



**PARENTAL PARTICIPATION PRACTICES AS PRECURSORS OF  
PUPILS' EARLY READING LITERACY SKILLS ACHIEVEMENT  
KIAMBAA SUB-COUNTY, KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA**

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to investigate ways in which parents are involved in their children's education as precursors of early literacy acquisition of children. The study used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Parental Model as its theoretical lens. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Data was collected through questionnaires and a reading assessment checklist for children. Public and private primary schools included in the study were selected through stratified sampling criteria comprising 12% of the total number of schools in the Kiambaa Sub-county. A stratified sample of pupils and purposeful samples of parents and teachers were then made comprising 12% lower primary students, 12% parents, and 12% teachers from each of the selected schools. A pilot study was conducted before the final study. Data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 26.0). Pearson Chi-square test to establish whether there was a correlation between nuclear family structure, level of parents' education, and parental involvement in early reading literacy skills achievement of lower primary school children. The results were presented in frequency tables, bar graphs, and bar charts. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the children were aided in their reading literacy by their significant others and family members. Most parents always read with their children in their sitting room, parents seldom read with their children outside, some parents often read with their children in the kitchen, and fewer parents never read with children in the kitchen as well. The study concluded that

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family structure can have some impact on parental involvement in early reading literacy skills achievements for lower primary school children. The study recommended that parents and teachers must be aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading, and writing, as well as supporting the school's literacy agenda at home, both during the early years of schooling and later years. It can be concluded that parents are willing to engage when they believe the schools are open and eager to facilitate their engagement. Parental participation is difficult for teachers in particular, and both teachers and parents require particular help and clear instructions to promote engagement. The study recommends that parents and teachers must be aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading, and writing, as well as supporting the school's literacy agenda at home, both during the early years of schooling and later years.

**Keywords:** parental participation, research-based good practices, and early reading literacy skills achievement

## 1. Introduction

Reading is crucial to learning for everyone, particularly for young children. It cannot be removed from the educational process since it is crucial (Sahin, A., & Zenc, 2021). Literacy is an essential life skill that is essential for a child's achievement in school and, in fact, during their entire lives (Jabamani & Senthilnathan, 2021). Reading gives kids a chance to grow intellectually, which aids in the development of character and long-lasting habits (Pike et al., 2021). Young kids need to acquire a love of learning and a reading habit from an early age. Learning must begin as soon as a kid is born, and literature can be thought of as the child's parental figure (Willinsky, 2017). Globally, parental involvement is regarded as a means by which schools can improve the performance of underachieving kids (Tan et al., 2020). Parental involvement in an early child's academic aspirations encourages parental participation and has a significant influence on the academic achievement and social development of children (Jeynes, 2018; Otani, 2020). Research has shown the value of personal interactions in enhancing the setting that children learn in at home (Junge et al., 2021; Kluczniok et al., 2013; van Bergen et al., 2017).

The fact that families are willing to shoulder early childhood education and care services some of the responsibility for raising their children does not minimize the significance of the parent's involvement (Currie, 2001). Educational researchers understand the value of father involvement in their students' ECDE learning (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). However, several obstacles have been discovered to exist (Adam, 2005). Most parents believe that teaching their children how to read and write is the responsibility of the teacher and the school (Sonnenschein et al., 2021), which is misinformed and does not seem to be the case for many parents. The majority of parents state that they are too busy to devote any time to read with their kids at home. (Park,

2008). Additionally, most homes do not offer a stimulating reading space with a variety of reading materials to introduce kids to reading (Castro et al., 2015).

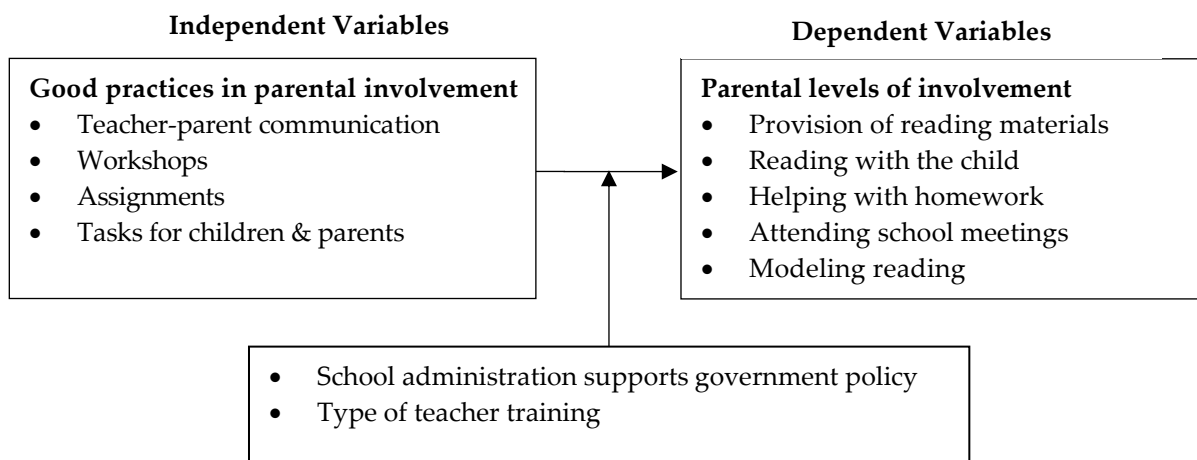
In South Africa, most teachers work with parents to help kids learn to read, and doing so during the foundational stage is seen as crucial to helping kids learn to read (Sibanda, 2021). In Kenya, Topping and Wolfendale (2017) found a strong relationship between parental involvement in children's reading at home with their performance in Kiswahili reading abilities. Kathure (2014) found out that there was a significant relationship between the level of teacher invitation and the level of parental involvement in their children's reading at home, in modeling, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of parental involvement. Leaving a gap in the involvement of parents as stakeholders in their children's education.

Literacy achievement is a key requisite for Kenya to the achievement of vision 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals by extension. Early literacy reading skills are well developed at an early age, and the foundation for success is particularly set during Early Childhood Education (ECD) (3-8yrs). At lower primary, children are expected to have already developed reading readiness skills (Mugalavai, 2012) However, knowledge and information about the mechanisms of parental involvement with lower primary school pupils' reading skills and factors influencing parental involvement in Kenya remain inadequate. If parents do not guide their children for example in reading, to prepare them to be successful in school and reading, they can only do so at their own and their children's peril (Akemoglu, 2022; Dupont et al., 2022). Kenya recently adopted a new Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) which is initially being implemented from preschool to grade three. The study sought to establish whether research-based good practices for parental participation in education were being followed in Kiambaa Sub-County.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to establish whether research-based good practices for parental participation in education were being followed in Kiambaa Sub-County.

### 3. Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework

### 4. Literature Review

This section discusses the theoretical framework and the literature related to the study topic.

#### 4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Hoover- Dempsey and Sandler parental involvement model. According to the parent participation process model developed by Hoover, Dempsey, and Sandler, family engagement is a process that starts with families' decisions about being involved and ends with student outcomes (Walker et al., 2005). Role construction for involvement and self-efficacy for supporting children's academic success are two aspects of the cognitive component of involvement decision-making. Parents' efforts to assist their children's learning, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, can be divided into one or more of the following categories: participation through instruction, involvement through modeling, involvement through reinforcement, and involvement through encouragement (Lavenda, 2011). Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement offers a more holistic perspective that explains why parents become involved in their children's education and how their involvement makes a difference (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, therefore, provide a very valuable framework that helps this study to understand the contextual factors of parental involvement.

#### 4.2 Parental Involvement and Early Reading Skills

Family influence has advantages that go beyond reading and academic success. According to studies, children with parental supervision exhibit better social and emotional growth. These children also exhibit greater life satisfaction, identity and self-control, interpersonal abilities, mental health, mutual support, social competence,

optimistic peer relations, tolerance, successful marriages, and fewer delinquent behaviors (Cosso et al., 2022; Syomwene, 2022). Children who were read to showed an interest in literature, narrated stories, and had a better head start in school than their non-read-to counterparts.

The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) (2016) also reported that the majority of class three pupils cannot read class one level English and Kiswahili (Wawire et al., 2022). This report also stated that most class eight pupils in Kenya cannot spell grade-two-level words correctly. This is a problem that affects even secondary school students and adults as well. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of involvement claims that specific teacher invitation to parents for involvement can take many structures including encouragement for frequent teacher-parent communication, promoting home activities that are relevant to the children's learning, frequent teacher-parent communication about the child and suggesting relevant activities for parents to engage in with children at home. A longitudinal study carried out by Barnard (2004) in Chicago USA to investigate the association between parent involvement in school and parent reports of home involvement in elementary school has attributed to teacher invitations for parent involvement in children's education to be associated with high student achievement and other positive child outcomes.

Kimu (2012) assessed parental involvement in public primary schools in Kenya and found out that teachers were required to be made aware of different involvement activities, their benefits, and, their responsibility in involving parents. Kimathi (2014) research geared to establish the relationship between the level of teacher invitation and the level of parents' involvement in the cognitive dimension showed that parents who were rarely invited were rarely involved in the cognitive dimension while the majority of those who were invited were highly involved. These results indicate that where the parental level of invitation is high, their level of involvement is high and where the parental level of invitation is low, the level of involvement is low. These results suggested that there is a relationship between the level of teacher invitation and the level of parental involvement in the cognitive dimension.

Kathure (2014) found out that the level of teacher invitation significantly influenced the level of parents' involvement in the modeling, cognitive and behavioral dimensions. This means that the level of parent involvement was higher when teachers required them to read with their children. Parents who introduce their children to books give them a head start in school and an advantage over their peers throughout primary school (Gichana, 2021). Parental support continues to play a crucial role throughout children's and young people's lives: Although parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children's educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years (Flovian, 2016).

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Research Design and Target Population**

This study employed a descriptive survey design to assess children's early reading skills achievement by capturing the views and opinions of the target population in this case teachers, children, and parents. The approach aims at collecting data without manipulating the research variables or respondents (Kombo & Tromp, 2008). The study targeted all lower primary school children that are; aged 6 to 10 in both private and public schools in Kiambaa sub-county, their parents, and teachers. According to the ministry of education, Kiambaa Sub County has 23 public schools, 31 private schools, and 8972 students County Education Office (2018).

### **5.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

The researcher used stratified random sampling to select 12% of the schools and this was to ensure both public and private schools are included in the study. Stratified random sampling was used to select lower primary male and female students to participate in the study. A parent automatically qualified to be included in the study if their child is selected. A purposeful sampling technique was used to select lower primary school teachers who were included in this study. A total of 7 parents, 24 teachers, and 130 students were sampled.

### **5.3 Research Instruments**

The study used questionnaires, and Reading Continuous Assessment reports checklist to collect data. The questionnaires were utilized for collecting data from the parents and teachers. Reading Continuous Assessment reports was used to establish the children's early reading literacy skills achievement, reading Continuous Assessment reports was assessed.

### **5.4 Pilot Study**

The questionnaire and observation instruments were piloted in two primary schools. One public school and one private school were selected at random for the pilot study. Twenty parents (ten from each of the pilot schools) were selected at random to fill in the questionnaire. The researcher sought the assistance of research experts, experienced supervisors, and the results of the pilot study to contribute to improving the content validity of questionnaires. They were asked to validate the content of the research instruments by giving opinions on whether the specific questions were addressing the research objectives. For reliability, the instruments were tested using a test-retest method, and a Cronbach coefficient was used to calculate the coefficient Cronbach alpha of 0.79 was obtained which showed that there is high reliability of data.

### 5.5 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires for teachers were delivered to the respondents through face-to-face meetings by the researcher in person while questionnaires for parents were sent through the school to be carried home by their children and returned after they had filled in their responses. Care was taken not to interfere with the normal teaching schedules. Each rating teacher was required to fill in the information in the questionnaires during the long break and later collected them after completion. This was done twice, before and after two weeks to comply with the study reliability test-retest plan

### 5.6 Data Processing and Analysis

After data collection, the questionnaires were checked for completeness. The incomplete ones were discarded. Quantitative data was edited, categorized based on research objectives, coded, entered into a computer, and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 26.0). The researcher used descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency distribution, and sample variance to assess central tendency and dispersion. Data were analyzed and results were presented in frequency tables, bar graphs, and bar charts. The findings of the study were used to make conclusions and recommendations.

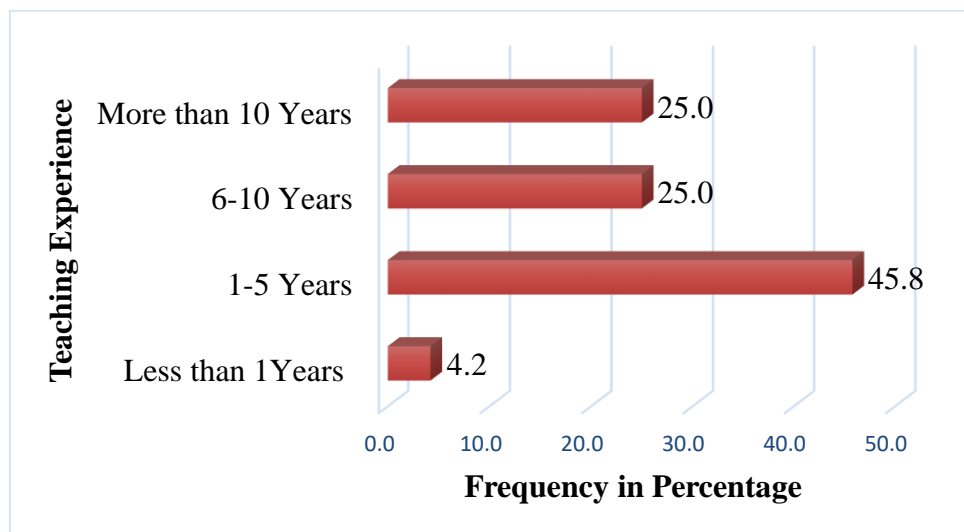
## 6. Study Results

### 6.1: Demographic Information

In terms of demographic data, the study determined the teaching experience of the teachers and their professional qualifications.

#### 6.1.1 Teaching Experience

The goal of the study was to determine the teachers' degree of teaching experience, and the results are shown in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1: Teaching Experience**

Figure 4.1 shows that 45.8% of the instructors had 1-5 years of teaching experience, 25.0 percent had 6-10 years of teaching experience, and 25.0 percent had more than 10 years of teaching experience. According to the research, just 4.2 percent of the teachers had less than one year of teaching experience. This meant that all of the teachers had sufficient teaching experience, which was important for the trustworthiness of the teacher research findings in this study.

### 6.1.2 Teachers' Professional Qualifications

The goal of the study was to determine the level and the professional qualifications held by the teachers who were sampled, and the results are shown in Figure 4.2.

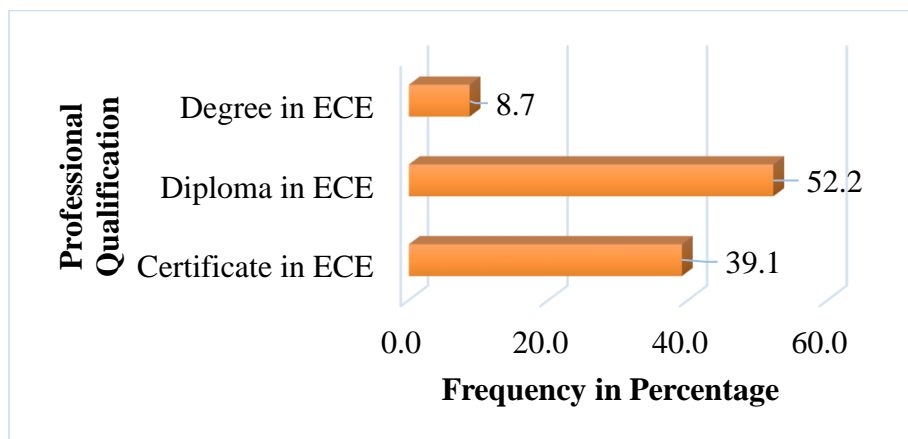


Figure 4.2: Teachers' Professional Qualifications

The study reported that the majority of 52.2% of the teachers had a diploma in early childhood education, 39.1% had a certificate level in early childhood education, and 8.7% with a degree in early childhood education as shown in Figure 4.5. Professionally qualified teachers are dedicated to providing excellent reading skills and education and are aware that no single teaching program or approach is effective for all pupils.

### 6.2 Good Practices in Parental Involvement in Education

The key purpose of this study was to establish if the research-based good practices for parental participation in education were being followed in Kiambaa sub-county. The good practices included teacher-parent communication, organizing of workshops regarding how parents can enhance their children's reading skills, how parents can help children improve their reading literacy through assignments given by teachers, and the extent of teacher invitation for parent involvement. The results were measured on a Likert scale of 1-5 where 1 strongly agreed and 5 strongly disagree and Table 1 shows the findings.



**Table 1: Teacher Invitation and Early Literacy Reading Skills Achievement**

| Statement   | 1           | 2           | 3          | 4          | 5          | Mean        | SD         |
|---|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Provides story books to pupils to read with parents at home.            | 47.8%       | 21.7%       | 17.4%      | 8.7%       | 4.3%       | 2.01        | 1.2        |
| Sets official language as the only medium of communication.             | 50.0%       | 33.3%       | 4.2%       | 12.5%      | -          | 1.79        | 1.0        |
| Encourage learners to read articles in newspapers and magazines at home | 50.0%       | 41.7%       | 4.2%       | -          | 4.2%       | 1.67        | 0.9        |
| Communicates to parents to buy more storybooks for their children.      | 45.8%       | 37.5%       | 8.3%       | 4.2%       | 4.2%       | 1.83        | 1.0        |
| Discuss literacy expectations with parents                              | 29.2%       | 50.0%       | 8.3%       | 4.2%       | 8.3%       | 2.13        | 1.2        |
| Talk about training opportunities with parents                          | 25.0%       | 37.5%       | 25.0%      | 8.3%       | 4.2%       | 2.29        | 1.1        |
| Encourage children to read to each other                                | 65.2%       | 21.7%       | 4.3%       | 4.3%       | 4.3%       | 1.61        | 1.1        |
| Give reading assignments for homework                                   | 70.8%       | 16.7%       | -          | 4.2%       | 8.3%       | 1.63        | 1.2        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>48.0</b> | <b>32.5</b> | <b>9.0</b> | <b>5.8</b> | <b>4.7</b> | <b>1.87</b> | <b>1.1</b> |

**Key:** SD= Standard Deviation

Teachers agreed that parents should provide story books for their children to read at home with their parents (M=2.01, SD=1.2), official language should be the only medium of communication (M=1.79, SD=1.0), and that parents should encourage learners to read articles in newspapers and magazines at home (M=1.67, SD=0.9), as shown in Table 4.1. Teachers also agreed that they should communicate to parents to buy more story books for their children (M=1.83, SD=1.0), talk to parents about literacy expectations (M=2.13, SD=1.2), talk to parents about training possibilities (M=2.29, SD=1.1), and encourage children to read to each other (M=1.61, SD=1.1). Teachers believed that delivering reading assignments for homework was also important for improving early literacy reading skills. According to the data, teachers had done a great job encouraging children to read to each other with a variance of SD 1.1. Teachers believe that parental engagement adds more value to children's reading progress, which explains the high level of invitation. These findings confirm the findings of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), who discovered that the success of invitations from children and schools is dependent on other factors such as parental involvement. Parents are willing to engage, according to Votruba-Drzal (2010), when they believe the schools are open and eager to facilitate their engagement. To put it in another way, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007) model of parental engagement says that parents will be convinced to participate if they get a broad invitation, but they will be influenced to participate in specific ways if they get a specific offer. According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) model of involvement, specific teacher invitations to parents for involvement can take a variety of forms, such as encouraging frequent teacher-parent communication, promoting home activities that are relevant to the children's learning, frequent teacher-parent communication about the child, and suggesting relevant activities for parents to participate in.

The findings are also supported by the local studies in Kenya including the findings of Kimu's (2012) that concur that teachers must be educated about various engagement activities, their advantages, and their role in incorporating parents. Kimathi (2014) agrees that when parents have a high level of invitation, they have a high level of engagement, and when they have a low level of invitation, they have a low level of engagement. These findings revealed that in the cognitive component, there is a link between the number of teacher invitations and the amount of parental participation hence good practice. The researcher observed who else reads with the children besides parents, places of reading, how the children read, and frequency of asking for help, and rated the reading capabilities of lower primary school children to further establish effective practices in parental engagement in early literacy reading. According to the findings, 70.0 percent of the children requested reading assistance from other relatives other than their parents.

Table 2 summarizes the findings to determine who, apart from parents assisted children with reading at home.

**Table 2: Those Who Helped Children Learn to Read**

| <b>Assistants</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Brothers/Sisters  | 76               | 63.9              |
| Grandma/Grandpa   | 10               | 8.4               |
| Uncle/Auntie      | 10               | 8.4               |
| House-help        | 19               | 16.0              |
| Not at all        | 4                | 3.4               |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>119</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

As indicated in Table 2, the majority of the children (63.9%) were aided with their reading by their brothers and sisters, 16.0 percent by house helps, 8.4 percent by grandma/grandpas and uncle/aunties correspondingly, and just 3.4 percent were not aided at all. As a result, brothers and sisters play an important role in supporting younger siblings in the early stages of literacy development. For instance, when one sibling reads to another, the youngster who is reading aloud receives a lot of oral practice, especially if the reading is fluent and expressive. When older children read to younger children, they typically gain confidence and develop important reading skills. The study sought to establish the most preferred places for reading at home and Table 3 presents the findings.

**Table 3: Place for Reading**

| <b>Place</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Couch        | 14               | 10.3              |
| Sitting Room | 92               | 67.6              |
| Outside      | 5                | 3.7               |
| Bedroom      | 25               | 18.4              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>136</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

As shown in Table 3, the majority of the children 67.6% preferred to read in the sitting room, 18.4% in the bedroom, and 10.3% on the couch while 3.7% preferred to read outside. The study also sought to establish how often the children asked for help with their homework and Table 4 presents the findings.

**Table 4:** Frequency of Assistance to Homework

| Number of Times                | Frequency  | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Every time                     | 13         | 9.6        |
| When I need help               | 112        | 82.4       |
| When parents have time to help | 9          | 6.6        |
| Never                          | 2          | 1.5        |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>136</b> | <b>100</b> |

As shown in Table 4, the majority of the children sought reading assistance only when they needed it, 9.6% needed assistance all of the time, 6.6 percent when their parents had time to help, and 1.5 percent never asked for help at all. The study conducted some observations focusing on children in lower primary schools rating their reading skills on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented excellent, 2 good, 3 fair, 4 average, and 5 below average. Table 5 summarizes the results of the ratings.

**Table 5:** Rating of Reading Skills

| Statement                      | 1            | 2            | 3            | 4          | 5            | Mean        | SD         |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| Letter name recognition        | 54.5%        | 18.2%        | 9.1%         | 5.7%       | 12.5%        | 2.03        | 1.4        |
| Letter sound recognition.      | 58.0%        | 13.6%        | 10.25        | 4.5%       | 13.6%        | 2.02        | 1.5        |
| Word recognition               | 45.3%        | 23.3%        | 14.0%        | 7.0%       | 10.5%        | 2.14        | 1.3        |
| Storytelling                   | 34.5%        | 26.4%        | 20.7%        | 6.9%       | 11.5%        | 2.34        | 1.3        |
| Paragraph and sentence reading | 24.1%        | 31.0%        | 21.8%        | 11.5%      | 11.5%        | 2.55        | 1.3        |
| Comprehension skills           | 31.8%        | 28.2%        | 11.8%        | 16.5%      | 11.8%        | 2.48        | 1.4        |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>41.4%</b> | <b>23.4%</b> | <b>14.6%</b> | <b>8.7</b> | <b>11.9%</b> | <b>2.26</b> | <b>1.4</b> |

According to Table 5, the study indicated that children in lower primary school scored (M=2.03, SD=1.4) in letter name recognition, (M=2.02, SD=1.4) in letter sound recognition, and (M=2.14, SD=1.3) in word recognition. The study also found that pupils scored reasonably (M=2.55, SD=1.3) in paragraph and sentence reading and (M=2.48, SD=1.4) in comprehension skills. In Summary, 41.4 percent of the children were classified as excellent in reading skills, 23.4 percent as good, 14.6 percent as fair, 8.7 percent as average or ordinary, and 11.9 percent as below average with a standard deviation of 1.4.

## 5. Conclusion

It was revealed that teachers believe that parental engagement adds more value to children's reading progress, which explains the high level of invitation. The success of invitations from children and schools is dependent on other factors such as parental involvement. Therefore, even the finest invitation tactics for engagement will provide

modest effects if parents have a restricted conception of their role and poor self-efficacy. It can be concluded that parents are willing to engage when they believe the schools are open and eager to facilitate their engagement.

Parental participation is difficult for teachers in particular, and both teachers and parents require particular help and clear instructions to promote engagement. It can be concluded that teachers must be educated about various engagement activities, their advantages, and their role in incorporating parents. It was noted that when parents have a high level of invitation, they have a high level of engagement, and where they have a low level of invitation, they have a low level of engagement.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 1) The study recommends that parents and teachers must be aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading, and writing, as well as supporting the school's literacy agenda at home, both during the early years of schooling and later years
- 2) Specific teacher invitations to parents for involvement can take a variety of forms, such as encouraging frequent teacher-parent communication, promoting home activities that are relevant to the children's learning, and suggesting relevant activities for parents to participate in with their children
- 3) Parents should always be involved in their children's early reading skills achievement by checking their child's comprehension of information and assisting with homework, which can serve as a foundation for problem-solving exercises.

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## **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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