

The Role of the Home Environment in Phonological Awareness and Reading and Writing Ability in Tanzanian Primary School Children

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This study examines the role of the home environment in children's literacy skills for a sample of 75 grade 2 children from rural eastern Tanzania. Fathers' education and mothers' occupation were strong predictors of phonological awareness and reading and writing.

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This study examines the role of the home environment in children's literacy skills for a sample of 75 grade 2 children from rural eastern Tanzania. Most of the factors studied were significantly related to phonological awareness and reading and writing. Fathers' education and mothers' occupation were strong predictors of phonological awareness and reading and writing. Home environment variables accounted for 25% of the

variance in phonological awareness and 19% in reading and writing ability.

- It is well known that the home environment is one of the most important factors influencing the development of a child's language and literacy skills.
- Socioeconomic status and home literacy environment are related to children's phonological awareness and reading and writing ability.

What is phonemic awareness?

- This refers to the ability to identify, think about, and manipulate the individual sounds in words.
- It has importance for the development of early reading skills.

What does home environment refer to in the context of this study?

- Socioeconomic status (parents' education, occupation, and income)
- Physical objects, such as housing variables
- Literacy-related activities in the home, e.g. book reading

What is Kiswahili?

- This is a language of the Bantu group spoken in areas of East Africa.
- It is a regularly spelt language with almost all letters corresponding to only one Kiswahili sound.



The study

The aim of this study was to identify specific aspects of the home environment that predict children's phonological awareness and reading and writing ability in Kiswahili in Tanzania.

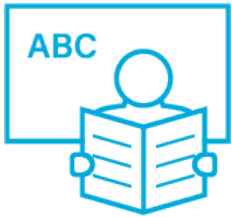
Participants were 75 grade 2 children aged between 8 and 10 years. The selection of the children was guided by their fathers' education. The idea was to find fathers with a variety of education levels. Children's phonological awareness and reading and writing ability were tested, and their female guardians participated by completing a questionnaire-based interview. All measures were designed in Kiswahili.



Findings

- A majority of mothers had primary-level education, with only 4% being educated to secondary level or higher.
- House-building materials and domestic facilities were of a fairly low standard.
- Only 5% of families had three or more books for school subjects.
- Fathers' education and occupation, mothers' occupation, house building material, and domestic facilities were significantly correlated to phonological awareness, reading, and writing.

- Home environment variables explained 25% of the variance in phonological awareness, whilst fathers' education and mothers' occupation were the main predicting variables.
- Home environment variables explained 19% of the variance in reading and writing, and fathers' education was the main predicting variable.



Practical Implications

- It was found that various home environment variables make a significant contribution to phonological awareness and reading and writing scores.
- Results suggest a need for the government to strengthen developing plans for improving the home environment because this plays an important role in enhancing literacy and learners' education.
- Early screening and support for children who are not developing as good readers are proposed for inclusion in educational plans and strategies.
- Activities such as children's book projects and school library facilities are suggested, aiming at supporting literacy-related activities in low income homes.