





Home Literacy Practices in Early Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Grade 1 School Children and Teacher Insights

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has a complex educational landscape. This study explored four children's early home literacy practices and their uptake by Grade 1 teachers in rural Libode, Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. The paper addresses the critical need for understanding literacy development in multilingual, resource-constrained environments. Using a qualitative, ethnographic design underpinned by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), the study used observations and interviews in home and school settings. The findings revealed a rich diversity of home literacy practices, including oral traditions and emerging digital literacy, contrasting with the school's emphasis on phonics-based instruction and English as the language of learning. Significant disparities between home and school practices challenge children's educational transition. Evidence of translanguaging suggests a potential for multilingual approaches to instruction. The study contributes valuable insights for developing culturally responsive pedagogies, informing teacher training, and guiding resource allocation to enhance literacy outcomes in South Africa's Foundation Phase.

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Publication History

Received:

17th October, 2024.

Accepted:

21st February, 2025.

Published:

14th March, 2025.

Keywords: *Home literacy, School Literacy Practices, Cultural Historical Activity Theory, Foundation Phase and Ethnographic Design.*

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's education system faces numerous challenges, particularly in early literacy development.¹ The country's complex linguistic landscape, with 11 official languages, adds to the intricacy of addressing literacy issues in the Foundation Phase.² According to Mojapelo, despite efforts to improve literacy rates, many South African children struggle with reading and writing skills, which has far-reaching consequences for their academic and professional futures.³ There is a growing recognition of the importance of home literacy practices in shaping children's early literacy development.⁴ However, in South Africa, there is often a disconnection between children's literacy practices at home and those emphasised in formal schooling. This misalignment can lead to difficulties in children's transition to

¹ M. Pascoe et al., "Many Voices, Many Languages: Listening and Learning from South African Children," in *Early Childhood Voices: Children, Families, Professionals* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024), 151–63.

² W. Kondowe, C.M. Kamanga, and P. Madula, *Multilingualism in Southern Africa: Issues and Perspectives* (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

³ S.M. Mojapelo, "Whopping Low Reading Literacies in South Africa," *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 89, no. 1 (2023): 1–14.

⁴ Pascoe et al., "Many Voices, Many Languages: Listening and Learning from South African Children"; Mojapelo, "Whopping Low Reading Literacies in South Africa."

school-based literacy and may contribute to the persistent literacy challenges observed in the country. How do the home literacy practices of four children in a rural South African context interact with and influence their early school-based literacy experiences, and how do Grade 1 teachers respond to and incorporate this home literacy practices in their classrooms? This paper aims to bridge the understanding gap between home and school literacy practices in South Africa, focusing on rural areas, where resources may be limited, and traditional practices may play a significant role in children's early learning experiences. By exploring this interplay, this paper sought to inform more effective and culturally responsive literacy instruction in the Foundation Phase, ultimately contributing to improved literacy outcomes for South African children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The state of literacy in South Africa presents a complex and challenging landscape. Mojapelo posits that despite significant efforts to improve literacy rates since the end of apartheid, many South African children continue to struggle with essential reading and writing skills.⁵ This review section examines the current state of literacy in South Africa, explores debates surrounding the impact of home literacy practices on school literacy, discusses the importance of literacy, and introduces Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the theoretical framework for this study.

Current State of Literacy in South Africa

South Africa's education system faces numerous challenges, particularly in early literacy development.⁶ The country's linguistic diversity, with 11 official languages, adds complexity to addressing literacy issues in the Foundation Phase. According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016, 78% of South African Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in any language.⁷ This alarming statistic underscores the urgent need for effective interventions and a deeper understanding of literacy development factors. The historical context of apartheid continues to impact educational outcomes in South Africa. Spaul argues that the country essentially operates two parallel education systems: one functional, wealthy, and able to educate students; the other dysfunctional, poor, and unable to equip students with the necessary skills to succeed.⁸ This disparity is particularly evident in rural areas, where resources are often scarce, and teacher training may need to be improved.⁹

Furthermore, the language of instruction plays a crucial role in literacy development. Although the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 promotes mother-tongue instruction in the early years, implementation still needs consistency across the country.¹⁰ The transition from mother-tongue instruction to English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) often occurs too abruptly, leaving many learners struggling to cope with academic content in a language that the learners have not yet mastered.¹¹ Recent research by Spaul and Pretorius highlights the critical importance of the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) in developing strong literacy skills.¹² Spaul and Pretorius argue that with a solid foundation in reading, writing, and comprehension in the early years, learners can catch up in later grades, leading to a cumulative deficit in learning outcomes. This emphasises the need for targeted interventions and support in the early years of schooling.

⁵ Mojapelo, "Whopping Low Reading Literacies in South Africa."

⁶ C. Meiklejohn et al., "A Review of South African Primary School Literacy Interventions from 2005 to 2020," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–11.

⁷ Sarah J Howie et al., *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement* (Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA), 2017).

⁸ Nicholas Spaul, "Poverty & Privilege: Primary School Inequality in South Africa," *International Journal of Educational Development* 33, no. 5 (2013): 436–47.

⁹ Howie et al., *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement*.

¹⁰ C. van der Walt, "Precarious Language Learning and Teaching: The Case of German, French and Mandarin in South African Schools.," *Language Teaching Research Quarterly* 39 (2024): 329-343.

¹¹ Meiklejohn et al., "A Review of South African Primary School Literacy Interventions from 2005 to 2020."

¹² Nic Spaul and Elizabeth Pretorius, "Still Falling at the First Hurdle: Examining Early Grade Reading in South Africa," *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality: A Study of the Present Situation and Future Possibilities*, 2019, 147–68.

Possible Influence of Home and School Literacy Practices

The relationship between home literacy practices and school literacy has been a subject of extensive research and debate. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital provides a valuable framework for understanding how home literacy practices can influence a child's educational outcomes.¹³ This relationship is particularly complex in South Africa due to the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. Studies have shown that children from homes with rich literacy environments tend to perform better in school-based literacy tasks.¹⁴ However, what constitutes a 'rich literacy environment' may vary across cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. In many South African communities, oral storytelling traditions and multilingual practices are integral to children's early literacy experiences.¹⁵ These practices, while valuable, may only sometimes align with the print-based, monolingual literacy emphasised in formal schooling.

The mismatch between home and school literacy practices can lead to what Iannuzzi terms the 'pedagogisation' of literacy, where school-based literacy is privileged over other forms.¹⁶ This can devalue home literacy practices, particularly those of marginalised communities. van Walt argues that recognising and building upon the diverse literacy practices that children bring from home is crucial for effective literacy instruction in South African schools.¹⁷ However, the relationship between home and school literacy can be complicated. Some studies have found that home literacy practices, such as shared book reading, correlate positively with school literacy achievement.¹⁸ Others have highlighted the importance of parental involvement and attitudes towards literacy in shaping children's literacy development.¹⁹ In South Africa, where many parents may have limited formal education, supporting children's literacy development at home can be challenging.²⁰

Recent research by Sibanda and Kajee explored the concept of 'literacy capital' in South African townships, highlighting how families leverage various resources and practices to support their children's literacy development despite socioeconomic constraints.²¹ This research challenges deficit views of literacy in disadvantaged communities and emphasises the need for schools to recognise and build upon these existing literacy practices. The role of digital technologies in home literacy practices is an emerging area of research in South Africa. Mabetha et al. examined how mobile phones are used for literacy practices in low-income South African families, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of digital literacy in resource-constrained environments.²² This research underscores the need for a broader conceptualisation of literacy encompassing traditional and digital forms.

The Importance of Literacy

Literacy is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and a critical social and economic development driver. In the South African context, where the legacy of apartheid continues to perpetuate inequalities, literacy takes on added significance as a tool for empowerment and social transformation.²³ At the individual level, literacy skills are crucial for academic success and future employment prospects. As Mabetha et al. argue, literacy is not just about decoding text but about engaging critically with information and participating fully in society.²⁴ In an increasingly digital world, the concept of literacy

¹³ P. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital. (1986)," *Cultural Theory: An Anthology* 1, no. 81–93 (2011): 949.

¹⁴ Pascoe et al., "Many Voices, Many Languages: Listening and Learning from South African Children"; Meiklejohn et al., "A Review of South African Primary School Literacy Interventions from 2005 to 2020."

¹⁵ S.J. Mahan, N.C. Phatudi, and M.R. Modise, "Translanguaging as a Strategy for Navigating Multilingualism in Peri-Urban Preschool Classrooms," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14, no. 1 (2024): 10.

¹⁶ Robert Iannuzzi, *Boys and New Literacies: Honouring out-of-School Literacies within Classroom Practice* (University of Toronto (Canada), 2014).

¹⁷ van der Walt, "Precarious Language Learning and Teaching: The Case of German, French and Mandarin in South African Schools."

¹⁸ Mahan, Phatudi, and Modise, "Translanguaging as a Strategy for Navigating Multilingualism in Peri-Urban Preschool Classrooms"; S.K. Cheung et al., "Home Literacy and Numeracy Environments in Asia," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 578764.

¹⁹ Pascoe et al., "Many Voices, Many Languages: Listening and Learning from South African Children."

²⁰ Mojapelo, "Whopping Low Reading Literacies in South Africa."

²¹ R. Sibanda and L. Kajee, "Home as a Primary Space: Exploring out-of-School Literacy Practices in Early Childhood Education in a Township in South Africa," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–10.

²² K. Mabetha et al., "Mobile Technology Use in Clinical Research Examining Challenges and Implications for Health Promotion in South Africa: Mixed Methods Study," *JMIR Formative Research* 8, no. 1 (2024): 48144.

²³ Spaull and Pretorius, "Still Falling at the First Hurdle: Examining Early Grade Reading in South Africa."

²⁴ Mabetha et al., "Mobile Technology Use in Clinical Research Examining Challenges and Implications for Health Promotion in South Africa: Mixed Methods Study."

has expanded to include digital literacy skills, further emphasising the need for comprehensive and adaptive literacy education.²⁵

At a societal level, improved literacy rates are associated with numerous positive outcomes, including better health outcomes, increased civic participation, and economic growth.²⁶ In South Africa, where unemployment rates remain high, particularly among youth, enhancing literacy skills is crucial to creating a more skilled and employable workforce.²⁷ However, it is essential to note that literacy should not be viewed in isolation from broader socioeconomic factors. As Iannuzzi argues, literacy is inherently political, and literacy education must be approached with an understanding of power relations and social justice issues.²⁸ This perspective is particularly relevant in South Africa, where literacy education intersects with language rights, cultural identity, and post-apartheid transformation.

The concept of 'critical literacy' has gained traction in South African education discourse. Researchers like Biggs et al. argue for an approach to literacy education that empowers learners to question and challenge dominant narratives, particularly in a post-apartheid context where issues of race, class, and power continue to shape educational experiences.²⁹ This aligns with the broader goals of South African education policy, which emphasises developing critical thinking skills and active citizenship.³⁰

Multilingualism and Literacy

South African society's multilingual nature presents challenges and opportunities for literacy development. While the Language in Education Policy promotes additive bilingualism, the reality in many schools is subtractive bilingualism, where learners' home languages are marginalised in favour of English.³¹ This approach can hinder literacy development and academic achievement. Recent research by Wei proposes a translanguaging approach to literacy instruction, recognising and leveraging learners' full linguistic repertoires.³² This approach challenges monolingual educational ideologies and argues for a more fluid understanding of language use in multilingual contexts. Translanguaging pedagogies have shown promise in enhancing linguistic and cognitive development in South African classrooms.³³

The role of African languages in literacy development is another critical area of research. While there is growing recognition of the importance of mother-tongue instruction, challenges remain in developing and implementing effective literacy programs in African languages. Spaul and Pretorius highlight the need for more research on reading acquisition in African languages and the development of high-quality reading materials in these languages.³⁴

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

To understand the complex interplay between home and school literacy practices in South Africa, this study employed CHAT as its theoretical framework. CHAT, rooted in the work of Vygotsky and further developed by Sannino and Engeström, provides a comprehensive approach to analysing human activity within its sociocultural context.³⁵ CHAT posits that human activity is mediated by cultural tools and artefacts and is shaped by historical and social factors. In the context of literacy practices, these tools

²⁵ Cheung et al., "Home Literacy and Numeracy Environments in Asia."

²⁶ H. Sung, *UNESCO World Culture Report. In Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Springer International Publishing.: Cham: Springer International Publishing., 2024).

²⁷ Spaul and Pretorius, "Still Falling at the First Hurdle: Examining Early Grade Reading in South Africa."

²⁸ Iannuzzi, *Boys and New Literacies: Honouring out-of-School Literacies within Classroom Practice*.

²⁹ E.E. Biggs et al., "Home Literacy Environment and Interventions for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Scoping Review," *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 66, no. 6 (2023): 2118–40.

³⁰ M. Singh and T. Mukeredzi, "Teachers' Experiences of Continuous Professional Development for Citizenship and Social Cohesion in South Africa and Zimbabwe: Enhancing Capacity for Deliberative Democracies," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 9 (Frontiers Media SA., 2024), 1326437.

³¹ Mabetha et al., "Mobile Technology Use in Clinical Research Examining Challenges and Implications for Health Promotion in South Africa: Mixed Methods Study."

³² L. Wei, "Transformative Pedagogy for Inclusion and Social Justice through Translanguaging, Co-Learning, and Transpositioning," *Language Teaching* 57, no. 2 (2024): 203-214.

³³ Wei, "Transformative Pedagogy for Inclusion and Social Justice through Translanguaging, Co-Learning, and Transpositioning."

³⁴ Spaul and Pretorius, "Still Falling at the First Hurdle: Examining Early Grade Reading in South Africa."

³⁵ L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Annalisa Sannino and Yrjö Engeström, "Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Founding Insights and New Challenges.," *Cultural-Historical Psychology* 14, no. 3 (2018).

might include language, texts, digital devices, and cultural practices around reading and writing. The theory emphasises the importance of understanding activity systems, the complex interactions between individuals and their communities, and the tools they use to achieve specific goals.

Sannino and Engeström's expanded activity theory model is beneficial for this study as it allows for the analysis of multiple interacting activity systems, in this case, the home and school literacy environments.³⁶ This model highlights potential contradictions and tensions between these systems, which can lead to challenges in children's literacy development and opportunities for learning and transformation. CHAT aligns well with sociocultural approaches to literacy, such as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective advocated by Wei.³⁷ NLS views literacy as a social practice, emphasising the importance of context and challenging the notion of a single, autonomous model of literacy. This perspective is particularly relevant in South Africa, where diverse literacy practices coexist and sometimes conflict.

Several scholars have explored the application of CHAT to literacy research in South Africa. Rzyankina used CHAT to examine the tensions between policy and practice in literacy teaching in South African schools, highlighting how historical and cultural factors shape classroom practices.³⁸ Similarly, Fakude applied CHAT to investigate digital literacy practices among South African university students, demonstrating how the framework can illuminate the complex interplay between individual agency, institutional structures, and technological tools in shaping literacy practices.³⁹ By applying CHAT to the study of home and school literacy practices in rural South Africa, insight which provides a comprehensive framework for analysing literacy practices across different contexts in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is gained. This approach considers multiple interconnected elements: the tools and artefacts employed in literacy activities, ranging from traditional textbooks to digital devices and oral storytelling; the rules and norms that govern literacy practices in both home and school environments; the division of labour among various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and peers; the communities involved in a child's literacy development; the specific objects or goals of literacy activities in different settings; and the potential contradictions that may arise between home and school literacy practices. By examining these elements, researchers can gain a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics that shape literacy development, particularly in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts such as South Africa.

This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how children navigate different literacy contexts and how these experiences shape their overall literacy development. It also provides a basis for identifying potential interventions that could bridge the gap between home and school literacy practices. Furthermore, CHAT's emphasis on historical and cultural factors aligns well with the need to consider the legacy of apartheid and ongoing socioeconomic inequalities in South African education. By examining literacy practices through this lens, we can better understand how broader social factors influence individual literacy development and how interventions might address systemic issues. While significant progress has been made since the end of the apartheid, major challenges remain in ensuring that all South African children develop the literacy skills necessary for academic success and full participation in society.

This review has illuminated several key themes in South African literacy research, including the enduring impact of historical inequalities on literacy outcomes, the intricate relationship between home and school literacy practices in multilingual and resource-constrained environments, the evolving concept of literacy to encompass digital and critical literacies, the promise of multilingual approaches like translanguaging, and the necessity for culturally responsive pedagogies. The application of Cultural Historical Activity Theory offers a robust framework for analysing the interplay between home and school literacy practices in rural South African contexts, conceptualising literacy as a socially situated practice within specific activity systems. This paper contributes to the growing body of research by examining home literacy practices in a rural setting and their integration into formal school environments. It aims to inform more effective and culturally responsive approaches to literacy instruction in the

³⁶ Sannino and Engeström, "Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Founding Insights and New Challenges."

³⁷ Wei, "Transformative Pedagogy for Inclusion and Social Justice through Translanguaging, Co-Learning, and Transpositioning."

³⁸ E. Rzyankina, "E-Textbooks as a Teaching Aid at a University of Technology in South Africa: A Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Analysis," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 10 (2024): 1079.

³⁹ N.L. Fakude, "Integrating Digital Technology in Teaching History in the Primary School" (University of Johannesburg, 2023).

Foundation Phase. As South Africa confronts the challenges of improving literacy rates and educational outcomes, research bridging the gap between home and school literacy practices becomes increasingly vital. By comprehending the complex interplay of factors shaping literacy development in diverse contexts, we can strive towards more equitable and effective literacy education for all South African learners, ultimately enhancing literacy outcomes nationwide.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative research approach, using an ethnographic case study design to explore the home literacy practices of four children and examine how these practices are taken up by four Grade 1 teachers in a rural school in Libode, Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. The paper is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex interplay between home and school literacy practices. An ethnographic approach was chosen to understand better the cultural and social contexts in which literacy practices are embedded. A case study design was employed to facilitate an intensive examination of the literacy practices of four children and their teachers. This design allowed for a holistic investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context, enabling the researchers to capture the complexity of literacy development in a rural South African setting.

CHAT as an Analytical Tool

This study employed the CHAT as a theoretical framework and an analytical tool, guiding the identification and analysis of various activity systems involved in children's literacy development. The research process, conducted in a rural school in Libode, involved selecting four children and four Grade 1 teachers as participants, gaining access to the research site, building rapport with participants and their families, and employing multiple data collection methods. These methods included observation of participants at home and school settings, semi-structured interviews with children, family members and teachers, document analysis of schoolwork and literacy materials, and detailed field notes. Applying CHAT principles facilitated the examination of tools, rules, and division of labour within each activity system and the exploration of contradictions and tensions between home and school literacy practices. This comprehensive approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how different activity systems interact and influence children's overall literacy development, providing valuable insights into the complex dynamics of literacy practices in rural South African contexts.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach that was guided by CHAT principles. This involved transcribing interviews and field notes and coding the data using CHAT concepts such as tools, rules, and division of labour. Themes and patterns were identified across cases, focusing on analysing contradictions and tensions between home and school literacy practices. The findings were interpreted around the research questions and theoretical framework, providing insights into the interplay between these two literacy contexts. Ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting cultural sensitivities were prioritised throughout the research process. The findings from the study focussed on the home literacy practices of the four children and the school literacy practices observed in the Grade 1 classroom, analysed through the CHAT framework to understand the dynamics of literacy development in these settings.

Table 1: Findings for literacy practices at Home and School

Aspect	Home Literacy Practices	School Literacy Practices (Grade 1)
Language Practices	Oral traditions in isiXhosa include storytelling and narratives.	isiXhosa as the primary language of instruction, with English vocabulary gradually introduced.
Reading Materials	Limited access to print materials (mainly religious texts and school textbooks).	Shared reading of significant books and individual graded readers (resource constraints noted).

Writing Practices	Digital literacy via mobile phones for communication and entertainment.	Focus on phonics-based writing: letter formation, word copying, and sentence construction.
Cultural Context	Oral narratives foster early language and cultural transmission.	Use songs, rhymes, and oral storytelling to develop oral language skills.
Religious Literacy	3 out of 4 families engage in Bible reading as part of literacy routines.	Minimal incorporation of children's home literacy practices into classroom learning.
Multilingual Exposure	IsiXhosa language is primarily used at home, with occasional English through media.	Phonics instruction in both isiXhosa and English.
Resource Constraints	Limited access to diverse print materials.	Resource limitations restrict access to varied reading materials and digital tools.

Table 1 clearly distinguishes critical literacy practices at home and school while highlighting patterns, resource limitations, and the interplay between these environments.

Analysis through CHAT Framework

Applying the CHAT framework to analyse the interplay between home and school literacy practices revealed:

- **Tools:** Differences in the tools used for literacy development (oral traditions at home vs. print-based materials at school) created potential tensions in children's literacy experiences.
- **Rules:** The informal nature of home literacy practices contrasted with the structured, curriculum-driven approach in schools, potentially affecting children's engagement with literacy activities.
- **Community:** The broader community's influence on literacy practices was more evident in-home contexts, while school practices were more isolated from community involvement.
- **Division of Labour:** In home settings, literacy responsibilities were shared among family members while in school, the teacher was the primary facilitator of literacy activities.
- **Contradictions:** Tensions were observed between the multilingual, culturally embedded home literacy practices and the more formalised, isiXhosa-focused school literacy instruction.

These findings highlight the complex nature of early literacy development in this rural South African context, emphasising the need for greater alignment between home and school literacy practices to support children's overall literacy development.

DISCUSSION

Home Literacy Practices in Rural South Africa

This study explored home literacy practices in rural South Africa, focusing on four children and their families in Libode, Eastern Cape Province. The research provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between home and school literacy practices by employing CHAT as both a theoretical and analytical framework. This discussion will examine the key findings of existing literature, highlighting their implications for literacy education in South Africa and similar contexts.

The study reveals a rich tapestry of home literacy practices, including oral traditions, everyday literacy, religious literacy, and emerging digital literacy. This diversity aligns with Wei's concept of 'literacy practices' as socially embedded activities that extend beyond mere reading and writing skills.⁴⁰ The findings echo those of Cheung et al., who emphasised the importance of recognising and valuing the diverse literacy practices children bring from their homes and communities.⁴¹ The prevalence of oral traditions in home literacy practices is particularly noteworthy. This aligns with Mahan et al.'s

⁴⁰ Wei, "Transformative Pedagogy for Inclusion and Social Justice through Translanguaging, Co-Learning, and Transpositioning."

⁴¹ Cheung et al., "Home Literacy and Numeracy Environments in Asia."

observations on the significance of oral storytelling in African contexts.⁴² The study's findings reinforce the argument that oral literacy should be recognised as a valid and valuable form, challenging the often narrow, print-centric definitions of literacy in formal education settings.⁴³

The complex linguistic landscape revealed in the study, with isiXhosa dominating home practices and a gradual transition to English in school settings, reflects the broader multilingual reality of South Africa. This linguistic diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for literacy development. The findings resonate with Mojapelo's critique of the disconnect between South Africa's multilingual reality and predominantly monolingual education policies.⁴⁴ Despite official English-only policies, the evidence of translanguaging practices in home and school contexts aligns with Wei's research on translanguaging in South African classrooms.⁴⁵ This suggests there is potential for leveraging translanguaging as a pedagogical resource, as Pascoe et al. argue.⁴⁶ The study's findings support the growing body of research advocating multilingual approaches to literacy instruction that build on children's full linguistic repertoires.⁴⁷

A significant finding of the study is the disparity between home and school literacy practices, which poses challenges for children's transition to school-based literacy. This disconnect echoes the findings of Sibanda and Kajee, who identified similar tensions in their study of out-of-school literacy practices in a South African township.⁴⁸ This paper provides further evidence of the need to bridge home and school literacy practices, as advocated by Kim in their concept of 'funds of knowledge'.⁴⁹ As noted in the study, the emphasis on phonics-based instruction and English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in schools aligns with Spaul and Pretorius's observations on literacy instruction in South African schools.⁵⁰ However, the findings suggest that this approach may need to fully capitalise on the rich literacy practices children bring from home, particularly in multilingual contexts.

The study highlights constraints in access to diverse literacy materials, particularly print resources, at home and school environments. This finding resonates with Iannuzzi's work on educational inequality in South Africa, which identified resource scarcity as a significant factor contributing to poor literacy outcomes.⁵¹ The current study provides a nuanced understanding of how these resource constraints manifest in rural contexts and affect home and school literacy practices. Despite limited access, the emerging use of digital technologies for literacy activities aligns with Mabetha et al. research on mobile literacies in South Africa.⁵² This suggests potential for leveraging mobile technologies to support literacy development, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

Implications for Literacy Education

The findings of this study have several important implications for literacy education in South Africa and similar contexts. The rich diversity of home literacy practices underscores the need for culturally responsive pedagogies that build upon children's literacy knowledge and skills. This aligns with Mojapelo's call for critical literacy approaches that recognise and value diverse literacy practices.⁵³

The linguistic complexity revealed in the study supports arguments for multilingual approaches to literacy instruction. As van Walt has argued, such approaches can help bridge the gap between home language practices and school language policies, potentially improving literacy outcomes.⁵⁴ The study highlights the need for teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills to recognise and

⁴² Mahan, Phatudi, and Modise, "Translanguaging as a Strategy for Navigating Multilingualism in Peri-Urban Preschool Classrooms."

⁴³ Iannuzzi, *Boys and New Literacies: Honouring out-of-School Literacies within Classroom Practice*.

⁴⁴ Mojapelo, "Whopping Low Reading Literacies in South Africa."

⁴⁵ Wei, "Transformative Pedagogy for Inclusion and Social Justice through Translanguaging, Co-Learning, and Transpositioning."

⁴⁶ Pascoe et al., "Many Voices, Many Languages: Listening and Learning from South African Children."

⁴⁷ Meiklejohn et al., "A Review of South African Primary School Literacy Interventions from 2005 to 2020."

⁴⁸ Sibanda and Kajee, "Home as a Primary Space: Exploring out-of-School Literacy Practices in Early Childhood Education in a Township in South Africa."

⁴⁹ Y. Kim, "Bridging Transnational Funds of Knowledge into Classrooms: A Narrative Inquiry of a Korean Migrant Becoming a Teacher of Newcomer Students," *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 17, no. 4 (2023): 299–316.

⁵⁰ Spaul and Pretorius, "Still Falling at the First Hurdle: Examining Early Grade Reading in South Africa."

⁵¹ Iannuzzi, *Boys and New Literacies: Honouring out-of-School Literacies within Classroom Practice*.

⁵² Mabetha et al., "Mobile Technology Use in Clinical Research Examining Challenges and Implications for Health Promotion in South Africa: Mixed Methods Study."

⁵³ Mojapelo, "Whopping Low Reading Literacies in South Africa."

⁵⁴ van der Walt, "Precarious Language Learning and Teaching: The Case of German, French and Mandarin in South African Schools."

leverage children's home literacy practices in the classroom. This echoes Mahan et al., emphasis on the importance of teacher professional development in addressing literacy challenges.⁵⁵ The constraints in access to diverse literacy materials indicate the need for increased investment in culturally relevant literacy resources for home and school use. This aligns with Spaul and Pretorius's recommendations for addressing resource inequalities in South African education.⁵⁶ The study's findings suggest the importance of more robust community engagement to foster a more integrated approach to literacy development. This resonates with Joshi et al. work on family literacy programs in Africa, emphasising the importance of community involvement in literacy development.⁵⁷ The emerging use of digital technologies for literacy activities suggests the potential for mobile learning initiatives to support literacy development, as explored by Kim.⁵⁸ However, care must be taken to ensure that such initiatives do not exacerbate existing inequalities.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to understanding home literacy practices in rural South African contexts. CHAT, as a theoretical and analytical framework, provides a nuanced view of the complex interplay between home and school literacy practices. The findings highlight the rich diversity of home literacy practices, the challenges posed by linguistic complexity and resource constraints, and the potential for more integrated, culturally responsive approaches to literacy instruction. The study's implications align with and extend existing research on literacy in South African contexts. It underscores the need for literacy policies and practices that recognise and build upon the diverse literacy experiences children bring from home. It also addresses the resource constraints and linguistic complexities characterising many South African educational contexts.

Future research could further explore the potential of translanguaging pedagogies in bridging home and school literacy practices and the role of digital technologies in supporting literacy development in resource-constrained environments. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how children's literacy practices evolve through the education system. In conclusion, this study provides a foundation for developing more effective, culturally responsive approaches to literacy instruction in South Africa's Foundation Phase. By recognising and valuing the diverse literacy practices that children bring from home and addressing the challenges of linguistic complexity and resource constraints, we can work towards more equitable and effective literacy education for all South African learners.

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