



Engaging parents in their children's education

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Question

A rapid literature review of the evidence on interventions supporting parents to participate more in their children's learning in Tanzania and other similar resource-constrained contexts. What does the evidence say on the results and lessons learned from these interventions, including on the effects of the way the parents participate? Where possible, gender dimensions will be flagged.

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Overview

Summary of key findings

In general systematic and rigorous reviews find limited (and little robust) evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to engage parents in their children's learning in resource-constrained countries – when looking at parental participation in their children's literacy development and parental engagement with schools. Effects tend to be mixed, with scarce evidence making it hard to come to firm conclusions on findings, including on the effects of the way parents engage in supporting their children's learning. Reviews report more, and more consistent, evidence showing significant benefits from interventions supporting parental engagement with their children's early childhood development (ECD). There are recommendations in the literature on the way parents are engaged in ECD interventions. In general the literature tends not to provide gender analysis, presumably because many interventions do not incorporate a gender focus (although some do). This rapid review has found limited evidence on the impact of interventions supporting parent engagement specifically for girls or for children with disabilities in resource constrained countries.

Scope of study

This rapid review has looked for evidence from resource constrained contexts and focused on the most recent studies. It has relied primarily on reviews, and particularly on systematic and rigorous reviews where available. The report has also included examples of evidence from individual interventions from Tanzania (primarily) or other resource-constrained contexts to illustrate the type of evidence and findings available.

This report includes evidence on adult literacy and skills interventions explicitly designed to support parents to participate in their children's learning. It does not cover other adult literacy and skills interventions that may have impacted on parents' engagement with their children's learning¹. It has also not included evidence on interventions that may provide an incentive for parents to send their children to school but without engaging them in their learning (such as cash transfers, merit-based scholarships, reducing user fees, school-feeding and school-based health programmes etc.). It has searched for evidence on interventions supporting parent engagement in the education of girls and children with disabilities².

The literature tends to use the term 'parents' loosely to cover family involvement, noting that in developing country contexts grandparents, older siblings or other relatives may be important carers (Cao et al, 2015: 13).

The literature identifies a range of different types of parent involvement in their children's education and learning. Marphatia et al (2010: 15) identify three levels of participation – in school, at home and between teachers and parents.

Guided by the literature reviewed, this brief review summarises findings on interventions that aim to support parent engagement in: 1) early childhood development; 2) children's literacy

¹ A recent K4D helpdesk query covers the broader literature on effective adult education (Bolton, 2017).

² A recent K4D helpdesk query covers the broader literature on education for children with disabilities (Thompson, 2017).

development; and 3) learning in school, including promoting inclusive education for girls and children with disabilities, community-based monitoring and school-based management.

2. Findings

Evidence base

- This rapid review identified a number of systematic and rigorous reviews which consider the strength of evidence on interventions on parent engagement with children's learning – across a range of different types of evidence – looking at what is known about the impacts and lessons learned, and research gaps.
- Reviews of interventions to support parent participation in their children's literacy development and with their children's schools find limited robust evidence from resource constrained countries (Spier et al, 2016; Cao et al, 2015; Unterhalter et al, 2016; Snilstveit et al, 2016). The reviews commonly find insufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions on the best ways to support and involve parents to participate in their children's learning.
- A rigorous review on parent-focused interventions on early childhood development in developing countries finds a medium sized body of evidence of moderate quality, with global coverage and consistent findings (Rao et al, 2014: 42). Reviews of evidence on parent-focused early learning interventions provide recommendations on timing and mode of engagement.
- There are few impact evaluations of interventions, with experts advising caution in interpreting findings from single interventions, and in particular from small, intensively delivered, demonstration programmes when considering their potential for scaling up (Cao et al, 2015: 47-48; Rebello Britto et al, 2017: 13).
- One review notes that the literature on parents' engagement in children's learning from the South (and specifically Africa) tends to concentrate on participation in school-level decision-making and parental roles in financing education as opposed to parental involvement with their own children's learning (Marphatia et al, 2010: 15).
- According to one review on the impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low- and middle-income countries, most studies report only average effects on all children and more analysis is needed on the basis of sex, age, ethnicity and disability (Snilstveit et al, 2016: 51).
- Unterhalter et al (2014: 1) find that interventions on supporting girls' education by shifting gender norms and enhancing inclusion are under-researched and underresourced.

Results of interventions to support parent engagement in children's learning

- A rigorous review finds **early childhood development (ECD) parent-focused interventions** produced small-to-medium-sized positive effects on young children's cognitive development in developing-country contexts, and appeared to lead to beneficial changes in parents and their relationships with their children (Rao et al, 2014: 43-44). A systematic review finds that psychosocial stimulation programmes for children on average aged one to three years old are effective in improving a child's cognitive development (Rebello Britto et al, 2016: 7). It finds that psychosocial programmes are delivered ideally as intensive home visiting programmes or as a combination of group

and individual sessions (p. 7). This review also highlights that programmes including fathers, in the training, is a promising and underutilized strategy (p. 6). Another review concludes that early stimulation interventions (many with home visit components) produce significant benefits in improving child and maternal outcomes likely to be sustained over the long term (Baker-Henningham & López Bóo, 2010: 45).

- A systematic review finds that interventions intended to support parents' ability to develop their child's school readiness (specifically through **strengthening literacy**) were not found to be effective overall, although they did have some positive effects in some countries (Spier et al, 2016: v). Another review finds that evidence from family literacy interventions, a common type of intervention to engage parent involvement in their children's learning, is mixed, possibly due to differences in programme intensity and content (Cao et al, 2015: 46). The same review finds that, looking at interventions to teach parents a specific technique for supporting their children's reading, the evidence is limited from developing country contexts.
- While more detailed research is needed, a rigorous review of interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality finds that programmes focusing on **changed gender norms and increased female participation** have "considerable potential" (Unterhalter et al, 2014: 47). Many of these programmes are complementary to schools, sometimes taking place in the community and involving parents.
- This rapid review has not found much detailed evidence on the effectiveness of interventions working with parents to support their **engagement with education for children with disabilities**.
- A systematic review finds that 1) **community-based school monitoring interventions** may improve school participation and learning outcomes in some contexts, but the effects vary greatly and more evidence is needed to confirm these findings; and 2) **school-based management programmes** do not appear to improve school participation on average, and that their average effect on learning outcomes was small, but with a large amount of variability in effects across contexts (Snilstveit et al, 2016).

Lessons learned

Cross-cutting lessons include:

- The most effective ECD programmes had culturally appropriate materials, opportunities for sharing, discussion, and guided parental practice with children (Rao et al, 2014: 43).
- Reviews recommend using interventions to promote the well-being of families as a whole (and particularly of mothers), and empowering mothers by providing and encouraging social support (Baker-Henningham & López Bóo, 2010: 60; Nag et al, 2014: 25).
- Activities to better support parent participation in schools and in their children's learning include adult learning opportunities for parents that combine literacy, participatory learning and community empowerment approaches (Marphatia et al, 2010: 9).
- For engagement with children's learning in schools, successful programmes were found to address constraints at multiple levels because children's education outcomes are influenced by a range of factors, while tailoring programmes to suit baseline constraints and capacities can improve the chance for success (Snilstveit et al, 2016: 49-50).

- Issues of scale and sustainability need to be considered carefully, because it is hard to know how the mainly small-scale interventions would perform if implemented at scale (Cao et al, 2015: 47-48).

3. Annotated bibliography

Early childhood development

A. Reviews

Rao, N., Sun, J., Chen, E. E., & Ip, P. (2017). Effectiveness of early childhood interventions in promoting cognitive development in developing countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *HK J Paediatr (New Series)*, 22(1), 14-25.

<http://www.hkjpgaed.org/details.asp?id=1103&show=1234>

“**Objective:** A systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted to compare the effectiveness of different types of early childhood interventions in enhancing cognitive development of children in developing countries, and to identify factors related to intervention efficacy. **Method:** The meta-analysis included 106 interventions from 62 studies in 30 developing countries, published between 1992 and 2012. Participants included 43,696 children below 8 years. **Results:** Results indicated that comprehensive programs were the most effective ($g=1.05$), followed by child-focused education and stimulation ($g=0.64$), parent-focused support ($g=0.44$), income supplementation ($g=0.23$), and nutrition and health interventions ($g=0.11$), respectively. **Conclusions:** Early childhood development interventions were effective in improving cognitive development of children in developing countries. The largest effect sizes were associated with comprehensive programs which may be scaled up, taking into account the country context.”

(Rao et al, 2017: abstract)

22 of the interventions covered in the review were categorised as parent-focused education and support. The findings for the parent interventions were:

“Parent-focused interventions in developing countries had relatively smaller average effect sizes than child-focused interventions. This may be due to large variations in the design of parent-focused interventions. In contrast to other studies, we did not find that these interventions were more effective with highly qualified educators, potentially because of generally low levels of training or lack of variability in developing country contexts. We did find that the age of the child targeted for intervention was significant for parent-focused interventions compared to other types of interventions; early parenting programs that enhance parent-infant interaction can, in turn, foster learning achievement and the development of executive function. Hence, adequate attention should be given to the timing of providing parenting interventions to promote typical cognitive development”

(Rao et al, 2017)

(The data for this paper is based on the DFID rigorous review – see below, Rao et al, 2014.)

Rebello Britto, P., Ponguta, L.A., Reyes, C., Karnati, R. (2015). A Systematic Review of Parenting Programmes for Young Children. UNICEF.

https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/P_Shanker_final__Systematic_Review_of_Parenting_EC_D_Dec_15_copy.pdf

This UNICEF-commissioned systematic review looked at 105 studies of parenting programmes. The review “classified programmatic strategies under two broad ECD programme goals: (i) those that promoted nutrition and health; and (ii) those that promoted holistic outcomes beyond nutrition and health such as cognitive and socio-emotional development” (p. 6). The review finds that “psychosocial stimulation programmes [where the average age of children participating in the intervention was around one to three years], which entail active engagement between the caregiver and the child, are effective in improving a child’s cognitive development” (p. 7). The review finds that “In terms of modality and dose, psychosocial programmes are delivered ideally as intensive home visiting programmes or as a combination of group and individual sessions. There is also strong evidence for combining psychosocial stimulation programmes with early education programmes” (p. 7). Another finding is that “programmes including fathers, in the training, is a promising and underutilized strategy” (p. 8). The review reports that “Only three studies across the entire review looked at fathers as recipients of parenting programmes” (p. 13). The review contains further detailed findings and recommendations on the design of programmes, including for how parents are engaged.

Rao, N., Sun, J., Wong, J.M.S., Weekes, B., Ip P., Shaeffer, S., Young, M., Bray, M., Chen, E., & Lee, D. (2014). *Early childhood development and cognitive development in developing countries: A rigorous literature review*. Department for International Development.

<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Portals/0/PDF%20reviews%20and%20summaries/ECD%202014%20Rao%20report.pdf?ver=2014-10-02-145634-017>

A rigorous literature review by Rao et al (2014: 15) identified twenty-five parent-focused interventions on early childhood development (ECD) conducted in 11 developing countries³. Five worked with either parents or caregivers only, and 20 worked with both parents/caregivers and children together. The review rated this a medium sized body of evidence of moderate quality, with global coverage and consistent findings (p. 42).

The review finds that (p. 43-44):

In general, parent-focused interventions produced small-to-medium-sized positive effects on young children’s cognitive development in developing-country contexts. Interventions that involved both parent and child often had larger effect sizes than did parent-only programmes or information-based interventions. Short-term interventions were effective for children under 18 months, but interventions that lasted at least two years were shown to have sustainable positive effects on older children. The most effective programmes were those with culturally appropriate materials, opportunities for sharing, discussion, and guided parental practice with children.

³ Studies involving interventions with children with disabilities were excluded (Rao et al, 2014: 10).

It appears that parent-focused interventions led to beneficial changes in parents, which were consequently reflected in their relationships with their children and in the general atmosphere of the home. This contextual change helped to support continuous cognitive development beyond the intervention period. However, although some parent-focused interventions, such as paired- and dialogic-reading programmes, have been shown to enhance both children's schooling and cognitive development and parent-child interactions in developed countries, they may not be feasible in developing-country contexts, given lower literacy rates in socially disadvantaged groups. Given the known relationship between maternal literacy and child outcomes, and the fact that parents are the child's first teachers, perhaps, in some programmes, adult-literacy education should be conceptualised as a component of ECD interventions.

However, the review "did not identify sufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions about the best ways in which to support and involve parents, extended-family members and communities in promoting early learning." (p. 2)

Rao et al (2014: 8) note that that the influence of ECD programmes on typical child development is moderated by participants' unique characteristics (for example, gender and socioeconomic status, but does not provide further detail (p. 8). They also report that some of the parent-focused programmes covered topics such as gender equality in their intervention sessions (p. 25).

Baker-Henningham, H. & López Bóo, F. (2010). *Early childhood stimulation interventions in developing countries: A comprehensive literature review. Discussion paper series // Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit No. 5282. Bonn: The Institute for the Study of Labor.* <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/46166/1/663155967.pdf>

Using a systematic methodology, this report reviews the evidence on the effectiveness of early childhood stimulation interventions for children from birth to five years old (with a particular focus on the birth to three year age group) in low or middle income countries. Twenty six studies (published from 1978-2010) from eleven developing countries were identified. The majority of the interventions reviewed involved a home visiting component and under half of them also conducted group parenting sessions. Two studies combined centre-based services with a parent training component. (Baker-Henningham & López Bóo, 2010: 57) One of the interventions included involves children with disabilities (in Vietnam) (p. 51).

The review concludes that early stimulation interventions produce significant benefits in child and maternal outcomes, and these are likely to be sustained over the long term. Evidence was found of significant benefits to children's mental and motor development, as well as reasonable strong evidence of benefits to children's behaviour and some evidence of benefits to children's schooling. The study also found reasonably strong evidence that mothers' parenting knowledge and skills can improve with early stimulation interventions. The seven studies that had a longer-term follow-up all reported sustained benefits for a broad array of outcomes including maternal reports of child behaviour and children's academic achievement. (p. 45)

The studies reviewed had relatively small sample sizes and involved extensive training and supervision, aspects to take into account when considering how to scale up. Nevertheless the review finds some evidence from large scale evaluations of ECD programmes in developing countries that significant benefits to child development are possible (for example as found for an integrated child health, nutrition and development intervention for children from birth to four years in the Philippines) (pp. 45-46).

The review highlighted that “early stimulation interventions can be delivered through a variety of modalities including homevisiting, group parent meetings, educational day care provision, child development messages integrated into routine health care visits and/or through media interventions” (p. 56). However, “no study was identified that investigated the effectiveness of different modes of delivery and the majority of studies used a home-visiting approach which was supplemented with parent group meetings in some studies. ... It is likely that the most effective and appropriate delivery mode will vary across cultures and across contexts” (p. 56). The review calls for more research to identify the relative effectiveness of different modes of delivery.

The review also provides an analysis of lessons learned, which include (among others) the recommendation to target younger and more disadvantaged children and their families and use interventions to promote the well-being of families as a whole (and particularly the mothers) (p. 60).

B. Examples of recent evidence on individual interventions

Dowd, A.J. (2016). *ECD Evidence for Scale*. Presentation. Save the Children.

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/ecd-evidence-scale>

This presentation reviews the Early Childhood Development (ECD) impact evaluation data from six Save the Children ECD programmes for children ages 4-6 years in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. Dowd (2016) concludes that “the collective evidence to date suggests that for children ages 4-6 years, the greatest impact for children accrues to quality ECD centers in combination with quality parenting approaches – and that in the absence of realistic ECD center coverage, quality parenting can have similar if not equal impact”.

Chinen, M. & Bos, J. M. (2016). *Impact Evaluation of the Save the Children Early Childhood Stimulation Program in Bangladesh: Final Report*. Washington D.C.: American Institutes for Research. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/163331484753270396/SIEF-Bangladesh-Endline-Report-Nov2016FINAL.pdf>

A three-year randomised control trial of Save the Children’s Early Childhood Stimulation (ECS) programme in Bangladesh found that it significantly improved child development outcomes across several dimensions even though its implementation did not fully adhere to the original program design (Chinen and Bos, 2016: 16). The ECS program targeted parents of infants and toddlers in three different areas and, integrating with the government’s National Nutrition Services (NNS), taught them about the importance of positive early stimulation and maternal responsiveness to support and enhance the development of these young children.

The impact evaluation found that by “building on the existing government infrastructure, the program was able to reach a large number of families at relatively low cost. This approach carried great promise, both in terms of improving child and family outcomes and in terms of scalability beyond these sites. However, it also led to implementation challenges” (p. 14). The authors also conclude that “The apparent positive interaction between the ECS and NNS programs suggests that nutritional programs should be encouraged to focus more broadly on all aspects of child development” (p. 16).

For other Save the Children evaluations of early childhood development interventions, see <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/keyword/emergent-literacy-and-math-skills>.

Weber, A., & Fernald, A. (2016). *An evaluation of Tostan's reinforcement of parental practices (RPP) program*. Stanford University.

http://www.educationinnovations.org/sites/default/files/program/m_e/Hewlett%20Stanford%20Final%20Report_12Oct16%20%281%29_1.pdf

The evaluation assesses Tostan's⁴ Reinforcement of Parental Practices (RPP) programme after two years of implementation in changing parenting skills and children's language outcomes in the Wolof-speaking Kaolack region of Senegal. It finds large and consistent changes in the caregivers' interactions with their children (under three and a half years old) in the RPP villages and small but statistically significant improvements in caregiver measures of child language development, with some longer-term effects. The evaluation concludes that the results are "an impressive achievement": "Senegalese mothers with no formal education, living in subsistence-level rural villages, were motivated to learn new ways of interacting with their young children, which in turn was associated with greater gains in their children's language development". However, all-day audio recordings suggested that in a typical day children's language experience in the RPP villages were the same as the comparison group, with adult verbal engagement with children decreasing in both groups as the children grew older and more mobile. Limitations of the study include: the evaluation was limited to 24 Wolof villages in one region and it is not known if the findings can be generalised to other language and culture groups; the villages were preselected and not randomly assigned; standard parent-report measures of children's language skill – which are inherently subject to over-reporting bias – were used (although triangulated with other direct assessments). (Weber and Fernald, 2017: 3-4)

Children's literacy development

A. Reviews

Spier, E., Britto, P., Pigott, T., Roehlkapartain, E., McCarthy, M., Kidron, Y., Song, M., Scales, P., Wagner, D., Lane, J. & Glover, J. (2016). *Parental, community and familial support interventions to improve children's literacy in developing countries: a systematic review*, 3ie Systematic Review 26. London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2016/07/21/sr-26-children-literacy.pdf

This 3ie systematic review examines the effectiveness of parental, familial, and community support for children's literacy development in developing countries. Studies included were published in 2003 or later; for children aged 3 to 12 years; included a comparison group; and took place in a low or middle income country (LMIC). Studies that focused on children with disabilities were eligible for inclusion (but it does not appear that any were) (Spier et al, 2016: 6.) The 13 studies ultimately included in the review encompass three areas: 1) educational television⁵; 2) interventions that help parents learn how to support their children's school readiness; 3) and tutoring interventions delivered by peers or other community members. Most aimed to improve school readiness. (p. v)

⁴ <https://www.tostan.org/>

⁵ Educational radio was examined in another systematic review.

The study finds that “parent education and training programmes” are among the most common out-of-school approaches to supporting children’s early academic learning (p. 38). It finds that “in the developing world, these approaches are typically used in settings of limited formal preschool opportunities but high rates of parental literacy. Programs are quite varied in structure, duration and intensity; with take-home assignments for parents and children to work on between sessions. This approach requires parents or other adult caregivers to have the time available to attend sessions and to engage in these activities with their children” (p. 38).

The review concludes that: “Interventions intended to support parents’ ability to develop their child’s school readiness were not found to be effective overall, although they did have some positive effects in some countries” (p. v). The review concludes that “though these approaches may work well in some contexts, there is no evidence that they work universally. However, the limited number of studies available makes it difficult to draw any valid conclusions regarding the kind of context and/or intervention required for this approach to have a positive effect” (p. 38).

A key finding of the review is that while there were many practices widely used in LMICs that work outside of formal education systems with a goal of improving children’s learning outcomes, very few have any evidence for (or against) their effectiveness (p. 39). The review found a scarcity of empirical studies and a limited focus on a few interventions. While numerous descriptions of interventions exist, few contained a study of programme effectiveness in reference to a comparison group. The review found only one study that addressed an intervention for children ages 7 and older, and no eligible studies from Latin America. As a result the review found significant gaps in understanding of what works in LMICs to improve children’s literacy outcomes using interventions outside of the formal education system. (p. v)

The review recommends 1) prioritizing studying interventions already in widespread use, but lack evidence of effectiveness and 2) “for interventions that have a positive impact at least some contexts (but maybe not others), investment should be made in replication studies to determine which children will benefit from these interventions, and under what conditions” (p. 39).

There is no gender analysis in this review.

Cao, Y., Ramesh, A., Menendez, A. & Dayaratna, V. (2015). *Out-of-school parental and community involvement interventions. Literature review. This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development.*

This paper reviews the evidence on parental involvement to increase education outcomes, and specifically reading outcomes (Cao et al, 2015: 6). It looks at interventions aimed at changing parental involvement at home through direct action with the child (reading aloud to children, shared book-reading, etc.) as well as community-based interventions (p. 7). It looks at interventions aimed at 1) primary school children and 2) pre-school or kindergarten age children. It finds that the “Link between parental involvement and literacy outcomes in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) is unclear” (p. 18). Most of the interventions are conducted and most of the evidence comes from the developed world (p. 18).

The review finds that most parent involvement interventions are family literacy interventions, which may also aim to develop parents’ literacy skills or good child-rearing practices as well as children’s literacy skills (p. 46). The evidence from these studies is mixed, which “may be explained by the differences in intensity and content between programs” (p. 46). Programmes

“which are highly intense and structured and provide guided materials to parents seem more effective” (p. 46).

The review finds that another set of interventions that aim to teach parents a specific technique for supporting their children read at home. Cao et al (2015: 46) report that “in general, the evidence shows that dialogic reading is effective at increasing children's oral language skills” and “there is also some evidence that techniques such as Hearing Reading and Paired Reading may be effective in supporting children's reading development”. One study investigating parental support in a developing country with multi-lingual setting (India) produced findings that suggest that in a low-literate environment, hearing-reading (HR) strategies may be useful in enhancing children's literacy skills (p. 33). However, evidence from developing countries is limited and generalisations from small-scale interventions must be made with caution (p. 33).

The review finds “evidence on the effectiveness of community–focused activities, particularly in developing country settings, is scarce” (p. 46). Two evaluations of a package of community activities – in Uganda and Kenya, and Burundi – show “no conclusive evidence that the community components had a positive impact on children's literacy outcomes” (p. 46). Cao et al (2015: 46-47) recommends this as an important area for future research, given that many interventions in developing countries are designed as a bundle of activities (such as Save the Children's Literacy Boost initiatives).

Key takeaways are (p. 47-48):

- “Parental involvement can take many different forms and no single type of parental involvement has been shown to have a positive impact universally. In general, intense, highly structured programs seem to be more effective. However, this may not be feasible in developing country contexts”.
- “While the evidence is mixed, the following interventions seem to show more promise:
 - Dialogic Reading interventions targeting children in the preschool years (particularly 2-4 year-olds) and focusing on emergent literacy skills Most of the studies come from developed countries; the studies from developing countries were implemented in daycare settings As such, this could be an area of further research.
 - Direct Instruction interventions which equip parents with the skills and resources to implement structured tutoring sessions with their children following a clearly defined sequence of lessons seem overall more effective than other types of Home Reading Programs.
 - Hearing Reading is one intervention that showed effectiveness in a developing country context, in India.”
- “Issues of scale and sustainability need to be considered carefully. Most of these evaluations, especially those of Home Reading Programs, involved small sample sizes.”

Cao et al (2015: 9) finds that the evidence tends to be inconclusive because

- As many programmes include parental involvement as a part of a broader package of interventions, it is hard to isolate the impact of parental involvement on reading outcomes.
- “Studies often do not measure whether the lack of results stems from a failure to adopt the promoted behavior or from the ineffectiveness of the targeted behavior.”

- “Many studies had very small sample sizes.”
- “Interventions are subject to implementation pitfalls, especially in resource poor contexts.”

There is no gender analysis provided. One of the interventions included – which was undertaken in Bangladesh – had a component on gender equality in its education programme to young mothers (p. 23).

Nag, S., Chiat, S., Torgerson, C., & Snowling, M. J. (2014). *Literacy, Foundation Learning and Assessment in Developing Countries: Final Report*. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/305150/Literacy-foundation-learning-assessment.pdf

This rigorous review covered five intervention studies to strengthen the family literacy environments and evaluated parenting outcomes (Nag et al, 2014: 25). Some interventions were delivered as group sessions to mothers from low-income families, with mothers receiving individual sessions in the home in one study. The review found that the evidence suggests “early parenting interventions can have sustained and long-term benefits spanning well into young adulthood”, and are particularly effective for children whose mothers have sufficient knowledge of school language and literacy to support the child in learning. The review highlights that “programmes that are effective focus not only on instilling knowledge of child development but also on empowering mothers by providing and encouraging social support”. (p 25)

No gender analysis provided.

B. Example of recent evidence on individual interventions

Friedlander, E. & Goldenberg, C. (eds.). (2016). *Literacy Boost in Rwanda: Impact Evaluation of a 2-year Randomized Control Trial*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

https://rwanda.savethechildren.net/sites/rwanda.savethechildren.net/files/library/LB%20Rwanda%20-%202%20Year%20Impact%20Evaluation_1.pdf

Friedlander and Goldenberg (2016) report the findings of a randomised control trial on the impact of the Save the Children Literacy Boost intervention in Rwanda. Literacy Boost enhances instruction through teacher training while simultaneously educating families and communities to better support learning outside the school and engaging children in fun learning activities at home and in the village. The study aimed to test whether a School-Only or a Life-wide Learning approach worked better. The RCT found that involving families and communities created greater numbers of readers who read fluently and with comprehension than simply training teachers alone. (pp. i-ii) The study reports differential effects on a sub-group of girls, but the study was not designed to investigate the causal mechanisms that might benefit boys or girls more (p. 75).

Engagement with learning in schools

1) *Promotion of inclusive education*

A. Reviews

Wapling, L. (2016). *Inclusive Education and Children with Disabilities: Quality Education for All in Low and Middle Income Countries*. CBM.

http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/54741/Quality_Education_for_All_LMIC_Evidence_Review_CBM_2016_Full_Report.pdf

This literature review examined 131 articles but found that “only one presented evidence in terms of academic performance. That created a significant limitation in terms of putting forward learning and recommendations in regard to effective approaches. There were also very few articles that covered the important issues of early childhood education for children with disabilities and the impact of community based rehabilitation programmes on school inclusion. Of particular concern was the fact that gender was not analysed as a factor in education for children with disabilities to any great extent.” (Wapling, 2013: 3) One of the six themes identified in the literature on how the education of children is discussed includes: “Discussions of interventions / programs that focus on working with parents and/or the community to increase awareness over the right to education for children with disabilities, to support children with disabilities in school or home based programs, attitudes” (p. 10). The review finds that “Awareness raising and sensitisation of teachers, parents and peer groups does help improve the numbers of children with disabilities who enrol in mainstream schools” (p. 31). However, little detail is provided on the effectiveness of interventions working with parents to support their engagement with education for children with disabilities.

Parkes, J., Heslop, J., Johnson Ross, F., Westerveld, R., & Unterhalter, E. (2016). *A rigorous review of global research evidence on policy and practice on school-related gender-based violence*. University College London, Institute of Education. New York: UNICEF. [https://www.unicef.org/education/files/SRGBV_review_FINAL_V1_web_version\(3\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/education/files/SRGBV_review_FINAL_V1_web_version(3).pdf)

This rigorous review includes evidence on interventions addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) through interventions in the wider community, including through work with parents (often of young children) in an attempt to reduce ‘risk factors’ to later violent behaviour in children, and those that work with parents and/or other community members to help create a supportive environment for work on SRGBV (Parkes et al, 2016: 36). The review finds that very few studies on the role of parents in supporting the positive development of their children and avoiding maltreatment or abuse have taken place in low- and middle-income countries, making it difficult to draw clear conclusions as to the potential of parent-targeted programmes in relation to addressing SRGBV in this context (pp. 36-37).

The review finds that ActionAid’s Stop Violence Against Girls in Schools project in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique is one of the only systematically evaluated SRGBV interventions designed to work at multiple levels. The project primarily aimed to empower girls and work in school settings but also involved work with parents and community members to strengthen reporting mechanisms and create safer communities. The intervention was effective in creating a discourse prioritizing girls’ education and supporting girls to challenge violence (pp. 36-37).

According to the review, emerging evidence supports an approach where, “rather than pitting policy or intervention aims against cultural norms, aspects of cultural identity are harnessed to feed into a shared direction towards more gender-equitable relationships and schools” (p. 38). The review provides the example of an intervention working with parents in Zimbabwe that helped them support their adolescent children in negotiating healthy and safe relationships

through identifying traditional and religious teachings that were supportive of the messages of the programme (p. 38).

Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J. & Saito, M. (2014). *Interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality*. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development. <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Portals/0/PDF%20reviews%20and%20summaries/Girls'%20education%202014%20Unterhalter%20report.pdf?ver=2015-12-08-165815-117>

This rigorous literature review examined evidence on interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality. Looking at 169 research studies published since 1991, the review found that "more research studies focus on interventions linked to resource and infrastructure and changing institutions" while "interventions concerned with shifting gender norms and enhancing inclusion, by for example, increasing participation in decision making by the marginalised, are under-researched and underresourced" (Unterhalter et al, 2014.: 1). While more detailed research is needed, the review finds that programmes focusing on changed gender norms and increased female participation have "considerable potential" (p. 47). Some of these interventions take place outside of school in communities and some involve parents. Unterhalter et al (2014: 47) find that an important issue is the sustainability of these programmes that are often led by NGOs and time limited; attention to how gender norm discussions can be embedded in communities (e.g. through religious institutions, women's groups and school structures) is important. The review also highlights that few studies consider gendered social divisions within communities, (e.g. due to poverty, ethnicity, location or disability), and how strategies for gender equality in education could address intersecting inequalities and support wider notions of inclusion (p. 47-48; 57).

B. Example of recent evidence on individual interventions

King, E., & Winthrop, R. (2015). *Today's challenges for girls' education*. Brookings Global Working Paper Series. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Todays-Challenges-Girls-Educationv6.pdf>

In their review of progress in girls' education, King and Winthrop (2015) find that "programs that focus on improving infrastructure and school inputs should be designed with incentives for girls in mind to ensure that they improve girls' education outcomes". They summarise findings from a government programme in Burkina Faso – the Burkinabé Response to Improve Girls' Chances to Succeed (BRIGHT) programme – which encompassed a package of interventions, including a mechanism for mobilizing community support for education in general and for girls' education in particular. For the community support component, the programme delivered an extensive information campaign for parents on the potential benefits of education, particularly of girls' education; an adult literacy training program for mothers; and capacity building among local officials. Using a regression discontinuity evaluation design, an evaluation found that the programme increased girls' enrolment by 5 percentage points more than boys' enrolment, but boys' and girls' test scores increased by the same amount (p. 38).

2) *Community-based monitoring interventions*

A. Reviews

Snilstveit, B., Stevenson, J., Menon, R., Phillips, D., Gallagher, E., Geleen, M., Jobse, H., Schmidt, T. and Jimenez, E. (2016). *The impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review summary report, 3ie Systematic Review Summary 7*. London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2016/09/20/srs7-education-report.pdf

This systematic review synthesised evidence on the impact of education programmes on learning and school participation for children in primary and secondary schools covering 216 programmes reaching 16 million children in 52 low- and middle-income countries. The programmes include interventions to stimulate parent engagement in their children's learning, as well as other interventions to address child, household, school and teacher constraints to education.

The review identified studies of nine different, diverse community based monitoring programmes in Brazil, Chile, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Pakistan and Uganda. The authors conclude that community-based monitoring may improve school participation and learning outcomes in some contexts but the effects vary greatly and more evidence is needed to confirm this finding (p. 2). Moreover, while community-based monitoring improves school enrolment in some contexts, effects on other participation outcomes, such as student attendance, completion and drop out is less clear (p. 38). The review found that "Despite being widely implemented, the effects of providing information to children and/or parents, ... are not clear because few studies have been conducted" (p. 1).

The review finds that effects vary between contexts and even within the same country. Explanatory factors include parents' lack of knowledge of monitoring institutions; the level of community human capital (e.g. influenced by illiteracy); lack of teacher responsiveness; and unaddressed other constraints (e.g. resource constraints such as lack of trained teachers or sufficient school materials) (p. 38-39).

Successful programmes were found to address constraints at multiple levels because children's education outcomes are influenced by a range of factors, while tailoring programmes to suit baseline constraints and capacities can improve the chance for success (pp. 49-50). Both school-based management and community-based monitoring were most successful in settings with high levels of social capital and a tradition of local participation (e.g. in the Philippines). (p. 50)

There is no gender analysis in the report in relation to the interventions on community based monitoring and school-based management.

B. Example of recent evidence on individual interventions

Rawle, G., Ruddle, N., Pettersson Gelande, G., Wallin, J., Binci, M., Jasper, P., ..., & Aldinucci, A. (2017). *EQUIP-Tanzania Impact Evaluation. Midline Technical Report, Volume I: Results and Discussion*. Oxford: Oxford Policy Management.

The four-year DFID funded Government of Tanzania Education Quality Improvement Programme in Tanzania (EQUIP-T) aims to increase the quality of primary education and improve learning outcomes for 2.3 million pupils, especially girls (Rawle et al, 2017: 2). One of the four programme components is strengthened community participation and demand for accountability. ‘Gender and social inclusion’ is a cross-cutting theme, and related initiatives are programmed into all components (p. 3).

Approximately 20 months into implementation the midline evaluation found some improvement in the involvement of communities in education. For example, school committees are perceived to be more active and engaged, both within schools and between schools and communities, than in previous years, and there are reported improved relationships and communications between teachers and parents, with EQUIP-T appearing to have contributed to these positive changes. Some parents also reported feeling more empowered to hold teachers to account on some issues. However, there are continuing issues. For example, while Parent Teacher Partnerships (PTPs) have formed their activity appears limited for multiple reasons, including high opportunity costs for parents, and awareness of the community-led school needs assessment in the case study schools is very weak. More generally, school and community relationships still appear to be fractious, there are some issues parents still feel ignored on and scared to raise, as well as lacking in knowledge or understanding to hold the school to account for the quality of education provided in some of the case study sites. (Rawle et al, 2017: x-xi) The midline evaluation concludes that there is much room for improvement in community involvement in education, with respondents feeling that EQUIP-T should focus on community awareness initiatives to help improve pupil attendance and learning. Rawle et al find that planned future activities to increase communities’ understanding of their entitlement and what quality education looks like appear relevant in regard to improving parents’ ability to hold schools to account (Rawle et al, 2017: xii).

The report provides gender analysis, including for example by measuring the gender balance of parent-teacher groups (p. 87).

(These findings are also relevant for the school-based management section below.)

3) School-based management

A. Reviews

Snilstveit et al. (2016). The impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low- and middle-income countries

The systematic review identified studies of 12 different school-based management programmes in Brazil, the Gambia, Indonesia, Mexico, Niger, the Philippines, Senegal and Sri Lanka. In the majority of the included programmes, decision-making authority on school operations and funds were transferred to a school management committee, and most programmes included a capacity-building component targeted at different school stakeholders (Snilstveit et al, 2016: 40).

The review finds that “School-based management programmes do not appear to improve school participation on average, as measured by enrolment, completion and drop-out rates” (p. 41). The

review found the average effect of school-based management on learning outcomes was small, but with a large amount of variability in effects across contexts. It highlights that comprehensive school-based management programmes in the Philippines substantially improve learning outcomes.

The review also finds that parents were not always able to participate effectively in school management and hold stakeholders accountable. It notes that school-based management programmes do not appear to consistently increase parents' engagement with schools. Moreover, even when parental involvement improved it is not clear this translated into school councils being a forum for collaborative planning or shared decision-making. (p. 42). It proposes that existing levels of social and human capital – including of parents – may moderate the success of school-based management, and also notes that programmes may not have been in place long enough to observe improvements. The review finds that other factors that may have influenced programme effectiveness include implementation issues and limited capacity of the education system in contexts with a significant lack of resources.

Carlitz, R. (2016). *Promoting Active Engagement of School Management Committees in Tanzania: A Research Proposal*. University of California.

http://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous_files/Carlitz_RD.pdf

In her review of the evidence, Carlitz (2016: 5-6) finds that in Tanzania and other countries that have established school management committees (SMCs) or embraced other reforms to decentralize education management, empirical evidence that such initiatives are fulfilling their promise (or even their institutional mandates) is mixed. She finds this for both studies that rely on time-series and cross-sectional observations to statistically isolate the impact of decentralization as well as case study and qualitative evidence. She reports that evidence suggests that a lack of information on school finances and low perceived levels of collective efficacy represent two of the main constraints on these institutions.

Carlitz notes that a recent doctoral dissertation on “Empowerment of School Committees and Parents in Tanzania” provides “a wealth of insights about the Tanzanian experience with SMCs”⁶.

There is no gender analysis.

Marphatia, A. A., Edge, K., Legault, E., & Archer, D. (2010). *Politics of participation: parental support for children’s learning and school governance in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda. The Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools*. Institute of Education and Action Aid. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ilops_parents_final.pdf

In 2008, ActionAid, the Institute of Education, University of London (IoE) and partners in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda undertook collaborative research to explore the role of parents and teachers in improving children’s learning. In total, the research teams conducted over 6,850

⁶ Masue, O. S. (2014). *Empowerment of School Committees and Parents in Tanzania: Delineating Existence of Opportunity, Its Use and Impact on School Decisions*. Thesis. University of Bergen.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287199942_Empowerment_of_School_Committees_and_Parents_in_Tanzania_Delineating_Existence_of_Opportunity_Its_Use_and_Impact_onSchool_Decisions

stakeholder interviews at the national level and across 240 schools located within two districts in each country. The learning participation and outcomes are analysed by gender. The research found that “although there is a history of capacity-building efforts in support of greater parental and community involvement in education, most have focused narrowly on sensitising parents to the importance of education, especially of girls, or on encouraging parents to contribute either in-kind or financially to schools. The teams found few initiatives aimed at building parents’ awareness of their role in improving learning and teaching strategies. As such, parental engagement in schools has not been sustained over time nor has it led to a marked improvement in children’s learning. Even in instances where policies have created a larger role for parents with respect to school matters (e.g. in Uganda), parents rarely feel confident in their own abilities to fulfil these requirements. This is particularly acute where parents are not literate themselves – either because they never went to school or they dropped out early” (Marphatia et al, 2010: 7). The study provides a summary of constraints limiting parental participation (including how cultural gender norms can be inhibiting factors), and make a series of recommendations pertinent for the design and implementation of interventions to support parent engagement in children learning. These include “providing adult learning opportunities for parents that combine literacy, participatory learning and community empowerment approaches” (p. 9).

The supporting literature review conducted for this study provides a broader annotated bibliography of research on parental participation (including earlier works not covered by this rapid review)⁷.

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⁷ Edge, K., Tao, S., Riley, K. and Khamsi, K. (2008). *Teacher Quality and Parental Participation: An exploratory review of research and resources related to influencing student outcomes*. London, UK: ActionAid and the Institute of Education, University of London.
http://www.academia.edu/484570/Teacher_quality_and_parental_participation_An_exploratory_review_of_research_and_resources_related_to_influencing_student_outcomes

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