University of Pretoria

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology

Emergent Literacy Beliefs and Practices of Early Childhood Development Practitioners in Low-Resource Communities

A RESEARCH ARTICLE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE BA SLP

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY / PLAGIARISM

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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Title of thesis/ dissertation/ mini dissertation:

The beliefs and practices of Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners in low-resource South African communities regarding emergent literacy

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation/acronym	Meaning
ASHA	American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
SLT	Speech-language therapist
PA	Phonological awareness
ECD	Early childhood development

JOURNAL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY (JECL): AUTHOR GUIDELINES

Item	Guideline
Referencing style	APA 7
Font and font size	Times New Roman, size 12
Line spacing	Double-spaced
Margins	At least 1 inch (25 mm)
Total pages (excluding addendum)	Up to 25–30 pages (approximately 6,000–8,000 words)
Title	Should not exceed 15 words
Title page	Must include author names, institutional affiliations, ORCID IDs (if available), and contact details for the corresponding author
Abstract	Up to 200 words
Keywords	Up to 6 keywords, presented alphabetically
Sections	Typically: Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review/Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Findings/Results, Discussion, Conclusion, Acknowledgements, Declarations (funding, ethics, conflicts of interest), References, and Appendices (if applicable)
Figures	Number sequentially (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.); provide clear captions below each figure; high resolution (≥300 dpi); submit as separate files if requested
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TITLE PAGE WITH AUTHORS

The beliefs and practices of Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners in low-resource South African communities regarding emergent literacy

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ABSTRACT:

Research has consistently established the importance of the development of emergent literacy skills in early childhood years as the foundation for later academic success. In South Africa, systemic challenges such as limited resources, multilingualism and insufficient ECD practitioner training often hamper effective literacy curriculum delivery. While evidence shows that practitioners' beliefs and practices shape their pedagogical choices and are therefore central to how literacy is supported in early childhood, limited research has explored these dynamics in underserved South African contexts.

This study explored the beliefs and practices of ECD practitioners in a low-resource South African community with regards to emergent literacy.

A mixed-methods, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Thirty-six ECD practitioners working in ECD centres in, a low-resourced community participated. Data were collected using a structured electronic questionnaire on the Qualtrics platform, adapted from Smit et al. (2020) and Sandvik et al. (2014). Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed to examine practitioner beliefs and practices.

The results showed that ECD practitioners strongly endorsed their role in promoting emergent literacy, reporting frequent use of practices such as shared book reading and interactive strategies that foster vocabulary, phonological awareness and comprehension. Findings also highlighted systemic barriers, including inadequate resources, multilingual factors and limited training, as well as practitioners' expressed feelings of underpreparedness and a recurring desire for greater caregiver involvement in supporting children's literacy.

ECD practitioners in underserved contexts demonstrate strong role commitment and resilience in fostering emergent literacy, despite systemic constraints and feelings of underpreparedness. Addressing these barriers through resource-sensitive professional development training and strengthened caregiver collaboration may support ECD practitioners in enhancing the literacy outcomes for children in low-resource South African communities.

Key words: Early Childhood Development, Emergent literacy, beliefs and practices, Early Childhood Development Practitioners Low-Resource Communities, South Africa

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Early childhood development (ECD) is an umbrella term that refers to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally, and socially (DoBE, 2015). ECD programmes are planned activities designed to promote development in all the above-mentioned domains of children and aim to intervene in the lives of children at risk. Programmes may include a range of services such as education, health and social protection (DoBE, 2015).

Phonological awareness (PA)

Phonological awareness is the awareness of the sound structure of a language and the ability to consciously analyse and manipulate this structure via a range of tasks, such as speech sound segmentation and blending at the word, onset-rime, syllable and phonemic levels (ASHA, n.d.).

Speech-Language Therapists (SLTs)

SLTs assist in the promotion of normal communication, as well as the identification, prevention, assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of a variety of developmental or acquired speech, language, and oral disorders. SLTs in South Africa play essential roles in literacy development (usually in close collaboration with a teacher). These include prevention, assessment, intervention, programme design, training, data gathering, analysis, and compliance (Wium & Louw, 2013).

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Literacy is a cornerstone of lifelong learning and vital to children's cognitive, social, and academic development (Delican & Ateş, 2022; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). From the earliest years, children engage in informal and gradual experiences that prepare them for the formalised reading and writing instruction in school (Cash et al., 2015). Although researchers have debated the timing and mechanisms of literacy acquisition, there is a broad consensus that prerequisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes must be in place for successful engagement with literacy. These foundational capacities are referred to in the literature as emergent literacy (also termed early literacy) (Clay, 1966; Hutton et al., 2021; Willenberg, 2007). Emergent literacy encompasses interrelated domains, including PA, print awareness, alphabet knowledge, vocabulary development, and narrative skills (Neuman & Knapczyk, 2022). These capacities are not discrete but interdependent, with growth in one area often supporting development in another.

Emergent literacy experiences, including shared storybook reading, exposure to print, and rich oral language interactions, provide the foundation for PA, vocabulary growth, and comprehension skills (Wildová & Kropáčková, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Zucker et al., 2013). Children who begin school with these foundational abilities are more likely to thrive academically. At the same time, those without them are at heightened risk for reading difficulties, which can persist across their schooling (Kaminski et al., 2017; Majorano et al., 2023). The literature emphasises that emergent literacy does not develop in isolation but through interactions within families, peer groups, and early childhood education settings (Cash et al., 2015).

Thus, caregivers and teachers play a pivotal role in scaffolding and enriching children's early experiences (Kim & Riley, 2021). However, children's exposure to such experiences varies significantly depending on socio-economic factors, with those in low-resource communities disproportionately deprived of literacy-rich opportunities (Slemming & Saloojee, 2013).

Components of Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy consists of several interrelated components, each contributing uniquely to later reading development (Snow et al., 1995; Witt & Lessing, 2018). PA refers to the ability to recognise and manipulate the sounds of spoken language (ASHA, n.d.). Given its central role in decoding, it is a strong predictor of reading success (Altun & Erden, 2018). Alphabet knowledge or recognising letters and linking them to their corresponding sounds forms the bridge between spoken and written language (Altun & Erden, 2018). Print awareness encompasses children's understanding that print is meaningful and follows conventions, such as reading from left to right (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, as cited in Hoffmann et al., 2024). Oral language includes vocabulary, listening comprehension, and

expressive skills; vocabulary knowledge, in particular, has been shown to underpin reading comprehension (Hilbert & Eis, 2014; Dickinson et al., 2019). Finally, narrative skills enable children to organise and understand stories, supporting comprehension and cognitive development (Babayiği et al., 2021).

These domains develop through participation in language-rich activities such as shared storybook reading, singing songs, engaging in pretend play, and conversations with adults (Neuman, 2023). Such activities expose children to new vocabulary and concepts and provide opportunities for interaction and meaning-making. Evidence shows that early interventions targeting these domains can reduce later reading difficulties and foster more positive academic trajectories (Foorman et al., 2016; Majorano et al., 2023). For example, interactive read-alouds in preschool have been linked to growth in both PA and vocabulary (Paulson & Moats, 2018). Importantly, these interactions also provide affective and motivational support, reinforcing children's sense of themselves as capable language users (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Zucker et al., 2013).

Emergent Literacy Development in the First Years

By the age of three, children exposed to books, storytelling, writing materials, and responsive adults already show stronger oral language and literacy readiness than peers without such exposure (Wildová & Kropáčková, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Zucker et al., 2013). These early experiences lay the foundation for connecting spoken and written forms of language (Goldstein et al., 2017). Neuroscientific evidence also points to the importance of emergent literacy environments, as experiences of talking, singing, and reading help form neural connections essential for language and comprehension (Erickson, 2019). Without these opportunities, children risk entering school with underdeveloped cognitive and linguistic foundations (Cisneros et al., 2023).

It is evident that emergent literacy is not merely preparation for later learning, but a developmental phase in its own right, which begins early and requires intentional support. Early childhood education and care settings thus play a vital role in ensuring children have opportunities to engage with print, language, and literacy-rich experiences.

Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Practice in Early Childhood

The curriculum provides an essential framework for structuring literacy learning opportunities. Effective literacy curricula integrate the components of emergent literacy into developmentally appropriate practices, balancing direct instruction with play-based and exploratory approaches (Foorman et al., 2016; Kostelnik et al., 2016). Internationally recognised curricula such as Montessori, High Scope, and Reggio Emilia situate literacy development within holistic and child-centred

pedagogies. For instance, the Montessori method uses tactile materials to help children link letters with sounds, while the Reggio Emilia approach emphasises creativity, collaboration, and storytelling as avenues for language development (Epstein & Hohmann, 2019; Lillard et al., 2017).

In South Africa, however, resource constraints often hampered the delivery of literacy curricula in ECD centres. Many centres lack books, materials, or adequately trained practitioners, making it difficult to implement comprehensive literacy programmes (Slemming & Saloojee, 2013). Furthermore, the absence of standardised curricula across ECD sites contributes to wide variations in quality, with some centres adopting structured, evidence-based practices while others rely on informal, unstructured approaches (Matjokana, 2023). Systemic inequities compound these disparities: children from affluent families may attend well-resourced centres, while those in rural or township communities often experience limited literacy exposure. The result is an uneven landscape in which literacy opportunities are inequitably distributed.

Teacher Beliefs and Professional Preparation

Alongside curriculum design, the beliefs and practices of ECD practitioners are central to how literacy is supported in early childhood. Teachers' beliefs about how children acquire literacy directly shape their pedagogical decisions. Those who regard literacy as developing naturally through play may provide unstructured opportunities for exploration, whereas those who see literacy as a set of skills to be explicitly taught are more likely to use structured activities (Sandvik et al., 2014; Buehl & Beck, 2014). These orientations are not fixed but influenced by personal, classroom-level, and systemic factors (Matsumoto & Tsuneda, 2019).

Research consistently shows that teacher qualifications and preparation matter (Buehl & Beck, 2014; Matsumoto & Tsuneda, 2019; Schachter et al., 2016; Weadman et al., 2022). Teachers with specialised training in early childhood development tend to demonstrate stronger literacy content knowledge and more effective practices (Schachter et al., 2016). Early career teachers or those without formal qualifications often feel underprepared to implement language and literacy practices (Weadman et al., 2022). In South Africa, many ECD practitioners, especially in low-resource communities, lack formal training (Moonsamy & Carolus, 2019). This undermines the potential for consistent, evidence-based practice. Professional development programmes, therefore, play a crucial role, equipping practitioners with tools such as interactive read-alouds, PA activities, phonics, and early writing instruction (Foorman et al., 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding emphasises the importance of guided interaction in literacy learning. Children's skills are enhanced when adults provide appropriate support, gradually reducing assistance as independence increases (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022;

Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Alkhudiry, 2022). In this sense, practitioner beliefs and practices are not only about *what* activities are offered, but also about *how* children are engaged in them. Literacy development is mediated through dialogue, joint activity, and responsive interactions that adapt to children's needs (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Zucker et al., 2013; Moonsamy & Carolus, 2019).

Multilingualism and the South African context

The country's linguistic diversity is another layer of complexity in South Africa. Many children grow up speaking indigenous languages at home but encounter English or Afrikaans as the language of literacy instruction at school (Owodally, 2015). This mismatch can hinder literacy development, as second-language learners often struggle to acquire foundational skills in a language that is not their mother tongue (Owodally, 2015). Early childhood development practitioners in South Africa are usually underprepared to meet the demands of multilingual classrooms. While they may have a theoretical grounding in additional language acquisition, they frequently lack the practical skills, contextually relevant materials, and confidence to implement effective strategies (Milton et al., 2020). These linguistic realities highlight the importance of practitioner training: teachers need skills to support multilingual learners, implement dual-language approaches, and scaffold literacy instruction in ways that build on children's home language competencies. Research supports using dual-language approaches that make literacy in the home language while gradually introducing the language of schooling (Owodally, 2015; Moonsamy & Carolus, 2019). By leveraging children's existing linguistic resources, these approaches support the transfer of skills and improve reading outcomes (Owodally, 2015; Moonsamy & Carolus, 2019).

The South African context, therefore, illustrates several challenges: limited resources in many ECD centres, uneven practitioner training, and multilingual realities that complicate literacy instruction. These conditions contribute to persistent inequities, with children in low-resource communities disproportionately affected. Despite extensive international recognition of the importance of emergent literacy, there is limited understanding of how ECD practitioners in such contexts perceive and enact literacy in their daily practices.

Research Gap and Rationale

This study seeks to address this critical gap by exploring the beliefs and practices of ECD practitioners in low-resource South African communities concerning emergent literacy. While existing research has established the importance of emergent literacy skills, the components of emergent literacy, and the role of practitioner beliefs in shaping pedagogy, little is known about how these dynamics play out in under-resourced contexts. By foregrounding practitioners' perspectives, this research

contributes to local and international debates about literacy, equity, and pedagogy. The findings are expected to hold particular value for speech-language therapists (SLTs), who frequently collaborate with practitioners in supporting emergent literacy, as well as for policymakers and training institutions tasked with strengthening the ECD workforce.

Research Question

What are the beliefs and practices of Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners in low-resource South African communities regarding emergent literacy?

2. Method

Aim and Objectives

The study aimed to explore the perspectives of Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners in low-resource South African communities on emergent literacy. The specific objectives were to:

- examine practitioners' beliefs about their role in promoting emergent literacy;
- evaluate their classroom practices in supporting emergent literacy;
- identify the strategies and approaches used to foster early literacy skills; and
- estimate the time practitioners devote to literacy activities daily.

Research Design and Approach

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to capture ECD practitioners' beliefs and practices at a single point in time (Wang et al., 2020). The instrument included both closed– and open-ended items: the former were analysed quantitatively, while the latter yielded rich, in-depth insights that were explored qualitatively. This methodological integration reflects established practices within mixed-methods research, as supported by scholars such as Aulén et al. (2021) and Ritchie et al. (2021).

Setting

The study was conducted in Eersterust, a formal township within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, approximately 15 km east of Pretoria. Eersterust is a historically underserved and low-income community, making it an appropriate site for investigating perspectives on literacy development in low-resource contexts.

Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised ECD practitioners working in ECD centres in Eersterust. A total of 36 practitioners participated, representing a range of ages, years of experience, and educational backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required participants to be over 18, employed as ECD practitioners in the study area, and proficient in English at a Grade 7 reading level. Formal educational qualifications were not required, reflecting the realities of the sector.

Participants were recruited through purposive convenience sampling. Centre principals were approached for permission, and practitioners were invited via email, WhatsApp, and in-person visits. To mitigate barriers to participation, internet data and devices were provided where necessary.

A total of 39 responses were initially obtained, of which 36 met the inclusion criteria and were analysed. Table 1 depicts the biographical information of the participants. Most participants were female (97.2%, n=35), with only one male participant (2.8%). The participants represented diverse home languages, with Afrikaans (41.7% n=15) and English (38.9% n=14) being the most common. Northern Sotho (5.6% n=2), Zulu (5.6% n=2), Southern Sotho (2.8% n=1), Tsonga (2.8% n=1) and Tswana (2.8% n=1). However, most participants reported teaching primarily in English (94.4% n = 34), with only 5.6% teaching in Afrikaans (n=2). Regarding educational attainment, approximately one-third had completed Grade 12 (30.6% n=11). Six individuals (16.7%) reported having Grade 11 or less as their highest level of education, one (2.8%) had obtained a degree in Teaching, seven (19.4%, n = 7) held certificate qualifications, eight (22.2%) had obtained diplomas, and three participants (8.3%) indicated having been educated in other areas. Approximately 64% (n=23) of the participants reported completing training in teaching, with about one third (30.6%, n = 11) indicating that this training was completed within the past five years.

Varying socioeconomic statuses were identified as a possible confounder and thus were controlled for by only surveying the population within a specific low socioeconomic area.

Table 1. Biographical information

GENDER		
	Frequency	Percentage
Female	35	97.2
Male	1	2.8

LANGUAGE		
	Frequency	Percentage
Afrikaans	15	41.7
English	14	38.9
Northern Sotho	2	5.6
Southern Sotho	1	2.8
Tsonga	1	2.8
Tswana	1	2.8
Zulu	2	5.6
LANGUAGE OF TEACHING		
	Frequency	Percentage
Afrikaans	2	5.6
English	34	94.4
LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 11 or less	6	16.7
Grade 12	11	30.6

Certificate	7	19.4
Diploma	8	22.2
Degree (please specify)	1	2.8
Other:	3	8.3
QUALIFICATION OF TEACHING		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	23	63.9
No	13	36.1
WHEN TRAINING WAS COMPLETED		
	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 years ago.	11	30.6
5-9 years ago.	5	13.9
10-14 years ago.	5	13.9
15-19 years ago.	2	5.6
Missing	13	36.1

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured electronic questionnaire, adapted from Smit et al. (2020) and Sandvik et al. (2014) to ensure contextual relevance. The questionnaire was hosted on the Qualtrics

platform, which enabled efficient administration and enhanced anonymity, thereby reducing social desirability bias. The instrument consisted of four sections:

- **Section A: Demographics** (e.g., age, gender, years of experience, home language, teaching language).
- **Section B: Beliefs** (48 items on practitioners' role in emergent literacy, the role of preschools, and alignment with current research). Items were rated on a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree).
- **Section C: Practices** (46 items on shared reading, literacy in play, print awareness, letter knowledge, PA, and early reading/writing). Items were rated on a six-point frequency scale (1 = never to 6 = always).
- **Section D: Time Spent** (9 items estimating daily minutes allocated to literacy activities).

Across sections B-D, items were grouped into nine constructs: Practitioner role, role in preschool, consistency with research, shared book reading, book and print concepts, literacy in play, PA, letter knowledge and emerging reading/writing.

Reliability and Validity

The survey comprised 28 items on practitioner beliefs (rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from *1 = Strongly disagree* to *6 = Strongly agree*) and 38 on practitioner practices (rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from *1 = Never* to *6 = Always*). Since both scales ranged from 1 to 6, the midpoint was 3.5, with values above 3.5 indicating agreement or frequent practice and below 3.5 indicating disagreement or infrequent practice.

Reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency across all nine constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.6 and most above 0.9. While a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 is widely accepted as the minimum threshold for internal consistency, some scholars consider values as low as 0.60 acceptable (Bhamjee et al., 2022, citing sources from 2008 to 2021 to support this view). This suggests that the items within each construct consistently measured the same underlying dimension. Construct validity was supported through inter-item correlations and factor grouping, which showed that items clustered in line with the constructs (Piedmont, 2014). These results indicate that the instrument was reliable and valid for use with ECD practitioners in this context.

Reliability was enhanced through consistent administration of the online questionnaire, validated instruments adapted for the South African context, and pilot testing by three experienced ECD practitioners for feasibility. The pilot study indicated that the questionnaire was clear, culturally relevant, and suitable for the target reading level (Grade 7). Content and construct validity were

ensured by aligning items with established emergent literacy literature and by adapting language for clarity and cultural appropriateness.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 30). Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarise demographic information and provide an overview of participants' characteristics. For Likert-scale responses measuring beliefs and practices, both measures of central tendency (mean [M] and median [Mdn]) and variability (standard deviation [SD] and interquartile range [IQR]) were reported. Including the Mdn and IQR alongside the M and SD provided a more accurate representation of ordinal data, which should not be treated as strictly continuous (Brink, Van der Walt, & Van Rensburg, 2018).

In addition to descriptive analyses, exploratory Spearman correlations were conducted to examine associations between demographic variables (qualifications, years of experience) and practitioners' beliefs and practices.

Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is suitable for smaller samples (Field, 2018). The analysis showed that the continuous variable (teaching experience in years) and all nine constructs had p-values below 0.05, indicating significant deviations from normality. Therefore, the data were treated as non-normally distributed, and nonparametric methods were chosen for the inferential analyses.

Responses to open-ended questions were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility and suitability for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative survey data. Coding was conducted inductively, with two researchers independently reviewing responses, generating initial codes, and grouping these into broader themes. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, ensuring the coding process remained rigorous and transparent.

Finally, integrating quantitative results and qualitative findings was achieved through triangulation, comparing statistical trends with the emergent qualitative themes. This allowed for the identification of areas of convergence (where practitioner beliefs and practices aligned with statistical patterns) and divergence (where quantitative trends and qualitative insights differed), thereby enriching the interpretation of results and providing a more nuanced understanding of ECD practitioners' perspectives on emergent literacy.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (SLPA2025/10). Informed consent was secured electronically before participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by coding responses and storing data securely in the institutional repository for 10 years. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation or skip questions without penalty.

3. Results

Since a six-point Likert scale was used for the questionnaire (with response options ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree*, or 1 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*), the midpoint was 3.5. A mean or median score above 3.5, therefore, suggests that participants tended to agree with the statement or reported frequent engagement in the practice. In contrast, a score below 3.5 indicates disagreement or infrequent practice. Reporting both the median (Mdn) and interquartile range (IQR) provides a comprehensive summary of central tendency and variability for ordinal data.

Table 2 presents the construct-level descriptive statistics for practitioners' beliefs and practices. Across all constructs, medians were above the midpoint, indicating that participants generally endorsed their literacy role and reported frequent engagement in supportive practices. The following subsections present item-level findings, qualitative themes, and exploratory correlations, organised by study aim.

Table 2. Construct-level descriptive statistics of ECD practitioners' beliefs and practices (n = 36)

Beliefs		
Construct	Median (Mdn)	Interquartile Range (IQR)
Practitioner role	5.15	0.92
Role in preschool	5.00	0.63
Consistency with research	5.00	0.57
Practices		
Construct	Median (Mdn)	Interquartile Range (IQR)
Shared book reading	5.27	1.27
Book and print concepts	5.00	1.75
Literacy in play	5.00	2.50
Phonological awareness	5.14	2.00
Letter knowledge	5.20	2.00
Emerging reading/writing	5.20	1.80

Practitioner Beliefs About Their Role in Promoting Emergent Literacy

Practitioners strongly endorsed their role in supporting emergent literacy. At the construct level, *ECD practitioner role* (Mdn = 5.15, IQR = 0.92), *Role in preschool* (Mdn = 5.00, IQR = 0.63), and *Consistency with research* (Mdn = 5.00, IQR = 0.57) all scored well above the midpoint, indicating strong agreement across the group.

Item-level findings reflected this trend. For example, 86.1% (n = 31) agreed it was their role to help children learn letter sounds, 88.9% (n = 32) agreed they should engage children in literacy activities, and 94.5% (n = 34) endorsed the importance of providing a literacy-rich environment. Items such as daily reading aloud and assessing risk of reading difficulties showed greater variability, with medians around 5.0 and wider IQRs. Table 3 depicts these results.

Table 3. Practitioner beliefs about their role in emergent literacy (n = 36)

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Slightly Disagree		Slightly Agree		Agree		Strongly Agree		MdN & IQR	
Item	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Mdn	IQR
It is my role to help children learn the sounds that letters make.	3	8.3	-	-	2	5.6	-	-	12	33.3	19	52.8	6	1
It is my role to engage children in literacy-related activities.	2	5.6	-	-	1	2.8	1	2.8	17	47.2	15	41.7	6	1
It is my role to familiarise children with letters.	2	5.6	-	-	1	2.8	1	2.8	17	47.2	15	41.7	6	1
It is my role to suggest literacy activities in play.	3	8.3	-	-	1	2.8	3	8.3	19	52.8	10	27.8	-	-
It is my role to assess if a child is at risk of reading difficulties.	3	8.3	-	-	1	2.8	1	2.8	16	44.4	15	41.7	5	1
It is my role to encourage parents to read with their children.	3	8.3	-	-	1	2.8	-	-	15	41.7	17	47.2	6	1

It is my role to help children learn to write their names.	3	8.3	2	5.6	2	5.6	2	5.6	14	38.9	13	36.1	5	2
It is my role to suggest activities that help children learn about literacy.	2	5.6	1	2.8	2	5.6	-	-	19	52.8	12	33.3	-	-
It is my role to help children learn the alphabet.	3	8.3	-	-	1	2.8	3	8.3	14	38.9	15	41.7	-	-
It is my role to help children prepare to read and write.	2	5.6	-	-	1	2.8	3	8.3	18	50.0	12	33.3	-	-
It is my role to initiate literacy-related activities.	2	5.6	1	2.8	1	2.8	1	2.8	20	55.6	11	30.6	-	-
It is my role to read to children in preschool every day.	2	5.6	-	-	2	5.6	2	5.6	17	47.2	13	36.1	-	-
It is my role to inspire children to want to learn to read.	2	5.6	-	-	1	2.8	2	5.6	16	44.4	15	41.7	-	-
It is important that children are read to every day in preschool.	2	5.6	2	5.6	-	-	2	5.6	16	44.4	14	38.9	-	-

It is important to have a structured teaching programme for emergent literacy.	2	5.6	-	-	-	-	2	5.6	23	63.9	9	25.0	-	-
It is important for children to learn how to use books in preschool.	1	2.8	-	-	-	-	1	2.8	22	61.1	12	33.3	-	-
It is important to provide children with a literacy-rich environment.	2	5.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	63.9	11	30.6	-	-
It is important to have a structured early literacy programme.	1	2.8	-	-	-	-	1	2.8	26	72.2	8	22.2	-	-
It is important for children to learn how print works.	2	5.6	-	-	1	2.8	2	5.6	19	52.8	12	33.3	-	-
It is important for children to learn the sounds letters make.	2	5.6	-	-	-	-	1	2.8	19	52.8	14	38.9	-	-
It is important for children to learn the alphabet.	2	5.6	1	2.8	1	2.8	2	5.6	17	47.2	12	33.3	-	-
Knowledge about books and print works is an indicator of success.	2	5.6	-	-	-	-	3	8.3	24	66.7	7	19.4	-	-

Children who enter school recognising letters learn easier.	3	8.3	-	-	1	2.8	-	-	21	58.3	11	30.6	-	-
Children's vocabulary size is an indicator of later reading success.	2	5.6	1	2.8	-	-	2	5.6	21	58.3	10	27.8	-	-
Early literacy skills children learn in preschool affects later learning.	2	5.6	2	5.6	-	-	1	2.8	19	52.8	12	33.3	-	-
Children who enter school with sound awareness learn to read easier.	1	2.8	1	2.8	-	-	2	5.6	18	50.0	14	38.9	-	-
Children's language skills are indicators of later reading success.	2	5.6	1	2.8	2	5.6	3	8.3	18	50.0	10	27.8	-	-
Literacy used in play contributes to literacy development.	2	5.6	-	-	-	-	1	2.8	23	63.9	10	27.8	-	-
Overall construct score	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.15	0.92

Qualitative data echoed these findings as can be seen in Table 6. The theme *Practitioner Beliefs About Their Role* highlighted a strong sense of responsibility, but also feelings of under-preparedness and systemic constraints. For example, one participant noted *"not having enough resources"*, while another requested *"more courses to help with [teaching] reading and writing."* A second theme, *Role of Caregivers*, emphasised the need for stronger parental involvement: *"Having parents help us as teachers more by doing that extra time with the children at home."*

Correlations

A nonparametric Spearman correlation was used to examine the association between the highest level of education (ordinal) and the factors/constructs (continuous). The results indicated that none of the correlations were statistically significant, since all p-values were less than 0,05. This suggests that the highest level of education was not significantly associated with any of the factors/constructs being investigated.

Classroom Practices Supporting Emergent Literacy

Practitioners reported frequent use of classroom practices. At the construct level, all six practice domains scored above the midpoint, including *Shared book reading* (Mdn = 5.27, IQR = 1.27), *Book and print concepts* (Mdn = 5.00, IQR = 1.75), *Literacy in play* (Mdn = 5.00, IQR = 2.50), *Phonological awareness* (Mdn = 5.14, IQR = 2.00), *Letter knowledge* (Mdn = 5.20, IQR = 2.00), and *Emerging reading/writing* (Mdn = 5.20, IQR = 1.80).

Item-level frequencies illustrated these practices. All practitioners (100%, n = 36) reported reading aloud daily, with the majority spending 11–15 minutes. Similarly, 72.2% (n = 26) reported modelling print directionality, 83.3% (n = 30) introduced books by referencing the title, author, and illustrator, and 80.6% (n = 29) frequently helped children write their names. Table 4 depicts these results.

Table 4. Classroom practices supporting emergent literacy (n = 36)

CLASSROOM PRACTICES														
	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Very Often		Always		MdN & IQR	
Item	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Mdn	IQR
Demonstrate how print works.	0	0.0	1	2.8	6	16.7	2	5.6	7	19.4	19	52.8	5.00	1.75
Introduce books by talking about the title, author and illustrator.	1	2.8	1	2.8	6	16.7	3	8.3	4	11.1	20	55.6	5.27	1.27
Demonstrate how books work.	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	16.7	4	11.1	5	13.9	20	55.6	5.00	1.75
Write menus or grocery lists during play.	1	2.8	5	13.9	6	16.7	2	5.6	6	16.7	15	41.7	5.00	2.50
Read books with rhyming texts.	1	2.8	0	0.0	11	30.6	4	11.1	6	16.7	13	36.1	5.14	2.00
Demonstrate the sounds letters make.	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.6	7	19.4	5	13.9	21	58.3	5.20	2.00
Help children sound out words.	0	0.0	2	5.6	1	2.8	8	22.2	4	11.1	20	55.6	5.20	1.80
Demonstrate rhyming word endings.	0	0.0	3	8.3	4	11.1	3	8.3	5	13.9	20	55.6	5.14	2.00

Demonstrate word patterns.	0	0.0	1	2.8	7	19.4	4	11.1	4	11.1	19	52.8	5.14	2.00
Demonstrate words starting with the same sound.	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	11.1	4	11.1	5	13.9	22	61.1	5.20	2.00
Help children become familiar with the alphabet.	0	0.0	1	2.8	4	11.1	7	19.4	23	63.9	23	63.9	5.20	2.00
Teach upper- vs lower-case letters.	2	5.6	3	8.3	7	19.4	5	13.9	4	11.1	14	38.9	5.20	2.00
Listen while children read or pretend-read.	0	0.0	2	5.6	2	5.6	5	13.9	4	11.1	22	61.1	5.20	1.80
Help children read simple words.	0	0.0	3	8.3	1	2.8	4	11.1	6	16.7	21	58.3	5.20	1.80
Help children write their own names.	0	0.0	1	2.8	6	16.7	4	11.1	3	8.3	21	58.3	5.20	1.80
Overall construct scores	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.20	2.00

TIME SPENT PROMOTING EMERGENT LITERACY

	0 minutes		**1-5 minutes**		**6-10 minutes**		**11-15 minutes**		**16-19 minutes**		**20+ minutes**	
Item	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Read aloud to children in preschool.	0	0	6	16,7	7	19,4	13	36,1	3	8,3	5	13,9

Write down the stories that children tell and read them back.	3	8,3	9	25,0	10	27,8	4	11,1	3	8,3	5	13,9
Involved with reading and writing in play (i.e. helping to write shopping lists, menus, prescriptions, receipts, etc.).	2	5,6	4	11,1	9	25,0	10	27,8	4	11,1	5	13,9
Help children learn letters.	0	0	1	2,8	8	22,2	12	33,3	3	8,3	10	27,8
Talk about the relationship between letters and sounds.	1	2,8	3	8,3	7	19,4	14	38,9	2	5,6	7	19,4
Point out sound patterns in words (i.e. ball, balloon).	1	2,8	6	16,7	9	25,0	10	27,8	2	5,6	6	16,7
Help children write.	0	0	5	13,9	3	8,3	11	30,6	3	8,3	12	33,3
Do alphabet activities with children (i.e. play with letter blocks, magnets, puzzles, etc.).	0	0	4	11,1	4	11,1	11	30,6	4	11,1	11	30,6
Listen to children read or pretend to read aloud.	0	0	4	11,1	8	22,2	5	13,9	5	13,9	12	33,3

Time Devoted to Literacy Activities

Practitioners reported dedicating daily time to literacy-supportive activities, though time allocations varied. All participants (100%) read aloud daily, with the largest group (36.1%, n = 13) reading for 11–15 minutes, and 13.9% (n = 5) reading for more than 20 minutes. Writing support was less frequent: only 33.3% (n = 12) reported spending 20 minutes or more helping children write, while 27.8% (n = 10) spent 6–10 minutes writing down children's stories. Alphabet activities (e.g., puzzles, blocks, magnet letters) were also common, with 30.6% (n = 11) engaging for 11–15 minutes daily, and 19.4% (n = 7) for more than 20 minutes.

Qualitative themes supported these findings. The theme *Barriers to Emergent Literacy Support* described limited resources, learner difficulties, and behavioural challenges. As one participant explained: *"Some children don't focus for long, so we have to take more time with them."* The second theme, *Diversity in the Classroom*, highlighted language and cultural barriers: *"Children not talking the same language."* Qualitative comments highlighted both committed ECD practitioners and limitations. For example, one practitioner explained: *"We try to read every day, but sometimes we don't have enough books to go around."*

Correlations

The participants reported a wide range of teaching experience from 1 to 23 years. The largest group of ECD practitioners had 3 years of experience (13,9%, n=5). This distribution reflects a sample that includes educators in the early stages of their careers, as well as those with more experience, such as one participant with 23 years of experience. The variation in years of teaching experience facilitates analyses that consider the potential influence of expertise on emergent literacy practices across different career stages. Spearman correlations were conducted to examine whether the demographic variables, years of experience and highest level of education, were associated with reported practices. No significant associations were found for the level of education. However, years of experience showed positive correlations with the constructs of "Quality of shared book reading" ($r = 0{,}346$, $p = 0{,}042$) and "Concepts of literacy in play" ($r = 0{,}394$, $p = 0{,}019$), both of which reached statistical significance. This suggests that more experienced practitioners tend to facilitate shared book reading and literacy in play more frequently. No significant associations were found between the years of experience and the other factors ($p > 0{,}05$). As with the Practitioner Beliefs About Their Role in Promoting Emergent Literacy, these results must be considered preliminary, given the limited sample size and underpowered test.

Strategies and Approaches Used to Foster Emergent Literacy Skills

Practitioners frequently used interactive strategies. Item-level results showed that 77.8% (n = 28) reported naming objects in pictures, 72.2% (n = 26) discussed illustrations, and 88.9% (n = 32) used "wh-" questions during reading. In addition, 86.1% (n = 31) encouraged children to retell stories, while 97.2% (n = 35) praised children's early reading and writing attempts. Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Strategies and approaches used to foster early literacy skills (n = 36)

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Very Often		Always		MdN & IQR	
Item	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Mdn	IQR
Name things in pictures while I read aloud.	1	2.8	0	0.0	6	16.7	6	16.7	7	19.4	15	41.7	5.20	1.80
Spend time talking about the pictures in books.	0	0.0	1	2.8	4	11.1	4	11.1	9	25.0	17	47.2	5.20	1.80
Talk about how the pictures relate to the text.	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	11.1	3	8.3	7	19.4	21	58.3	5.27	1.80
Ask children to relate their own experiences to stories.	1	2.8	1	2.8	3	8.3	4	11.1	6	16.7	20	55.6	5.20	1.80
Ask children ‘wh-’ questions while reading.	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	8.3	1	2.8	7	19.4	24	66.7	5.27	1.80
Ask children open-ended questions while reading.	1	2.8	0	0.0	5	13.9	1	2.8	6	16.7	22	61.1	5.20	1.80
Allow children to interrupt with comments/questions.	2	5.6	1	2.8	10	27.8	2	5.6	8	22.2	12	33.3	5.00	2.00

Spend as much time talking about the book as reading it.	1	2.8	1	2.8	4	11.1	4	11.1	10	27.8	15	41.7	5.20	1.80
Ask children to guess what happens next in stories.	2	5.6	0	0.0	5	13.9	2	5.6	5	13.9	21	58.3	5.27	1.80
Explain unfamiliar words as I read.	0	0.0	1	2.8	4	11.1	2	5.6	5	13.9	23	63.9	5.27	1.80
Use character voices while reading aloud.	0	0.0	1	2.8	4	11.1	6	16.7	8	22.2	16	44.4	5.14	2.00
Talk about the feelings stories convey.	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.6	6	16.7	4	11.1	23	63.9	5.20	1.80
Read different types of books.	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	19.4	5	13.9	8	22.2	15	41.7	5.20	1.80
Choose books related to what we are doing in preschool.	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	11.1	6	16.7	6	16.7	19	52.8	5.20	1.80
Ask children to retell familiar stories.	0	0.0	1	2.8	3	8.3	5	13.9	3	8.3	23	63.9	5.27	1.80
Use my finger to follow words as I read aloud.	0	0.0	3	8.3	5	13.9	5	13.9	3	8.3	19	52.8	5.20	1.80
Helped write menus when children played in restaurants/shops.	1	2.8	5	13.9	6	16.7	2	5.6	6	16.7	15	41.7	5.00	2.50
Point out rhyming patterns when I read stories.	1	2.8	1	2.8	8	22.2	6	16.7	5	13.9	14	38.9	5.14	2.00
Use alphabet books with children.	1	2.8	2	5.6	4	11.1	3	8.3	5	13.9	20	55.6	5.20	2.00

Teach children the letters in their names.	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.8	5	13.9	7	19.4	22	61.1	5.27	1.80
Help children write the letters of the alphabet.	1	2.8	1	2.8	2	5.6	5	13.9	5	13.9	21	58.3	5.20	2.00
Please write down the stories children tell and read them back.	7	19.4	3	8.3	5	13.9	3	8.3	6	16.7	11	30.6	5.00	2.00
Praise children for their attempts at reading and writing.	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.6	3	8.3	4	11.1	26	72.2	5.25	1.70
Overall construct scores	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.20	1.80

Qualitative themes provided further insights. *Practices and Strategies* included oral/auditory methods, multisensory activities, and vocabulary building: *"Kicking a ball while sounding a word."* A second theme, *Aspirations and Suggestions for Improvement*, reflected practitioners' desire for more resources and training: *"Each child would have their own [book] as I read for them."* Table 7 reflects this.

Table 6. Qualitative Theme Analysis

	Theme	Subtheme	Example of Participants' Statements
Aim 1: Practitioner Beliefs About Their Role in the Development of Emergent Literacy Skills	Practitioner Beliefs About Their Role in the Development of Emergent Literacy Skills	Role identity and motivation, Feelings of unpreparedness, Systemic limitations	(P1) "Not having enough resources" in the classroom (P22) Requested "More courses to help with [teaching] reading and writing".
	Role of Caregivers in Emergent Literacy Development	Lack of involvement from caregivers Desired collaboration between ECD practitioners and caregivers.	(P6) "Having parents help us as teachers more by doing that extra time with the children at home" (P34) "Parents involvement so they can participate all time and understand our way of teaching"
Aim 2: The practices used and time spent by ECD practitioners in promoting emergent literacy practices.	Barriers to Emergent Literacy Support in Low-Resource Settings	Resource and environmental barriers Developmental and behavioural barriers Individual learner differences	(P24) "Not enough resources" (P36) "Children that has very low self-confidence" (P10) "Some children don't focus for long so we have take more time with them" (P21) "The challenges we face is that there are some kids who has the

			difficulties in understanding and manipulating sounds in words"
	Diversity in the Classroom	Language barriers Cultural differences	(P37) "Different home language" (P15) "Language barriers" (P38) "[Difficulty] understanding different cultures" (P4) "Children not talking the same language"
Aim 3: Strategies and approaches used by ECD practitioners to foster emergent literacy skills	Practices and Strategies for Promoting Emergent Literacy	Oral and auditory practices Multisensory and physical activities PA and vocabulary building	(P9) "Kicking a ball while sounding a word" (P36) "Songs whereby I explain the words and the actions to the kids and we sing with actions always until they are able to do it on their own." (P12) "I read their favourite story then they imitate characters in the story."
	Aspirations and Suggestions for Improvement	Having more resources Better training and support More engaging curriculums and dynamic assessments	(P33) "By getting more resources" such as: (P12) "Each child would have their own [book] as I read for them." (P37) "More information and training [in emergent literacy education]" (P24) "I'd change the curriculum" and (P20) "Regular Assessments to monitor learners progress."

4. Discussion

The study provides insight into the perspectives of ECD practitioners in Eersterust, a low-resource South African community, by examining their beliefs, practices, strategies, and the time devoted to

emergent literacy. Overall, findings suggest that practitioners strongly endorsed their role in supporting emergent literacy and actively engaged children in literacy activities such as shared book reading, often using strategies such as 'naming things' as they read aloud. However, variability was evident in the extent of support for writing and the integration of literacy within play activities. Qualitative data further revealed systemic challenges, including limited resources, the complexities of a multilingual context, and ECD practitioners' desires for additional resources, training, and caregiver involvement.

Practitioner Beliefs About Their Role in the Development of Emergent Literacy Skills.

ECD practitioners strongly endorsed their role in supporting emergent literacy, echoing findings of Sandvik et al. (2014), who reported positive beliefs among Norwegian ECD practitioners about their role in fostering emergent literacy skills. In both contexts, practitioners valued the creation of literacy-rich environments. However, variability was observed in how specific practices were implemented, such as daily reading aloud and identifying reading difficulties. In the South African low-resource context, strong role identity appeared to co-exist with feelings of underpreparednes – possibly related to limited formal qualifications and scarce access to adequate training (Moonsamy & Carolus, 2019; Chikwanda et al., 2022). Additionally, ECD practitioners described systemic constraints, particularly a lack of resources, which may limit their ability to enact their intentions. Further thematic analysis indicated that ECD practitioners strongly desired greater caregiver involvement. This finding aligns with Kim and Riley (2021), who emphasise the importance of collaboration between caregivers and ECD practitioners to nurture emergent literacy. These findings suggest a need for practical, resource-sensitive professional development that capitalises on ECD practitioners' strong role endorsement while building specific skills to combat their sense of underpreparedness and strengthen caregiver involvement.

The practices and time ECD practitioners spend promoting early literacy skills.

The six constructs measuring practices and time spent promoting emergent literacy scored above the midpoint, indicating frequent engagement. Notably, all participants reported reading aloud for 11-15 minutes daily. According to Paulson & Moats (2018), interactive read-aloud sessions in preschool have been linked to increased PA and vocabulary growth, which indicates consistent practices with current literature. There is limited literature on the minimum estimated time one should spend on shared book reading in preschool; however, a study by Brown et al. (2021) indicated that 11 minutes or more of parent-child shared book reading leads to stronger academic skills in the long term. This reinforces the need expressed by ECD practitioners for parental involvement. Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2015) and Zucker et al. (2013) indicates that children develop stronger literacy skills when exposed to books, stories, paper, writing materials, and interactions with adults, resulting in rich oral language

experiences, which fosters connections between spoken and written language, which are crucial for later reading and writing proficiency (Goldstein et al., 2017). Thus, increased exposure time is associated with stronger literacy outcomes. While quantitative data reflect practitioners' commitment to these practices, contextual imitations, – particularly inadequate access to books and educational resources – remain a barrier, as reported by the ECD practitioners and in previous studies (Chikwanda et al., 2022; Visser et al., 2021). These limitations impact children's literacy development and readiness, as many enter formal schooling without the emergent literacy skills necessary to succeed (Salas & Pascual, 2023). In addition, practitioners reported that children's engagement and behaviour influenced activity duration and frequency. Exploratory correlations revealed a significant association between practitioners' years of experience, the quality of shared book reading, and literacy integration in play. Dramatic play, in which children converse with peers and teachers, often reflects emergent literacy behaviours (Terrell & Watson, 2018). No other significant associations emerged between constructs and demographic variables. This suggests that experience may enhance practitioners' ability to embed literacy naturally within play and interactive reading contexts, highlighting the value of sustained professional exposure and reflective practice in strengthening emergent literacy support.

Strategies and approaches used by ECD practitioners to foster emergent literacy skills.

Despite contextual barriers and feelings of unpreparedness, which highlight the need for resource-sensitive professional development, practitioners actively engaged in interactive strategies. They frequently praised children's early attempts at reading and writing, encouraged story retelling, and asked 'wh–' questions. This aligns with international evidence highlighting the key role of dialogic reading and interactive practices to support vocabulary, PA, and comprehension development (Zucker et al., 2013; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). The array of practices and strategies indicates the resilience of ECD practitioners in adopting best practices despite significant challenges. The strategies and approaches mentioned by practitioners resonate with the principles of more structured literacy curricula that integrate interactive practices with developmentally appropriate, play-based learning, as advocated in internationally recognised frameworks such as Montessori, High Scope, and Reggio Emilia (Foorman et al., 2016; Kostelnik et al., 2016; Epstein & Hohmann, 2019), however, the lack of consistent curricular framework and scarce resources in the South African context limit successful application.

Limitations

Results should be interpreted cautiously, as the sample size (n = 36) was underpowered. A power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that 84 responses would be required to achieve sufficient power (0.8) to detect a medium effect at $p < .05$. Consequently, the findings are tentative. It should be

regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. Studies that rely on convenience and purposive samples may only be generalised to the specific subpopulation from which the sample was drawn (Andrade, 2021); therefore, the present findings may not extend beyond the characteristics of the participants included in this study. Furthermore, using self-report measures introduces the potential for social desirability bias, and the reliance on a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences. Given this, future studies should aim to recruit larger samples to ensure adequate statistical power and enhance the results' generalisability and robustness.

Conclusion

This study shows that ECD practitioners in an underserved South African community strongly endorse their role in promoting emergent literacy. They demonstrated this by engaging in frequent practices such as shared book reading and interactive strategies that support vocabulary, PA and comprehension. However, variability in the integration of writing and play-based literacy activities and systemic barriers such as limited resources, multilingual complexities, and feelings of under preparedness constrain their ability to carry out their intentions. ECD practitioners also desired greater caregiver involvement, aligning with evidence that partnership between caregivers and ECD practitioners is essential to children's literacy development. Overall, findings underscore the importance of addressing these barriers through supporting resource-sensitive professional development or training and caregiver collaboration. Strengthening these supports may assist ECD practitioners in building on their strong role endorsement and enhance emergent literacy outcomes for children in underserved South African Communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho

Humanities 100. Since 1919

Department of Speech- Language Pathology and Audiology

20 February 2025

Dear Researchers,

Project:	Emergent Literacy Beliefs and Practices of Early Childhood Development Practitioners in Low-Resource Communities
Researchers:	Megan Pike (u22541030) Loren Saint (u22497219) Cherize Nieuwenhuis (u21487244) Abbigail Daves (u22515284)
Supervisors:	Prof Salomé Geersema, Prof Mia Le Roux , Dr Carmen Milton
Department:	Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology
Reference Number:	SLPA2025/10

Thank you for the application submitted to the Research Committee of the Department of Speech-Pathology and Audiology, Faculty of Humanities. We have the pleasure of informing you that the above application was approved on 20 February 2025.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Lidia Pottas
Chair: Departmental Research Committee

Prof J van der Linde
HEAD: DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY AND AUDIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho

Informed consent:

This form is to gain informed consent from Early Childhood Practitioners currently in the year 2025, to participate in a research study pertaining to *Emergent Literacy Beliefs and Practices of Early Childhood Development Practitioners in Low-Resource Communities*.

Dear participant

Should you wish to participate, and following consultation of the infographic, please sign in understanding of the following.

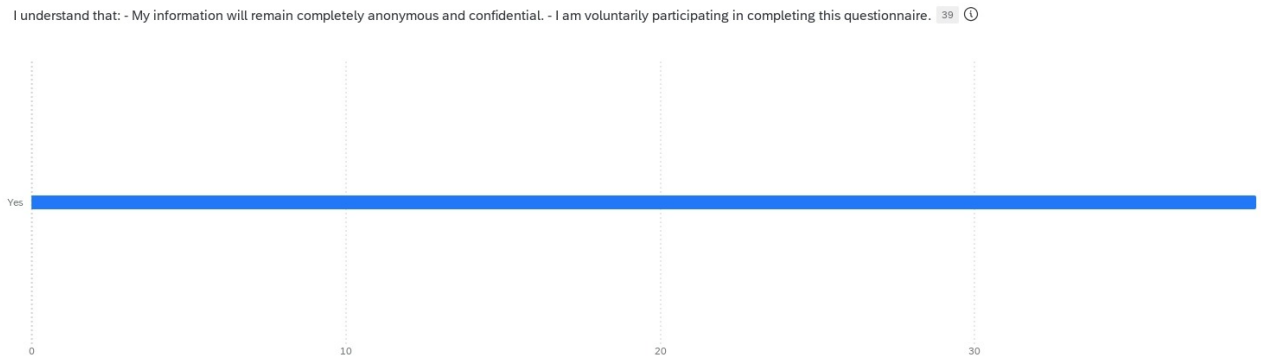
- I hereby consent to participate in the study *Emergent Literacy Beliefs and Practices of Early Childhood Development Practitioners in Low-Resource Communities*
- I hereby confirm that I understand the process of this study, and have read and understood the information leaflet, asking questions if necessary.
- I am aware of how the study's data will be obtained, stored, and reported, and give consent for my information to be anonymised and published in the final research dissertation.
- I am aware that my information will remain confidential.

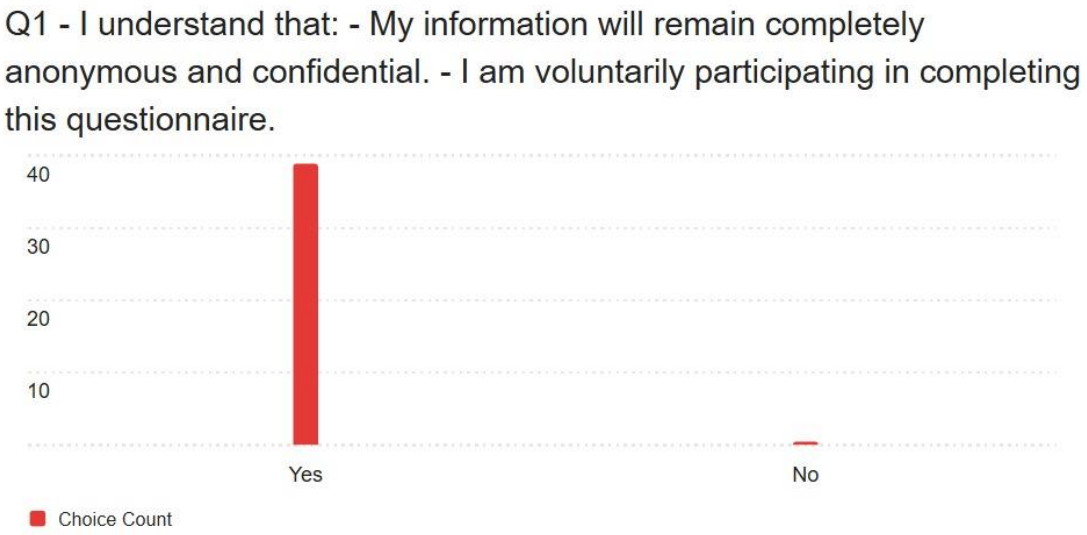
_____ _____

Sign and/or initial Date

Should you have any further questions, feel free to contact Megan Pike at u22541030@tuks.co.za or our supervisor Dr Carmen Milton at carmen.milton@up.ac.za

Appendix C: Proof Of Informed Consent





Appendix D: Questionnaire

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Informed Consent

I understand that:
- My information will remain completely anonymous and confidential.
- I am voluntarily participating in completing this questionnaire.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

SECTION A: Background Information

My age (in years) is:

My gender is:

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other (please specify)

For how many years have you worked as an educator?

My home language is

- ○ Afrikaans
- ○ English

- ○ Ndebele
- ○ Northern Sotho
- ○ South African Sign Language
- ○ Southern Sotho
- ○ Swati
- ○ Tsonga
- ○ Tswana
- ○ Venda
- ○ Xhosa
- ○ Zulu

My language of teaching is:

- ○ Afrikaans
- ○ English
- ○ Ndebele
- ○ Northern Sotho
- ○ South African Sign Language
- ○ Southern Sotho
- ○ Swati

- ○ Tsonga
- ○ Tswana
- ○ Venda
- ○ Xhosa
- ○ Zulu

My highest level of education is:

- ○ Grade 11 or less
- ○ Grade 12
- ○ Certificate
- ○ Diploma
- ○ _____ Degree (please specify)
- ○ Other:

I teach children who are_ _ _ _ _ _ old: (please check all that apply)

- [ ] 0-2 years
- [ ] 3-4 years
- [ ] 4-5 years
- [ ] Grade R (age 5 turning 6, or 6 turning 7)

Have you completed formal training to teach?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If you answered yes to the above question, please answer the following:

When did you complete your training?

- ○ Less than 5 years ago.
- ○ 5-9 years ago.
- ○ 10-14 years ago.
- ○ 15-19 years ago.

- ○ 20-24 years ago.
- ○ 25 or more years ago.
- ○ Not applicable

I would like support to help teach emergent literacy (reading and writing) to the children in my class

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If you answered yes to the above question, please answer the following:

I need support in the following areas related to emergent literacy (you can select more than one)

- [ ] Information on how children develop reading and writing skills.
- [ ] Information on early childhood education policies that support literacy development.

- [ ] Information on teaching skills specifically for promoting early reading and writing skills.
- [ ] Information on creating a classroom environment that fosters early reading and writing skills.
- [ ] Information on strategies for supporting children with language difficulties in developing early reading and writing skills.
- [ ] Other – please specify:
- [ ] Not applicable

SECTION B: OPTIONAL OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

What is the biggest challenge you face in supporting early literacy?

Can you describe one real-life activity or strategy you find most

effective for promoting emergent literacy in your classroom?

If you could change one thing in your preschool to better support children's literacy, what would it be?

SECTION C: ROLE OF ECD PRACTITIONERSse

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement pertaining to the role of the ECD practitioner.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is my role to help children learn the sounds that letters make.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to engage children in literacy-related activities.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to familiarize children with letters.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to suggest literacy activities in play (i.e. help write shopping lists for children playing shop).	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to assess if a child is at risk of reading difficulties.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to encourage parents to read with their children.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to help children learn to write their names.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is my role to suggest activities that help children learn about literacy.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to help children learn the alphabet.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to help children prepare to read and write.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to initiate literacy-related activities.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to read to children in preschool every day.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is my role to inspire children to want to learn to read.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement

pertaining to the role of the ECD practitioner in preschool.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	SStrongly agree
It is important that children are read to every day in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to have a structured teaching programme for emergent literacy skills in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important for children to learn how to use books in preschool (i.e. hold books and turn pages correctly).	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to provide children with a literacy-rich environment in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to have structured an early literacy programme in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	SStrongly agree
It is important for children to learn how print works in preschool (i.e. words are read from left to right, up to down).	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important for children to learn the sounds letters make in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important for children to learn the alphabet in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to consistency with current research.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Children's knowledge about books and how print works is an indicator of later reading success.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Children who enter school able to recognize the letters of the alphabet learn to read more easily.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Children's vocabulary size is an indicator of later reading success.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The early literacy skills children learn in preschool affects how they learn when they start school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Children who enter school with sound awareness skills learn to read more easily.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Children's language skills are indicators of later reading success.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Literacy used in play contributes to children's literacy development.	○	○	○	○	○	○

SECTION D

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to quality of shared book reading.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I name things in pictures while I read aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I spend time talking about the pictures in books.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I talk about how the pictures relate to the text.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I ask children to relate their own experiences to the stories I read.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I ask children 'wh-' questions while reading (i.e. who, what, where, why).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I ask children open-ended questions while I am reading aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I allow children to interrupt with comments and questions while I read aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I spend as much time talking about the book I am reading as reading it.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I ask children to guess what happens next in stories.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I explain unfamiliar words as I read.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I use character voices while I read aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I talk about the feelings stories convey.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I read different types of books (i.e. rhyming, fiction, non-fiction, alphabet).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I choose books related to what we are doing in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I ask children to retell familiar stories.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to concepts of books and print.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I demonstrate how print works (i.e. words are read left to right, up to down, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I introduce books by talking about the title, author and illustrator.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I demonstrate how books work (i.e. front and back, hold the right way up, turn pages right to left, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to concepts of literacy in play.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I initiate games such as restaurant, shop, school, etc.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I do things like help write menus when children play restaurant, grocery lists when they play shop, etc.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to concepts of phonological awareness.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I read books with rhyming texts.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I demonstrate the sounds letters make.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I help children sound out words (i.e. /buh/ + /oy/ = boy).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I demonstrate how some words end with the same sound (i.e. boy, toy).	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I demonstrate patterns in words (i.e. ball, balloon).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I demonstrate how some words start with the same sound (i.e. boy, ball).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I point out rhyming patterns when I read stories.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to concepts of letter knowledge.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I help children become familiar with the letters of the alphabet.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I use alphabet books with children.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I teach children the letters in their names.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I help children write the letters of the alphabet.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I teach children the difference between upper- and lower-case letters.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to concepts of emerging reading and writing.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I write down the stories children tell and read them back.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I listen while children read or pretend to read aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I praise children for their attempts at reading and writing.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I help children read simple words.	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
I help children write their own names.	○	○	○	○	○	○

SECTION E

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to quantity of time.
*time is minutes per day

	0 minutes	1-5 minutes	6-10 minutes	11-15 minutes	16-19 minutes	20+ minutes
I read aloud to children in preschool.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I write down the stories that children tell and read them back.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am involved with reading and writing in play (i.e. helping to write shopping lists, menus, prescriptions, receipts, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○	○

	0 minutes	1-5 minutes	6-10 minutes	11-15 minutes	16-19 minutes	20+ minutes
I help children learn letters.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I talk about the relationship between letters and sounds.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I point out sound patterns in words (i.e. ball, balloon).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I help children write.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do alphabet activities with children (i.e. play with letter blocks, magnets, puzzles, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○	○
I listen to children read or pretend to read aloud.	○	○	○	○	○	○