

## Emergent And Early Literacy And Implications For Early Childhood Teachers Continuing Professional Development: A Case Study Of Gweru Urban Pre-Schools.

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### Abstract

*The study sought to find out early childhood development teachers' conceptualisation of emergent literacy and how continuing professional development could assist teachers in nurturing emergent literacy skills in early learners. The sample consisted of six early childhood teachers purposively selected from two identified well established and registered preschools and one Early Childhood Development Centre at a primary school. Two early childhood education teachers were selected from each institution following set criteria. The study employed a qualitative research design and data were collected through the use of semi-structured interview schedules. Five curriculum documents were analysed. The results revealed that conceptualisation of the term 'emergent literacy' by early learning teachers is ambiguous. There is also a danger of forcing the kindergarten literacy development programme into preschool literacy development, thereby focusing more on school readiness than on emergent literacy development. In-service training lacks the required details about emergent literacy. In-service training includes a degree programme in Early Childhood Education and emergent literacy is covered in Language Arts. Continuing Professional Development workshops range from administrative to instructional based, but not necessarily on emergent literacy. There is no fixed budget for materials and equipment for ECD. Special needs learners are not catered for because there are no specialists in that area and no resource unit for ECD. Document analysis revealed that all documents do not explicitly address the phenomenon of emergent literacy. It is just implied. There are no teacher manuals for language literacy at preschool levels. The study recommended that In-service training of early learning teachers requires an intense model of learning and training which focuses on language literacy and emergent literacy development. Quality literacy programmes which incorporate the use of educational technology should be developed. Instructional manuals for early learning teachers need to be developed. Additionally, preschool programmes should be well funded and the programmes should be inclusive in nature.*

**Keywords:** Emergent literacy; Early learning teachers; Early learning; Continuing Professional Development.

### Introduction and Background to the Study

Over the past years, the concept of emergent literacy has gradually replaced the notion of reading readiness which suggests that there is a point in time when a

child is ready to begin to learn to read and write (Weiss, 2010). Emergent literacy is functional, interactive and it is centered on meaning. It is constructive in that it develops internally as the child, from birth builds concepts about the environment and culture on the basis of active explorations and meaningful language. Innovative models of teaching and learning that build from the child can provide the essential foundation of how reading and writing should be taught from the emergent literacy perspective thereby ensuring future academic success and long term social and economic implications for families and societies. The role of the teacher becomes one of setting conditions that support self-generated, self-motivated, and self-regulated learning. New theoretical accounts must be developed, and current models modified to be inclusive in nature to effectively meet the unique needs of children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and exceptional children. Early childhood educators and caregivers need quality and specific preparation in child development related to emergent and early literacy. The early childhood years serve as an essential foundation for subsequent literacy development (Green, Peterson and Lewis, 2000). Despite increased attention given to children's early literacy development, gaps remain in the actual understanding of what is taking place in childcare programmes in Zimbabwe.

Most educators believe that reading readiness is a product of biological maturation. There has always been the belief that a natural unfolding of intellectual skills is required for reading and writing. The relative importance of biology and environment in determining readiness was debated but not the concept readiness itself. The notion of emergent literacy challenges that view, since it suggests that children may be ready to learn the elements of literacy in infants. Emergent literacy refers to early reading and writing behaviours in a child's life which will later develop into conventional literacy. Marie Clay introduced the notion of emergent literacy in New Zealand in 1967. She used the term to describe five year olds' interaction with books even though they could not read or write in the conventional sense. Children displayed skills required for reading, for example making appropriate eye movements and matching spoken words with written words. She hypothesised that literacy development was a continuous process that begins long before formal instruction starts in the first grade (Teale and Sulzby, 1986). A research study by Charles Read was instrumental to the introduction of the concept of emergent literacy to nursery schools. Results gathered through parent participation revealed that children as young as three were spelling words. Although the spellings were unconventional, Read found out that children revealed a sophisticated grasp of language (Teale and Sulzby, 1986). Emergent literacy is a gradual process that takes place over time from birth until a child can read and write in the conventional way. The term signals the belief that in a literate society, young children including one and two year olds are in the process of becoming literate (Weiss, 2010). This is the child's natural ability which emerges under the right conditions. Literacy refers

to the interrelatedness of speaking, listening, reading, writing and viewing. Reading and writing develop concurrently in children and they are interrelated. Children learn literacy through active engagement with books and writing opportunities. Through reading favorite books over and over and by using invented spelling, children continuously reconstruct their knowledge. Reading to children each day is one of the most beneficial ways in which parents, teachers and caregivers can promote literacy. Reading aloud to children and giving them the opportunity to listen helps them to develop a feel of the nature of written language at a very early age (Roskos, Christie and Richgels, 2003). They begin to understand the function of reading and to develop a positive attitude towards it. Children pass through stages of emergent literacy at different stages and in different ways. These developmental stages lead to skills needed for reading and writing. Research has challenged traditional assumptions about reading and writing by studying families and children where children were reading before they started school. Nelson (2000) posits that the theory of emergent literacy has evolved to encompass the following elements:

- Learning to read and write begins early in life-children identify logos, labels and signs in the environment. Early scribbling displays characteristic of the writing system of a particular culture.
- Reading and writing skills develop concurrently and interrelated in young children. Writing is an easier learned activity than reading.
- Literacy develops from real life situations in which reading and writing are used to get things done. Function precedes form. Literacy is functional, meaningful and authentic.
- Children learn literacy through active engagement, i.e. reading story books over and over again and accepting children's use of invented spelling. Invented spelling is a way to see the phonetic element a child is acquainted with.
- Reading to children plays a significant role in literacy development of young children. Children form concepts of books print and reading.
- Learning to read and write is a developmental process. Children exhibit individual differences. These ideas are supported by many researchers in early literacy development.

Support for quality preschools and developmentally appropriate activities shows the importance of an understanding of emergent literacy. Preschools should not be like kindergartens which get children ready to read and write in the conventional way. Readiness activities common in many preschools and kindergartens are not supported by research on emergent literacy and how children learn. It is not appropriate to force a first grade programme into kindergarten and preschools and make it work. Typical formal reading and writing instruction of first grade is inappropriate for young children. Teachers of young children need to provide open-

ended activities which allow children to build upon existing knowledge already acquired about literacy. Instruction is built upon what a child already knows and this supports continued growth of reading and writing. The teacher's role is to set the conditions that support self generated, self motivated and self regulated learning ( Nelson,2000 ).The teacher should litter the environment with print. Research has shown that when children were provided with books, paper and pencil activities children displayed an almost natural affinity for them.

Preschool children develop early language skills when teachers use interactive and dialogic reading strategies .In interactive reading, children talk with the teacher about a story and pictures in a story. Dialogic reading uses a more systematic method to scaffold adult-child language interaction around story book reading. Teachers can help children develop language skills by engaging before, during and or after reading a text through explicit interactive techniques .Children can be asked to make predictions of what might happen next, retell an event or a story. Dialogic reading can be used to assess and support oral language and vocabulary development through multiple readings, during which the teacher helps a child to become the story teller by gradually using higher level questions to move the child beyond naming objects in pictures to thinking more about what is happening in the pictures and how this relates to own experiences.

Emergent literacy writing is a critical activity in early childhood classrooms because it supports the integration of important language and emergent skills that lay the foundation for children's reading, skills (Gerde, Gray and Bingham, 2012).Writing activities should play a central role in preschool classrooms. Research by Gerde and Bingham (2012) carried out with a large sample of preschool classrooms observed found out that writing was an underrepresented activity in some classes and nonexistent in others. Findings indicated that teachers were not always sure about ways in which writing could be integrated into classroom activities. Young children's writing include naming which is related to later reading and literacy skills (NELP, 2008). This study focuses more on knowledge base of emergent literacy that early learning teachers in Zimbabwe have and implications for teacher training and development. Emergent writing in kindergarten predicts later literacy skills, for example decoding, spelling and reading comprehension in first grade. Name writing is related to letter knowledge, word recognition and phonological awareness (Roskos, Christie and Richgels; 2003; Gerde et al 2012). Emergent writing is a developmental process. Children begin writing using small marks and they may not convey meaning of those marks. Next, they make continuous scribbles with consistent shapes. Children use invented spelling until they start writing accurately. All these forms are considered emergent writing. Gerde and Bingham (2012) in a study of 65 preschools representing a variety of programmes found out that classrooms typically provide writing materials but teachers rarely incorporate

writing into daily activities or routines, draw attention to writing, engage in shared writing or scaffold child writing. When children are exposed to meaningful print and learning letters they engage in invented spelling which is a signal that children are beginning to build schemes about principles of the alphabet that letters represent sounds. Initially it is acceptable for children not to include every sound in a word or to write in a conventional way. Invented spelling simply looks like inaccurate spelling to untrained adults. Children's writing attempts may be reduced if teachers require spelling accuracy. Children's understanding of letters and sounds should be recognised and appreciated. Teachers should offer them information to correct their spelling well. Writing opportunities should be meaningful. For example, names are meaningful. They do not change and they depict ownership. Thus names of people, places, and objects provide children with a more dependable source of sounds and letters for practicing reading and writing (Tolchinsky, 2006 in Gerde et al, 2012).

Various studies have shown positive effects of technology in supporting learning in emergent literacy development. Experts agree that integration of technology and literacy experiences has positive effects in supporting learning in emergent literacy. Technology use should not be isolated but rather integrated with classroom routines and activities for the learning environment to offer meaningful experiences for children. The effectiveness of a technology rich curriculum depends on how teachers integrate technology-supported learning with interactions with peers and adults. Teachers play a central role in bridging the gap between the potential of technology to support learning and teacher's own choices about pedagogy and classroom practice. Pictopal is a technology rich curriculum for emergent literacy, with activities both on computer and off computer. The curricular was created to address gaps common in early language curricula by focusing on a selection of the national attainment goals for emergent literacy. A central tenet underlying Pictopal is the notion that children have an intrinsic drive to engage with the world around them. Pictopal invites children to engage with written and spoken language and to create their own written products, form linguistic concepts and use their written texts in meaningful contexts (Mckenney and Voogt, 2009). Continuing Professional Development needs to include the use of technology. When teachers have an understanding of what emergent literacy is, they should be able to integrate literacy development with technology.

Interactive Technology Literacy Curriculum mode (ITCL) has proven effective for young children with disabilities, their families and teachers. With a literacy – rich environment, developmentally appropriate curriculum activities both on and off computer and adaptations all young children are ensured opportunities to develop literacy skills. Interactive software promotes both vocabulary growth and

increased reasoning skills .Interactive software offers opportunities for children to socialize and discuss objects in stories. Children enjoy hearing stories read on the computer. Off computer activities which support the software help children to understand story content and structure. ITCL teachers use print and electronic books to introduce children to story concepts. Children also tell stories through their drawings. Hyper Studio is a good tool to help children become more aware of sound of language. Children can record their own voices and replay them in Hyper Studio. The print rich environment in ITCL classrooms promotes print concepts in children. Each ITCL classroom has a writing centre with a variety of tools and materials to encourage children to draw and write their thoughts. Children have opportunities at all centres to write and draw and they also have access to a variety of books and software (Robinson, 2003).

Beck (2002) say that Assistive Technology increases, maintains or improve functional abilities of individuals with disabilities. Assistive Technology refers to an item and it includes both High –tech systems and low-tech communication systems .High –tech refers to microcomputer components and low-tech refers to non-electric technology like alphabet boards .In teaching and learning Assistive Technology is used to maintain and improve functional capabilities of learners with disabilities Research indicates that teacher perceptions of a curriculum affect its implementation. The interpretations might be related to teacher perceptions and ideas about teaching and learning technology and innovation. Teacher perceptions can also originate from existing beliefs about pedagogy.Hermans, Tondeur and Valcke, (2008) found that teachers’ beliefs affect integrated classroom use of technology in primary schools. Teachers who hold constructivist views are pupil centered and have positive effects, while those who are teacher centered have a negative effect on the use of technology. The success of the implementation of technology innovation is determined by teachers’ computer proficiency, knowledge about technology and support offered to teachers(Inan and Lowther,2009;Koehler and Mishra,2008).Support to teachers by administration and availability of resources seems to influence teacher perceptions of technology which in turn influences teachers’ technology integration in classroom practice.

Pedagogy is an act of teaching together with its attendant discourse. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is considered(Cogill,2008).CPD should include building teachers’ skills to nurture early language literacy from birth throughout early childhood years( Osborn, Sn’achez and Thorp,2007). An early childhood teacher is at the cutting edge of education, plays a critical role in helping young children along a pathway of lifelong

learning. Early years teachers teach all areas of the foundation stage which focuses on helping children to achieve early learning goals. Typical activities include motivating and stimulating children's learning abilities and encouraging learning through experience. Training should include developmental stages of language and literacy, building up environments that nurture early language and literacy, use of language and literacy to promote positive behaviour. An early childhood educator has a significant impact on the communication development of preschool children. Early years of a child's life are the most important for brain development, so the quality of a child's experiences during this time will significantly contribute to his/her ultimate success in life. During preschool years children need to develop a strong foundation in social skills so that they can establish and maintain relationships and language skills so they can communicate effectively, develop strong emergent literacy skills and succeed in all areas of academic learning. In order to flourish in these areas, children need a classroom environment that is rich in learning opportunities and in which the teacher engages every child in responsive interactions throughout the day. The goal is to equip teachers with knowledge, skills and tools they need to make language and literacy learning a fun and natural part of every child's life. Professional development for teachers remains an important decision to make. For example, Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning (CELL) Extended Literacy Learning (ExLL) and Second Chance are research based programmes that are designed to support teachers in preparing young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive and early reading skills to prevent reading difficulties and to ensure success. The primary goal of such programmes is to increase the achievement of children by providing high quality professional development for teachers. High quality preschool education produces substantial long term educational, social and economic benefits. When teachers are highly qualified and professionally prepared benefits are large. An evaluation of the Literacy Environment Enrichment Programme (LEEP), an academic course for teachers on basic language and literacy development, theory and practice, shows that children whose teachers had completed LEEP had better scores on assessment of vocabulary, phonological awareness and early literacy than did children whose teachers did not participate in LEEP. Training approaches include workshops or guest speakers, curricular training, ongoing in-service training and retraining staff. Efforts to produce ECE professionals with outstanding preparation are encouraged (Morrow, 2005).

Preschool teachers need to know about individual needs of children taking into consideration social, emotional, physical and cognitive abilities. Teachers must be sensitive to children from different cultural backgrounds. To be on the cutting

edge of language and literacy instruction preschool and kindergarten teachers and directors need to engage in continuous professional development. Research show that excellent teachers are not only well prepared teachers but those who continue to participate in professional development, during their careers. In addition children at risk and those from diverse socio economic backgrounds and marginalized populations who often fail, do better in schools that have the greatest number of well trained teachers (Morrow, 2005). Successful professional development should include input from teachers and should have strong administrative support. Teachers need to be reflective practitioners by engaging in a continuous process of questioning, planning, and trying out and evaluating their own students learning. Teachers also need to work toward establishing a professional community in which they rely on the collective expertise of colleagues to inform the day to day judgments. They also need to learn about research based strategies and pedagogy. Reading coaches help teachers with new strategies for teaching and study groups provide opportunities for teachers to read about new ideas, reflective planning and evaluation. Participating in study groups and having reading coaches as sources of information offers opportunities to learn about research based practices (Morrow, 2005).

### **Statement of the problem**

The notion of emergent literacy challenges the view of readiness to read and write because it suggests that children may be ready to learn elements of literacy in infants. It is believed that literacy skills will almost inevitably develop if the child is placed in a literate environment and given some scaffolds. While readiness suggests that there is a point in time when a child is ready to begin to learn to read and write, emergent literacy suggests that the development of literacy is an ongoing activity in the early childhood learner. This is the child's natural ability which emerges under the right conditions. Thus the notion of emergent literacy has gradually replaced the notion of reading and writing readiness. The view that children should be ready to read and write is strongly held in Zimbabwean early childhood education programmes. Emphasis is on school preparation and school readiness and developing the whole child. Researches have been carried out on language policy and policy implementation. There seems to be no researches which have been carried out to date specifically on emergent literacy in Zimbabwe. The importance of emergent literacy and implications of CPD for early childhood teachers should be an area of concern for early childhood education research. Knowledge gained by children through development of emergent literacy from birth until children begin formal school can be put to good use when formal instruction in reading and writing begins. It is against this background that the

researcher seeks to find out how preschool teachers conceptualise the term 'emergent literacy' and implications for CPD in Zimbabwe.

*The guiding question for this study was*

How do early childhood teachers conceptualise 'emergent literacy' and what are the implications for Continuing Professional Development?

*Sub Research questions:*

1. How do early learning teachers conceptualise emergent literacy?
2. How has Continuing Professional Development assisted teachers in nurturing emergent literacy in early learners?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in providing services for emergent literacy development?
4. What resource materials are there to assist teachers ?
5. How are teachers nurturing emergent literacy in learners with special education needs?

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

This study employed a qualitative case study research design. It is idiographic in that it seeks a deep, detailed, and descriptive understanding of the participants' views (Creswell, 2007). The use of this qualitative research design was informed by the nature of the research questions, which focused on emergent and early literacy and implications for continuing professional development of early learning teachers. This design was therefore deemed suitable for use in this particular study as it allows for a rich description and deep understanding from the perspective of the participants. The purpose of the phenomenological approach was to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation in this case, early learning teachers. This translated into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through interviews.

### **Sample and sampling procedure**

The study was conducted at two selected well established and registered preschools situated in Gweru and one primary school with ECD classes situated in a low density suburb in Gweru urban in Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling method was employed because of the specificity of participants required for the study (Creswell,2007). As such, the researcher selected six participants, two from each institution, who were employed as preschool teachers on a full-time basis at the time of the study and who had worked continuously as teachers for at least five years. Participants' work

experience ranged from five years to twenty years. No part-time staff or volunteers were considered for inclusion. Semi-structured interviews schedules were used to carry out face-to-face interviews with participants. I tested my instrument at one of the pre schools which was not included in the study. I then administered the interviews personally. Data were also collected through document analysis for triangulation purposes (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2010). Five documents which are in use were analysed in order for the researcher to get insight of the content in the documents.

### **Data collection procedure**

The data used for this study were collected through the use of individual, semi-structured interviews. Devlin (2006) states that interview methods of data collection fit well with the tenets of the qualitative research design and as such are often heavily relied upon in these types of studies. The interviews ranged in duration from 40 to 60 minutes. While the format of the individual, semi structured interview is flexible, allowing questions to be adjusted to each of the participants as necessary, the risk with using this type of interview is that the interviewer may use leading questions, which affects the validity of the results (Babbie, 2004). During the interview, the responses were noted down to make sure every word expressed was recorded. Data were also collected through documental analysis (Grix, 2010). This was done by simply reading curriculum documents that are in use as well as training manuals and a module with the aim of gaining information pertaining to emergent literacy and implications for teacher continuing professional development.

### **Analysis of data**

Data was analyzed through content analysis where themes were allowed to emerge using line by line coding and categorization. The concepts identified clearly stipulated early learning teacher's views on emergent literacy and implications for training and development of early childhood teachers. This helped to make the data manageable.

### **Findings**

The study sought to find out how teachers conceptualised emergent literacy and how continuing professional development has assisted teachers in nurturing emergent literacy skills in early learners. Findings of the study are presented verbatim and in descriptive form under emerging themes. All the six participants' responses are presented in the following paragraphs. Responses will be presented as per school. Thus A, B and C will represent the school names. Findings from

document analysis are also presented with some examples extracted from these documents.

### *Theme 1: Early learning teachers conceptualisation of emergent literacy*

Responding to the question and probes concerning what they understood about emergent literacy participants gave the following responses:

#### **Pre-School A**

- *I have never heard of the term emergent literacy but I know that mothers can talk or sing to an unborn baby. Lullabies. I know something about invented spelling.*
- *One of the workshop facilitator just mentioned it in passing.*

#### **Pre-School B**

- *I am aware of it because many mothers nowadays read to their babies. There is a shop in town which sells such materials to help mothers teach children to read and write .You can go and see for yourself and hear how the lady in that shop explains.*
- *Not much was said but it involves early reading and writing.*

#### **Pre-School C**

- *I think it is about reading picture books and using the thematic approach . Storytelling and retelling.*
- *It is a new term but I think we teach it at circle time.*

### *Theme 2:CPD*

In answering the question about CPD to nurture emergent literacy, participants gave the following responses:

#### **Pre-School A**

- *Library time is very important. Reading to children and story time was emphasised.*
- *We were taught to develop the language skills of speaking listening, reading, and writing in children. Talk to them, pattern writing and listen to their stories.*

#### **Pre-School B**

- *The emphasis was on oral work, reading and written language.*
- *On language development my lecturer at that time stressed the four language skills. I did not learn about emergent literacy directly.*

#### **Pre-School C**

- *Book corner and storytelling .Learning through play*
- *Use of picture charts and picture books so that children can form stories*

Asked to state how they are being developed professionally to nurture emergent literacy on the job, participants gave the following responses:

**Pre-School A**

- *I have attended some workshops organized by Ministry of Education personnel on reading at infant level. I am wondering when they are going to invite us for another one.*
- *I have attended several workshops and several changes have been made to the programme. But syllabus has not changed.*

**Pre-School B**

- *I have embarked on Bed.ECE programme with a local university one of the modules is Language Arts and emergent literacy will be covered. I attend workshops.*
- *There is an ongoing in-service training programme every school holiday for para-professionals being funded by UNICEF.*

**Pre-School C**

- *When there is a workshop here in this town we are invited. Mostly administrative.*
- *I have attended a good number of them and I have benefitted. One was on learning through play and the other one was on reading.*

Respondents who have attended workshops said they learned some or all of the following: No more letter symbols or labels in ECD classes, children should read picture books without words, do not mark children's work wrong. The other respondent said that staff development was ongoing and targeted mainly paraprofessionals and funding was by UNICEF.

***Theme 3: Nurturing emergent literacy in learners with special education needs***

On nurturing emergent literacy in learners with special education needs, the following were some of the responses:

**Pre-School A**

- *We are not able to include special needs children because we have no specialist teacher. We enrolled a mentally retarded child last year but the family has moved to South Africa.*
- *There is a special class in the school but there is no special needs learner in ECD.*

**Pre-School B**

- *No, not yet because we are not trained.*
- *We take those with speech problems and the mentally retarded and we have managed to help. But when they go to the primary school, they are placed in a special class with no expert assistance. We are not happy about it.*

**Pre-School C**

- *We need to have a resource unit first.*
- *There are no facilities for such children.*

***Theme 4: Challenges ECD teachers have in nurturing emergent literacy***

When participants were asked about challenges that they have in nurturing emergent literacy the following were their responses:

**Pre-School A**

- *Lack of infrastructure in a school set up. We use a school hall for the three ECD classes. No child size furniture. Children need to practice writing.*
- *There is no fixed budget for ECD. It is not taken seriously.*

**Pre-School B**

- *We have no computers. We need computers. Children will learn a lot about reading and writing*
- *There is need for a cluster resource room with an ECD specialist.*

**Pre-School C**

- *Curriculum Development Unit should supply ECD reading and writing materials to ECD classes that are part of the school system.*
- *Materials are lacking.*

**Document Analysis**

Five documents were analysed namely: Curriculum for the Child; an ECEC programme ; Early Childhood Development Handbook for Paraprofessionals and an Early Childhood and Care Teacher Training Manual and a Language Arts module for ECD student teachers. The purpose of document analysis was for the researcher to gain insight into the content covered by these documents on emergent literacy and to examine trends, patterns and consistency in these documents which would then form the basis for recommendations to improve instructional activity or approach.

***Curriculum for the child***

This document is being used in all the three ECD centres under study. The document has the following aspects on language: verbal and language activities. Activities listed include storytelling, reading pictures, puppetry, poems and rhymes, song. The block area is included as an area that promotes intellectual development. There is a sub-topic entitled 'Literature' which is also referred to as book area from where the following caption was extracted:

*Children need to be exposed to books at a very early stage of their development.  
Children learn that spoken words can also be written down when they read*

*books and when adults write down children's stories. The book area promotes listening skills, self discipline and extends the children's imagination through storytelling and listening to stories.*

Some aspects of emergent literacy are evident but there is lack of specificity to guide the teacher in the development of emergent literacy. This document does not have a teacher's manual to guide teachers on how to develop emergent literacy skills.

### ***Early Childhood Education and Care Instructional Programme***

This document is being used at ECD level in primary schools. The document provides guidelines to ECD teachers to ensure that children are exposed to experiences which will help them to develop appropriate concepts, skills and attitudes and values. Key concepts there related to emergent literacy are 'Book skills' and 'Writing'. Objectives stated are: *to develop left - right, top - bottom progression; practice caring of books.* Suggested activities do not include activities required for the development of emergent literacy. On writing skills the objective reads: *children will express thoughts and feelings using symbols or objects.* Activities include, *drawing a story, relating, talking to and writing and reading, writing messages to family members and friends.* Such activities if carried out correctly can help to nurture emergent literacy. The biggest hitch is that there is no manual for the teacher. Activities to develop fine motor skills are clearly stated but no engagement in actual writing is specified.

### ***ECD Handbook for Para-professionals***

This is a training manual which contains six modules. The ECD curriculum in this document includes some aspects of emergent literacy, for example Book play area which should include: *picture books, story books, pens, writing paper, story books* etc. There is also a computer area which shows an awareness of the importance of technology. Mental development area includes these skills: *recalling, comprehension, logic, conservation, fluency, visual/auditory discrimination and imagination.* Stated opportunities for writing are *colouring, painting, and writing patterns.*

### ***ECEC Teacher Training Manual***

The manual places emphasis on language skills of listening, speaking but there are no specifics about reading and writing. Suggested activities are *teacher-child*

*conversations, child to child talk, listening to sounds and distinguishing them, recording children's conversations.*

### ***Language arts teaching materials for pre service student teachers***

These were also analysed. The document covers different aspects of language development like oral development but writing is underrepresented. There is also a strong focus on readiness than on emergent literacy.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Analysis and interpretation of findings sought to address themes that emerged during interviews with preschool teachers regarding emergent literacy and teacher training and development. Document analysis was another source of important information for triangulation purposes. Responses to the question on conceptualisation of emergent literacy revealed that two of the participants were aware of the emergent literacy but they lacked details about it. The other four respondents were not quite knowledgeable about the theory but they were able to reason correctly in trying to answer this question. All the responses revealed that the teachers' conceptualisation of emergent literacy was weak, may be because they were never made aware of it during initial training or because they are not in the habit of searching for new information to improve on what they learned as student teachers. Over the past years, the concept of emergent literacy has gradually replaced the notion of reading readiness which suggests that there is a point in time when a child is ready to begin to learn to read and write (Weiss, 2010). This is an understanding which all early learning teachers should possess. During preschool years children need to develop a strong foundation in social skills so that they can establish and maintain relationships and language skills so they can communicate effectively, develop strong emergent literacy skills and succeed in all areas of academic learning. In order to flourish in these areas, children need a classroom environment that is rich in learning opportunities and in which the teacher engages every child in responsive interactions throughout the day. The goal is to equip teachers with knowledge, skills and tools they need to make language and literacy learning a fun and natural part of every child's life (Morrow, 2005).

In responding to the question on CPD and emergent literacy, three of the participants revealed that they were taught to develop the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing in learners. On further probing they gave good examples of activities that they would use to develop these skills some of which are related to emergent literacy. The other respondent talked about learning through play and the use of the book corner. The other two respondents emphasised the use of picture charts and picture books for children to form stories and also

reading to children during story time. No mention of phonological awareness, invented spelling or consistent writing was done. Although they possess good ideas on language development the idea of emergent literacy is lagging behind. Teachers in early childhood programmes are better able to provide quality programmes in language literacy when they understand the continuum of reading and writing development and its integration in the preschool curriculum. CPD should include developmental stages of language and literacy, building up environments that nurture early language and literacy, use of language and literacy to promote positive behaviour (Nelson, 2000; Morrow, 2000; Osborn et. al2007).

Responding to the question on CPD, all the participants indicated that they have attended a workshop at one time or the other. Workshops varied from administrative ones to those which dealt with classroom instruction .Only one respondent indicated that the term emergent literacy was mentioned in passing by a certain facilitator at a reading workshop .No details were given. Research shows that excellent teachers are not only well prepared teachers but those who continue to participate in professional development, during their careers (Morrow, 2005). CPD approaches include workshops or guest speakers, curricular training, ongoing in-service training and retraining staff. Efforts to produce ECE professionals with outstanding preparation are encouraged.

Concerning learners with special education needs, all the six responses showed that there is not much going on in these preschools. They have very limited capacity due to a number of challenges which include lack of a resource centre and specialist personnel for preschoolers. Interactive Technology Literacy Curriculum mode (ITCL) has proven effective for young children with disabilities, their families and teachers (Robinson, 2003).

Responding to a question on challenges that they face as preschool teachers in their centers, participants from a primary school said that there was no budget for ECD and ECD was being taken for granted. One of the pre schools under study has a computer laboratory which was not functioning at the time of the study because the system was being upgraded. The other two of the three ECD centres did not have a computer laboratory. This means that children are missing out on the use of electronic technology which is an important tool in emergent literacy development. Although all the three centres had television sets these were not frequently in use which also deprived children of assistive technology. Various studies have shown positive effects of technology in supporting learning in emergent literacy development. Experts agree that integration of technology and literacy experiences has positive effects in supporting learning in emergent literacy (Mckenney and Voogt, 2009). The success of the implementation of technology innovation is determined by teachers' computer proficiency, knowledge about

technology and support offered to teachers. Support to teachers by administration and availability of resources seems to influence teacher perceptions of technology which in turn influences teachers' technology integration in classroom practice.

In the documents which were analysed, there is also a strong focus on readiness than on emergent literacy. The term emergent literacy does not appear anywhere in these documents. However, some aspects of emergent literacy are evident but there is lack of specificity to guide the teacher in the development of emergent literacy. Although the documents reflect good opportunities for children to do reading, writing is underrepresented. There are no teacher manuals to guide teachers in developing emergent literacy skills. Support for quality preschools and developmentally appropriate activities shows the importance of an understanding of emergent literacy. Preschools should not be like kindergartens which get children ready to read and write in the conventional way. Readiness activities common in many preschools and kindergartens are not supported by research on emergent literacy and how children learn. Research has shown that when children were provided with books, paper and pencil activities children displayed an almost natural affinity for them (Nelson, 2000). Children need a classroom environment that is rich in learning opportunities and in which the teacher engages every child in responsive interactions throughout the day.

### Recommendations

- CPD for early learning teachers requires intense models of learning about child emergent literacy development.
- Quality literacy programmes where reading and writing opportunities are provided for at all the centres of learning should be developed by curriculum developers in the Ministry of Education Sport, Arts and Culture.
- Curriculum planners should recognise the importance of emergent literacy by integrating early literacy experiences into the pre-school curriculum.
- Instructional manuals on language literacy should be developed for use by preschool teachers with a special emphasis on emergent literacy.

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