison of Mean Scores on Home Parental Involvement Measures (Parental Educational Goals, Parental Practices, Parental School Involvement, Parental Monitoring)

		Mean Difference	p-Value
children of post-secondary and college degree parents	children of high school diploma parents	10.083	0.000
children of post-secondary and college degree parents	children of no high school diploma parents	11.122	0.000
children of high school diploma	children of no high school diploma	8.132	0.000

These results above indicate that the educational background of parents has some effects on the learning care services provided by the parents in the home. The Table indicates that, on early parental involvement provided in the home there is a significant difference between the mean scores of children from postsecondary and college degree holders, and those of high school diploma and no high school diploma parents, $P < 0.05$ (two-tailed). There is also, a significant difference between the mean scores for children of high school diploma parents and those of no high school parents on early parental involvement care provided in the home, $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). This suggest that parental educational background are also linked to the level of built-in measures such as parental educational goals, parental practices, parental early school involvement and monitoring are functions of parents' education background.

Scores of combined literacy skills in rhyming, receptive vocabulary and emergent literacy for children of post-secondary and college degree, children of high school diploma and children no high school

Table 5. Descriptive Statistic on Rhyming, Receptive Vocabulary and Emergent Literacy of Children

Parent education background	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Children of post-secondary and college degree parents	80	96.00	0.002
Children of high school diploma	80	55.00	0.013
Children of no high school diploma	80	48.00	0.021

The mean and standard deviation results above on children's skills in rhyming, receptive vocabulary and emergent literacy skills suggest some degree of link between children's performance and their parents' education background. The higher the parents academic background, the better the performance

Table 6. Descriptive Statistic on Phonological Awareness Measure of Children

Parent education background	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Children of post-secondary and college degree parents	80	93.09	.378
Children of high school diploma	80	49.24	.873
Children of no high school diploma	80	38.37	1.092

Phonological awareness measure was specifically isolated in order to examine the different levels of children's performance. Again, the mean scores of 93.09, 49.24, and 38.37 and standard deviations respectively of .378, .873 and 1.092 suggest some link between parental education background and children's phonological awareness.

The table below shows the correlation between children's early literacy and parental practices in the homes.

Table 7. Correlation between Literacy (Reading) and Parental Practices Variables

		Reading measures	Phonological awareness measure	parental educational goals	parental practices	parental school involvement	parental monitoring	parental motivation
Reading measures	Pearson Correlation	1	.998**	.999**	.837**	1.000**	.996**	.962**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	262	249	243	254	229	216	220
Phonological awareness measure	Pearson Correlation	.998**	1	1.000**	.863**	.999**	.999**	.950**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	249	249	235	244	221	208	211
parental educational goals	Pearson Correlation	.999**	1.000**	1	.871**	1.000**	.999**	.944**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	243	235	250	250	226	218	216
parental practices	Pearson Correlation	.837**	.863**	.871**	1	.889**	.930**	.736**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	254	244	250	266	236	228	226
parental school involvement	Pearson Correlation	1.000**	.999**	1.000**	.889**	1	.997**	.956**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	229	221	226	236	249	228	236
parental monitoring	Pearson Correlation	.996**	.999**	.999**	.930**	.997**	1	.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	216	208	218	228	228	228	226
parental motivation	Pearson Correlation	.962**	.950**	.944**	.736**	.956**	.931**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	220	211	216	226	236	226	237

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

9. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest some answers to the first and the second research questions, namely, that there is a link between the level of home parental involvement and early phonological awareness in English of Ghanaian pre-school children as non-native speakers. They also indicate a synergy between parent-infant/toddler home interactions and emergent literacy skills for Ghanaian children from diverse family background. The means and standard deviation scores measuring early built-in home background measures (such as parental educational goals, parental practices, parental school involvement and monitoring, care services in the home) as in Table 1 of 33.13 (SD= 0.87), 23.04 (SD=0.755) and 22.01 (SD=0.668) of children of parents who possessed postsecondary and high school diploma,

children of parents of high school diploma and children of parents who did not possess high school diploma, respectively, indicate that the higher the educational background of parents the higher the level of involvement. The test for homogeneity with $F_{(2, 290)}=7.059$, $p<0.05$ (two-tailed) in Table 2 as well as the Robust Test of Equality of means in Table 3 show significant differences among the three groups of children.

Comparing this early parental support from homes with the combined scores in rhyming, receptive vocabulary and emergent literacy skills of these children as in Table 5, the means and standard deviations of 96.00 (SD= 0.002), 55.00 (SD= 0.013) and 48 (SD= 0.021) respectively suggest some answers to the third research question of this study, as to whether or not parent-infant/toddler home interactions at age 54 months better predict early literacy skills such as receptive vocabulary for Ghanaian pre-school children. These scores show that parent/toddler home interactions at 54 months of age better predict early literacy skills such as such as receptive vocabulary. Again, they indicate that children's early performance, generally, is more likely to be constrained by parental educational background.

These scores corroborate (even though it is not always the case in Ghana that children from higher academic background perform better than children from less educated families) the findings of considerable number of empirical research that suggest that children who due to early parental educational goals, educational monitoring, etc. from the homes who arrive at formal reading instruction with explicit awareness of orthography and phonology for example, make better progress in reading instruction than children with little or no explicit awareness (Walpole et al, 2004). In addition, children who show significant deficits in these areas of awareness are at an elevated risk for reading and writing disability (Catt et al, 2002). Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst et al, 1988) in training parents to read to their toddlers in order to make them more active conversational partners through 'dialogic reading' discovered the benefits of such approach for children's early grammatical and vocabulary achievement. The findings also confirm studies in the first decade of this century focused on training parents to modify their book-reading styles to include a more deliberate focus on print have shown to have a positive effect on children's code-related skills, particularly alphabet knowledge and print concepts (Justice & Ezell, 2002).

Thus parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004), while reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status. The involvement of parents as intervention agents in delivering language-focused interventions to young children is established (cf. Girolamento et al, 1996). However, the extent and the frequency with which children are exposed to language-focused interventions through built-in parental educational goals, parental practices, parental school involvement and monitoring care services from the homes seem to be linked also to the educational level of parents. It appears from this study that children from parents with higher educational qualification compared to their peers from parents with no high school diploma seem to participate frequently in adult-child activities that include a deliberate focus on print such as alphabet knowledge relative to those who may spend

time on other activities (cf. Aram & Levin, 2004).

This also confirms the position of other research work that early reading experiences with parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Indeed, parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995). Furthermore, parents who introduce their babies to books give them a head start in school and an advantage over their peers throughout primary school (Wade & Moore, 2000). Tables 5 and 6 as well as the correlation results in Table 7 measuring different aspects of early literacy skills in this study consistently indicate statistical significant difference between the three groups of Ghanaian children based on parental educational background.

Regarding the fourth research question on the relationship between socio-emotional development from parents, and early literacy development especially reading skills, the 5 point Likert scale spanning from 1 (strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree), 85% of parents across the three different parental educational background and 90% of teachers were of the view that parental involvement was a more powerful force than social class, family size and level of parental education in enhancing child's literacy practices.

This point underscores the fact that the number one predicting factor of children's literacy practices in Ghana is not always likely to be contingent upon variables as family size, parental educational background and socioeconomic status as on early parental involvement especially love, care and academic support from the home. Even though the test for homogeneity with $F_{(2, 290)}=7.059$, $p<0.05$ (two-tailed) in Table 2 as well as the Robust Test of Equality of means in Table 3 show significant differences among the three groups of children from the different parental education background, there were few instances of individual higher performance on rhyming, vocabulary test and emergent literacy scores of children from less academic parental background.

In other words, the benefits of parental support and involvement extend beyond the realm of literacy and educational achievement. This finding support other studies that show that children whose parents are involved show greater social and emotional development (Allen & Daly, 2002), including more resilience to stress, greater life satisfaction, greater self-direction and self-control, greater social adjustment, greater mental health, more supportive relationships, greater social competence, more positive peer relations, more tolerance, more successful marriages, and fewer delinquent behaviours (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). This came out forcefully in the 5 point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

10. Constraints

This paper like most research study is constrained by its research objectives and questions. A study of the strength of link between parental involvement and early literacy skills as rhyming, vocabulary awareness and emergent literacy skills and phonology of children within the

context of home background and parental academic background is likely to set limit on the results and findings as evident in this paper. Thus, the results from this study de-facto does not at all mean that it is always the case in Ghana that children from higher educated parental background always perform better than their peers from less educated background. Indeed, there are few instances (not too many though) in which children from less educated parents perform better even as early as the pre-school period.

This seems to suggest that the number one critical factor that predicts children's early literacy skills is the level of parental involvement and support and not so much on level of parental education as such. The implication here as per the findings of this paper is that the level of parental involvement for most of the time is also contingent upon the parents' academic background though this is not always the case. Further research may be needed to find out the few instances why disadvantaged children from less educated and even non-educated background outperform their peers from educated and more endowed background in Ghana.

11. Conclusion

The benefits of parental involvement and support as predictor of literacy and educational achievement are enormous. They go beyond early academic achievement in pre-school. Early reading experiences with parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Indeed, parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy. Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills. This study from four administrative districts in Ghana suggest that the earlier parents become involved in their children's early literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer lasting the effects in reading skills such as rhyming, vocabulary emergent literacy and phonological awareness. This report also suggests some strength of link between the educational background of parents and children's reading achievement at the pre-school: the higher the parental education background, the higher the level of home involvement in reading, story-telling, etc. predicting children's early achievement in literacy skills.

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