

## Importance of Early Literacy for Children Zero to Five from Parent's Perspectives

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain parents' perspectives on how to access early literacy for children zero to five in the community. It was believed that the exploration of this research problem was worthwhile as it could bring awareness about the importance of early learning for young children. The research question for this study was: what were parents' perspectives on how to access programs and supports for early literacy for children 0-5? Purposeful sampling was used to recruit parents of children zero to five years of age. The researcher had gathered the information on the parents' perspectives regarding the importance of early literacy. The data was collected through six one-on-one interviews with parents. The key findings that emerged through this research study were importance of early literacy for children zero to five years of age, parental involvement in development of early literacy for children, services available in the community to promote early literacy and the last theme was the barriers to access and implement early literacy for children zero to five years of age.

#### Introduction

In the discussion of early literacy for children 0-5, one important concern was to recognize the benefits and significance of early literacy for young children. Lack of children getting early literacy before kindergarten was the major concerns that lead to this study to understand the problem. The purpose of conducting this research was to gain parents' perspectives on how to access the services that were offered in the community and to examine the reasons for children not getting early literacy in the community. It was believed that the exploration of this research problem was worthwhile as it could bring awareness about the importance of early learning for young children. Dennis and Horn state, "the development of early literacy skills is critical to children's later success in reading and reading-related activities" (2011, p. 29). Early literacy was not only beneficial for children at a young age; it was a lifelong achievement and insights gained from this research may have assessed and found the possible suggestions and the solutions for this issue. The research question for this study was: what were parents' perspectives on how to access programs and supports for early literacy for children 0-5? The sub-questions included, what were the supports or the limitations to accessed early literacy for children zero to five? Why early literacy was important and how it was being promoted in the community for parents to access? Purposeful sampling was used to conduct the study and parents of children zero to five years of age were included as participants. This paper will discuss steps that were taken in the data preparation, data analysis phases to complete the research study along with the results and discussion of the findings from this research study as well as supporting evidence from the existing literature.

#### Literature Review

The importance of literacy is universal; it is not associated with a particular race, age, gender, cultural or a time period. The benefits and significance of literacy cannot be denied in any way. However, there can be a question for the importance and benefits of early literacy for children 0-5. The research indicates that "Early literacy skills are associated with academic success and increased graduation rates which in turn are associated with better health outcomes. And children who do not acquire these skills before school entry, are at greater risk for poor school-related outcomes and poor health" (Mayne, Pai, Morrow, Lima, & Jimenez, 2018, p. 667). Exposing children towards learning at an early age has positive lifelong impacts on children's overall wellbeing; developmental domains including social, emotional, and academic achievement. "The children with the larger vocabulary at 2 years of age also demonstrated better comprehension at both grade three and grade five levels" (Torr, 2019, p. 520). Children, who join or attend early literacy programs before formal schooling, have a larger vocabulary and stronger comprehension skills in later school years (Torr, 2019). The other findings from the literature also highlight that early literacy is vital for building strong foundations for greater success in the later school years. "Top priority for early literacy education is that children develop a strong language and literacy foundation before they enter formal schooling. Research has indicated that a relationship exists between early oral language and reading, writing, and thinking" (Curry, Reeves, & McIntyre, 2016 p. 69). Helping children learn and develop the knowledge about sounds, letters and words will enable children's smooth start at school. Another "study suggests that boosting children's early print knowledge may serve as a gateway to a range of literacy accomplishments in early elementary school" (Piastra, Justice, McGinty, & Kaderavek, 2012, P. 818-819). Also, the Childcare Resources and Research Unit emphasis for participating in the programs for early learning to develop better educational skills and states that "Participation in high-quality ECEC programs helps lay the groundwork for school success, higher education and life-long learning" (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, n.d). Early literacy benefits children in the later years of their life.

#### Summary Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of conducting this research was to gain parents' perspectives about multiple aspects of the importance of early literacy for children zero to five. It was believed that the exploration of this research problem was worthwhile as it could bring awareness about the importance of early learning for young children. The research question for this study was: what were parents' perspectives on how to access programs and supports for early literacy for children 0-5? The sub-questions included, what were the supports or the limitations to accessed early literacy for children zero to five? Why early literacy was important and how it was being promoted in the community for parents to access?

#### Methodology

##### Research Design

Qualitative study, semi-structured interviews and narrative approach

##### Instrument

- Twelve one-ended interview questions
- Six semi structured interviews
- Interviews were 18-20 minutes in length

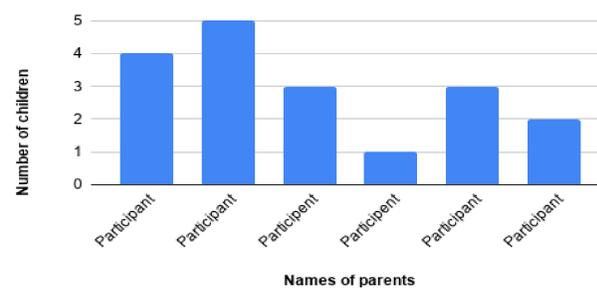
##### Procedure

- the questions were piloted with the peer in the class as well as with the students of a different section.
- The questions had been reviewed and been approved by the supervisor professor and Sheridan Research Ethics Board Comity.
- The researcher had refined and made the corrections and had arranged the questions according to the recommendations and suggestions of the peers and the professor and the REB Comity.
- Participants were contacted in person and through text messages
- Participants were provided with the information letter and consent form to read and sign and were collected before the interviews
- Interviews were conducted upon availability of the participants.

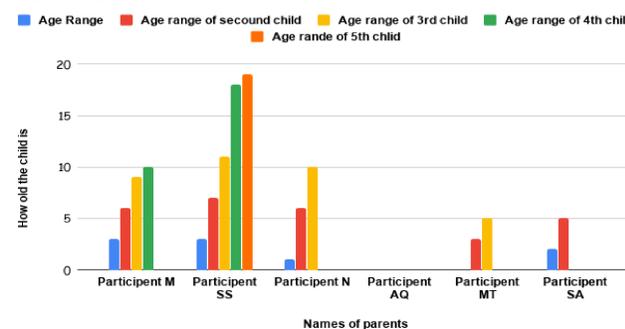
##### Participants

The 6 participants were the parents of children 0-19 years of age and were recruited from Peel; Halton and York Region. The rationale for selecting parents in this study was because parental involvement is extremely important in children's education and plays a huge role in early literacy. Parental engagement can promote high quality early learning experiences. The research has shown that "families' contributions to their children's literacy development extend beyond their immediate impact upon specific, discrete early literacy skills" (Dail, & Payne, 2010). In fact, families and parental engagement towards children's learning leave a significant impact for their development in all domains of life.

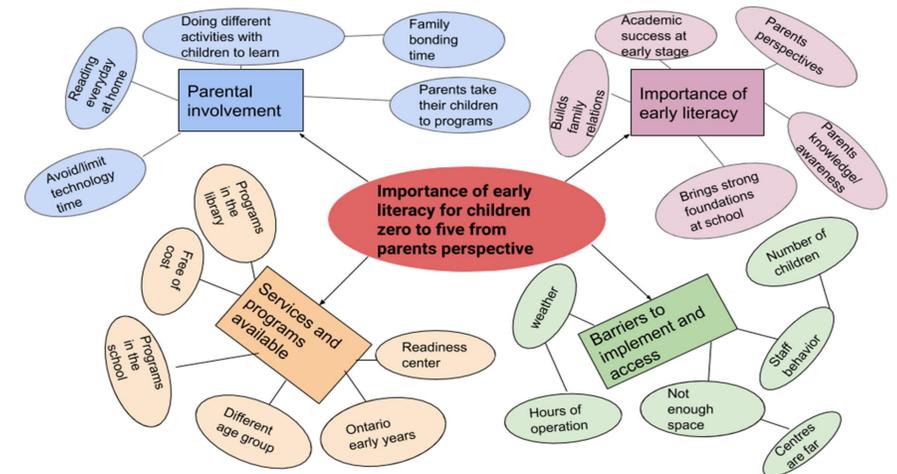
Number of children



Age range of children



#### Results and Discussion



##### Importance of Early Literacy

Six out of the six participants stated that early literacy was very important and had provided various reasons throughout the interviews. Participant SS stated that "it is very important. It plays a big role; it will help them build strong foundations" (Participant SS, personal communication, January 15, 2020). Participant M mentioned "it is important especially for their social growth" (Participant M, personal communication, January 9, 2020).

##### Parental Involvement

Six out of six parents mentioned that they read to their children at home and do different activities with children to help with early literacy skills. Participant M mentioned, "I read with them daily, I spend with them around one and half hour. I do different activities with them that help them with their learning and they also play, I try to give each child one hour" (Participant M, personal communication, January 9, 2020). Participant SA stated, "I take my child to family literacy center about twice a week and going to the library would be more often when my older child is off from school" (Participant SA, personal communication, January 10, 2020).

##### Services and Programs

All of the participants were aware of at least one of the programs that were being offered for children. Participant AQ stated, "to be honest, at this point, I am aware of only one service for literacy learning and that is the library" (Participant AQ, personal communication, January 14, 2020). Participant MT, "I know programs one in the library and the other one is the family literacy cent that supports early literacy for children" (Participant MT, personal communication, January 17, 2020).

##### Barriers to Implement and Access

Six out of six participants mentioned barriers and the challenges that they encounter to access the programs and the services that were offered in the community as well as the challenges that they have at home to support their children's early literacy skills. MT stated that "I do not have a car and it is a bit far and it is impossible to go with both children in double stroller in this weather" (Participant MT, personal communication, January 17, 2020). SS stated, "my older children get lots of homework from school and it takes lots of time" (Participant SS, personal communication, January 15, 2020).

##### Limitations and implications

The limitation to the study included the time for this research which was only around 2 academic terms and the number of participants was very limited as the data was collected from only six participants. There is additional research is needed on this topic to further enhance and strengthen the results from this study. The suggestions for the next study might include the use of different methodologies. As this study was qualitative, next time this can be set out as quantitative to evaluate the results and also include a larger number of participants to gain perspectives on the importance of early literacy for children zero to five. There is need to conduct future research which can provide awareness and promote more programs about the importance of early literacy in the community.