

Publication

A qualitative assessment of community acceptability and use of a locally developed children's book to increase shared reading and parent-child interactions in rural Zambia

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INTRODUCTION: Early reading interventions hold promise for increasing language and literacy development in young children and improving caregiver-child interactions. To engage rural caregivers and young children in home reading, Zambian child psychologists and education specialists developed a culturally representative, local language children's book targeted at pre-grade 1 children. **OBJECTIVES:** We qualitatively assessed community acceptability and use of the book distributed to households with young children in two provinces of Zambia. **METHODS:** We conducted 15 focus group discussions (FGDs) with women (n=117) who received the "Zambian folktales adapted stories for young children" book. A codebook was created a priori, based on established themes in the guide; content analysis was conducted in Nvivo v12. Data were interpreted against the Theoretical Framework on Acceptability. **FINDINGS:** Respondents described wide acceptability of the children's book across multiple framework constructs. Respondents believed the book was culturally appropriate for its folktale structure and appreciated the morals and lessons provided by the stories. Respondents described using the book in multiple ways including reading in one-on-one or group settings, asking the child questions about the narrative or pictures, and providing additional commentary on the actions or figures in the pictures. Respondents believed the books were helping children grow their vocabulary and early literacy skills. The book's simple vocabulary facilitated use by less educated caregivers. The primary concern voiced was the ability of low literacy caregivers to utilize the book for reading. **DISCUSSION:** The children's book was widely considered acceptable by rural Zambian communities. It provided a platform for an additional method of caregiver-child interactions in these households for reading, dialogue, and oral storytelling. Shared reading experiences have potentially substantial benefits for the language development and emergent literacy of young children. Programs to develop and deliver culturally acceptable books to households with limited access should be considered by governments and funders.

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