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GRADUATESCHOOL IN HUMANITIES

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Investigating the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home

literacy learning.

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22/05/2012

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning. The study was conducted in rural and urban settings in the Kavango Educational Region of Namibia. The particular focus of this small-scale study is the kind of activities children engage in their homes, and how parents and other family members engage with them. Attention was also given to how family members involve themselves in children's literacy learning, both in Namibia and in many other countries. The data for this report was collected using a case study, which included both observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers, learners, and parents.

The findings of the study were that families in the Mungunda and Rundu communities of the Kavango region were not involved effectively in their children's literacy learning – for a number of reasons. These include lack of literacy knowledge, lack of a print environment and literacy resources in and outside the school, and the absence of literacy programmes in the community, as well as lack of reading habits, encouragement and motivation. However, many of these problems are fuelled or exacerbated by the severe lack of reading materials written in ruManyo. The most important factor is that families in the Mungunda and Rundu communities do not act as role models in their children's literacy learning.

From the study findings, it is clear that there is a need for empowering families to understand and develop knowledge and skills regarding their children's literacy learning. The study recommends that schools and communities work together, update each other and build bridges between home and school. In addition, there is a need to have reading materials in the home, and to introduce children to literacy activities at an early age.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IIEP - International Institute for Educational Planning

NIED - National Institute for Educational Development

NLS - New Literacy Studies

SACMEQ - Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

For about 10 years, I have been a teacher of Agriculture and ruManyo (first language) in the Junior Secondary phase of the Namibian education system. In this time I have observed that many of the learners I teach experience problems with reading –a culture of reading is lacking among learners, and they cannot read texts fluently, with understanding, or write meaningful exercises appropriate to their grade levels. I conducted a study at two different schools in the same region in 2009, and found a similar problem in both the Senior Primary phase and the Junior Secondary phase. Teachers in both phases commonly accuse Lower Primary phase teachers of not giving children a solid foundation in literacy.

This led me to question what the reading and writing habits of both adults and children in the school communities are; what reading materials are available (in ruManyo or English); and whether parents, teachers and learners encourage each other to read. My curiosity led me to investigate these issues further, in an attempt to discover what is really happening in foundation phase (Grade 2) children's literacy learning, both in and outside the home. My observations in the two settings showed that there are many factors that affect literacy learning in young children.

1.2 Background to the study

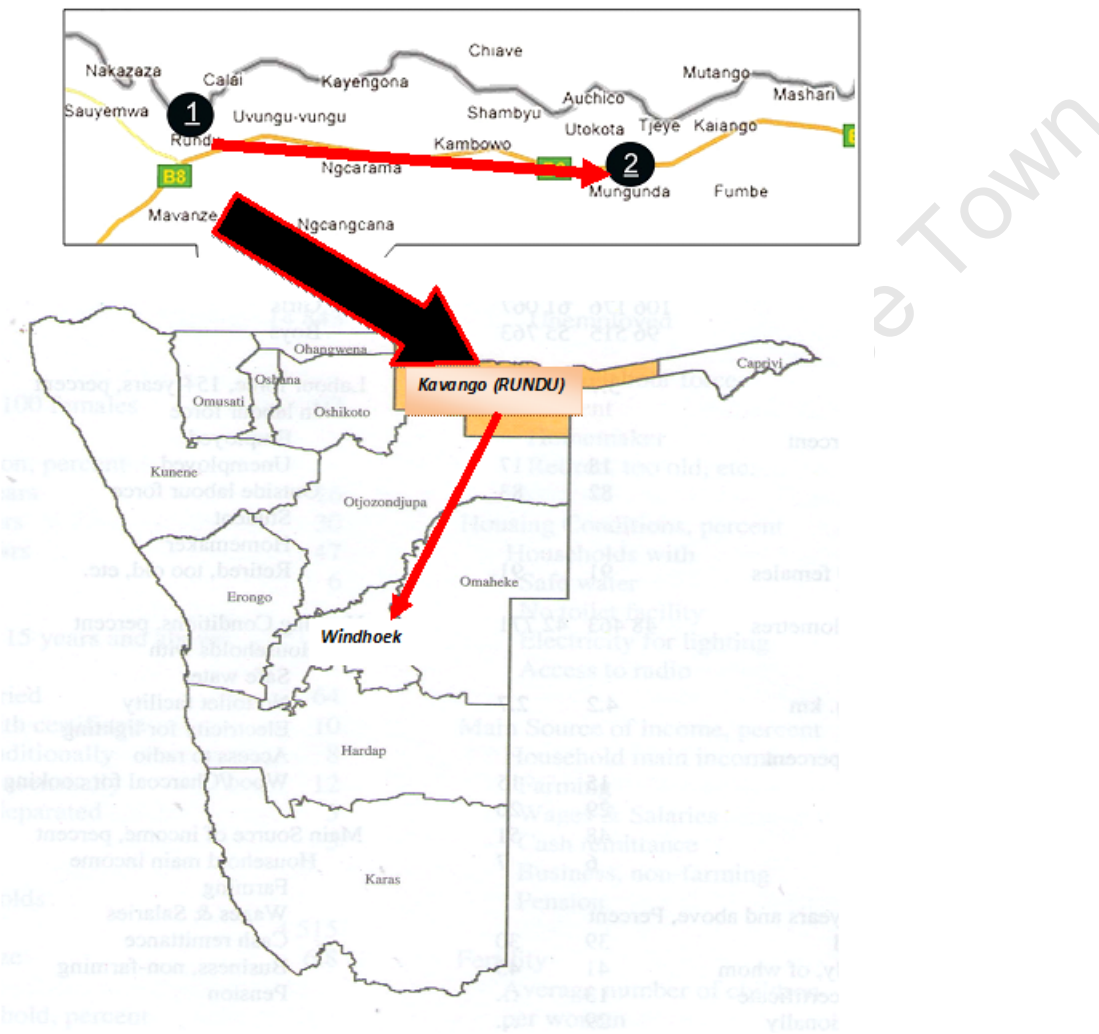
1.2.1 Research site

The study took place at Mungunda and Rundu, in the Kavango region in the north of Namibia.

Mungunda is a rural community, situated 35 km east of Rundu. There is only one primary school, accommodating children from this community and nearby villages. Mungunda has no electricity, clinic, library, police, bank or post office. Most of the parents in this community are unemployed and subsist on farming. The dominant language is ruManyo. It is a print-scarce environment

Rundu is the biggest town in the Kavango region. There are many Pre-primary, Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary schools, catering for learners from Rundu and surrounds, other regions of Namibia, and even other countries. There is a post office, offices, a hospital, clinics, banks, libraries, shops and electricity. It is a print-rich environment, though most printed texts are in English.

Rundu town and Mungunda village in the Kavango region (Namibia)



1.2.2 Research context

Today, literacy plays a big role in daily life. It is evident that there is a need to reinforce family literacy learning. But home background and environment differ between families, and the experiences of young children and their levels of engagement in literacy differ as well. These differences can have a profound effect on children's literacy learning, and contribute directly to their performance in school. The reasons for them are heavily dependent on factors such as socio-economic background, literacy experiences of family members, resources available in the home and surrounding areas, literacy events available, and the value that family members attach to literacy. The family's role in children's literacy learning is extremely important, since they are the people with whom children spend most of their time.

In countries such as Namibia there are great differences between rural and urban life experiences; many rural parents do not read or write themselves, and are not involved in their children's reading and writing learning process. However, the information or empirical data available is inadequate to illustrate the kinds of experiences with literacy that children have at home and at school in Namibia. The studies that have been conducted in the area of literacy, with regard to reading, focus mostly on the school environment. Many of them indicate that Namibian literacy rates are poor compared to other countries, including studies by the Namibian Institute for Educational Development (NIED) in 2000, to investigate reading and writing practices in the Lower Primary (LP) phase; the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality II (SACMEQII) Grade 6 study, between 1995 and 2000; and the study by Wilkan et al (2007) on reading among Grade 6 learners in Namibia and Norway. The SACMEQ II study found that Namibian Grade 6 learners were unable to read with understanding, resulting in high failure rates in the Junior and Senior Secondary phases. This means that many learners go through their Lower Primary, Upper Primary and Junior Secondary schools without developing adequate literacy skills.

A study was done by Siririka (2007) in rural schools in the Omaheke region of Namibia to investigate the involvement of parents in the development of their children's literacy. The findings were that parents were not effectively involved in their children's acquisition of literacy, for the following reasons: the parents were not appropriately empowered to influence the

development of their children's literacy; an absence of environmental literacy programmes within the community; and a lack of literacy materials (Siririka, 2007). I will expand upon these findings by examining, comparing and contrasting family involvement in the rural and urban areas of the Kavango region.

There have been wide-ranging debates about how best to ensure that children become literate, including everything from pedagogical concerns to the influence of the relationship between home and school environments. As Chatry-Komarek (2003) and Wray and Medwell (1991) stress, literacy is more than just reading and writing; children should learn to think, read critically and be able to understand and handle information from their everyday lives across the curriculum. In addition, Wragg et al (1998) state that if children do not acquire literacy skills in the foundation phase, they will struggle to catch up, and find it hard to learn effectively. That is why there is a need for the recognition of the importance of family involvement in children's literacy development.

There are several conditions that enable this literacy learning to take place in and outside the home, such as availability of literacy resources, and different literacy activities that the families engage in with their children, such as story-reading, story-telling and play. The important role of social, economic, cultural and personal factors should not be taken for granted in children's literacy learning. The key factor in a child's literacy learning is not being surrounded by a lot of print; it is determined by the way family members demonstrate how print is used. As Wray et al argue, "a literate environment is a fairly meaningless concept without people who are using that environment; people who, through the variety of the ways in which they use print, demonstrate when it is used, how it is used, where it is used and what it is" (1989: 66). Thus, literacy development in children appears to be strongly influenced by the opportunities made available to them.

Purcell-Gates (1996) also noted the importance of family involvement in literacy activities. In her study, she describes how children who were successful in school were the ones who observed family members engaging in different literacy activities, and who also participated in these

(1996: 406). This suggests that even though children's experiences with print may vary from family to family, families contribute to children's literacy learning in many different ways.

1.3 The aim of the study

This study aimed to investigate the kinds of literacy activities that families engage in with children at home. These are discussed in relation to children's literacy learning.

In order to fulfil this goal, the following research questions guided this study:

- What kinds of literacy activities and interactions do parents of first language ruManyo-speaking children engage in with their children at home?
- What are the differences between literacy activities in rural and urban homes?
- How do the literacy activities and interactions in both settings support young children's literacy learning and in which ways?

By answering these questions, the role of family involvement in children's literacy may be better understood.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Researchers in family literacy generally have concentrated more on examining school environments when studying family involvement in children's literacy learning. In Namibia, for example, family literacy studies conducted by Siririka (2007) and Kasokonya and Kutondoka (2005) have taken place in rural and urban settings in schools.

Unlike in previous studies, there is a shift in this study from examining school environments to examining children's home environments. Although there is some printed material to be found in the communities where this study is based, most (if not all) of it is in English. Children in urban settings have more access to print around their homes than children in rural settings do. This study investigates how different families in the selected communities involve themselves in their children's literacy activities and their uses of print, in their homes and the surrounding environment. In addition, the study also examines the kinds of literacy activities and other inputs performed by teachers in schools.

I hope the findings of this study will be useful for further investigation into children's literacy learning, and that they may provide insights that will encourage families in rural and urban settings to be involved in their children's literacy learning.

1.5 Ethical considerations

Educational research invariably involves human participants; in this case, caregivers, children and teachers. I considered ethical issues carefully, and ensured that the participants and those with parenting responsibilities for the children I observed understood their rights regarding privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, research responsibility and betrayal of participants; all the above were taken into consideration. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. From the beginning, each participant was informed about the purpose and objectives of my research. I also informed all participants that they and their children were free to withdraw from the study at any time, and should feel free not answer questions about which they felt uncomfortable.

Before I began the observations and interviews, I wrote to two school principals asking permission to do research in their schools. I proceeded only when both had given this permission. I visited the schools a day before I started the observations to make myself known to the teachers and learners. The actual observation period lasted for five days at each school. I observed lessons in classrooms and then identified children as potential participants. I then sent out letters (through the children) inviting them and their families to be in the study. All families indicated their willingness by signing the letter sent to them. Although I had introduced myself in the letters and had explained the purpose and objectives of the study and what I was going to do in their homes, I also did it verbally when I began my observations, for clarity. Again I guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity for the participants, and re-emphasised their right to withdraw at any time.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents an overview of literature relevant to the research topic, as well as the literature that has informed this study. This provides the theoretical framework of the research.

Chapter 3 presents and discusses the chosen research methodology in terms of my research paradigm (interpretive) and research method. I used a case study method, observations and semi-structured interviews as research tools. In this chapter I further explain how the research was initiated and how research data were collected and analysed, and note the ethical issues. The limitations of the study conclude the chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the data, without any comments in terms of theory and literature. Topics are presented in the order in which they emerged from the study. Throughout this process I allow the reader to listen to the participant's voices, by quoting them.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the main findings in terms of my research goals and research questions. The main themes that emerged from Chapter 4 will form the structure of this chapter.

In Chapter 6 I present my conclusions, by summarising my main findings according to the themes presented in Chapter 5. The potential value of my research study and its limitations are spelled out. Finally, I will give my personal reflections on the research, and my recommendations based on its results.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In order to better understand issues related to the study in literacy in children, I will present a framework in which I examine the views of current researchers who have studied family literacy. Firstly, I will look at the understanding and explanation of the theory of the New Literacy Studies, including the different views of researchers in terms of family involvement in children's literacy and learning. Secondly, I will look at the challenges faced by families in developing children's literacy learning. These include lack of resources, poor educational level of parents, and poverty. I will discuss ways in which family members can encourage literacy learning. These include a supplying a print-rich environment, storytelling, supportive influence, reading and playing. Thirdly, I will look at information and communication technology in terms of children's literacy learning. And finally, I will discuss literacy studies in Namibia.

2.2 Understanding New Literacy Studies (NLS)

My theoretical framework is embedded in the ideas of New Literacy Studies (NLS). NLS scholars argue that literacy learning occurs everywhere; in formal and informal settings, in or out of school, but also in everyday interaction, as a tool for building and maintaining social relations (Larson & Marsh, 2005: 18). This means that children see print everywhere, in and outside the home. NLS scholars understand literacy differently to traditionalists: for them, literacy is more than just reading and writing. It is seen as something that develops rapidly together with other global changes. The more technology develops, the more changes take place in literacy. Today, people do not depend only on print materials to learn how to read and write; there are many other resources. According to NLS researchers, the focus in their studies has shifted from the “local to the translocal, from print-based literacies to electronic and multimedia literacies, and from the verbal to the multimodal” (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009).

Another key idea in literacy research is ‘literacy practices’, which advocates that reading and writing are located in social practices (Barton, 2010: 1). According to Barton (2010), the use of the term ‘practices’ has its roots in the work of the British anthropologist Brian Street. The study

by Street (cited in Barton, 2010: 1) in Iran provides a broader theory of literacy based on practices that were taken up by applied linguistics researchers, thus developing the field of New Literacy Studies. Street sees a link between literacy practices and literacy events. “Practices refer to the general cultural ways of using reading and writing, and literacy events are particular instances of people drawing upon their cultural knowledge.” (Barton, 2010: 1).

New Literacy Studies understands literacy as a social practice (Street, 2004). Prinsloo maintains that “such studies produce evidence that reading and writing, in whatever modality, appear as not exactly the same thing, in their uses, functions, modes of acquisition and status, across groups of people and across specific social domains within societies” (2005: 3). He further adds that the studies focus on the uses and meanings of literacy in different cultural and social contexts, leading to the recognition of ‘multiple literacy’. For Street (2004) and Prinsloo (2005), the use of, meaning of, and the way people acquire literacy differ from individual to individual, depending on social, cultural, economic and personal factors.

Ethnographic studies prove that “social practices around literacy vary”, and also (more fundamentally) that what is meant by the terms ‘literacy’, ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ differs across cultures; and that these activities can have different roles in people’s practices (Barton, 2010: 2). Barton adds that there can be different meanings to the activities of reading, writing and literacy not just cross-culturally, but within different contexts in the same culture, such as the home and work place (2010). There is a shift in the ethnographic approach focus of researchers: from the lone individual (common in traditional psychological paradigms), to the activity or interaction people participate in; and to broader institutional structuring (Barton, 2010: 3).

According to Barton (2010: 1), “Ethnographic approaches examine people’s practices in particular contexts, and they provide both a framing theory and a methodology”. An example of ethnographic studies is the study by Heath (in Barton, 2010: 1), in which she examined the different ways of using language and literacy between family and school in Appalachian communities of the United States. Her use of the concept of a ‘literacy event’ became central to literacy research, and was developed partly in parallel to the idea of the notion of a ‘speech event’ used in research on the ethnography of communication. One of the important questions

she asked in her study was why black students were not coping in the recently desegregated schools. Heath looked at the differences between language and literacy socialisations in their community settings, given that the children of white mill-workers and middle-class children grew up in the same town. Her finding was that reading and writing was practised in all three communities; but communities had varying histories, and different rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge and opinions (Heath, in Barton, 2010).

As mentioned above, the environment in which children live and the people they interact with play a significant role in their literacy learning. Heath's findings point out that although all the children in her study grew up in the same town, they were not raised, prepared or taken care of in the same way. Which means that literacy learning in children also depends on factors such as socio-economics, culture, educational background of family members and literacy knowledge.

NLS researchers also take a conceptual turn from the traditional, seeing literacy as something that is not 'neutral', and which should not be generalised; it varies from one person to another, and from context to context. As Street explains, literacy should be studied "not as an issue of measurement or of skill but as social practices that vary from one context to another" (2009: 21). His studies suggest that literacy should not be treated as 'one size fits all', while its use and meaning varies among people, depending on various factors. In the same vein, the study by Heath (1983) found that written texts play a significant role in literacy learning, but their use differs in the practices of everyday life. She further stresses that people use language, reading and writing for different reasons, and that these vary among groups of people. From her findings it is evident that all people practice literacy; but in different ways and for different purposes, depending on their beliefs and customs and the availability of resources.

It is difficult to imagine a life without literacy; it is a vital skill that is part of one's everyday life. It is very important to note what literacy actually means for people in modern society and the different ways in which literacy impacts on individuals' lives. People are surrounded by printed material environments – but do they realise that so much of what they ignore plays a big role in their comfortable survival in the world (Wray et al 1989)?

Clay maintained that young children learn that print carries meaning, and that reading and writing are used for different purposes through experiences in their homes and communities (in Tompkins, 2010: 111). Similarly, Dyson's 1993 study uses three spheres, which she calls the multiple Social Worlds of the Classroom (Official Sphere, Home Sphere, and Peer Sphere); she discusses how each sphere contributes to children's literacy learning. Dyson suggests a learner-centred approach to teaching literacy, in which the teacher is there to facilitate this process. According to her, there are no neat boundaries between 'home' and 'school', or between the official and unofficial spheres. She states that the spheres should be integrated, through encouraging children to share their outside life experiences and different cultures with their peers. Dyson's study is also concerned with teachers who do not accommodate these differences, thus diminishing the sharing of literacy experiences with one another that can benefit all literacy learners. She suggests that literacy learning in young children should be built on what children bring to school from home; from what they know and do, in and outside school.

Dyson (1993) argues that people learn and use language (written and spoken) differently, based on their cultures and on their social relationships with the world. To illustrate her studies she uses the complex landscape of discourse described by Bakhtin. Bakhtin describes "stories and other kinds of texts, as situated within a complex of human relationships, responding to and anticipating a response from others; each text is 'dialogic', a reaching out in a world riddled with voices talking to, past, and over each other" (cited in Dyson, 1993: 5-6).

Dyson's 1993 study follows up on ideas from Bakhtin, arguing against the understanding of literacy learning and teaching grounded in small imaginative universes; universes that see literacy as taking root comfortably only for children with middle-class backgrounds who speak Standard English and respond to school-like tasks in conventional ways. Dyson has a different understanding of literacy learning and teaching. She claims they happen more broadly; within the social structure of the broader society, the children themselves engage in much 'social' work. In this broader society children built relationships among themselves, and they do so by using familiar tools, brought into the classroom from their lives on the outside. The tools children bring to class are stories, jokes, songs, language plays and other cultural art forms or genres that people create as they construct their social lives together.

According to Dyson (1993), researchers and teachers state that literacy begins at home, and in the kinds of written knowledge and language that middle-class children bring to school with them, especially the language of storybooks. They worry about children from a 'lower' class, who may have less experience with books. For Dyson, young children from diverse backgrounds bring diverse experiences to symbol-producing – talking, drawing, playing – and with these, both teachers and children can build new possibilities. Her view is that even though there are exceptionally different students, with diverse forms of expression and ways of learning comfortably, most schools do not embrace that diversity and try to teach children to read by using methods that can accommodate every child. Dyson argues for embracing the children's socio-cultural 'breadth and depth' of their composing process – essentially, embracing children's different ways of writing and speaking, based on who they are and what kind of family they come from.

In the case of African communities, many are poor, and do not see the need for sharing books with their children; their daily activities are predominantly carried out using oral language. However, Bloch maintains that "it is the wealth of this oral language that provides much hope for literacy development in future" (2002: 11). There are important teachings in oral language that contribute to children's literacy learning. Furthermore, Chukovsky and Pinker (in Bloch, 2002) suggest that to build on these young children's competencies, we need to put what they use in oral language into print: stories, songs, play, poems and games. If we do that, we will make literacy learning for African children more easy and enjoyable.

Hannon points out that "social, economic, cultural and personal factors determine to what extent, and in what ways, families value literacy, and how they help children to become users of written language determine to what extent, and in what ways, families value literacy and how they help children to become users of written language" (1995: 104). Similarly, Bloch (2005) and Street (1999) opine that these factors play a large role in children's literacy development, and should not be taken for granted. For various reasons, it is helpful to recognise that literacy is possible in every culture, and that people practise it in different ways, depending on the above-mentioned factors.

2.3 Family literacy studies

According to Morrow (1997), the term ‘family literacy’ is a complex concept. Morrow refers to several studies that describe family literacy. One such description is that “family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family use literacy at home and in their community, occurs naturally during the routines of daily living, and helps adults and children to get things done” (Morrow, 1997: 54). Casper (in Rule and Lyster, 2005) describes family literacy as a very broad concept, which is difficult to define exactly because it depends on the context in which it is used. The concept of family literacy appears to be used and understood in two significant ways: “literacy practices within families”, which refers to what families ‘do’ with literacy in their homes and communities, and “programmes which are designed to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member”, referring to programmes that work with the literacy development of children and adults in various contexts (Casper, in Rule & Lyster, 2005).

Both Purcell-Gates (2007) and Anderson et al (2010) stress that family literacy is important and contributes positively to children’s literacy learning. Children who grow up in families that practise literacy-related activities know from a very early age that literacy-related activities happen everywhere, in and outside the school environment. Those children come to school with a plethora of literacy-related activities, experiences and knowledge that the school could build on.

Mace argues that family literacy support activities are passed on by parents to children, from one generation to another. However, a recent ethnographic study with families by Gregory (in Anderson et al, 2010) argues against this perspective. The studies by Gregory show the important roles that siblings play in supporting literary learning, and how both young children and older siblings benefit from language and literacy learning. Gregory questions the assumption (inherent in current educational thinking) that children’s learning should necessarily be facilitated by adults; she argues, instead, for a more reciprocal view of such learning. For her, “the children’s language and literacy practices reflected syncretism as children borrowed and melded elements from home, school, church and community literacies, although school literacy and at-home literacy are sometimes portrayed dichotomously in literature” (in Anderson et al, 2010: 35).

Gregory argues that children learn language and literacy from more than one person; they adopt and adapt to the situation as they find it. There are similar findings from a study by Molosiwa (2007), in Botswana, who also reports that many children were introduced to print literacy by their siblings who had attended school and that very few become literate through the influence of their parents. The evidence from these studies indicates that children's literacy development is supported not only by parents, but that older sibling's play a significant role as well.

Gregory (in Anderson et al, 2010) has also looked at the role that extended family plays in young children's literacy learning. Evidence from studies with South Asian immigrant families shows the important role that grandparents play in their grandchildren's literacy development. Findings from these studies using ethnographic techniques show that "grandparents used a blend of traditional teaching practices from the Bengal and contemporary western pedagogy as they worked productively with their grandchildren with a wide array of text" (in Anderson et al, 2010: 35). Gregory sees that these practices "exemplify syncretism that they saw not just as a mixing of traditional cultural practices and forms, but 'instead as a creative process in which people reinvent culture as they draw on diverse resources, both familiar and new'" (in Anderson et al, 2010: 35).

Aitchison & Land (2005) argue that the concept of the family requires substantial revision in the light of the serious social problems arising from violence, AIDS and migrancy. Many children are not taken care of by their biological parents; at a particular point, conditions have led to a breakdown and re-ordering of family structures. In such cases, caregivers could be relatives, community members or older siblings. The concept of family literacy needs to include single-parent families, extended families and orphaned families (Aitchison & Land, 2005), or anyone associated with the children in a family who can support their literacy learning– not only the biological parents.

Mui and Anderson (in Anderson et al, 2010) also challenge the widespread idea that the nuclear family should be the model on which the assumptions about families and about literacy are based. For them, any member of the family (including the extended family) can support children's literacy learning. In their study, Mui and Anderson looked at the family literacy

practices of six-year-old Genna Johar, growing up in an Indo-Canadian family in Canada. Johar lived with her parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, their wives and children, all in the same household; all members of the family shared responsibility, contributing all their finances and promoting and supporting the children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development, even in the absence of parents or other family members. The study reports that the Johar family value literacy highly and have compiled a large collection of school literacy activities, such as workbooks and practice exercises. The study also demonstrates the important roles played by nannies, hired by the Johars to do household cleaning – and to look after children and play a part in the children's literacy development; pretending to be students when the children play 'school', participating in game shows and dramas that the children create based on those they have seen on television, and playing board games with them. Crozier and Davies see that in some ways "Johar's family embodies the concept of a 'gemeinschaft community' or the notion that it doesn't matter where or with whom "business" is transacted as long as it gets done" (in Anderson et al, 2010: 36).

The findings from a similar study by Slonimsky & Stein (2005) show that any family member can support children's literacy learning. Their study was conducted in South Africa (in the Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo Provinces) between 2000 and 2001, to examine how different family and extended family members contribute to children's literacy development. These researchers used an ethnographic-style study to look at three families and their children, focusing on the children's literacy learning in homes, community and schools, in order to establish why some children and not others are successful acquirers of literacy. It is important to examine the entire environment in each case to see how each environment is contributing to children's literacy learning. In the first case, the whole family (father, mother and brother) took part in helping the younger child with reading texts in Sesotho and English. In the second case, the researchers noted the important role that the grandmother played in her grandchild's literacy learning, by telling and reading bedtime stories every evening.

In the third case, an aunt supported her niece's literacy development, playing a more directive, pedagogical role by helping her niece to understand and locate the generic features of a house-for-sale advertisement. She built the interaction playfully by arousing her niece's interest in

looking for ‘the price’ in the text. This led to an extensive conversation on ‘the price’ and the meaning of the term ‘estate agent’. The study also noted how the niece switched to other literacy activities such as writing, and how the aunt constantly communicated the message to her niece that her writing was meaningful and that she was ‘saying’ something. The evidence from this study shows that all three families practiced literacy and supported the children’s literacy learning in different ways, and different family members were involved. Although the families in the study did not practise all literacy-related activities with their children, the few activities they did practise were significant to the children’s literacy learning.

2.4 Challenges faced by families in developing children’s literacy learning

Family involvement in children’s literacy learning in and outside school environments may be influenced by a number of factors. Common factors identified by researchers include lack of resources, poor educational level of parents, and poverty.

2.4.1 Lack of resources

Researchers such as Bloch (2006) and Arbor & Michigan (1981) state that the unavailability of printed material in children’s surrounding areas contributes negatively to children’s literacy learning. According to both sets of researchers, the environment in which learners live plays a large role in literacy learning; the absence of print in and outside their homes can result in children lacking interest in reading and writing. Riden (in Arbor & Michigan, 1981) compared children who lived in poor residential areas and villages to children who lived in well-off or richer residential areas. In the study, the children who lived in the well-off areas performed better on reading tests than the others, showing that parents’ and children’s attitudes developed in different homes and neighbourhoods can have an influence on progress in reading. Generally speaking, the poor social environment does not promote good reading habits. Arbor and Michigan quote several studies that stress the children’s attitudes towards literacy learning; that “a child’s social environment and relationships are potent factors in determining his attitude toward reading and what he may want to read about and that these attitudes are acquired through contacts in the home, the neighbourhood, the church and other social institutions” (1981: 10).

The study by Bloch reports that “the majority of African children grow up in as ‘print scarce’, in contrast to ‘print rich’ to emphasize the issue of environments for literacy as a major contributing factor to literate behaviours” (2006: 22). Kasokonya and Kutondokwa’s (2005) study, conducted in a remote and disadvantaged area of Namibia, found a lack of reading materials; the most common types of printed materials available in homes were the Bible and other religious books, present in 15 homes out of 62. Newspapers were found in four homes; only two houses had children’s storybooks. Some other reading materials found in some houses included literacy books, health booklets, the telephone directory, the constitution, and magazines. The researchers also visited the San community in the area, and found that there was no evidence of literacy in their environment. The study concludes that there is nothing in the San people’s community that can inspire them to read. The San grow up without any experience of print, and most cannot read or write.

2.4.2 Poor educational level of parents

A poorly-educated family can also contribute to a lack of literacy interest among parents and children, because disadvantaged parents do not practise reading and writing, in or outside the home, to encourage their children to read and write more. Chatry-Komarek points out that “reading and writing are learnt by demonstration, instruction and practice” (2003: 140). Many children do not see their parents demonstrating the importance of literacy by reading and writing with their children or even in their presence. Chatry-Komarek (2003) also claims that this is another reason for bad performance in writing at school. The study by Kelly (in Arbor & Michigan, 1981) reveals that people of lower educational attainment are less interested in reading the classics than others are. The study also noted that people of lower economic and educational backgrounds expressed considerably greater interest in reading about ‘serious life problems’ than individuals from educated or high economic backgrounds do.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) claim that one of the problems they encountered in disadvantaged communities in South Africa was a high level of illiteracy among caregivers. The low educational qualifications of many caregivers have a negative impact on the relationship between the school, the teachers and the community. If the educational background of caregivers is inadequate, they cannot participate fully in children’s literacy activities. Purcell-Gates (1996)

quotes several studies showing that children from low-income homes may experience many uses of print in their daily lives, but continue to perform at lower levels of literacy than children from higher income homes. They have identified that one factor differentiating the two socio-economic groups is the education of parents; this also affects the nature of the print being read and written in the homes since it is related to literacy performance. The evidence from these studies is that educational background of families influences children's literacy learning.

2.4.3 Poverty

The studies by Kasokonya and Kutondokwa (2005) and Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) reveal that poverty and other domestic ills are some of the problems affecting family literacy. Kasokonya and Kutondokwa's (2005) study in Namibia reported widespread poverty; many children go to school barefoot, and some parents cannot afford school uniforms or even breakfast for their children. This study shows that poor living conditions contribute negatively to families' involvement in children's literacy learning. Similarly, Van Wyk and Lemmer's 2009 study found that in some poorer communities of South Africa, parents or caregivers cannot afford to pay their children's school fees; indeed, they are struggling to survive, and have little or no energy left to be involved in school activities. It is evident from this study that most poor families are unable to support literacy learning, and that children from these families find it difficult to cope with reading and writing both in and outside of school.

2.5 Ways in which family members can develop literacy learning

Various studies have attempted to establish ways in which family members can develop their children's literacy learning. This section will discuss some of the views and findings from African and other countries.

2.5.1 A print-rich environment

A print-rich environment encourages literacy learning among children (and even among elders). Evidence from various studies (for example, the 2008 studies of both Kersten and Perry) shows that the availability of print in and outside school contributes a lot to literacy learning, arousing interest in further reading and writing. Perry (2008) noted that the availability of religious materials played a significant role in her participant's literacy practices. They read the Bible, the

Oxford Companion to the Bible, church pamphlets, church bulletins, and other religious texts, and wrote notes from sermons heard in church, the sermons themselves, and articles for church bulletins.

The study by Kersten (2008) on out-of-school literacy practices in the home and community also found that church services and activities associated with church proved to be an important socio-textual domain for various literacy practices. Children whose parents were actively involved in church activities engaged in a variety of reading and writing activities, both in and outside of church, and were also involved in several church activities themselves: they listed reading the Bible, songbooks and papers (copies of the music) and various writing practices, primarily in Sunday school. The children in Kersten's study gave examples of print materials in their communities: parking laws, street signs, and billboards. They also listed the literacy-related activities they did with their families, such as writing shopping lists and reading, listing the different places where they ate out, writing journals, and creative writing for pleasure.

These studies show that there is a lot of print material in homes and around communities that people take for granted but can contribute to literacy learning – not necessarily only school books. Print material in the home, such as writing on food containers and packets, bills, letters, and writing shopping lists, can be used for literacy learning in the family. Access to a library also contributes a lot to the formation of reading interest. As Heynes (in Krashen, 1993) shows, children who live closer to public libraries read more than those who live far away. A good reading environment also encourages those already reading to read more. The study by Greaney and Helary (in Krashen, 1993) found that children allowed by their parents to read in bed read more than others, to the extent of being classified as 'heavy' readers.

2.5.2 Storytelling

Reading or telling stories are very powerful, as it encourages children to read more on their own and helps them to learn to use language in different domains. As Krashen states, "Hearing stories and discussing stories encourages reading, which in turn promotes literacy development" (1993: 39). Storytelling or reading arouses children's interest in listening and participating in discussions in and outside school (Krashen, 1993). In some communities, storytelling and

reading is part of the traditional culture, and this tradition contributes to many current literacy practices among children as well adults (Bloch, 2002; Perry, 2009). Bloch (2002) suggests putting the daily-life stories children tell into print, as it is the easiest way of demonstrating the link between oral and written language; and a way of building a bridge between home and community life in the school. She adds that stories create a sense of community among children and with their teachers; it helps them to get to know each other and what they have in common.

Stories also teach people about the past. As Ezra (in Perry, 2008) explains, storytelling is an important aspect of culture – through storytelling, the history of the community, the culture and the customs are kept and passed from one generation to another. It is through storytelling that people come to learn about their culture, customs, traditions, norms and values – in oral-language societies it is the only way, as they do not appear in any books. Since stories are rich in language, through storytelling and reading children can learn how to use the language. Stories can also increase vocabulary, helping children to pick up new words, and can develop children's minds to think and write creatively. Bloch maintains that “storytelling and reading expose children to a special form of language which is holistic, rich and complex. This allows them to tune into the rhythms and structures of language and broadens their conceptual worlds and their vocabulary to express themselves” (2006: 13). These studies all indicate that storytelling and reading do contribute to children's literacy learning, so there is a need to reinforce it in the family context.

2.5.3 Supportive influence

Direct encouragement to read can stimulate children's interest so that they develop a reading interest for themselves. Krashen (1993) claims that just telling children to read may have an impact on the amount of reading done. If children are directly encouraged to read, whether in or outside school, they can develop an interest in reading more – and in the process, they also learn more, and improve their literacy learning, including spelling and vocabulary size; and then their lessons become more interesting, which improves their performance in general (Krashen, 1993). When children read more books they come across a lot of new information, which can help them in daily literacy activities and in their performance at school.

Positive attitudes towards reading and writing in families can influence children's literacy learning: the more their families read for pleasure, the more children develop a love for books. According to Krashen (1993), children read more when they see other people reading, wherever this occurs. He quotes several studies reporting that "parents of children who do more leisure reading read more than parents of children who show less interest in books" (1993: 42). He adds that even if parents try other methods to encourage their children to read, the study indicates that having a model for good reading habits is more effective.

2.5.4 Reading

Another reason reading is a very important skill to people is that it helps them to understand the world and the changes that are taking place in it on a daily basis. Through books, newspapers and other materials people know what is going on in the world, and can get information on how to do things. But to keep up, they are required to read a lot. As Freire maintained, "Reading is not exhausted merely by decoding the written word or written language, but rather anticipated by and extending into knowledge of the world and that reading the world precedes reading the word, and the subsequent reading of the word cannot dispense with continually reading the world" (1991: 139).

Like adults, children need information to be able to participate in daily literacy-related activities. To get this information by reading, children need to be supported by their families. Researchers such as Krashen (1993) and Morrow (1997) encourage reading to children, stating that this will make them lifelong readers. Smith (in Morrow, 1997) suggests that reading to children gives them an understanding of the functions of print, a sense of how print is used, and what people are doing when they are reading. Krashen (1993) quotes several studies that report that children who are read to at home develop the culture of reading and read more on their own. These studies found that reading aloud not only helps small children, but is also helpful for college students; children who were read to also performed better in reading comprehension and vocabulary assessments. These researchers have shown that reading for both children and adults is important, as it encourages literacy learning in the family.

2.5.5 Playing

Literacy and play go together, and play in general supports children's literacy learning. According to Morrow (1997), play provides meaningful, functional social settings; through play, children interact with peers, they build on what they already know, and they learn from each other's life experience. Play promotes literacy development, since "during play children read, write, speak, and listen to each other using literacy in functional ways" (Morrow, 1997: 144). While playing, children talk, draw, sing, and tell jokes and stories; through this process they share and learn from each other's literacy experience. The study by Dyson (1993) shows that through play children interact and share their experiences outside school life with their peers; and subsequently attempt to put these ideas on paper. Kersten's (2008) study also proved that through play, children learn; the study shows that when children play at school, both the 'teacher' and the 'learner' benefit, because both children write and read. These studies show that play is important for children, and supports literacy learning in different ways.

2.6 Information and communication technology

Although literacy-building activities existed long before schools were even introduced, home background and the environments in which children live and grow up always differ. Children's experiences in literacy practices vary even within their families, as well from family to family. From my own observations, it would seem that world advances in technological gadgetry are also affecting the development of literacy skills in young children. At present, many young children seem to be surrounded by print-rich environments, especially those living in urban settings. Even though some family members may still tell stories and teach their children in traditional ways, using songs and poems, it appears that technology is playing a bigger role in how children live today, and this has brought a significant change in literacy development in and outside the home environment, in both urban and rural settings. Stories, songs, and poems are no longer the only examples of literacy children are experiencing with their families. Some of the newer technologies that families provide – often to keep children busy, but which help them learn literacy more quickly – are television, radio, mobile phones, video games and computer games (Gee, 2003; Marsh, 2004; Larson & Marsh, 2005).

Information and communication technology does contribute to children's literacy learning (Marsh, 2004; Gee, 2003). Since many families have both old and new technologies in their homes, and most children today live around people who use new technologies (televisions, computers, mobile phones), there is a need for the children to become literate in different domains. The New Literacy Studies scholars have recognised the important role information and communication technologies (ICTs) play in children's literacy learning. Marsh (2004) quotes several scholars that have challenged the traditional notions of literacy, stating that "it is no longer appropriate to focus on literacy as a paper-based activity when children access text in a range of modes". With the increased availability of the new technologies children do not depend only on reading books for their literacy learning, also making use of computers, television and mobile phones. According to Kress (in Marsh, 2004) the idea of 'multiliteracies' has served to broaden the understanding of what it means to be engaged in encoding and decoding text, and the importance of visual, aural, and corporeal ways of meaning-making are being recognised in the field of literacy.

Gee stresses that "in the modern world, print literacy is not enough and people need to be literate in a great variety of different semiotic domains" (2003: 19). His studies suggest that people should become literate in all the domains, since some domains do not involve print as a resource at all. Gee (2003) states further that it is important that people learn to continue to be literate in new semiotic domains throughout their lives, for them to be able to cope with the changes that are taking place globally. One of his studies focused on video games as a semiotic domain. According to Gee (2003), those who seriously consider video games a semiotic domain in which one can learn to be literate face the immediate problem that many people who do not play them do not understand their importance, regarding them as "a waste of time". However, his study shows that children benefit a lot from playing video games; besides gaining enjoyment, they also learn through the process.

In Gee's study (2003) of a six-year-old video-gamer, he notes the importance of good quality video games, which encouraged the boy to think of himself as an active problem-solver, to persist in trying to solve problems even after making mistakes, and to see mistakes not as errors but as opportunities for reflection and learning. Rather than ritualising the solutions to problems,

the boy became the sort of problem-solver who is open to undoing former mastery and to finding new ways to solve new problems in new situations. He was encouraged to see himself as solving problems from the perspective of a particular fantasy creature and his faithful helpers; thus, he was able to get outside his 'real' identity and play with the notions of perspective and with identities themselves. The games also encouraged the boy to focus on the problem-solving and fantasy aspects of his new identity, de-emphasising his worries about killing 'living' creatures (however odd they may have been). He could also choose to avoid killing some of creatures by running from them or sneaking around them (Gee, 2003: 44-45). Generally, there is an indication that video games do contribute to children's literacy learning. Through playing this game a child can pick up a lot of information's that he/she can use in other domains.

Gee's (2003) study of video-game players concluded that a number of young people have used the domain of video games as a fruitful precursor domain for mastering other semiotic domains tied to computers and related technologies. Several of his subjects planned to go to college and major in computer science or related areas. The finding in this study indicates that playing video games can also arouse children's interest in studying further in the same areas.

The study by Zhang (2008) on the literacy practices of bilingual Chinese-American families shows how children participated in different literacy activities, using materials such as phones, video games, DVDs and computers for their literacy learning. Many of the literacy activities Cindy and Jerry (the children in the study) engaged in centred on the domain of entertainment. Zhang observed Cindy booking a movie ticket online, reading the updated information and writing down on a notepad the number of the ticket. Both Cindy and Jerry played a number of videogames for fun; while playing, they were reading instructions, and sometimes conversations between the characters, and typing information requested by the game. Another source of entertainment for Cindy and Jerry was the internet; Zhang notes that Cindy and Jerry changed their computer desktop 'wallpaper' frequently; to do so, they went to websites to download newly-released wallpaper designs. The study also shows that Cindy read a lot of online information while she was searching for her favourite songs. The study shows that through using phones, computers, DVDs and video games, children engage themselves in literacy activities such as reading and writing. In the process they learn how to use these new and different

technologies, and the more they use them, the more they develop the interest to read and write for pleasure.

A similar study by Perry (2008) on literacy practices among Sudanese refugees identified interpersonal communication as a very important life domain for literacy practices in this group. The refugees used a variety of text media in this domain, including e-mail and phone messages. Perry's (2008) study reveals that refugees in different camps and even in different countries read and wrote messages to each other through e-mails, and would gather around the computer screen with the recipient, reading the message aloud. The community information domain also contributed a lot to the Sudanese refugees' literacy practices. Perry (2008) notes that they wrote texts such as newsletter columns, letters to the editor, letters passing on community news, and postings to discussion boards on Sudanese-oriented websites. The refugees also read all of these texts; in addition, they read listserv e-mails from organisations such as the UN News Service, international news websites, and personal e-mails. They found the internet a very important source of information and news about the Sudanese community. As one refugee put it,

“It is where I write a lot, because I read about almost every day, maybe two or three times a day, about Sudan and about the peace talks that have been going on in Nairobi. And I write a lot to the news media, and also I express my opinions, because we do have a website for the Sudanese who are outside Sudan in the West here. That website brings them together and shares their thoughts and ideas and experiences.” (Perry, 2008: 71).

These studies show that people use different technologies to practice literacy learning. They prove that the use of different technologies contributes a lot to literacy learning; not only for children, but for anyone who uses them.

2.7 Literacy endeavours in Namibia

A study by Kasokonya and Kutondokwa (2005) looked at the ways a family literacy program could assist parents and other care providers to support their children in their first years of primary school. The findings were that 50% of parents could not help their children with school work, as they were illiterate. The parent responses in the interviews reveal that not all those

parents are aware that their responsibility in assisting their children with education does not end with physical support such as the provision of food and clothes; it extends to helping their children with homework and other school-related activities (Kasokonya & Kutondokwa, 2005). Other studies (Wikan et al, 2007; SACMEQ, 2005) on literacy learning have been done, on reading among Grade 6 learners in Namibia and Norway, and on reading and mathematics achievement levels of learners and teachers. Both indicate that children in Namibia lack reading interest and perform low in reading assessments compared to children from other countries (Wikan et al, 2007; SACMEQ, 2005).

As yet, no research has been done on the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning in Namibia. Thus, I have relied heavily on the findings from research done in other countries. When considering these foreign studies, my aim was to determine how their findings apply to or fit the Namibian context.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of what has been studied and published on family involvement in children's literacy learning. It also addressed the importance of New Literacy Studies and information and communication technology in children's literacy learning. The chapter also looked at the different ways families can develop literacy learning, and the factors that hinder family involvement in children's literacy learning. The next chapter presents my methodology, the research paradigm within which the research was located, my research method, a description of data collection, and the data analysis.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores and analyses the different research methods used in conducting my research, first providing a theoretical framework for the selected research design. The research falls within the qualitative, interpretive research approach, and I start the first section of the chapter by explaining the selection of this orientation. I then focus on data collection tools used, which include observations and semi-structured interviews, and give a brief description of how data was collected and recorded. At the end of the chapter I comment on data analysis and triangulation, research ethics, and the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research design

Research approach

I located my research within an interpretive paradigm in which I seek to understand phenomena and to interpret meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting (IIEP, 2003: 4). To understand and interpret social situations, the researcher should interact with the people involved in such situations, observe, and listen to them to be able to make sense of their experiences (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Being interpretative also means accepting that there is variation in human behaviour which is greatly dependent on the situation and the context in which events are taking place, and that reality is perceived differently from one individual to the next. Since the aim of the study is to investigate the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning, in the two selected communities in the Kavango region, the interpretive paradigm allowed me to explore and get a deeper understanding of my participants' views, experiences and opinions regarding the role of family involvement in their children's literacy learning.

3.2.1 Qualitative research

Since my study falls under the interpretive paradigm, a qualitative research approach was most appropriate: it complements attempts to investigate a social phenomenon in its natural setting; it

focuses on understanding the phenomenon holistically, in its entirety; and it does not make use of numeric data.

Qualitative researches see the importance of getting close to their objects of study through participant observation, so they can experience for themselves the subjective dimensions of the phenomena they study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The qualitative researcher is therefore considered the “instrument of data collection”, since they attempt to collect data through speaking directly to participants and observing the way participants behave in the context in which they are experiencing the issue under study. It is a kind of interpretive inquiry, in which researchers interpret what they see, hear and understand (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Creswell, 2009: 176). Drawing from Johnson and Christensen (2012), one understands that qualitative research allows a researcher to understand the people that he or she is observing from the participants’ (or “natives” or “actors”) viewpoint. From that perspective, it is important for the researcher using a qualitative method to understand the data, interpret it by developing descriptions of individuals or settings, and analyse it for themes; and also to draw conclusions about its meaning.

In undertaking this study my interest was in investigating the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children’s home literacy learning. To achieve this I used several data collection tools, including a case study.

3.2.2 Case study

Case study research considers the setting to be a powerful determinant in examining both causes and effects of events (IIEP, 2003); thus, I opted to use the case study as an appropriate method for qualitative research. As it also provides unique examples of real people in real situations, it enables me as the researcher to understand ideas more clearly than if I were to attempt to fit them to abstract theories or principles (Cohen et al, 2000: 181). For Punch (2009), the case study in qualitative research aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context. Punch (2009) notes that the case study is more a strategy than a method, because it acts holistically, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case.

Case study research simulates “what is it like” to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and “thick description” of participants’ lived experiences of a situation, and their thoughts about and feelings for a situation (Cohen 2000: 182). To this end I allowed the parents, their children and the teachers to speak for themselves rather than to direct their responses.

The factors above influenced my use of the case study method. Throughout the study process I tried to understand what it was like to be a caregiver, according to their own experiences and what they feel about the nature of family involvement in their children’s literacy learning. The purposeful sampling of my study was used to identify the kinds of literacy activities that families engage in with children at home. As I was also interested in obtaining a range of experiences, I included the school environment and teachers. Permission to do the study was granted by the school principals and the caregivers.

3.3 Research context and sampling

This study is a small-scale interpretive study conducted in the Kavango Education Region in the north-eastern part of Namibia. The sample consists of 10 participants, and the study involved four families; I selected one caregiver and their children from each family, from two selected settings: one rural and the other urban. I also selected two teachers; one from each setting. The sample size was adequate for an interpretive research. As Cohen et al (2000: 93) point out, sample size depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under scrutiny. The two communities were purposely selected. One of the settings is the town of Rundu, while the other one is in a more rural area. The reason for selecting both an urban and a rural setting was to enable me to look at the influence of context on literacy development; the teachers were selected so I could investigate their experiences in teaching literacy and the difficulties they encounter, in the different settings.

3.4 Data collection tools

I opted for observations and interviews as the appropriate tools for collecting data.

3.4.1 Observations

IIEP (2003) considers the observation method a powerful tool for gaining understanding into situations; and its data-gathering characteristics are attractive, since it gives live data from a live situation. Through the observation method I managed to collect data about issues that the participants did not necessarily want to share with me.

In addition, Bell states that “direct observation may be more reliable than what people say, it can be useful to discover what people say they do, or behave in the way they claim to behave” (1993: 109). I opted to use a semi-structured observation method, because it allows the researcher to get into a situation and let the elements of the situation speak for themselves (Cohen et al, 2000). During my observations I used a non-participant observation method, and recorded events as an outsider. To reinforce this, the observations in this study focused on the ways the children interacted in their homes, with parents or other members of the family. I took note of all the activities that included print media or evidence of reading and writing by any members of the family. I observed and took notes about the kinds of activities children perform in homes and how parents and family members engage with them.

In the schools I observed one teacher in each setting, to familiarise myself with how teachers teach literacy, and the kinds of activities they do with the children.

I observed two families in each setting, for two weeks each. The observations in homes always happened during the day, after school. During the observations I noted the existence of print and its uses in homes. The aim was to get a clear picture of how families engage in literacy activities, in and outside the home.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

According to Punch (2009), in general, interviews are the most important data collection tool in qualitative research. I opted to use semi-structured or unstructured interviews for my study, which allowed me to collect rich data. Unstructured interviews are used as a way of understanding the complex behaviour of people without imposing any *a priori* categorisation

which might limit the field of inquiry, and for exploring people's interpretations and meanings of events and situations, and their symbolic and cultural significance (Punch: 2009).

Along similar lines, Bell points out that semi-structured interview allow the respondents "a considerable degree of latitude" (1993: 94). Even though certain specific questions are asked, respondents are given the freedom to talk about the topic and give their views in their own time; unlike structured interviews, in which respondents are limited to a range of responses previously developed by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews are an effective tool for allowing the respondents to talk freely. In this type of interview the ordering of questions is less important and the interviewer is free to probe any interesting areas that arise.

The duration of each interview was approximately one hour, and participants were interviewed individually. The interviews took place after the week of observations in the home. The time and the day of the interview were arranged with the participant. The children interviewed were aged between 8 and 9 years; they are in Grade 2, and the teachers interviewed teach the same grade. I used a tape recorder to record responses to avoid having to write during the interview, which was less time-consuming and allowed me to engage more. I transcribed and translated the interviews myself. The interviews helped me to probe deeply; I was able to understand the adults' involvement in the children's literacy activities, and their influence on the children's school achievements and motivation to read and write.

The interviews were conducted in ruManyo, since my participants included caregivers and young children and I could not take it for granted that they would understand questions in English. I present my interview questions in English in this thesis. I further informed my participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and to refuse to answer questions about which they felt uncomfortable, without penalty, risk or loss.

3.5 Data analysis

During my observations in homes I made notes about each participant's background; the kinds of activities carried out in homes (such as reading, writing, playing and drawing); the print media found in and outside their homes; and the children's engagement with the caregiver and other

family members. In schools, I noted how teachers teach literacy, and the kinds of activities teachers do with their children. The interviews conducted with parents and children were to get information about their literacy activities. The teachers were also interviewed, to give their views about literacy learning and other inputs. The data collected from the home and school observations and interviews was organised, broken down, synthesised, searched for patterns, and I was able to discover what was important and what could be learned, and to decide what should be shared with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

I organized my data from the observations and interviews into categories and was able to identify patterns for those categories emerging from the data. These helped me to identify the themes that formed the final basis for my data analysis.

Cohen et al (2000) define triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some human behaviour. Reduced data from my observations and interviews in homes and schools were triangulated to ascertain to what extent the data complemented each other, and to reveal any similarities or variations. Using triangulation in this study gave a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation.

3.6 Research ethics

Educational research invariably involves human participants, in this case caregivers, children and teachers. I considered ethical issues carefully and ensured that the participants and those with parenting responsibilities for the children I observed understood their rights regarding privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, research responsibility and betrayal of participants. For the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, each participant in the study was given a pseudonym. From the beginning the participants were well-informed about the purpose and objectives of my research. I also informed them that they or their children were free to withdraw from the study at any time and should not answer questions about which they felt uncomfortable.

Before I began the observations and interviews, I sent letters to two school principals to ask permission to do research in their schools. I only proceeded with the research when both had given this permission. I visited the schools the day before I started the observations to make

myself known and familiar to the teachers and learners. The actual observation in schools lasted for five days. I observed some lessons in the classrooms and then identified my child participants. I then sent out letters, through the children, inviting families and their children to be involved in the study. All families who agreed to participate with their children signed the letter sent to them to indicate that they were willing to be involved in the study. In the letters sent to the families I introduced myself and explained the purpose and objectives of the study and what I was going to do in their homes; but I repeated this process verbally when I started my observations in the homes. Once again I guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and re-emphasised their right to withdraw.

3.7 Scope and limitations

As the sample was relatively small and the observations were conducted in a short period of time, it is not possible to make any claim for generalisation of observed results. The aim of the study was to investigate the kinds of activities that families engage in with children at home in rural and urban settings in Namibia. The aim was not to attempt to generalise the information collected in the study to the general population; but to use the findings of the study as a starting point for further research in the field of family involvement in children's literacy learning.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research design I used in this study, and the methods I chose to collect data in order to achieve my research goals. Interviews and observations have been used as method of collecting data from the participants in this study. I considered ethical issues, and data analysis was done. In the following chapter I present my findings from the semi-structured observations and semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER 4 – DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This section reports the findings from the observations and interviews of the four selected families and two schools.

The homes I visited varied in terms of their living standards and literacy resources, since two homes are situated in urban settings and the other two in rural settings. Of the four caregivers interviewed, three are employed and one is not. The physical positioning of the resources in most of the homes is more than adequate to allow easy access for both children and parents so they can interact in literacy practices on a daily basis.

I now identify and discuss the caregivers' attitudes towards and resources for literacy-related activities, in the home and outside. These items fell into three broad topics, one with additional sub-topics:

- Print in the classroom and school environments
- Print in and outside the home environment
- Literacy activities in homes and school
 - Playing in the home environment
 - Playing in the school environment
 - Writing in the school and home environment

The names below represent the participating community and the teachers, caregivers and their children observed and interviewed. For anonymity and confidentiality, all names used are pseudonyms.

Mungunda: Rural community

Ms. Ndimba: Teacher and caregiver

Ms. Tjilemo: Caregiver

Pashula: Child

Sikule: Child

Rundu: Urban community

Ms. Siku: Teacher

Ms. Uyemu: Caregiver

Ms. Muyako: Caregiver

Maha: Child

Mwambo: Child

4.2 Print in the classroom and school environments

Pashula and Sikule's school

Pashula and Sikule's class is a combination class (Grades 1 and 2). The classroom is full of pictures, posters, and charts with different writings pasted on the wall. Some of the posters display information such as the days of the week, the months of the year, the alphabet, pictures of different animals and their names, pictures of different fruits and their names, and pictures with words (verbs like 'running', 'skipping', and 'washing', to mention a few). The writings in the class are in two languages, ruManyo and English. Reader books for Grade 2 are available, and there are enough for every learner, in both English and ruManyo. The learners are not allowed to take the prescribed books home. Apart from the prescribed reading books, there are other reading materials available at school, in the storeroom. There are storybooks for children, as well as pamphlets and brochures; some are written in English and some in ruManyo. The children have enough exercise books for all their subjects. Apart from the books there are also sticks and dried fruits, from mangetti trees, which the children use in mathematics, for counting.

Literacy activities observed in the class included storytelling, songs, and reading. The teacher told stories to the learners, who listened and then answered questions (verbally) on the story. Each lesson the teacher taught was introduced with a song. I included the songs as literacy activities, because each song was related to the specific subject or topic. For example, in mathematics lessons, the songs were about counting, and in reading lessons, learners sang about different letters of the alphabet. In reading activities, the teacher wrote different letters (and words that began with those letters) on the chalkboard. The teacher asked learners individually

to identify the letters and to read the words aloud. The teacher also sounded out the different letters and read the words aloud, and then asked the learners to repeat them.

During breaks, learners were allowed to take the reading books from the class. While the learners were waiting for their soft porridge to be ready, most of the girls took books and sat in front of the class to read. Sikule was one of those who liked reading in this time. The children with books read aloud; others concentrated on what the readers were reading. Pashula played soccer during breaks, and sometimes climbed trees.

Maha and Mwamo's school

The school has a notice board outside the administration block where notices are pasted with various school information's. The classroom was full of print, such as posters, pictures, brochures, charts, children's reader books and other reading materials.

The literacy activities observed in the class consisted of songs, reading and writing. Each lesson the teacher taught was introduced with a song related to the lesson or subject. For the reading activities, the teacher had shelves in her class where she kept her learners' exercise books, textbooks and other reading materials. The name of each subject was displayed at the edge of its shelf. Whenever the teacher gave the class written activities, she assigned certain learners to hand out the books to the others. There was a table in the corner of the class where the teacher kept her learners' toilet paper, tissue boxes and tins of air freshener. Each learner brought these items from home, and the names of the owners were written on them. If learners wanted to use the toilet paper or tissues they went to the table and looked for their names; they could not just pick any item.

The teacher made copies of short passages and called upon the learners to read them to the whole class; in groups, or in pairs, or individually. The teacher wrote work on the chalkboard and asked learners to read it. After each lesson the teacher gave learners activities to write in their exercise books. The teacher wrote the exercises on the chalkboard, and sometimes made copies of activities and gave them to the learners to paste in their books and to write on. The teacher always asked her learners to copy the daily activities in their homework books, to read at home.

4.3 Print in and outside the home environment

This section discusses the background of each of the four children studied, and describes their homes.

Four Grade 2 children, each aged between 8 and 9 years, were observed and interviewed in the two settings: Mungunda and Rundu. I purposely selected a boy and a girl in each setting to see what kinds of literacy activities children engage in most, at school during break and at home. The home language of all the four children is ruManyo. Two of the learners live with their biological parents, while one lives with her grandmother and the other one with her aunt.

Pashula

Pashula's parents have two houses, one in Rundu (town) and another in Mungunda (rural), where his mother is teaching. The house in Mungunda is built in the traditional Kavango way: there are seven substantial rooms, all built with clay soil on the sides. Five have a grass roof, and the other two plus the *cuca* shop (a small shop) outside the house have a corrugated iron roof. The house is surrounded by a wooden fence. In Mungunda, Pashula lives with his mother, and there is another family living in the house, with their two children, who take care of the house. In the same house there is also a girl who helps in the *cuca* shop as a salesperson. People in the community buy from the *cuca* shop, as it is the only shop in that village. From Monday to Friday, Pashula and his mother live in Mungunda; they only go to their house in town on the weekends. In the town of Rundu, they live in a big, three-bedroomed brick house with an outside room and a garage; it is situated in the former white location, Tutungeni. In the house in Rundu they have television and a computer. Pashula's father works at the Rundu vocational training centre as an administrator, for the Ministry of Education.

Sikule

Sikule lives with her grandmother, older sister and brother, and younger brother. Sikule's older brother and sister both left school after Grade 4 because that is the highest grade taught at the school in Mungunda, and their grandmother cannot afford the hostel and school fees for them to continue at another school. Sikule's mother is dead and her father has remarried; he is not living

with his children. There are eight rooms in their house, also built in the traditional Kavango way; the rooms are made with clay soil on the sides and have grass roofs. The house is not fenced. Looking at the house one can tell that the inhabitants are very poor. No-one in the family is employed, and they depend on agriculture for a living. During my observation at the house Sikule helped her grandmother and her sister with fetching water from the tap in small containers, pounding *mahangu* (a type of cereal, the staple food for people living in Kavango) and washing dishes.

Mwamo

Mwamo lives in a two-bedroomed brick house in the Katutura location; the house also has three outside brick rooms. Mwamo lives with his father, mother and three cousins, all girls older than him; one is in Grade 5 and the other two are in Grade 6. The house is surrounded by a wire fence. A television is placed in one of the outside rooms and Mwamo often watches television there. Mwamo's parents work until five o'clock in the afternoon, and his cousins attend studies in the afternoons, while he stays in the house with a nanny.

Maha

Maha lives with her mother's elder sister, who is a teacher at Mupini Combine School, in the western part of Rundu. Maha's aunt normally goes to work in the morning and comes back late in the afternoon, around five or six o'clock. They live in a two-bedroomed brick house, fenced with wire, in the Safari location. Only three people live in their house: Maha, her aunt, and her aunt's son, who is in Grade 7. In the afternoons Maha's cousin attends study sessions, and Maha is always alone at home. Maha often plays at her other aunt's house, which is nearby.

Literacy-related occurrences from the observations in the homes

Pashula

One afternoon, after lunch, Pashula was sent by his mother to go and get two drinks, a Coca-Cola and a Fanta, from their cuca shop. The shopkeeper was not in. Pashula brought the correct items to his mother; he gave me the Coca-Cola and his mother the Fanta Orange. Later he asked for a drink for himself, and his mother told him to get a Pepsi, because the other drinks were more expensive. He did this. The important thing I noted was that Pashula knew that the cans were

different in colour. He could read and identify them without any difficulties, because when he was sent, he did not make any mistakes, and when he gave us the drinks, he gave the correct can to each person.

On some afternoons Pashula helps his mother to tie thatch grass in small bundles of ten, and then counts the bundles. Pashula's mother writes a lot, concerning business matters, but I did not see the rest of the family members writing or reading. I also saw no other reading material in the house during the observation.

In Pashula's home, on weekdays, literacy materials include labels on food packets and containers, such as maize meal, soup, milk, fruit juice, candles, sugar, biscuits, drinks, and bread used in the house and sold in their cuca shop. The prices of goods are also displayed at the counter and on the edges of shelves in the cuca shop. On weekends, in Pashula's urban home, literacy materials include books, bills, newspapers, a hymnbook, a Bible, and TV guides. Writings on clothes, such as 'Aa, Bb, Cc, Dd' etc. and 'John Cena' on his T-shirts were also noted.

Sikule

One afternoon during observation, Sikule complained to her grandmother of a headache. The grandmother sent her into her room to bring a bag in which she keeps medicine. Sikule fetched a black bag. The grandmother took out all the containers of tablets from the bag (small, transparent plastic bags), then looked at one very closely and said in ruManyo: "*Dino pera dadikenu da di nenepo da kukora rutu, 'Panado'*". (These big white pills are for body pain, 'Panado'). I noticed that Sikule's grandmother had two different small plastic bags of white pills; but she could tell from the difference in size that one type of pill was Panado, and the others were not. She asked her grandchild to fetch water, and gave her a pill to take. I asked her why she had given Sikule one pill, as the instructions on the plastic bag indicated two pills. She told me that her grandchild was still young and that two pills would be too much.

Literacy-related materials in Sikule's home included a bag of maize meal and medicine containers, and small plastic bags containing pills from the hospital. There was some writing and

also pictures on the plastic bag – instructions on how and when to take the pills, and a picture of the sun, representing the time of day. I also noted some materials I found outside, near the home such as empty tins of fish and cool drink cans.

Mwamo

Mwamo always came home from school with his homework book, and he would read it every day after lunch. He would revise the work he had learned at school each day and after reading, would turn to a clean page and write the same work again. The literacy materials in the home included books, newspapers, hymnbooks, a Bible, bills, and TV guides.

Mwamo's house is very close to a collection of shops, such as Pick n Pay, Metro, Woerman Broack, and some bottle stores. The names of the different shops are written on the shop premises. Prices of goods are displayed outside and inside the shops. There are many road signs on the streets. Empty bottles, tins, cans, pages of magazines and newspapers may be seen near the shops and in the neighbourhood.

Maha

I noted the following literacy materials in Maha's home (these may be found in most urban homes): books, files, hymnbooks, a Bible, magazines, newspapers, TV guides, bills, food containers and packets, and writing on one of her T-shirts ('cute girl').

Maha lived very close to the main road, and her house is opposite the clinic. Just outside her home environment there are a lot of health-related posters displayed on the notice board and walls of the clinic, and many road signs in the streets.

4.4 Literacy activities in homes and schools

During my observations in the homes, I noticed that the children selected played a lot with their peers. Their caregivers confirmed this in the interviews. The general view of caregivers about play is that children learn a lot through playing, and it develops their minds and bodies. As one caregiver (Ms.Ndimba) said, children do not just play; they also learn a lot from each other. She

gave the example of her child, who had learned from his friends how to make a slingshot and hunt birds.

Similarly, Ms. Uyemu commented that through play, children share their different experiences with each other. Their home and school experience lessons are put into practice when they play. She added that children know what type of play is suitable for girls only, or for boys only, or both together.

4.4.1 Playing in the home environment

Pashula's play with friends included drawing cars in the sand, giving each one a name and then pretending to 'drive' it with other very high-speed cars. He also made slingshots and hunted birds at the trees near the house. He climbed trees with friends, competing to find who would climb higher than the others. He also played soccer with his friends. The boys gathered, divided themselves into teams and gave themselves positions, such as goalkeeper, striker, midfielder, and so on. If there were not enough for two teams, they gave players two positions to play.

Sikule built a house on the ground with sand, sticks and leaves and made an imaginary family for this home, including father, mother and children. She also extended her area and built a clinic, school and shop. During play, she took on the role of being a nurse, teacher and shopkeeper and pretended that she was talking to real people. For example, she pretended that some of the people were sick and visited the clinic. She treated them, first asking them where they felt pain. She checked them for fever using a stick as a thermometer, and gave them medicine. She did not have any paper or pen, but moved her hand as if she was writing notes. At the shop, she asked her imaginary people what they wanted to buy. She responded for each, then calculated the cost of the goods and gave the 'customers' an amount to pay. She even gave them change. At the imaginary school, she taught the 'learners' to read and write. She asked them to write words like 'bottle', 'blade', or 'scissors' (in ruManyo). She asked the imaginary learners to write words on the chalkboard. She pretended to mark the work; if the learners were 'correct', she gave compliments, otherwise they were marked 'wrong' and she gave corrections. She did all this work herself.

Mwamo played a lot with his friends running up and down in the street, rolling old car tyres. He played with friends or alone, making cars using wire and cutting empty tins to make wheels (tyres) for his car. There is a damaged car at his house, in which he sometimes sits and pretends to drive. He waves and gives lifts to imaginary passengers, and talks to them about where they are from and where to drop them.

Maha and her cousins had a lot of toys, magazines and catalogues, kept in a box in the house. Maha played a lot with dolls; washing them, combing their hair, and dressing them. She played with her friends or alone by cutting pictures of people, food, clothes, and furniture from magazines and pasting them in her book (an old telephone directory). She talked to the pictures in her book as if she was talking to real people. Her other play activity was to organise a beauty contest with her friends. The girls who participated in the competition knew that they had to walk differently, to smile and to introduce themselves to the audience in English. Maha wrote the 'points' awarded on a piece of paper. She also took the role of 'audience', clapping hands for each contestant; and at the same time, she was the 'judge' who awarded points to the contestants. At the end of the competition, she calculated the total points and then announced the first, second and third places (there were three contestants).

4.4.2 Playing in the school environment

In Pashula and Sikule's school, children played freely during break while they were waiting for their soft porridge to be prepared. They played soccer, climbed trees, or ran around the schoolyard.

In Mwamo and Maha's school, children in the class I observed were not allowed to play freely during break, as their class teacher was always present. During break, these children took their containers of food from their school bags, sat in front of their classroom with their teacher, and ate. After break, they washed their hands and went back to class.

Neither the members of the family nor the teachers took part in the children's play very much. Families and teachers may know that they should support their children's literacy learning; but in actuality, it doesn't happen. From my observations, it seemed that most of the children's play

did support literacy, and that the play was meaningful and enjoyable. Most activities included writing, drawing, looking at print, and talking about print in different ways. However, this was dependent upon the environment and the availability of resources.

4.4.3 Writing in the school and the home environment

Teachers in both school and home settings supported children in learning to write. Children were given activities at the end of every lesson, which entailed writing in their exercise books, on the chalkboard, and on paper. Teachers encouraged the children to practise writing and drawing (even at home), on paper or on the ground. This was true for each of the children I observed.

Mwamo read his homework book every afternoon, and then copied the same work onto a clean page for practice. Maha did a lot of writing, also on paper. She wrote down the points for the beauty competition and calculated the marks. Sikule did a lot of drawing on the ground and made hand movements, pretending that she was writing. Pashula also did a lot of drawing, specifically of cars, on the ground.

Overall, members of the families in both settings do not support their children with literacy learning. They are unaware that some things they take for granted – such as children’s drawing, writing, reading, or playing – contribute a lot to children’s literacy learning. Children’s writing carries a lot of messages and meanings and by taking part in children’s activities, caregivers can easily identify some of the problems children experience at school, and give them help based on what the children have written.

4.5 Interview findings

Caregivers, children and teachers shared their views, opinions and experiences concerning literacy-related activities in and outside their homes. Their discussions are covered by three broad themes – reading experiences, support provided to young children, and young children in the school environment.

4.5.1 Reading experiences

In order to get a better picture of the reading experience of the caregivers, I took them back to their early childhood and then asked them to recall their experiences with reading from the time they entered school. Caregivers shared different experiences. Two recalled being read to when they were growing up, one said that she had been read to only when she started school, and the other indicated that she had had no reading experience at all, since she never went to school.

Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Uyemu said that they had experienced reading and could read to a limited extent before they started school. Ms. Ndimba said that her sister used to read her stories from the bible, specifically the story about when Jesus went to Jerusalem with the donkey. She recalled that the reason she liked the story was that the story had a picture; although she couldn't read the words, she was able to interpret the picture and tell other children the story. She added that she knew the page of that story very well, and had read the same story many times. Similarly, Ms. Uyemu said that she had learned how to count from 1 to 20, recognise some letters, and read and write her name, before she started school; she learnt all this from her older siblings who were attending school. She also said that her older siblings used to play 'school' in the afternoon and on weekends, to teach her and her friends in the neighbourhood who were too young for school. The lessons were all about copying what the 'teacher' was writing on the ground, and repeating numbers and the alphabet orally, after the teacher.

To the same question, Ms. Muyako reported a different experience. She said that no reading took place in her home when she grew up, because they did not have any reading materials there. As she put it, "I only got hold of a book when I started school." She added that they were not allowed to take schoolbooks home, and only 'read' the books by repeating after the teacher.

Since Ms. Tjilemo had indicated that she did not have any experience with reading, only three of the caregivers responded to the follow-up questions. They were asked whether they remembered when they had first started reading by themselves. It was interesting to note that Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Uyemu could still remember this; they both indicated that they had started reading very early in Grade 1. For Ms. Muyako it was different; she started reading by herself very late in Grade 3, which is Grade 6 today. According to Ms. Muyako, her problem was that she did not

know the different letters of the alphabet, and so could not put them together to read or form a word. She was just memorising words without understanding them, and it took her a lot of time to learn to read. After some time she did learn the letters, and started combining them and reading by herself. She started to enjoy reading storybooks, especially stories from the bible. The story she liked to read most was about the creation of heaven and earth, since her teacher liked talking about it in school.

Ms. Muyako, Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Uyemu confirmed that they liked reading storybooks when they were young, especially the bible, since (Ms. Muyako added) “it was the only book available in the home”. They said that these days they like to read a lot of different materials, such as newspapers, magazines and work-related texts. Ms. Uyemu stated that she likes reading newspapers, to keep her up to date with what is going on in her country and elsewhere. She also likes reading a magazine called ‘Move’, because it has lots of interesting stories and contains important information and advice that she can use in her daily life. Ms. Muyako, Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Uyemu stated further that throughout their school lives, reading did not make much sense to them, because they could not understand what they were reading. However, all three confirmed that today they do understand and it does make sense.

I asked how the caregivers had learned to read. Their experiences differed. Ms. Muyako and Ms. Ndimba suggested that the best way of learning to read is through practice. Ms. Muyako said that she learned reading at school, but she used to practise reading more at home. Ms. Ndimba said that her sister used to read to her. She enjoyed listening to stories a lot, and she could connect the pictures to the words. She was able to read before school, and used to practise reading a lot at home, which helped her learn very quickly in Grade 1. Ms. Uyemu added that she learned reading through playing ‘school’ with the elder siblings at home.

Caregivers were also asked to recall their experiences as readers. Their responses showed that they understand the importance of reading. They confirmed that they have benefited from literacy. Ms. Muyako said that reading improved her oral and written language (English). Ms. Ndimba said that she differed a lot from people who cannot read. In addition she pointed out that her vocabulary in English has increased and that she understands and can speak English

better than before. Ms. Uyemu said that reading updates her regarding current events, and has also improved her social life. As she put it, “I read a lot about how people live their lives, and I am really learning a lot from them. I always put what I read into practice.”

4.5.2 Family involvement

Through the interviews I found that families are not providing any support to children’s literacy learning. Caregivers gave excuses, such as not having time to help their children at home. They seemed unaware that any member of a family can contribute to children’s literacy learning. In addition to that, there was nothing in the homes to support children learning to read; it seems that families depend mostly on the schools. Since the caregivers confirmed that they were aware of what reading activities were taking place at school, their responses gave the impression that they were happy with what was happening and did not see the need for helping their children at home. As Ms. Tjilemo pointed out, although she did not know exactly what reading activities were taking place at school, she was happy her grandchild could read and write. She added that the teachers were working hard, and they were always at school.

The question of whether caregivers and other members of the family read to their children was analysed. Only Ms. Muyako indicated that she sometimes reads to her child. The rest admitted that neither they nor any other members of their families read to their children. Meanwhile, Ms. Ndimba responded that she had tried to read to her child when she noticed that her child had a problem with reading and writing at school. She drew up a programme for the boy to help him over the weekends. According to her, it did not work out because the boy was not paying attention. As she said, “I started teaching him but it did not work out because he started frustrating me by answering what he was watching on the television whenever I asked him a question.” She added that they went through the process several times, and then she decided to stop because he was just wasting her time.

Ms. Uyemu said that she tries to read to her child if she wants to help her with her schoolwork. Ms. Ndimba’s child was different from the others: she reported that her child (Pashula) likes stories so much that he always asks his mother to read storybooks to him, since he cannot read fluently by himself. The boy’s mother ignored him or told him that she was busy and did not

have time to play with him. The boy (Pashula) confirmed in the interviews that he likes stories and knows four stories his mother told him at school, but that at home she does not tell him stories (his mother is also his teacher at school). The other three children also admitted that their caregivers and other members of the family do not read to them at home, but that their teachers do read to them at school.

The interviews showed that the caregivers were more concerned with the formal literacy activities than the other activities children engage in for pleasure, which can also contribute to their literacy learning. When caregivers were asked what shapes the literacy practices in their homes, they concentrated on the formal reading and writing sessions where printed materials such as books are used. Three caregivers responded that nothing shaped literacy practices in their homes. For them, whatever children do in the home, with the family or alone, such as playing, singing, drawing, and talking about books or print, has nothing to do with literacy learning. Only one caregiver, Ms. Ndimba, remarked that there is a poster in their house that has pictures and letters that can help her child learn to read by matching the pictures to the letters.

Though the caregivers confirmed that their children are not exposed to any reading in the homes, I noticed during the interviews that there were a lot of materials both in and outside the homes that children could read. The families were unaware that children can be exposed to any print available in the homes and outside, such as bills, TV guides, newspapers, magazines, notes, shopping lists, labels on food packets, and other materials. Children do not need books alone to contribute to their literacy learning. As Ms. Muyako responded, “My child is not exposed to any reading. There are a lot of reading materials in the home, but he is not exposed to them, maybe only television.” Similarly, Ms. Ndimba mentioned that her child is not exposed to any reading materials, but he could get anything in the home and read. According to her, her child does not really read words; he just mentions things because he knows the words for them in English; for example, a chair. If she asks him to point to what he has read, he cannot. This suggests that families are limiting the children to certain information by not exposing them to the variety of print in and outside their homes.

On the matter of which language they wanted their children to read and write, all caregivers suggested that their children should learn to read and write first in the language they use at home (ruManyo), and then in a second language. In support of their views they said that if children can read and write well in their first language, it would not be difficult for them to read and write in a second language.

4.5.3 Teachers and learners in the school environment

In this section I present the interview results obtained from the teachers in response to the questions posed on their experiences of teaching young children. While their views about teaching these children varied, the teachers identified various common aspects related to the teaching of young children.

The first aspect they raised was that of the problems teachers experience when they teach reading and writing to young children. Both teachers raised the concern that some of the children they teach in Grade 2 cannot read and write. According to the teachers, they have to move very slowly with their work in order to accommodate all learners; this also means that they have to teach those who cannot read and write from scratch. Ms. Siku stated that when she discovers a learner who cannot read or write, she tries to engage them in different literacy activities. She also contacts the parents of those learners, asking them to help and encourage them to read at home. Ms. Ndimba uses a different plan to help her learners to read and write – she gives them remedial teaching.

The learners interviewed confirmed that their teachers do read to them, and that their schools have different reading materials that the teachers use to read to them.

The second aspect the teachers raised concerned what teaching strategies are being used in the classroom. Ms. Siku said that she tries to get teaching aids for every lesson. According to her, the aids help her learners follow, remember and learn the work more easily. She added that she starts every lesson with a song that relates to the work, to help catch the learners' attention so that they listen attentively. Ms. Ndimba believes that the first step for teaching reading and writing is to make sure that all learners know the letters of the alphabet. Next she combines two

letters, then three, and so on, until the learners can read whole words. According to her, if learners start combining letters and reading words then they also learn to write easily. Both teachers felt that the best way their learners could develop good reading and writing habits is by putting them into practice. Ms. Siku added that teaching using pictures relevant to the lesson topics could also increase the learners' interest in reading and writing.

The third aspect teachers shared with me was that of promoting reading and writing in their classes. Both teachers said that they encourage learners to read in class. Ms. Siku said that she organises group competitions in which she gives a short passage to each group to read and then asks questions about the passage. She said that she targets learners with reading difficulties, and pointed out that she cannot depend only on the prescribed teaching materials; she knows that her learners get bored easily, so she tries different ways to get extra reading and teaching materials for her learners.

The teachers interviewed confirmed that the schools contribute a lot to learners' acquisition of reading and writing skills. Ms. Ndimba reported that her school is the only place where her learners are exposed to a lot of print, since the school is situated in a rural area. She also commented that at school, learners are able to concentrate on books, but at home – even if the learners do want to read – there are many disturbances from their families. Ms. Siku stated that school contributes a lot to learners' literacy learning. She said that her school organises class competitions, and she encourages her learners to read well and win the competitions. She always chooses learners with reading difficulties to represent the class in the competitions. The idea is to get these learners to practise reading more, at home and at school. Her experience is that those ideas work very well, and that her learners improve a lot in their work.

Overall, there is an indication from the study that families rely heavily on schools for their children's literacy learning. They are unaware that their home contributions to literacy learning are important to their children.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

My research aimed to investigate the kinds of literacy activities that families engage in with children at home. The discussion in this chapter will determine whether my research goal has been appropriately addressed and if the main research questions have been answered. I present the lessons learnt from this case study in terms of the questions and issues raised by the results generated. The data presented in the previous chapter falls mostly within the three main themes; that is, the literacy activities and interactions parents of first language-ruManyo-speaking children do with their children at home, literacy activities in rural and urban homes, and literacy activities and interactions in both settings.

Firstly, I focus particularly on the literacy activities and interactions that parents of first language-ruManyo speaking children do with their children at home. These include reading aloud to children, storytelling, and playing. Then I focus on the other two main issues, which are literacy activities in rural and urban homes and literacy activities and interactions in both settings.

5.2 The literacy activities and interactions that parents of first language-ruManyo-speaking children do with their children at home.

5.2.1 Reading aloud to children

Reading aloud is the key to everything children do in school. It came up as an important literacy activity during the interviews with caregivers in this study. Caregivers emphasised the importance of reading in general. Previous researchers have had similar views: Krashen (1993) claimed that reading is the only way children can become good spellers and good readers, and develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary and advanced grammar. Similarly, Morrow (1997) argues that children who are read to regularly from an early age have an increased interest in books and in learning to read and write, and that reading provides a model for children to emulate and aids development of literacy skills.

The most significant finding from the observation and interviews regarding this topic is that reading aloud for pleasure at home is being done; whether by caregivers, other family members, neighbours or friends. This was evident in the homes I visited: Maha and Sikule always engaged in a lot of reading activities when they played with friends at home. Mwamo was always reading his homework book at home to revise what he had learned at school. Two caregivers (Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Muyako) claimed to read school books with their children.

Contrary to the claims made by the caregivers, all four children interviewed stated that their caregivers and family members do not read to them, but that their teachers do. Furthermore, one caregiver complained that she tried to help her child with his schoolwork when she noticed that he was not doing well at school, but it did not work out, as the child did not take it seriously. The caregiver said that she had started a programme to help the child with reading and writing over weekends, but that he started frustrating her by giving arbitrary answers whenever he was asked a question. The caregiver said that after it happened several times, she decided to stop because the child was not paying attention.

As noted in Chapter 2, the research literature suggests that reading books to children will encourage them to read more, develop the culture of reading, give children an understanding of the functions of print, and help them to perform well in reading comprehension and vocabulary assessments. Further investigation revealed that three of the caregivers (Ms. Muyako, Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Uyemu) liked to read storybooks when they were young, especially the Bible. They added that currently they like to read a lot of different materials such as the Bible, newspapers, magazines and work-related materials, but they did not mention sharing these experiences or information with their children.

The study by Kersten (2007) encourages caregivers to be involved and engaged in different literacy activities, since it motivates their children to take part as well. Kersten's study discourages children learning to read and write from one source of information (the textbook) only, but rather to use different literacy resources (2007). This means that it is important to introduce children to a variety of literacy resources, in and outside the school environment. There is a lot of print material in and outside the home environment, which can contribute to

children's literacy learning, that family members take for granted; not only school books are useful.

The caregivers (Ms. Muyako, Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Uyemu) confirmed in the interviews that their families do not like reading for pleasure, since they only read sometimes. The interviews and observations show that reading aloud to children is been done in the different homes. However, it does indicate that different reading activities are practised in different ways in those homes. Some caregivers felt that they do not do much reading aloud to their children because of their busy schedules, and other personal reasons. It appears that caregivers do recognise the importance of reading aloud to children, and the benefits it brings to children's literacy learning.

5.2.2 Storytelling

Another issue that has emerged from the study is that of storytelling and story reading. Research by Dyson supports the view that storytelling and reading contribute significantly to children's literacy learning (1993). As noted in Chapter 2, the study by Bloch claims that storytelling and reading expose children to a special form of language, which is whole, rich and complex (2006). During the interviews, all three caregivers (Ms. Tjilemo, Ms. Ndimba and Ms. Muyako) claimed to tell their children stories; however, only one did it at home. Ms. Ndimba tells stories at school, since she is her son's class teacher; she stated that she does not have time to tell stories at home. Ms. Muyako's son did not support her claim that she told stories at home.

Looking at the findings, it seems that caregivers claimed to do more than they actually do. As with 'reading aloud', this suggests that the caregiver and other family members may know they should be supporting their children's literacy learning, but are not actually doing so. There may be many obstacles preventing them from showing that support. Storytelling is another aspect of literacy that caregivers and other family members should be encouraged explore to support their children.

Caregivers were also asked to share their past experiences, and all four recalled being told stories by their parents when they were children, and that their parents used stories as examples to teach them whenever they did something wrong or right. The study revealed that caregivers are not

sharing their experiences with their children; during the observations and interviews, I noted that storytelling is not a routine practice in homes as it was in the past. Caregivers claimed to be busy working all day; at the end of the day they are too tired to sit with their children and tell them stories.

My observations during the home visits showed an alternative; today, storytelling is not the only activity that can keep children busy and help them to develop their literacy learning – technological gadgetry such as radios, televisions and cell phones have taken over some past activities, including story telling. During my observations and interviews I found that families in the rural setting are more likely to listen to the radio, and those in the urban setting watch more television. I conclude that these activities take most of the families' time and keep them busy, so they may not see the need for other activities like story telling.

When the four children were interviewed they confirmed that their teachers do tell them stories at school; but only one child out of the four indicated that she was told stories at home, by her grandmother. One child said that he does not like stories; and although the other two (Pashula and Maha) indicated that they do like stories, it appears that family members do not always make time to tell stories. In one case, when one of the children (Pashula) interviewed asked his mother to tell him a bed-time story, she told him that he was making a noise and asked him why he liked acting white. The reason for this may be cultural; in Kavango culture, we tell stories to children while they are sitting around the fire after having their dinner, but not while they are lying in bed. It's possible that Pashula got the idea of a bed-time story from television or from friends.

From the interviews with caregivers, children and teachers it is clear that storytelling and reading to children is not fully supported in either the Rundu or the Mungunda communities. However, it was observed that there is a positive aspect to the caregivers' responses. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bloch (2006) found that storytelling and reading mean different things to different people, depending on people's cultural background and experiences. In African tradition, for example, stories usually help children learn morals, traditions, societal values, and much else. These are spread by caregivers through reading aloud, talking, and storytelling. In some ways this is different to other cultures – in Western culture, reading and telling of stories is done for

pleasure, enjoyment, and stimulating thinking – but in all cultures, stories are important and should be encouraged in families (Heath, 1983). It is the latter view that argues that the idea of reading for enjoyment motivates a lot of school reading programmes.

5.2.3 Playing

Play is another issue of importance in this study. It was clear from my observations and interviews that play is a natural activity. All four children confirmed that they enjoyed playing, at home, and all engaged fully in different play activities, such as playing ‘school’, playing ‘house’, cutting and pasting papers, talking, reading, writing, and drawing pictures. These findings are in line with Dyson’s 1993 study, as stated in Chapter 2; she reports that the children in her study shared experiences, culture and literacy activities through play. In the same vein, Bloch (2006) supports the idea that through play, children discover language and learn reading, writing, listening and talking with others.

In this study I learned that children do not just play; they demonstrate or imitate what they see from people around them, for example their teachers, parents and other people in the community. I observed one child playing ‘school’ and ‘home’, with sticks as her children and at the same time as her learners. At ‘school’, she talked to the sticks and taught them as her teacher did with her at school, and at ‘home’ she talked to the sticks as a parent, just the way her family members spoke to her. The children also indicated that they like to play at school because there are a lot of friends to play with and they all know different games.

Furthermore, I found that not all the children have the opportunity to play and share experiences and culture with others at school, since some are not allowed to play during breaks. This was the case at one school I observed, in an urban setting. Children were not allowed to play at break time; instead, they sat and ate their food in front of their classroom with their teacher, because the teacher did not want her children to get dirty. A finding of this study is that some caregivers and teachers do not see the need for children to take part in play activities; they are unaware that play contributes to literacy learning in different ways.

This is consistent with Dyson (1993: 3), who claimed that there are no neat boundaries between 'home' and 'school', or between the official and unofficial sphere. Spheres should be integrated through encouraging children to share their outside life experiences and different cultures with their peers; Dyson's study is concerned with teachers who do not accommodate these differences. Dyson (1993) suggests that literacy learning in young children should be built on what children bring to school from home, what they know and do both in and outside school. Therefore, children should be allowed to play freely, since through play children share their experiences and cultures with other children; and they do this through talking, drawing, playing, and storytelling.

5.3 Literacy activities in rural and urban homes

This study revealed that there are many contributing factors that could be related to the support of children's literacy learning. Some of those identified include the environment in and outside the home which can encourage or discourage children's literacy learning, as well as direct encouragement from teachers and family members. This study found that some of the children's home environments are very poor, and lack print and other resources that can encourage children to read and write. The children in such an environment may have difficulties in learning to read and write quickly and easily. Previous studies by Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), Kasokonya and Kutondokwa (2005), and Arbor and Michigan (1981) support the view that poverty can be an obstacle for establishing children's literacy learning, both in and outside the home environment.

I also found that there was a serious lack of support in and outside the children's homes. Children are not fully supported in reading and writing. There are very few literacy-related activities in and outside homes to encourage literacy learning. This was evident during observations and interviews: the four families studied engaged in very few literacy-related activities and showed very little literacy support, in or outside their homes, to encourage their children's literacy learning. The four caregivers also indicated that their family members have poor reading habits.

Ms. Muyako, a caregiver, confirmed that her family only read sometimes. Ms. Ndimba added: "My family do not like reading for pleasure. I only see the children in this house with books

when they do their homework, or they are studying for a test or exams; and even my daughters who are at the university only read sometimes.” To the same question, Ms. Uyemu responded: “We are only three in the house and I teach outside town; I go in the morning and always come home late. The children are always alone at home or they go out and play with others at my sister’s house. I do not think that there is any reading happening; the elder one, who is in Grade 7, sometimes reads when he has a test or to prepare for exams, but they do not read just for the sake of reading.”

The teachers’ view on the support given to children was more concerned with activities that should be introduced to develop children’s literacy learning in school. Both teachers suggested that children should first learn phonics in their first language in order for them to be able to learn to read and write quickly and easily in both first and second languages. This was evident when I did class observations: teachers always started their reading lessons from parts and progressed to the whole; for example, from one letter of the alphabet to two, and then combining the letters to form words. However, researchers such as Chartry-Komarek (2003) and Goodman (2005) suggest a more holistic approach, starting with texts that are meaningful to children. The holistic approach encourages children to read, because they develop predictable and consistent habits.

The result is that reading is not fully supported and encouraged, because both family members and teachers lack information on how to do it effectively. Krashen (1993) argues that motivation and direct encouragement of children are the keys to literacy learning and that children observe and copy what they see people doing around them. Krashen also proposed that teachers and family members should be role models in and outside the home, since children read more when they see other people read. Family members should lead by example, by practising literacy activities, to show children that literacy-related activities are important (1993). Family members of children who show less interest in reading should encourage their children to read, or try to do other things to promote reading. This would support Krashen’s claims that having a role model for good reading habits may be more important than anything else (1993).

5.4 Literacy activities and interactions in both settings

In this study I refer to ‘informal literacy moments’ – simple, casual, unprescribed interactions in which families engage with their children in literacy activities. These may include sitting around the television and talking about a certain programme being viewed, or talking about any print in the home.

These incidents came to my attention during the interviews and observations I conducted with caregivers. Family understanding of ‘literacy activities’ was limited to formal reading sessions, where printed materials such as books were being used. I feel this lack of understanding is one of the important issues to have come from this study. The main concern of the caregivers I interviewed was that they did not spend much time helping their children to read and write; but they seemed unaware of the opportunities available during the informal time families spend together, using resources other than books. Outside the children’s homes they see lots of writing – in town, on shops, hospitals, post offices, banks, street names and road signs.

Because all this print is easily available in and outside homes, families do not recognise all resources for literacy learning. Families are unaware that informal literacies and the use of any print in the surrounding environment of the child may increase children’s interest in books and encourage literacy learning.

Another issue that emerged from the study was that of television. During the observations and interviews I found that television plays a large role in some of these children’s lives. Three caregivers out of the four interviewed said that their children enjoy television very much. Pashula’s mother stated that if they are at home in town, Pashula spends most of his time watching children’s programs on television; he enjoys watching, and repeats what he has heard afterwards. He does not play a lot in the house. Supporting this claim, Pashula himself said in the interviews that he likes television and enjoys watching scary movies. As he put it: “I enjoy watching television, scary movies such as vampires and so on because I like to turn into them”. Studies by Marsh (2004) and Krashen (1993) suggest that television does not do any harm to children’s literacy learning. According to these researchers, television helps children to acquire a second language more easily.

These interviews and observations showed that families depend more on school for children's literacy learning. It seems that family members are satisfied with what is happening in school, and do not see the need for putting more effort in to helping children at home. In the interviews, three parents confirmed that they were aware of what literacy activities are taking place at their children's school. As Ms. Muyako put it, "Yes, I am aware, since my child has a homework book where he writes his daily activities that the teacher is giving him in the class; he brings this book home every day after school to practise and learn what he does each day at school." Answering the same question, Ms. Tjilemo said that she does not know exactly what reading activities take place at school, but she is happy her grandchild can read and write; it means that the teachers are working hard and that the children are always at school.

As stated above, 'literacy activities' were only recognised by families in terms of formal reading events, in which printed materials such as books were being used. In the interviews and observation, families (and even teachers) were more concerned with formal literacies than with other forms of literacy. This study shows clearly that families give little support to storytelling, playing, drawing, reading aloud and other children's activities. It seems that families are unaware that those activities form part of literacy learning and should be taken into consideration. On the other hand, teachers claimed that they try their best to teach reading and writing, and give remedial teaching when they discover that their children are unable to read and write. One teacher added that she also informs the parents of their children's needs, and encourages the parents to help the children at home.

Although teachers experiencing difficulties in teaching reading and writing may encourage caregivers and family members to help children to read and write, I still conclude that families are unaware that their involvement plays a large role in children's literacy learning.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the findings that emerged from the data collected by conducting interviews and observations. The findings that link to the research questions were reported. The

chapter also reported on themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data during the data presentation. Chapter 6 sums up and gives an overview of the study.

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CHAPTER 6 –CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a critical outline and reflection of the study, including what prompted the research and the importance of doing it. A critical reflection of the selected research design and the research process is given. In addition, an outline of the key findings and lessons learnt from the study is presented, as well as a discussion of its limitations. Lastly, tentative suggestions for actions and future research areas on the basis of this research are also made.

Significance of the study

The study will be of great significance to me as a researcher, a language teacher, and a parent, because the findings helped to broaden my own knowledge in terms of how different families engage in literacy activities, and the way they use literacy materials in homes and the surrounding environment. The study gave me ideas about how these literacy activities, practised in and outside the home, with the family members, are contributing to children's reading and writing in school. It also helped me to understand why policy-makers should consider social, economic, cultural and individual factors in literacy learning program.

This study identified a link between the home literacy activities and school literacy activities involved in learning to read and write. The findings of this study may be shared with parents, teachers, translators and writers of children's books, and others, to encourage family literacy activities in and outside homes. It is my hope that if my fellow Namibians read this paper, they will become more aware that various factors – for example, writings found in children's surrounding environment – are useful for literacy learning; families should not take them for granted. The findings from this study can also be a stepping stone for further research.

6.2 Study outline

6.2.1 An outline of the research design

This section is a reflection on how the selected research design contributed to the success of this study. This was a qualitative study conducted within an interpretive paradigm, which gave me an opportunity to understand the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning through interacting with my respondents. By exploring their views and experiences, the research topic was investigated in a way that I think increased the richness of my data.

The small sample of participants used allowed me to engage my participants in detailed conversation. I probed deeply in order to understand their views, opinions and shared experiences. As researcher, my personal interaction with participants helped me to get ideas, and identify and make sense of their responses so that I could relate them to my research area. As a parent, and a teacher by profession, I hope that knowledge, skills and understanding I acquired from this study will help me to share information with other parents and family members, with the goal of seeing how best we can all work towards improving our children's literacy learning.

Lastly, I found the study very useful, even though – or perhaps because – it was on a small scale. It has enriched me deeply, which I think may not have been the case had I opted for a larger number of participants. Through the research process I have also managed to get the detailed information I needed, which has helped me to understand how rural and urban settings contribute to children's literacy learning.

6.2.2 An outline of the research process

The purpose of my study was made clear to my participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, as stated in Chapter 3. The participants were encouraged to speak openly during interviews and observations and I reminded them of their right not to answer questions which made them feel uncomfortable, without penalty, risk or loss. In addition, the interviews were conducted in our home language as most of the participants were ruManyo-speaking. The follow-up questions went well, and there were no misunderstandings. Since my participants

were mainly parents and small children, the use of home language during interviews allowed both me and my participants to express ourselves openly and freely, and to participate fully in the discussions. However, I found it difficult to translate some of the ruManyo words into English and vice versa, as the study of ruManyo is under-developed and there is a lack of resources that I could use to help me find meanings for certain words.

I observed the four families for two weeks in each setting. The observation for each family was scheduled for weekdays, over the hours of the day during which both adults and children were awake and at home. As I am from this community I did not have a problem being accepted in the children's homes to observe and talk to the inhabitants. I have the same ethnic heritage as all the participants, so there were no cultural differences. However, doing observations and interviews for two weeks in the rural setting did present inconveniences in terms of distance travelled, transport arrangements, and lack of shops, electricity and water, to mention but a few.

6.2.3 An outline of the findings

The key result of the study was that families in both communities practice literacy, but in different ways. In some homes there were storytelling activities; in others reading aloud, writing and playing. This is an indication that families are involved in their children's literacy learning both in and outside of school; which means, essentially, that children are supported in different ways when learning to read and write. The significant conclusion derived from this study is that family members and teachers must look at children's needs and learn to come up with some ideas about how best they can help children with literacy learning.

Another significant result found is that children are not inspired to read, in or outside the school. The four families studied did not read for enjoyment. This means that these children grow up without developing a culture of reading or knowing that reading is important, since they are not motivated to read at an early stage and do not see their families reading for pleasure. This is seen as a concern which will need the attention of all parties involved to come up with different strategies to support the children in whatever activities they do, both in and outside of school, in order to contribute to their literacy learning.

Lack of literacy knowledge, another significant result found in the study, affects children's literacy learning negatively, causing them to lag behind children who are introduced to different literacy-related activities at an early stage. This is a universal problem, as seen in research by Gee (2003), Marsh (2004) and Prinsloo (2005), as mentioned in Chapter 2. My conclusion is that lack of literacy knowledge is a challenge for children, as they may find it difficult to cope with literacy-related activities later in life.

In addition, it was found that the environments in which children live and lack of literacy resources are also obstacles to children's literacy learning. Also, the low educational level of parents cannot be ignored, since their contribution plays a significant role. According to the evidence from Chapter 2, families seem not to know that any reading materials, in and outside of school, all contribute to children's literacy learning. Despite the small scale of this study, it was obvious that such a situation makes literacy learning in children more difficult.

6.3 Lessons learnt from this study

I learnt from the study that I cannot make assumptions about children's literacy learning. It has broadened my understanding of the challenges faced by families in developing children's literacy learning. I have learned how literacy-related activities such as songs, play, reading aloud, storytelling and reading contribute to children's literacy learning. Another lesson from this case study is that new technology (such as computers, television and mobile phones) also plays a significant role in children's literacy learning, as has been revealed by the New Literacy Studies researchers.

I also learnt that literacy learning and teaching happen everywhere, both in and outside school; they differ according to factors such as culture, social economy, and people's surrounds and environment. The study suggests that publishers in ruManyo, illustrators, translators, writers of children's stories, librarians, teachers of beginner learners, parents and their children should all learn from what is being done in other countries in order to help families with literacy learning and teaching.

In addition, I have learned that like any other individuals, children have unique, individual needs; therefore varied support needs to be provided to cater for these different needs. Literacy resources and motivation were some of the needs I found that children must have fulfilled in order to learn literacy more easily and quickly. After learning that, I realised the importance of the views of Krashen (1993) and Morrow (1997), about supporting and motivating children to read and write. Their views encouraged me, and should encourage all community members, to identify ways in which we can best support our children in learning reading and writing, both in and outside the school.

6.4 Limitations of the study

As mentioned previously, the data was collected through interviews and observations. This resulted in a number of limitations. (However, this small scale study is regarded as a unique case, in the sense that it is the first of its kind in Namibia to deal with family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning). One limitation is that the study focused on a limited number of participants, and I only shared views and experiences regarding the children's literacy learning with these participants involved in the study.

A second relates to the fact that this was a qualitative case study, conducted in two settings in the Kavango Education Region in Namibia. Kavango Region is a large area with many schools, and the findings of this research cannot be generalised statistically.

Thirdly, group discussions with families and their children were not used as a tool in this study. This could have further enriched the data collected.

6.5 Tentative suggestions for action and future research on the basis of this study

As stated above, this was a small-scale study, and I was not able to generalise the findings. Therefore, I have identified possible actions and suggestions for further investigation. The reason for this would be to 'spread the word'; to make people who are in the situation described understand what might help them in supporting their children's literacy learning. Various factors in this regard were brought to light by this study; they are discussed in the following two sections.

6.5.1 Possible actions

Families in both communities are involved in their children's literacy learning – although they do it in different ways, depending on various factors. It has been observed that if families get more involved in assisting children with literacy, the children benefit, learning literacy more easily. Therefore, the introduction of the family literacy programme to these communities would be an opportunity for families to learn how they can help their children with literacy learning.

As stated earlier, families need to realise the needs of children, and learn how best to support them. Introducing children to technological gadgetry may help families understand that children do not need to depend only on reading books for their literacy learning; they can also make use of the newer technologies available in their homes and communities.

The caregivers' concern in regard to their children's literacy learning in the home environment is how to engage their children fully in reading and writing activities. The findings of this study are that children get bored with the literacy activities organised in the home that are based mostly on printed materials such as books. It is therefore important to introduce children to other literacy resources (such as shopping lists, menus, telephone and water bills, recipes, text on food packets and containers, to mention but a few) to make literacy more interesting and enjoyable for them. The use of these literacy resources will be to the advantage of the caregivers, as they will learn more about the alternative literacy resources they can use to help their children with reading and writing more easily and effectively.

Children's literacy experiences are important – for themselves and for others – and should not be taken for granted. Schools should recognise the literacy-related activities and experiences children bring from outside their school environment. They should try to work out how best to accommodate every child, and how to share and build on the experiences children bring to school.

6.5.2 Possible areas for further investigation

In order to provide a full picture of the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning, further (and larger-scale) research is needed, in more than just two communities of the Kavango region. This could include ascertaining the view points of

different family members, of publishers in ruManyo, and/or of translators and writers of children's stories. This kind of research has the potential to provide a much broader view of why family involvement is needed in the children's literacy learning, and how it can be encouraged.

6.6 Conclusion

This research has discussed the nature of family involvement in ruManyo-speaking children's home literacy learning. Thanks to the research participants sharing their views and experiences regarding this research area, the results of this study have provided invaluable insights into children's literacy learning. Literacy learning in children does not only have serious implications for those children's education; it has social, cultural and economic implications as well. More than anything, however, I hope that the findings from this study will inform families and other community members; and persuade them to take children's literacy learning seriously, and start to put what they take for granted into practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

The principal

.....

Rundu

Subject: Request for permission to conduct educational Research at your school.

Dear Sir / Madam

I am Angelika, M. Mukoya, currently doing Masters in Applied Linguistics and African Languages with University of Cape Town, South Africa. I am in the process of doing my research for my dissertation. The topic for my thesis is "Investigating the nature of family involvement in ruManyo speaking children's home literacy learning"

Thus the study will start as from July 05 to July 09. I intend to observe and interview a teacher teaching ruManyo first language and 2 learners at grade 2 or 3.

My interest lies mainly in the literacy development of young children and how they are engaged in different literacy activities.

Therefore, I am requesting for a permission to do this study at your school.

Your support will be highly appreciated. Looking forward hearing back from you.

Sincerely

.....

A.M. Mukoya

Appendex: B

Vakurona

.....

Rundu

Namibia

Vimo: Lishungido lyalipulitiro likuhamitiromo lyamukurona ndi murerwanamone.

Mukalikuto

Ame Mukoya Angelika Mate munashure kuUniversity ya Cape Town, na kurughano vyaghunongononi wamarakapantamboyakuyeruka (Masters). Weno kuna kara mulikonakono ndi vikengurura ano shitambo shakudemenea “Kukengurura likuturomo lyavakamapata navarangweka unene po mwavavaghambango liraka lyaruManyo muvitjangaghura navivaraura vyavanukeghona”

Muyendo wande ghuno shitambo ndi shakukengurura vya kuhamena vitjangaghura navivaraghura ovyo varughananga vanukeghona mumandi ghavo muruvede rwaumwavo ntani nakupuraghera mapuro kuvakurona navanuke vano kuhamena ovyo natwenyakuwiru.

Morwa vino ngoli kuna kuromba lipulitiro lyakumuhamitira mo namonenu.

Nawa tupu / hawe

.....

Lishayino

Appendix C

Findings from interviews with parents, teachers and children:

Interview questions to parents

1. What were your reading experiences as a child?
2. Do you remember when you first started reading to yourself?
3. Did your parents read to you?
4. When did this usually take place?
5. Did anyone else read to you?
6. What did you like to read as a child?
7. What do you like to read these days?
8. When did reading start to make sense for you?
9. Can you remember something you enjoyed reading that was not necessarily academic?
10. How did you learn to read?
11. What has your life experience been as a reader?
12. What has your life experience been as a parent who reads to their child?
13. Do read to your child?
14. When do you read to your child?
15. Do you enjoy reading to your child?
16. Does anyone read to your child?
17. How is your child reading program scheduled?
18. What shapes the literacy practices in your home?
19. Are there older siblings or is he/she the only child in your house?
20. What are your views about literacy?
21. Can your child read and write?
22. What reading materials are available in your house to arouse your child's interest in reading and writing?
23. What value do you think the books holds today?
24. What do you think are the benefits of books and other reading materials?
25. Does your child ask to be read to or do you initiate it?
26. In which language do you want your child to read and write and why?
27. Are you aware of what reading activities take place at your child's school?
28. What reading opportunities is your child exposed to in the home?
29. What does your child prefer to do in his/her free time?
30. Do you ever go to the library?
31. Does your spouse enjoy reading?
32. Where do you get your reading materials?
33. What are reading habits of your family?
34. Apart from home and school where else do you see print?
35. How does this print if there is any contributes to your child's literacy development?

Questions to teachers

1. What do you do when you discover that learners in your class are unable to read and write fluently?
2. What do you do to promote reading and writing in your class?
3. How does the school contribute to the development of reading and writing among learners?
4. Apart from the prescribed text books, what other resources are available for the development of reading and writing in learners?
5. How often do you read?
6. What kind of reading material do you read mostly?
7. How has reading contributed to your academic performance and professional development?
8. What problems do you experience when teaching reading and writing?
9. What teaching strategies do you employ in teaching reading and writing?
10. What do you think is the best way learners could develop reading and writing habits or interest?
11. How do you motivate learners to read and write?
12. Do read to your learners, what kind of reading materials do you read to your learners and why?
13. In your view, what is the value of literacy?

Questions to learners

1. What do you most enjoy in the class and why?
2. What do you most enjoy at home and why?
3. Can you read and write?
4. Which books do you read at home and school?
5. What other reading materials are available at home and school?
6. Do your parents and teacher read to you?
7. What kind of reading materials do your parents and teacher read to you?
8. Do you like to be read?
9. What do you like to be read to at school and home?
10. Do you like stories, do your teacher and parents tell you stories?

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