AN OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION:
This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, cited and referenced.

Signature: **Date**: 15/02/2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an outcomes evaluation of the Home-School Partnership (HSP) programme, implemented by Wordworks, an organisation based in the Western Cape Province. The programme aims to improve language and literacy for the children between four and eight years of age. To achieve this, the programme seeks to integrate parents in the process of child learning at home. The programme sensitise parents and make them realise their important role in child development. South Africa's averages of numeracy and literacy test scores range from 30% to 35% as presented in Annual National Assessments (2011) for Grade one to six. The low language and literacy performance in South Africa is one problem that calls for action from different stakeholders.

The implementing organisation train teachers to become facilitators. The facilitators will then cascade the training to parents with children aged four to eight years. This evaluation focused on addressing three evaluation questions:

1. How do teachers (facilitators) perceive the programme to have impacted on students' literacy learning and achievement in and out of school, in terms of participation, confidence and self-esteem?
2. To what extent has the Home-School Partnership programme managed to change parents' attitude towards child learning and improved their involvement in child learning at home?
3. What early indications are there to suggest that the Home-School Partnership programme will be sustainable after Wordworks has fully withdrawn its support?

In this evaluation, a descriptive design was used. The design employed a quantitative approach to address question one as secondary data from 90 feedback reports by teachers were analysed using Microsoft excel. The data to answer the second evaluation question was gathered through interviews with six teachers and six school management members. Data from three focus group discussions with parents was used to address evaluation question three. In analysing the data, thematic analysis was used which involved the processes of open coding in generation of themes.

The results of the study revealed a positive improvement of learners' performance on various indicators that are related to child language and literacy development. Ninety percent of the 90 sampled learners showed a positive change in at least one of the several academic assessment areas. That is, 46% of learners showed some notable improvements in writing, 32% in drawing, 31% in reading and about 30% showed some improvement in vocabulary. However, these results should be interpreted with some degree of caution as the analysis was based on subjective teachers' perceptions. Regardless of the drawbacks of the design and data collection methods, there is a growing amount of evidence from other studies to validate the findings of this study.

There were some positive changes noted in parents particularly their attitude towards child learning. Parents are now more involved in child learning and have gained some important skills to support child development. However, the results need to be taken with caution as they are based on subjective perceptions of parents. There was always an increase in the number of parents who enrolled for the programme each year and more interestingly, men started enrolling for the programme in the last two years. In 2016, a total of 42 men were trained and in 2017, a total of 86 men were trained under HSP. This provides some evidence of the ability of the HSP programme to change parents' attitude towards child learning.

The HSP programme shows some signs of sustainability particularly around environmental support and organisational domains. In this regard, results of the study revealed that the HSP programme has managed to garner support from its operational environment. The programme is particularly applauded by teachers, school leadership and parents, and their appreciationis one of the indicators of sustainability. Under organisational support, the study revealed that theteachers and parents are satisfied with the timely support they are receiving from Wordworks. However, there are some gaps around programme evaluation and funding stability domains. All the schools are still fully receiving financial support from Wordworks to facilitate the HSP programme. Based on the study findings it is prudent that Wordworks prepares schools for continuity in the event that their support is withdrawn and a more robust monitoring and evaluation system needs

to be put in place. It is recommended that the programme documents more success stories to showcase its relevance.

ABBREVIATIONS

HSP – Home-School Partnership

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

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Introduction

According to Geraldine (2014), communication can be considered as one of the fundamental life skills of the 21st century and without these skills learning is compromised and functioning in everyday society is severely challenged. If children cannot say words, they will be more likely to have difficulties in sounding out words for reading and spelling, or in writing them down. If they cannot understand the words they hear, they will struggle to understand what they read (Albino & Berry, 2013). The acquisition of a first language is the most complex skill for children to learn and the learning process needs to be virtually complete by the time a child reaches school age (Geraldine, 2014).

According to Carina (2014), it is an essential right of any child to enjoy freedom to seek, receive and impart information and share views of any kind with people around them. To enable children to enjoy this right, they need to be supported in communication, that is, to initiate interactions with others in order to convey their feelings, needs and wants and get feedback. Literacy is especially important to nurture in children in their early years, when they are most susceptible and most able to grasp complex new ideas and concepts (O'Carroll & Hickman, 2012).

The South African government has made some positive steps and shown willingness to improve literacy levels through literacy and reading campaigns. However, the literacy level among learners is still low (Bharuthram, 2012) and many educators in South Africa believe that, learners do not have well developed reading abilities (Msila, 2014). National averages of numeracy and literacy test scores from 2007 to 2009 range from 30% to 35% (Taylor, 2011). The same score ranges were also recorded in Annual National Assessments (2011). Bharuthram (2012) stressed that, drastic measures have to be employed in a bid to improve literacy and reading levels of learners. According to Diamond & Powell (2008), language and literacy skills at a young age are an essential part of a child's educational success and individual future potential. Reading skills are indispensable to the academic achievement of learners (Rajchert, Zultak & Smulczyk, 2014). However, Wilson et al (2013) state that, this is not always achieved, especially in disadvantaged communities where poverty is one of the major problems that lead to poor

early literacy in children. This is often the case for children from South African families who are exposed to English for the first time during Grade One (Wilson et al., 2013). Hseih, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrosky (2009) stated that, parents in low income households often have limited vocabulary and poor reading ability in English, rendering their efforts to teach their children unsuccessful. Furthermore, in South Africa particularly in poor communities, households are exposed to various risks such as domestic violence and other forms of emotional and physical abuse, which have a negative impact on children depending on their socio-cultural context (Gran, 2010).

The term literacy seems to be easy for everyone to understand but as a concept, the term can be dynamic and complex. It is important to define the term literacy as there are many definitions which have been put forward by different scholars and there are different approaches through which literacy is acquired.

Defining Literacy

Wilson et al. (2013) defined literacy as the collective abilities of word recognition, spelling and writing skills, and language skills such as vocabulary and comprehension. It is important to note that literacy is a collection of two equally important components, that is, reading and writing. There is a general consensus of literacy as being a set of tangible skills, particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing. UNESCO (2006) states that; these skills are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the individual who acquire them.

Diamond et al. (2008) pointed out that there has often been less of an emphasis on the writing element of literacy. However, writing competence especially in young children is essential to promote early childhood literacy. According to Diamond et al (2008), writing competence nurtures the experience of distinguishing different letters, drawing the reader's attention to print and the structure of different letters, as well as the different sounds of letters and combinations. Consequently, writing ability integrates important early literacy skills including letter recognition and phonological awareness, that is, the awareness of different sound structure of words (Diamond et al., 2008). These elements

therefore link writing competency inextricably to the ability to read in early childhood years.

Scholars still fail to reach an agreement on the ideal way of acquiring literacy skills as there are many approaches that have been advocated for in the area of literacy development (Goodman, 1996). The different ways of literacy skills development are summarized into two main categories, that is; the whole language approach and the skills based approach (also known as phonics approach). Phonics advocates for synthetic and analytic methods. According to Leu & Kinzer (1987), with synthetic method, different grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught (e.g $C = /k/$). Once they master this, children are then equipped with skills on how to change sounds into words. However, the adequacy of this approach was challenged by experts like Smith (1973) who suggested that the phonic method at best achieves decoding proficiency. According to Hughes (1986) this has to be a component of reading process and not the starting point. Therefore, there is need for other approaches to compliment the phonics approach. Other approaches like language experience approach are mainly used in-school by teachers and are less relevant to this study as this evaluation will focus mainly on learning at home.

Goodman (1986) favors the whole language approach which postulates that, the introduction to reading must be meaningful and has to be developed from real communicative settings in the development of young learners. This is the approach which is mainly applied by the Home-School Partnership programme as it is based on the assumption that oral language and writing is made easier when awareness of it emerges naturally rather than when it is explicitly taught. According to Hughes (1986), the model implies that the learner is in an interactive relationship and to gain meaning, the learner has to predict and anticipate meaning.

Literacy is generally recognized as one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling. It refers to the ability to read and write to an appropriate level of fluency; that is age-appropriate cognitive performance. However, there is no commonly accepted

definition of what 'an appropriate level' or 'effective level' to read and write, hence there is no universal standard of literacy (Lawton and Gordon, 1996).

An alternative explanation given by Nugent (n.d,) suggests that adequate literacy assessments must test for the three 'literacy basics', that is; alphabet skills, ability to read aloud and skills for spelling, which are the foundations for age appropriate literacy performance. Diamond et al (2008) explained the duality of early literacy emphasizing that reading and writing are equally important. This perspective is also supported by Nugent's (n.d., p.2) literacy basics approach. Effective programmes geared towards building literacy skills in young children must recognize both these approaches and give almost similar attention to analyzing the acquisition of reading and writing alike. Having highlighted the different definitions and conceptualizations, sound programs geared towards building literacy skills must therefore give equal attention to the acquirement of writing and reading.

South African Department of Education (2004) revealed international data showing that, even when compared with low income countries in Africa, South Africa performance on tests of literacy is very poor. As a result of these worrying statistics, Wordworks came in as one of other players with initiatives to improve language and literacy levels in South Africa. According to Albino & Berry (2013), research in South Africa demonstrate that only a small proportion of children younger than three years attend registered early childhood development facilities. Most of the children are taken care of at home. Therefore, in these instances where attendance to registered early childhood development facilities prior to the first grade is limited, home-based education support initiatives could be important to ensure that a child's school readiness is achieved.

Wordworks emerged in 2005 with the aim to improve children's language and literacy challenges in South Africa. The organisation is located in St James in the Western Cape Province. The organisation is currently implementing four programmes and the Home-School Partnership (HSP) programme is one of its main long-term interventions, which was first implemented in 2005. Currently, the HSP programme is being funded by DG

Murray Trust, ELMAR Foundation and Fynbos Foundation on a three-year grant which started at the beginning of 2016. This evaluation focuses on the Home-School Partnership (HSP) programme. Under the HSP programme, parents with children between the ages four and eight are the primary beneficiaries of the programme and their children are the secondary beneficiaries. In terms of coverage, in the year 2017, the HSP programme was being implemented in 67 schools in Western Cape targeting a total of 882 parents. The HSP programme has reached a cumulative total of 4434 parents since its inception in the year 2005. Table1 below depicts the HSP programme reach from inception in 2005 to date.

Table 1

HSP Programme Reach

Year	Number of Schools Reached	Number of Parents Trained
2006	2	46
2007	4	97
2008	7	170
2009	9	162
2010	7	145
2011	9	155
2012	39	552
2013	36	499
2014	47	626
2015	42	571
2016	38	529
2017	67	882
Cumulative Total		**4434**

Programme Description

According to the programme manual, the intervention has four goals which were unpacked during the preliminary discussions made with the Programme Director (S O'Carroll, personal communication, March 7, 2017). The programme strives to foster a culture of learning among families by assisting parents of young children with after-hours learning activities, and it nurtures constructive relationships between schools and families. It seeks to provide guidance, ideas and resources on how to support and stimulate learning at home, particularly early language and literacy learning. To achieve this, Wordworks trains teachers to become the facilitators on a two-and-half day training workshop. The teachers then cascade the training to the parents over a period of eight weeks during weekly sessions of two and half hours. The programme activities are aimed at achieving improved literacy skills, practical ideas and building confidence necessary for parents to be able to support child learning at home. Participants are equipped with skills on how to talk with their children, share stories and books, sing songs and play games with sounds, facilitate pretend play, provide opportunities for drawing and support early writing in different local languages (S O'Carroll, March 7, 2017)**.** The programme also seeks to improve interaction between teachers and secondary beneficiaries (learners/children). One of the programme outcomes is to improve child participation, confidence and self-esteem. The long-term objective of the programme is to build sustainable home-school partnerships which are maintained through community engagement for age-appropriate cognitive performance.

Recruitment Process

The programme is open to all schools in the Western Cape Province. For schools to be recruited into the programme, they should complete an application form which can be downloaded from Wordworks website. For schools to be recruited the following requirements should be met:

- Submit a list of at least three teachers willing to participate in the facilitator trainings done by Wordworks staff. This is done to ascertain that there is a reasonable number of teachers who will be able to cascade the training to parents.

- The school should have a plan in place for the recruitment of at least ten parents to be trained by facilitators.
- The school should have a suitable and secure venue for the trainings.
- The school should show commitment to share their experiences of running the programme with Wordworks through submission of course registers and give feedback reports.

How the Programme Works

- Schools apply to enrol in the programme by completing a standard application form which is available for download from Wordworks' website. Application forms can be physically collected from the organisation for free.
- Some schools are recommended by the District Education Department to enrol for the programme based on their learners' academic performance,
- Schools identify at least three teachers to be trained over two and half days to become programme facilitators.
- Wordworks provides a two and half day resource-based training to teachers so that they become HSP programme facilitators. In this training, teachers are equipped with skills to cascade training to parents on eight-week training sessions guided by the training manuals for the Home-School Partnership programme.
- The school invites parents to enrol for the programme and attend the trainings for eight weeks,
- Facilitators cascade the skills to parents during weekly two-and-half hour's workshops. Each school select convenient dates and time to carry out the training.
- All parents who attend the course receive stationery and resources, and a certificate on completion of at least five of the eight sessions. Stationery includes writing books, story books, animal books and game packs which are meant to support learning at home.

After training of teachers, Wordworks programme team conducts monitoring visits during the eight weeks training to ensure that the trainings are being conducted according to guidelines and if need be, Wordworks staff also provides some technical support. If the

teachers (facilitators) face any challenges or difficulties in any of the topics in the training guide, they are instructed to contact an allocated mentor from Wordworks for assistance. After completion of the eight weeks training, parents/caregivers are given a certificate of completion. Certificate of completion is handed to parents by Wordworks on the graduation day which is organized and fully supported by the implementing organisation. The figure below is a summary of the programme implementation flow chart.
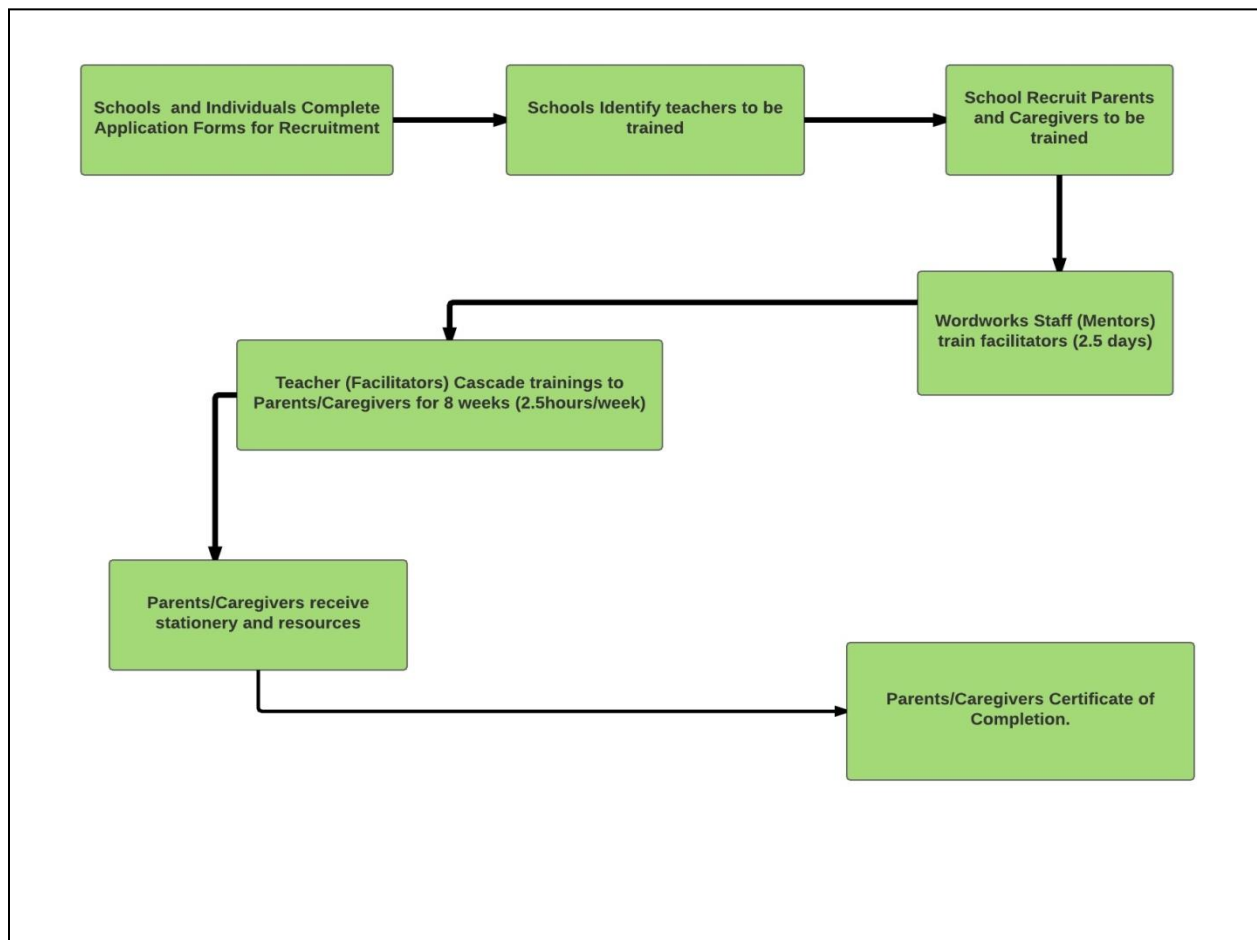

Figure 1. Implementation Flow

Programme Theory

The process of formulating a theory of change is one of the important and early steps involved in evaluation of any programme. According to Rossi et al (2004), programme theory forms the basis for appropriate evaluation design, formulation of relevant evaluation questions and systematic interpretation of evaluation findings. The

organisation had no explicit programme theory for the HSP programme. Following the preliminary discussions with Wordworks programmes Director and other staff members, a programme theory was developed using the explicit details they gave during the discussions. An outcome oriented approach was used in developing a theory of change for the Home-School Partnership programme. The programme people managed to explain their intention to improve language and literacy levels through integration of parents and caregivers in child learning, targeting those with children aged four to eight. In this regard, parents are the primary beneficiaries of the HSP programme and their children are the secondary beneficiaries. The Programmes Director (S O'Carroll, personal communication, March 7, 2017), pointed out that; the programme was based on and inspired by the mounting body of research evidence on the learning achievement gap. The programme is based on the assumption that child language and literacy levels can be improved by integrating parents in the process of child learning as this can promote a culture of learning at home. Through the trainings, parents are equipped with the necessary skills and the implementing organisation also provides resources required to facilitate learning at home. According to O'Carroll, for the programme to have long lasting effects the skills should be cascaded to parents through teachers. This was an initiative to ensure that schools will not call for the implementing organisation every year to come and conduct the trainings in face of limited time and resources.

The outcomes evaluation will be centered on the assumption that facilitating home-school partnerships in the early years of a child can yield notable improvements to language and literacy levels of children. To test the plausibility of the theory underlying the HSP programme, literature focusing on the home-based education initiatives was compiled and is discussed in depth below. It is however important to note that there are few published evaluations of home-based education interventions implemented in developing countries. What works in the developed world might not necessarily work well in the developing world, in particular because of profound disparities in the literacy levels of parents. There is low literacy level in the developing countries and limited resources which have an impact when it comes to implementation of programmes of this nature. This assertion is also supported by Hseih, Hemmeter, McCollum, &Ostrosky (2009) who

postulated that, parents in low income households often have limited vocabulary and poor reading ability in English, rendering their efforts to teach their children unsuccessful. Literature is going to be drawn from the few studies that were carried. Based on the discussions that were made with Wordworks programme people and with their views supported by programme documents, the evaluator came up with a theory of change depicted in figure 2 below.
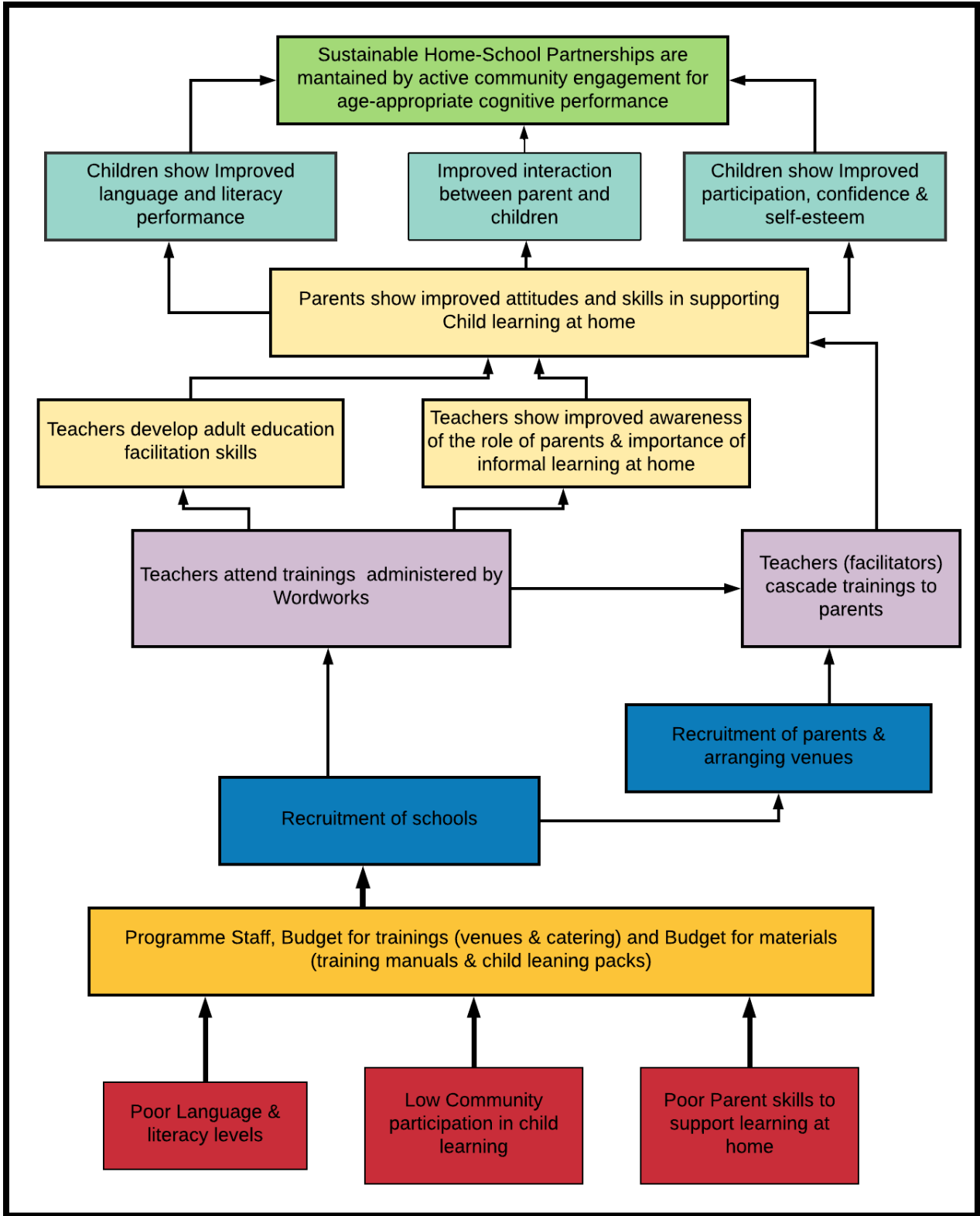
Figure 2. Programme Theory

Plausibility of Programme Theory

This section is going to focus on exploring some documented evidence which suggests that the HSP programme can yield the intended results which are depicted in the programme theory of change. Rossi et al (2004) suggested that, when the programme goals and objectives are not logically related to the social conditions which the programme was designed to address or the assumptions and expectations embodied in a programme's operation frame then it does not represent a credible approach which can bring such a change. This evaluation will be centred on the assumption that facilitating home-school partnerships in the early years of a child can yield notable improvements to language and literacy levels of children. To test the plausibility of the Home-School Partnership programme theory, literature focusing on the home-school education initiatives was compiled.

Lemmer (2007), the relationship between community, parent and school is significant for positive learning outcomes to be realised. There is always an overlapping relationship as the learner is influenced by the three institutions. The performance and behavior of children is influenced by an array of factors such as their relationship with the parents and home environment which have a direct effect. There are also indirect influences from the community which encompasses the national law and policies. The influence for both direct and indirect can either be positive or negative, hence the sphere of influence can offer protection or may increase risk with the latter creating an environment which might impede the success of the child. It is therefore important that all the spheres of influence are taken note of for children to reach their full potential.

Figure 3 below is a vein diagram showing the linkages that exist between parent, school and community with the learner at the centre of the three influences.
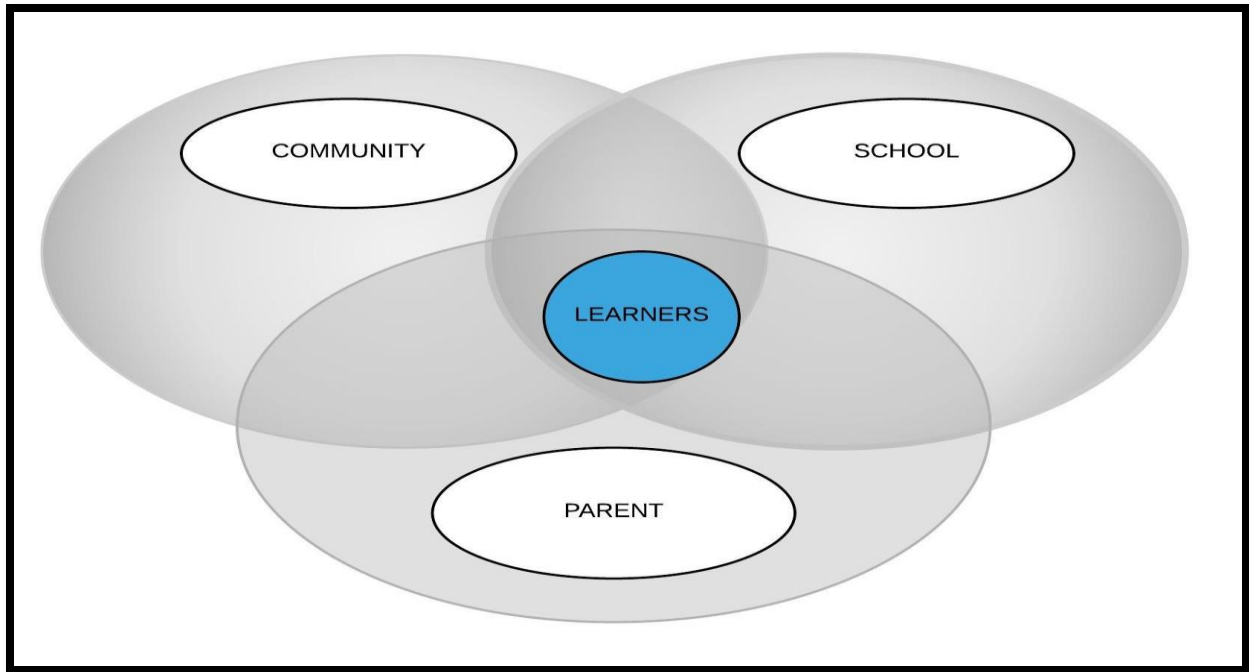
Figure 3. Learners' Sphere of Influences

According to Brooker (2002), social class dimensions and parental attitudes within the family have major influence on early literacy development in children. For example, middle to upper class families often nurture childhood literacy simply by exposing their children to books in the home and bedtime story sessions, while in low-income families, children may be at risk of literacy difficulties as they lack access to resources such as books to facilitate learning and, in worst cases, the parents do not prioritise education. Results of a longitudinal study carried by Wells (1985) revealed a positive correlation between overall child performance and parental involvement variable. The study results concluded that, children with higher opportunities to interact in the home environment had a higher language development rate before going to school. Hseih, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrosky (2009) stated that, parents in low income households often have limited vocabulary and poor reading ability in English, rendering their efforts to teach their children unsuccessful. Furthermore, in South Africa, particularly in poor communities; poor households are exposed to various risks such as domestic violence and other forms

of emotional and physical abuse, which have negative impact on child cognitive development (Gran, 2010).

Results of a study which was carried in Ghana on parental involvement suggested that greater parental involvement was related to higher academic performance which was attributed to the parent effect on the learning outcomes (Chowa, Masa & Turker, 2013). However, it is important to note that data from the study was cross-sectional. The critics of cross sectional studies argue that it does not help to determine cause and effect (Sedwick, 2014). The study identified gaps that call for more research to examine the complex relationship s between parental involvement and youth academic performance. A longitudinal study tracking parental involvement could have provided a more accurate and clear picture of the relationship.

Donkor (2010) presented the findings which supported that greater parental involvement in their children's education led to improved child behavior in classroom and improved morale in the learning environment. In light of such evidence, there is a logical link between the HSP approach to integrate parents in the learning of their children and the improved education outcomes.

Various researches have also demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between home parental involvement and a range of school-related outcomes, including academic achievement, school engagement, and socio-emotional adjustment (Izzo et al., 1999). A study conducted on the effects of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers has revealed positive results promoting school readiness and higher academic achievement persisting into adolescence as well as lower drop-out rates. The Child-Parent Centers focus on five areas, one of which is parental involvement. The study's positive results included the involvement of parents in early childhood development which was associated with positive reading ability and less grade retention through at least eighth grade. The study also revealed that parents who participated in the pre-school program were more likely to be involved in primary school and the more these parents were involved the more their children were successful in school (Hayakawa et al, 2013).

Christian, Morrison and Bryant (1998) also postulate that the most salient influence in a child's early development is their family and home environment. The level of parental involvement has important implications for children's academic performance. An exploratory qualitative research study which was carried in Ghana presented some interesting results which support the theory of change of the HSP programme being implemented by Wordworks. The results of the study suggested that children's poor education performance was primarily a result of parents who were not supervising and supporting their children in doing their homework. The study indicated that more than seventy percent of the parents who were in the study agreed that home supervision and support play a significant role in improving children's academic performance. Some parents attributed the poor performance to their absence from home which limited their engagement with children. Therefore, the study results support the HSP programme theory.

Comer and Haynes (1991), state that; "achievement gains have been the greatest when parents are involved at all levels of school life, through general support of schools' academic and social goals, active participation in daily activities, and in school planning and management, a pattern that is referenced as meaningful parental participation". Another research conducted by Epstein (1991) also reinforced that children with teachers who intentionally emphasize family involvement have larger achievement gains in literacy than those who do not. Roberts, Ritchie and Wilson (2015) pointed out that improvements in parent and career knowledge and confidence were found to be impacting on children, by fostering an 'enriched' environment for early language development. The results of the survey indicate a positive effect of parent involvement to the literacy, language, confidence and self-esteem as some parent feedback quotes were cited:

> *"Since I have been shortening my sentences to match my child's, I have found he is actually starting to communicate a lot more."*

Another was quoted:

> *"I wouldn't have known that reading to your child helps them to talk, and that it is hearing words constantly which helps. Instead of saying, 'what's this, what's this?' now I say words related to what he is saying, to extend his language."*

Much of the existing literature on the impact of family involvement in the learning circles shows a positive correlation. Barnard (2004) looked at the association between parental involvement in elementary school and student success in high school, and concluded that early parental involvement in a child's education promotes positive long-term effects. Christenson et al (1992) cited multiple studies which support the positive impact of family involvement on educational outcomes. Five factors that affect student achievement were listed, namely; parent expectations and attributions, structure for learning, home affective environment, discipline, and parent involvement.

Storch (2001) suggests that home and family involvement in child learning account for approximately 40% of the variance in pre-school skills such as vocabulary development and conceptual knowledge. Parental characteristics were found to be the strongest contributing factors in this domain, followed by literacy environment and parental expectations. Parent attitudes and support towards their children's education were also found to influence performance on literacy tests. Bennett (2002) examined the relationship between family environment and children's language and literacy and showed that family is significantly related to child language and literacy outcomes. Findings from the study were categorized into two age groups, preschool and school-age. The preschool findings showed a number of influences within the home to be strong predictors of children's attainment scores when entering into pre-school. Leslie & Allen (1999) argued that, children with parents who are highly involved in their learning showed better literacy growth than children whose parents are less involved.

There is a body of evidence which suggests that the engagement of parents in their children early learning better prepares children for school readiness and later improves their academic success (Henrick & Gadaire, 2008). There has been a fallacy in developing countries, with South Africa not an exception, that learning to read and write starts at school (Hickman & O'Carroll: 2013). However, this is contrary to reality as supported by Zeece & Wallace (2009) who postulated that literacy development starts at

birth. The brain of a child is gullible; it absorbs quickly and learns fast different skills, such as language and literacy especially at the foundation phase.

The Home-School Partnership programme attempts to improve the involvement of parents in child learning through formal and informal learning at home. Swick (2008) emphasized the significant role which is played by high-quality parent-child relationships in improving child confidence, self-esteem and participation which are part of the HSP programme outcomes. It is through the simple loving and caring interactions with their parents when children experience a sense of goodness and their potential. This creates a platform for parents and children to understand each other and children learn a lot from their parents (Brooking & Roberts, 2013). This is in line with the HSP approach whereby the programme advocates for parents to realise the need to form close relationship with their children thus constructing a sense of security and love.

According to Sumaiti (2012), the evaluation conducted in Dubai revealed that schools which adopted the approach to partner with parents and community were awarded higher ratings in learning outcomes. This finding provides some justification for an intervention like the HSP programme which seeks to promote learning at home with parents being key drivers. The study used a descriptive design which was based on observations. The study recommendations stipulated that there is need to encourage parents to be pro-active in the process of child learning. Parents need to be educated so that they realise that reading to their children at young age has some positive gains. Improved parent interest in what happens at school is a good step towards creating an effective learning environment which works well in improving academic performance (Brooking & Roberts, 2013).

According to Brooking & Roberts (2013), a study on partnership of parents and school in New Zealand revealed that eight percent of schools in the sample indicated that parental involvement had a positive impact on children's opportunity to learn and about seventy-five percent of the surveyed schools indicated that there was a slight positive effect on learners' engagement, attitudes, confidence and literacy improvement. In light of this

evidence, the Wordworks HSP programme can really expect the results presented in its theory of change. However, it is important to note that the study did not reveal the statistical significance of the programme effect. Furthermore, there is always one main challenge with home-school partnership programmes that threatens its internal validity. The language and literacy developments in children cannot be attributed solely to the programme itself. In some instances, there are simultaneous compensation that might occur, for instance when children attend a day care facility (Bennet et al., 2002). EGRS (2017), an impact conducted in South Africa revealed that parental involvement has small impact in child learning outcomes but however, there is a significant positive impact on the phonological awareness. This can make huge impact on children's cognitive development. Therefore, with Home-School Partnership programmes, it is difficult to eliminate the effect of other confounders.

Evaluation Questions

According to Chen (2004), every evaluation like any other research, starts with one or more questions. Sometimes, the questions are simple and easy to answer. Often, however, the questions can be complex and the answers less easy to find. Carefully formulated evaluation questions serve to focus and structure an evaluation in order to provide useful answers for program stakeholders (Donaldson, 2006; Lipsey & Rossi et al., 2004). The evaluation questions for this study were formulated in consultation with the stakeholders, particularly Wordworks programme people. Considering that the HSP programme has been running for more than ten years, with increasing coverage each year, it was deemed necessary to carry out an outcomes evaluation as the programme has achieved a relatively reasonable level of maturity and stability. This outcomes evaluation study will attempt to answer three main questions below:

1. How do teachers (facilitators) perceive the programme with regards to how it has impacted on students' literacy learning and achievement in and out of school, in terms of participation, confidence and self-esteem?
2. To what extent has the Home-School Partnership programme managed to change parents' attitude towards child learning and improve their involvement in child learning at home?

3. What early indications are there to suggest that the Home-School Partnership programme will be sustainable after Wordworks has fully withdrawn support?

Methodology

Design

Labovitz (1976) defined research design as a plan of the study which indicates the logical manner in which individuals and other units are compared and analysed to make interpretations. In this outcomes evaluation, a descriptive design was used. In all studies, the core objectives of a research are to describe, explain, and validate findings. Descriptive design has emerged following creative exploration, and serves to organize the findings in order to fit them with explanations, and then validate the explanations (Krathwohl, 1993). The description often illuminates knowledge that we might not otherwise notice or even encounter.

The design used a quantitative approach in answering evaluation question one and qualitative approach in answering the other two outcomes evaluation questions. Conducting a literacy assessment with true experimental design would have yielded some interesting quantitative results with high internal validity. However, there was no random assignment of programme participants before the intervention for a true experimental design to be used. The evaluator was engaged when the programme was already rolling out. The recruitment process under the HSP programme is voluntary making it impossible to use a true experimental design. Alternatively, the evaluator had proposed a quasi-experimental design where students were supposed to write assessment tests pre-and post-treatment with a control group but the implementing organisation (Wordworks) justifiably discouraged such a design as there was no budget for literacy assessment and time was not permitting since the programme was already rolling out.

In this study, evaluator used a descriptive design, specifically a survey. Burns & Grove (2003, p.201) explained that, descriptive research "is designed to provide a picture of a situation as it naturally happens". In a descriptive design, there is no manipulation of any variable.

The evaluator used a qualitative and quantitative approach in this study. The main strength of qualitative approach in this evaluation lies in its ability to probe for underlying attitudes towards innovation of supporting informal learning at home and draw individual and group perceptions on the relevance of the intervention in improving language and literacy level of children. Another important advantage of qualitative approach is that the inquiry is broad and open-ended, which gives participants room to raise issues that matter most to them without being restricted to predetermined options which might not best explain their experiences and perceptions.

Participants

There were four groups of participants who formed part of this study that is; teachers, school management, Wordworks program staff and parents. This will be clearly discussed below under each evaluation question. In qualitative research, there is no specific rule when determining an ideal sample size. However, the guiding principle in this evaluation will be the concept of saturation. Saturation in qualitative approach was explained by Glaser & Strauss (1967) as the point when the continued collection of data no longer brings any further light on the issue under investigation.

Evaluation Question 1

In answering this evaluation question, nine schools were sampled to participate. Teachers of learners with parents who were trained under the HSP programme completed learners' feedback forms. A total of thirty teachers from the nine schools completed the feedback forms. A total of ninety feedback forms were collected for analysis from the nine sampled schools. Wordworks took the responsibility to collect the feedback forms from the schools.

Convenience sampling was used to select the schools. The sampling method is highly vulnerable to selection bias but the evaluator adopted it because of resource limitations and according to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2012), one of the main advantages of convenience sampling is that data collection can be facilitated in a short duration of time. As such schools which are easily accessible were selected. Regardless of easy accessibility the other critical aspect was selection of schools which have been in the programme for at least three years which show signs of maturity as the outcome

evaluation had a focus to measure the level of programme sustainability. As such schools which have been in the programme for more than three years are likely to be more engaged compared to others which were implementing the programme for the first or second time.

Evaluation Question 2

A total of four focus group discussions were planned to be conducted with parents who had received trainings under the HSP programme. However, on the last focus group discussion, parents failed to turn-up on two different appointments that had been made. Considering the time constraints, the evaluator had to work with the three focus group discussions which were deemed enough for saturation to be met considering the homogeneity of the group. Each focus group had at least six participants and a cap of twelve participants to ensure that the group remained manageable. Kitzinger (2005) stated that, the use of focus groups is an ideal approach for examining individual and group experiences, stories, needs, beliefs and different point of views. The focus group discussions were convened at schools as they are central points and considering that school leadership was used to invite parents.

Convenience sampling was used in selecting parents who were going to participate in focus group discussions. The sampling method was preferred because it was easier to invite parents who stay close to schools and who were available at scheduled time for FGDs. The FGDs were conducted during the day when most parents will be at work; hence convenience sampling enables the selection of available participants. Mostly females (96%) attended the discussion meeting with only four percent males attending. Table 2 below is a summary of the FGD participants:

Table 2

Focus Group Discussion Participants

	Participants by Sex		
Activity	**Males**	**Females**	**Total Participants**

FGD 1	0	8	8
FGD 2	0	12	12
FGD 3	1	6	7

Evaluation Question 3

In trying to establish the indicators of sustainability summarised under environmental support, organisational support, programme evaluation and financial stability, which will be defined later and explained under the sustainability framework, teachers, school heads and programme staff were the participants. A total of 15 interviews were conducted with the breakdown unpacked in the table 3 below:

Table 3

Participants Summary

Participant Group	Number of participants
Teachers	6
School Management Member	6
Wordworks Programme Staff	3
Total	15

Using Wordworks registration database, six schools which were actively participating in the Home-School Partnership programme for at least three years were sampled. As part of the selection criterion, the schools were also supposed to meet three indicators of organisational support as a domain of sustainability, that is;

- Teachers receive refresher training from Wordworks every year
- Parents training workshops are conducted for eight weeks every year

- Schools request for training resources from Wordworks

This information was provided from Wordworks records. Convenience sampling was used in selecting the schools. In each of the sampled schools, the evaluator interviewed one teacher who was trained by Wordworks to be an HSP programme facilitator and also one member of the school management. The total number of teachers and school management members was 12. This was a good sample for interviews as it was sufficient for saturation to be met. Teachers were chosen as key informants because they have better understanding of the programme. They are the major players in ensuring the continuity of the programme as they were trained to be HSP programme facilitators. The evaluator also selected a member of the school management in an attempt to understand the level of support which the programme is receiving in the environment operation.

In-order to understand some of the important aspects of sustainability around funding stability, programme evaluation and reflection on organisational capacity, the evaluator interviewed three programme people. These included the HSP programme coordinator and two field team members.

Therefore, in answering evaluation question three, a total of six teachers, six school heads and three Wordworks programme people were interviewed. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) suggested that, in a qualitative research, a sample of at least six interviews can be sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations.

Measures

This evaluation will use different data collection tools in addressing the different evaluation questions.

Question 1

The study used questionnaire that was developed by Wordworks to capture teachers' feedback (Appendix C). The open-ended questionnaires were filled in by teachers for all the learners with parents who were trained under HSP programme. The tool has three questions and, relevant in answering the evaluation question, were the last two which the evaluator used. The process of completing feedback forms is done once a year, after

completing the eight sessions with the parents. Previously, the submission of these feedback reports to Wordworks was not consistent as teachers were only filing them in their portfolios. However, for the purpose of this evaluation, Wordworks engaged with teachers to ensure that they completed the feedback forms and submitted them to Wordworks for analysis.

Question 2

In an attempt to address question two, the evaluator developed a focus group discussion guide (Appendix B) that was used during the discussion with parents. A focus group discussion guide was designed to capture information regarding any changes which parents might have noted in terms of their attitudes and perceptions towards their child learning as a result of the Home-School Partnership trainings which they received. The focus group discussion guide also probed for recommendations from parents regarding the HSP programme operation. Focus groups discussions are ideal for initial concept exploration, testing ideas, generating creative ideas, and identifying diverging ideas within groups. It is important to note that focus group discussions are favored as they are less expensive and flexible since they allow participants to ask questions, probe and clarify responses where necessary. The evaluator closely guided the discussions to ensure that they remained focused and created room for opinion formation.

Question 3

Evaluation question three focuses on assessing sustainability level of the HSP programme. It is prudent to start by defining programme sustainability as the term means different things in different contexts.

Schell, Douglas, Schooley, Michael, Herbers et al (2013) defined programme sustainability as the availability structures and processes that necessitate a programme to leverage resources to effectively implement and maintain its activities. The definition is broad, and goes beyond the features of the programm1e itself that might support its sustainability to include other external components like environmental support. According to Mancini & Marek (2004) programme sustainability refers to "the continuation of a programme's goals, principles and efforts to achieve desired outcomes". In this study,

program sustainability is defined as the capacity and capability to maintain programming and its benefits over time.

Schell et al (2013) listed eight domains of sustainability, namely, political support, funding stability, partnerships, organisational capacity, programme evaluation, programme adaptation, communications and strategic planning. There are overlaps in these domains. In this study, the evaluator summarised the different domains into four main domains, that is; environmental support, funding stability, organisational support and program evaluation. The environmental support domain refers to the internal and external support which has a bearing on the programme operation. For the HSP programme to achieve sustainability it should garner support from the community, education system and the parents. Funding stability refers to the plans in place for continued financial support especially when Wordworks decides to withdraw its support. The evaluation will establish whether or not the schools have any plans to mobilise resources on their own if the implementing organisation has fully withdrawn its support for the annual trainings currently being done.

Programme evaluation can best be described as the frameworks in place for evaluating the programme on an ongoing basis in-order to inform planning and documenting of the results. It is a very important component for any programme as it helps to identify the gaps, relevance and give recommendations for any adjustments deemed necessary for improved programme effectiveness. The last domain that is organisational support which can be defined as the capability of schools to deliver all programme needs such as staff complement and, externally, the community support in enhancing the goals of the Home-School Partnership programme. It is worth noting that the different listed domains relate to each other as there are some overlaps in the defining elements.

According to Schell et al (2013), determining the point at which a program is sustained may also prove difficult, given programs' varying sizes, fidelity, and stage in programme cycle. Programmes usually come to an end as soon as the funding is withdrawn and when the programme implementers are no longer on the ground (Stephenes & Peikes, 2004). The discussion of results will be classified under each domain. The framework for the HSP programme can be divided into two, showing the internal and external locus of

control among the domains. On the internal side there is organisational support and program evaluation and the external side encompasses two domains; that is, funding stability and environmental support. Figure 4 below is a summary of the sustainability domains classification.
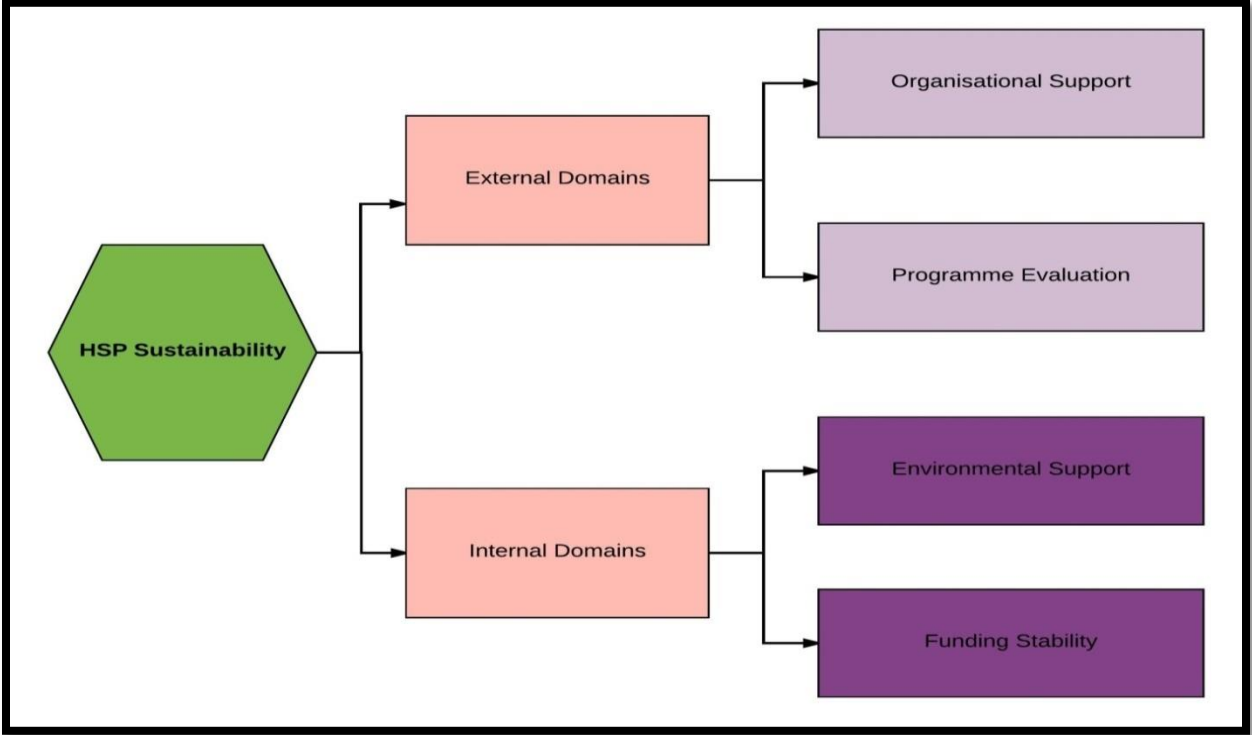
Figure 4. Sustainability Domain Classification

Table 4 below is a summary of the programme sustainability framework showing the different domains of sustainability. The table also shows the different indicators and means of measurement.

Table 4

Sustainability Framework

Sustainability component	Indicators of HSP Sustainability	Will it be Measured & How
Organisational Support	1. Teachers receive refresher training from Wordworks every year	Yes- Teacher Interviews
	2. Parents Training Workshops are conducted for 8weeks every year	Yes- Teacher Interviews & check training schedule
	3. At least 10 parents are trained every year	Yes- Teacher Interviews & check attendance registers
	4. Schools request for Training resources from Wordworks	Yes- Wordworks Staff Interviews
Environmental support	1. Positive attitude of parents	Yes – FGDs with Parents
	2. Positive attitude of teachers	Yes- Teacher Interviews
	3. Buy-in from School Head	Yes- School Head Interviews
Funding Stability	1. Evidence that school has raised their own funds to support the programme	No - this is a prospective indicator and no school is currently required to raise their own funds
	2. Stated willingness of school to raise their own funds	Yes- School Head Interview
	3. Evidence of planning in place to source own funds for supporting trainings	Yes- School Head interviews
Programme Evaluation	1. Completed Teacher Feedback Reports	Yes- Check Completed Teachers feedback forms
	2. Completed Parent Feedback Reports	Yes- Check Completed Parent Feedback forms
	3. Updated Training checklists	Yes- Teacher Interviews & check updated checklist

The evaluator developed an interview guide (Appendix A) which was used for key informant interviews to address evaluation question three. The tool was used to focus the interviews and ensure that the interview stayed on track. According to Neale (2006), in-depth interviews are used in qualitative approach and they involve intensive interviews with individuals in a bid to explore their opinion on a particular situation, idea or program. Key informants will be asked about their experiences and expectations related to the program, the thoughts they have concerning program operations, processes and outcomes and about any changes they perceive as a result of their involvement in the program. The information gathered through interviews the interviews will help to determine the level of sustainability of the HSP programme.

Ethics and Procedure

To start the data collection process, the evaluator sought the ethical clearance from the Commerce Faculty's Ethics Committee who gave consent to collect, analyse and ensure anonymity of data. Wordworks program director has granted permission to access and analyse relevant secondary data. A convenience sampling was used in selecting the schools and the evaluator sought permission (Appendix D) from the responsible head of schools to talk to the sampled teachers and senior management member for the key informant interviews. In order to select relevant contacts, the evaluator consulted Wordworks programme staff in identifying teachers who were interviewed. All the teachers who were interviewed were comfortable with the use of English language regardless of their varying first language like Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa

In setting up parent focus group discussions, HSP Programme Coordinator requested school heads of sampled schools to invite at most 12 parents. The invitation which was sent explained the purpose of the exercise and sought their consent to be part of the study. Parents who used public transport to come for focus group discussions were given fifty rand for transport and a gift pack from Wordworks. There were animal playing cards and a book for kids in the pack. The evaluator deliberately avoided to inform parents in advance that they will receive R50 and a gift pack after attending. This was done to avoid any possibilities of bias. However, only three focus group discussions were successfully conducted as parents failed to turn-up for the last FGD. The focus group discussions were

done after all the parents' training sessions had been done to ensure that they had sufficient knowledge of the entire programme.

All the focus group discussions and interviews were tape recorded and the evaluator engaged one person to assist in transcribing. The person was trained on how to present the interviews and focus group discussions. All the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in English. A back-up plan of using interpreter was on standby considering that the evaluator's first language is Shona and English was a neutral language. Regardless of the differences of participants' first languages as some were Xhosa, Afrikaans, Zulu and so forth; it was coincidentally fortunate that all the participants were comfortable with the use of English during focus group discussions. There were few parts were the participants would use their first language which the evaluator did not understand and had to seek use the interpreter so as to ensure that no information is missed. As part of setting up key informant interviews, Wordworks invited teachers and school management through email to take part in the study.

Data analysis

In analysing data from teacher feedback reports, the evaluator used a quantitative approach. Based on teacher perceptions, the evaluator did a frequency count for children who showed some improvement on different themes such as academic performance, self-esteem, confidence and participation. The responses were coded in Microsoft Excel and COUNTIF function was used to come up with the proportions for each category.

A qualitative approach, specifically thematic analysis was used in analysing the data that was gathered from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions Qualitative methods involved the generation of codes which were analysed. Qualitative data was analysed for known and emerging themes and constructs. The data was coded through open-coding techniques. Open coding is the analytic process through which themes and concepts are identified. It is also during open coding that the dimensions and properties of the concepts and themes are exposed (Strauss and Corbin: 1998). Through open coding, ideas and experiences were compared for similarities and differences, which allowed for discrimination and differentiation of codes until saturation was met. The coded

concepts were organized into categories and subcategories. The process of relating categories to subcategories is called axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once saturation is met, selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) takes place where codes are organized into analytic and thematic categories. There were some predetermined themes for the three evaluation questions. The second evaluation question had predetermined themes like parent attitude, support and communication with children. For evaluation question three, the predetermined themes included environmental support, funding stability, organisational support and program evaluation. In analysing data for evaluation question two and three the evaluator used NVivo software which is qualitative data analysis package.

Findings

This chapter will focus on presenting the findings of the study. The evaluation questions will be used to classify the findings to ensure smooth flow.

Evaluation Question 1

How do teachers (facilitators) perceive the programme with regards to how it has impacted on students' literacy learning and achievement in and out of school, in terms of performance, participation, confidence and self-esteem?

The feedback was based on teachers' observations in class with specific focus on; performance, participation, confidence and self-esteem of learners. Table 5 below depicts the coding scheme and rating of feedback responses.

Table 5

Coding Scheme and Rating

Main Theme	Subthemes	Rating		
		Slightly Improved	High Improvement	No Change
Literacy Performance	Reading			
	Writing			
	Vocabulary			
	Drawing			
	Phonemic awareness			
	Numeracy			
Participation	Engagement			
	Involvement			
	Sharing Ideas			
	Contributing in class			
Confidence	Self-esteem			
	Sharing answers			
	Raising hand in class			
	Voluntary participation			

The findings from the teachers' feedback reports showed some positive effects of the Home-School Partnership programme on the learners' performance, participation and confidence. Based on the feedback comments, a frequency count revealed that 90% of learners had improved signs in at least one of the four main domains. Comments such

as, "No improvement as yet" and "the learner is still weak at the moment" were classified under no improvement in any of the categories. Comments such as "the learner is now much more confident"; indicate that there is some improvement which the teacher observed on learners. This is presented in figure 5below:
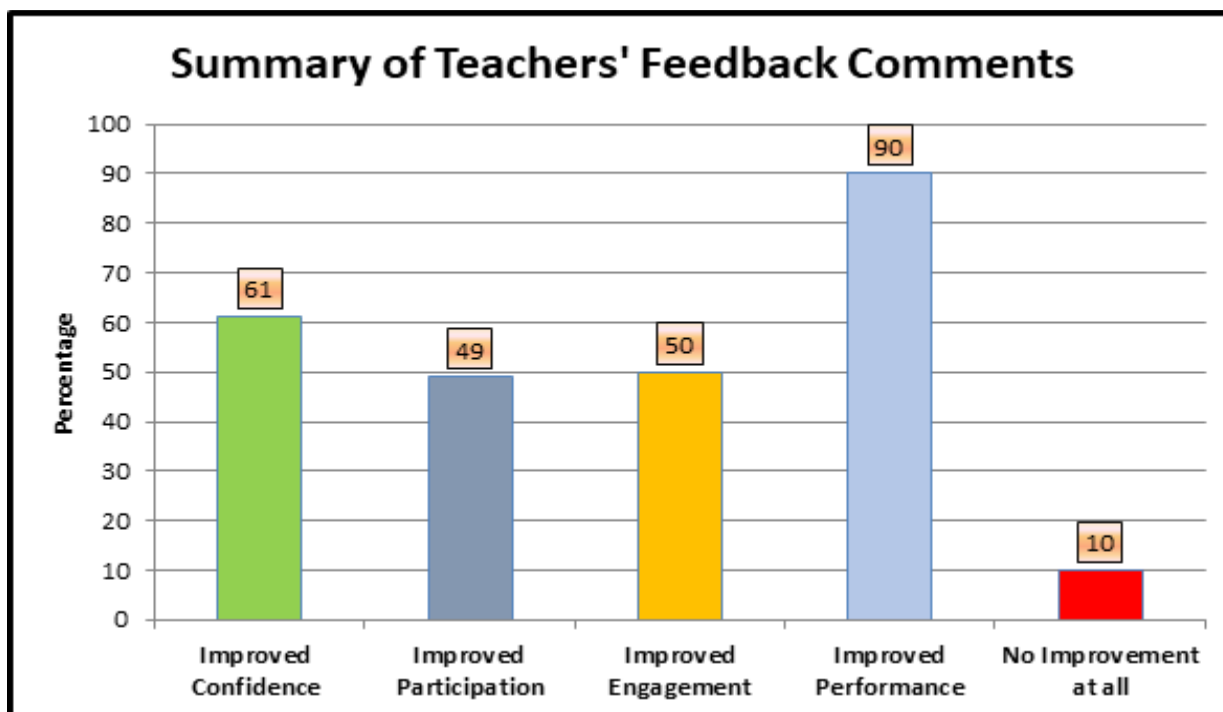
Figure 5. Summary of Teachers' feedback Comments

Teachers' perception on learners' performance in class

Based on the feedback of the learners sampled, about 90% of learners showed improvement in at least one key area of academic performance in class. Conversely 10% did not show improvement in any of the subcategories of performance. Teachers' observations of improvement were specifically on reading, writing, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, numeracy and drawing. A frequency analysis was done for the six different aspects of learners' performance. Teachers' comments such "no improvement in reading and writing" indicated that there was no notable effect which was attributable to the programme and in analysis these we classified as no change. Figure 6 below is a depiction of the teachers' comments on number of students with observable improvements.
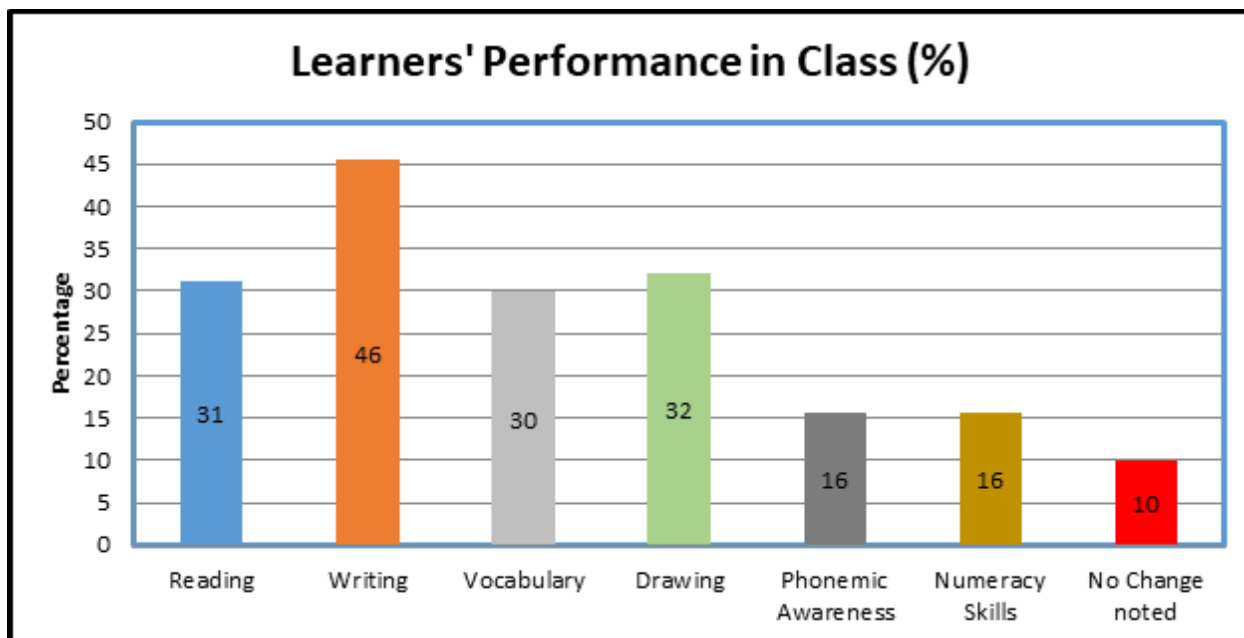
Figure 6. Teachers' observations on Performance in class

The feedback indicated that there were notable improvements on the indicators of literacy and language skills. One of the teacher's feedback comments on one of the leaners was captured in quote:

> *"There is a big improvement noted. She now likes to read; she volunteers to read in a   group.   She   is really interested in her work, even her writing has   improved significantly. I am   very impressed by the change!"*

It is such kind of positive comments which partly justifies the relevance of the intervention. Conversely, there was a small fraction of about 10% which did not show signs of improvement. During the key informant interviews, evaluator probed for the challenges for learners who did not show signs of improvement. Teachers cited reasons such as; lack of commitment by parents in assisting their children and lack of time due to work commitments. Teachers strongly believe in the theory of change of the Home-School Partnership programme. Probing for a deeper understanding of the challenges, it was also indicated during the focus group discussions with parents that some parents were not assisting their children, not so much because they were unconcerned but because of

work commitments. In fact, it was revealed that some parents finish work very late and with household chores to attend, they are left with no time to spend assisting their children. This was a common reason echoed in all the three focus group discussions that were conducted. In some cases, the school going children would be fast asleep by the time the parents get home from work.

Whilst the majority show improvement as discussed above, it is important to note that, the observed improvements in vocabulary, reading and writing skills, are partly a result of other confounders apart from the HSP programme such as learners' maturation and the effect of teachers' efforts. Due to the qualitative nature of this evaluation it is difficult to measure the actual effect size of the HSP programme only. The results need to be treated with caution as they are based on subjective teacher perceptions. More objective methods were not feasible as explained in the methodology chapter and in this case literature is used to substantiate the findings of this evaluation as shall be discussed in the last chapter.

Programme effect on Participation in Class

The teacher feedback reports depict that 49% of learners have shown some improvement in terms of their engagement in class. Deeper analysis was done so as to have an understanding of the differing levels of improvement among the learners. Teachers' comments on participation were classified on a 3-scale rating: 'high improvement', 'slightly improved' and 'no improvement at all'. Comments such as 'the learner now participates more in class' were classified under high improvement and comments like 'there is improvement but the learner does not participate all the time' was classified under slight improvement. The last category was composed of comments which indicated that there was no improvement noted on the learner. Figure 7 below show the ratings based on teacher feedback comments.

Participation Rating

High improvement   Slight Improvement   No Improvement

51%   40%   9%
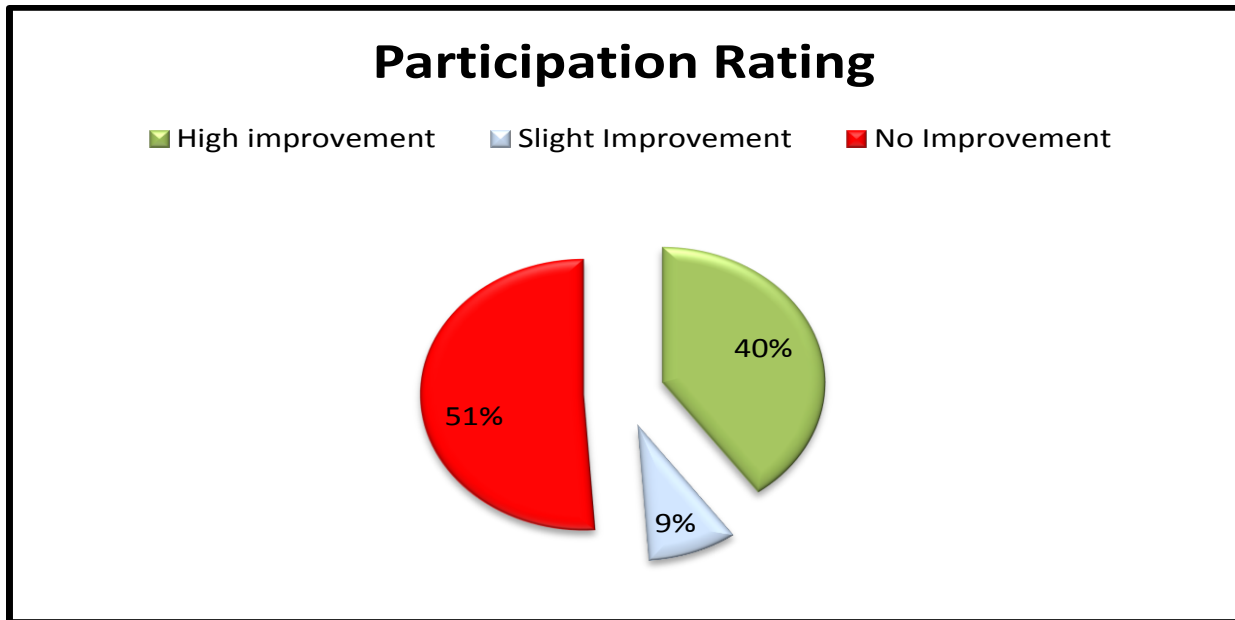
Figure 7.Learners' Participation in Class

Some learners (49%) with parents who were trained under the HSP programme now participate more in class compared to the time before their parents had enrolled in the programme. A comment by one teacher was quoted:

"She volunteers to do a classroom task like handing out pencils/scissors. She now feels free to put up her hand and give answers. It does not matter if answers are the right ones or the wrong ones. Before she would not even participate nor volunteer an answer".

In-depth understanding of participation was also done as the theme was unpacked further and engagement change was a sub-category which was also drawn since it came up frequently on the feedback forms. In presenting the findings on learners' engagement, comments from teachers were classified into three categories as was done for other key themes discussed before. Comments around improved concentration, contributing in class exercises, seeking clarity from teacher and less disrupting in class were the indicators of improved child engagement.
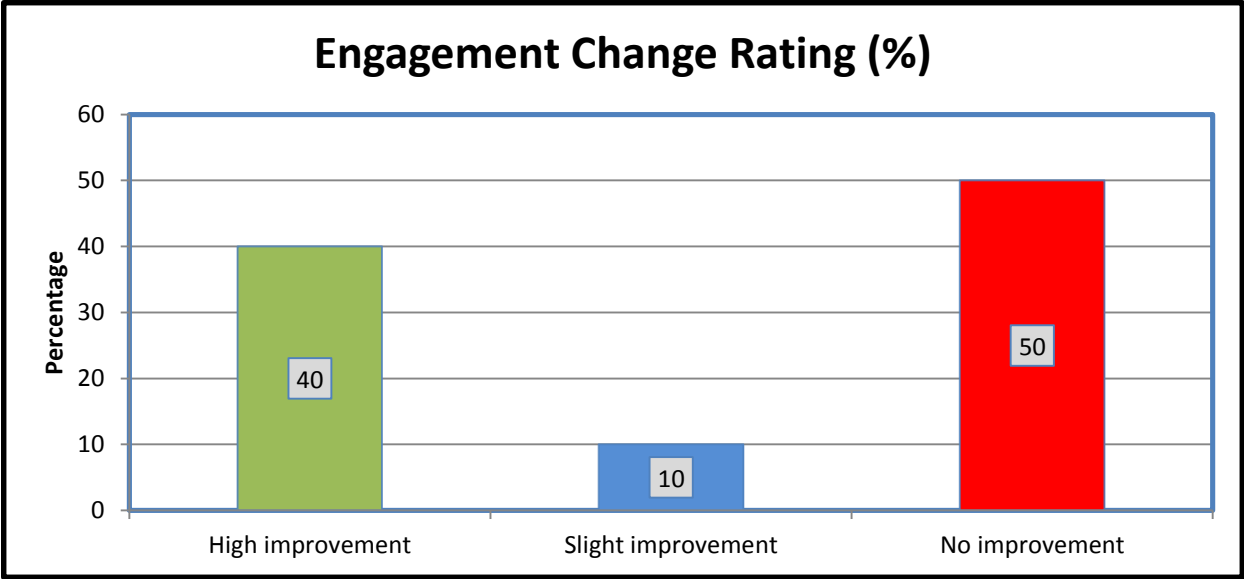
Figure 8. Learners' Engagement in Class

Programme Effect on Confidence and self-esteem

The theme is closely linked to the previously discussed theme on participation. Participation is also an indicator of confidence but the findings for these two are presented separately as confidence, in some cases, goes beyond just participation. In analyzing the feedback reports, comments such as "the learner has gained a lot of confidence" were classified under 'high improvement'. Comments such as "there is a bit of improvement in confidence noted" were classified under 'slight improvement'. Figure 9 depicts the changes in confidence levels based on the classification that was explained above.

Confidence Change Rating

■ High Improvement ■ Slight Improvement ■ No Improvement

38%

55%

7%
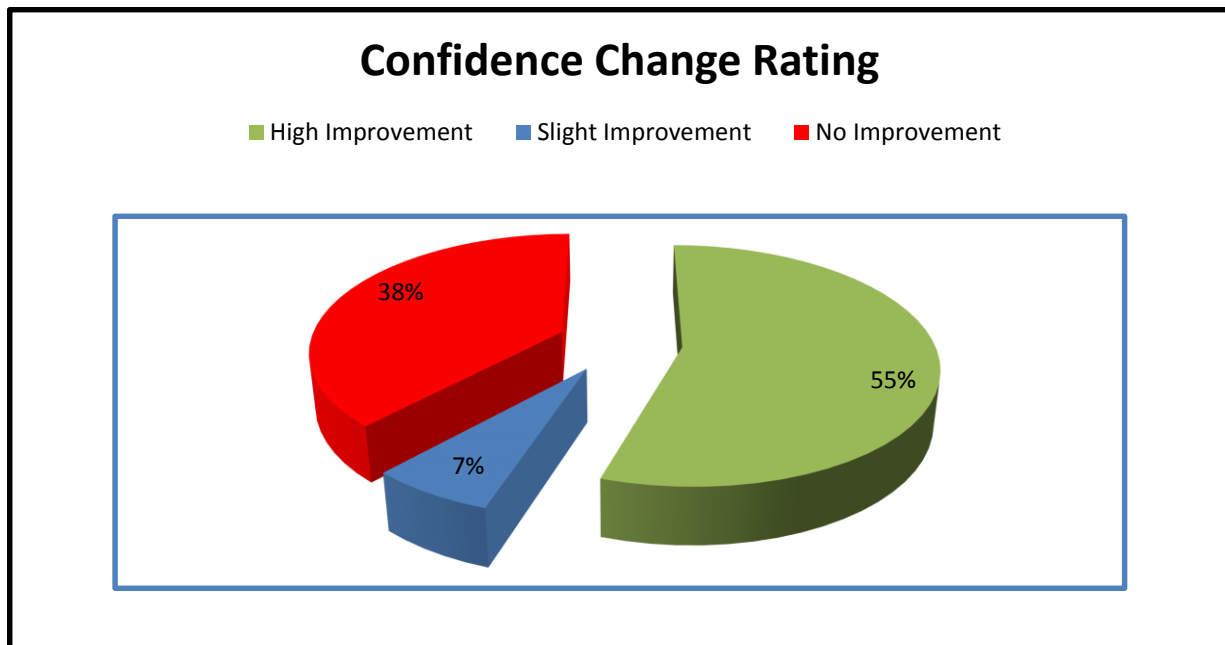
Figure 9. Learners' Confidence Rating

Sixty-two percent of teacher feedback reports depicted that there was an improvement in the confidence level of learners with parents who were trained under the HSP programme. As the confidence increased, learners now participated and engaged more in class asked for clarity where they did not understand. This is a very important aspect in learning as teachers receive feedback on areas with gaps and this enables them to establish a different approach to explain things in a manner that is well understood by all learners. The growing confidence is also reflected on the feedback comments for the majority of learners with parents who were trained now being able to complete their tasks without copying others. Even where learners are not sure of the answers, the most important thing is their ability to present what they think without fear of saying wrong answers. Two comments made by teachers regarding the changes in learners are presented below:

> *"…I did notice that there is improvement in her work. This has*
> *boosted her self-esteem such that the child is confident…."*

Another anonymous teacher commented:

"The learner has gained confidence. She is more eager to answer questions in   the classroom. She interacts more with her peers and her co-operative group.   She feels   more confident to ask for help/assistance".

Evaluation Question 2

To what extent has the Home-School partnership programme managed to change parents' attitude towards child learning and improve their involvement in child learning at home?

In analysing data from the focus group discussions, a thematic analysis was used. The evaluator had predetermined themes and was open to acknowledge new themes which were emerging from the data. The three main themes were an integration of various subcategories which were emerging from the discussions. A summary of the theme categorization is presented in table 6 below:

Table 6

Theme Categories

Main theme	Subthemes
Improved Parental involvement	▪ Monitoring child progress
	▪ Improved skills to teach children
	▪ Help children in learning
Attitude	▪ Enthusiasm
	▪ Patience
	▪ Listen to the child when talking
	▪ To be more open minded
Improved interaction with children	▪ Improved communication
	▪ Use English more often

Improved Parental Involvement in child learning and development

This theme comprised of different self-reflections made by parents during focus group discussions, such as improved monitoring of child development, improved help and assistance skills to support child learning both formally and informally. In all the three focus group discussions (100%), the aspect of improved parental involvement came out as one of the main positive results of the HSP training programme.

The success stories captured from the discussions provide an interesting perspective on what the programme has achieved in terms of parental involvement in child learning. Some of the interesting quotes:

"…. for me it helped me as a parent to realize that I should be more involved. I should be more in control when he is doing his homework…"

and

"… told my husband that, these kids need more time, they need more time with us. A 30 minutes' session is not enough. They need people who are committed and I now like to do it every day…"

Improved Parent Attitude toward child development and learning

It emerged from all the focus group discussions that some parents initially thought that it was solely the responsibility of the school to teach children. Parents now acknowledge that they have an important role to play when it comes to assisting their children. Thus training engagements led to improved relationships between parents and their children.

Parents revealed one of the major positive gained from the programme. They are now more patient and understand their children better, listen better, and speak more politely and affirmatively.

The low participation of males in the programme is worrisome as they have not been enrolling in the programme. Males only started taking part in the last two cycles and even this year the numbers were still very low, if there has been any. It emerged from one of the focus group discussion that, for the first time this year, they had male participants

coming for training and they completing the required eight sessions before graduating. Some parents were coming as couples thus showing an improved attitude by parents towards child learning. The zeal to be part of the learning and development of the child is key a step for children to reach their full potential with all support necessary.

Improved Skills to Assist and interact with Children

In two focus groups parents admitted that they did not know how better to assist their children. The programme helped them with a variety of ways of helping their children. One participant was quoted saying:

> *"…before I didn't know how to teach my child how to read.*
> *Because whenever it was reading a book story, it was me reading for*
> *her to sleep. But now I know that I can read and start showing her the*
> *pictures…"*

In one of the focus group discussions it emerged that whilst some parents used to assist with basic school things like alphabet, there was a discord in approach as it was done differently at school. Children end up being confused and at worst they would openly criticise the parent's approach to which parents indicated that it was quite frustrating. As such the participants in one of the focus group discussions, approximately fifty percent acknowledged that the trainings opened a platform for parents to gain new approaches used and was a good opportunity for harmonisation of teaching approaches.

The HSP programme made parents realise the importance of some of the small things like more communication and playing with children while they read stories together. They feel they are now closer to their children and this has made their children more open and confident. Parents now believe they should often spare sometime to listen and engage more with their children as they have already start noticing the improvements not only in academic performance but also builds their self-esteem.

Evaluation Question 3

What early indications are there to suggest that the Home-School Partnership programme will be sustainable following full Wordworks withdrawal of support?

This section will present the results from the survey showing the level of sustainability for different domains in the framework. To address this evaluation question three interviews were conducted. A total of 15 respondents were interviews were sampled as shown in table 7 below:

Table 7

Participant Summary

Participant	Number of participants
Teacher	6
School Senior Management Team (SMT) member	6
Wordworks Programme Staff	3

The evaluator came up with a framework for programme sustainability which directed the topics to discuss during the interviews. There are various domains of sustainability but relevant to Home-School Partnership programme are organizational support, environmental support, programme evaluation and funding sustainability. This formed the main themes of the analysis and the indicators were the subcategories. This is clearly depicted in table 8 below:

Table 8

Themes and Subthemes of Sustainability

Sustainability Domain	Indicators of HSP Sustainability
Organisational Support	1. Teachers receive refresher training from Wordworks every year
	2. Parents Training Workshops are conducted for 8weeks every year
	3. At least 10 parents are trained every year
	4. Schools request for Training resources from Wordworks
	5. Wordworks capacity to support all programme activities
Environmental support	1. Positive attitude of parents
	2. Number of parents trained each year
	3. Positive attitude of teachers
	4. Buy-in from School Head
Funding Stability	1. Evidence that school has raised their own funds to support the programme
	2. Stated willingness of school to raise their own funds
	3. Evidence of planning in place to source own funds for supporting trainings
Programme Evaluation	1. Completed Teacher Feedback Reports
	2. Completed Parent Feedback Reports
	3. Updated Training checklists

Organisational Support

All the interviewed teachers from the six schools indicated that they have been implementing the programme for at least 3 years. All the interviewees from the six schools

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confirmed that they have been consistently receiving the support from Wordworks to conduct the trainings. The support was in terms of training of more facilitators, training resources (manuals), provision of child learning material and facilities for games.

In terms of the resources and material all the teachers (100%) indicated that they were satisfied with the support they were getting from Wordworks. When asked about the support they are getting from school management and Wordworks, one interviewee stated:

"I can clearly say, school has given us the facilities we need, whatever
we need it's there for our access. With Wordworks exactly the same
thing……. you can just pick up the phone and say and they deliver
without any delays."

Every year Wordworks has managed to support the programme activities through running refresher training and hosting graduation events for all the parents who would have completed the 8-week programme. All graduating parents are awarded a certificate of completion.

Environmental Support

Many programmes at all settings and levels usually struggle when it comes to sustainability capacity which encompasses environmental support. The ability of any intervention to continue reaping the benefits after initial support has stopped heavily depends on the support it garners from the operational environment. This domain encompasses the support from teachers, parents, school management and the community at large.

School Management: Results from the interviews with teachers and school management revealed that they fully support the programme. They acknowledged that it is really making a difference. Although it is not the same for all the learners but for the majority there are observable positive changes evidenced in the teacher's feedback reports on learners conduct and performance in class. As such they find it worthy to keep doing the programme. To also understand if the management really supports the

programme, the interviewees from all sampled schools were asked on whose idea it was in the first place to join the programme and results revealed that for 66% of the schools it was the school principal and for 33% it was the teachers in the foundation grades. One school head was quoted:

"…. I support my teachers and I'm there to make sure they've got all resources or whatever they need for the programme to be a success."

The support from school management is also evidenced by allocation of a venue for the eight-week training workshops. It also came up from the interviews that 50% of the schools offered some snacks and refreshments during the training sessions.

Teachers: Considering that the training of teachers to be facilitators and giving them the duty to cascade training to parents is an extra responsibility which does not come with any allowance, it was important to establish teachers' motivation, commitment and attitude towards the implementation of the programme. In most of the schools the trainings are done over the weekends which mean teachers are denied part of their time for other social responsibilities outside the working environment. In light of all that it is the level of buy-in from teachers which also play a significant role in determining the ability of the school to continue with programme in the long run. All the teachers who were interviews (100%) indicated that; regardless of the extra responsibility added they are committed to continue with the programme as they really see the benefits of the programme. In 50% of the schools that were interviewed there are more teachers who are willing to be trained in every cycle. Teachers cited that it is important for more and more teachers to be trained each year to ensure that in the event that the others are transferred there will be enough teachers who can carry on.

In trying to establish the level of commitment from teacher, one principal indicated that, it was one of the teacher's initiatives to join the programme and the school was happy to support it. Interestingly, the headmaster was also trained and acknowledged the relevance of the programme. To show his delight with the commitment from teachers, he quoted:

"I'm blessed to have a fantastic staff, staff that goes beyond and yes, it is a lot extra because it's a hectic 8-week programme, really hectic programme. They've got to prepare, they've got to sacrifice, they've got to tell the families, 'Stay home I'm going to be here'……. because they are committed they just do it."

Parents: It came out from the interviews that there is slower uptake of the programme by parents than expected. Furthermore, when the programme starts some parents drop out as they do not complete the 8 weeks' sessions. This is worrisome and the evaluator also tried to understand the reason for very low numbers of male parents. The reasons for low uptake were:

- Work commitments.
- Not all parents know of the programme.
- As a new innovation some parents are just skeptical since they are not sure if the programme really helps.
- Misinformed parents who think that child learning is the responsibility of schools and not their responsibility.
- Single parents have a lot of commitments at home and they find it difficult to spare time to come for trainings.

More than 90% of the parents who come for training are women. However, it was acknowledged that starting 2016, men also came and managed to complete the sessions. One facilitator was quoted:

"Well this year we had, besides the principle, about 8 males during the course so everything is just changing. Previously it was just ladies and I think because they are women they feel it is their responsibility to do it and is part of the protection and the nurturing nature."

Whilst not all parents came for the trainings as per expectation as less than ten percent enrolled, it was noted from the programme records that from programme inception, the number of parents being trained are on the rise each year. During focus group discussions, the parents were also asked if they would recommend the programme to their colleagues and all responses were positive. In two of the focus group discussions

more than 30% of the parents indicated that they were actually convinced to enroll into the programme by their colleagues who had also been trained. Figure 10 below is a graphical presentation of the number of parents who have completed the trainings since 2006.

Programme Reach

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
■ Males											42	86
■ Females	46	97	170	162	145	155	552	499	626	571	449	796
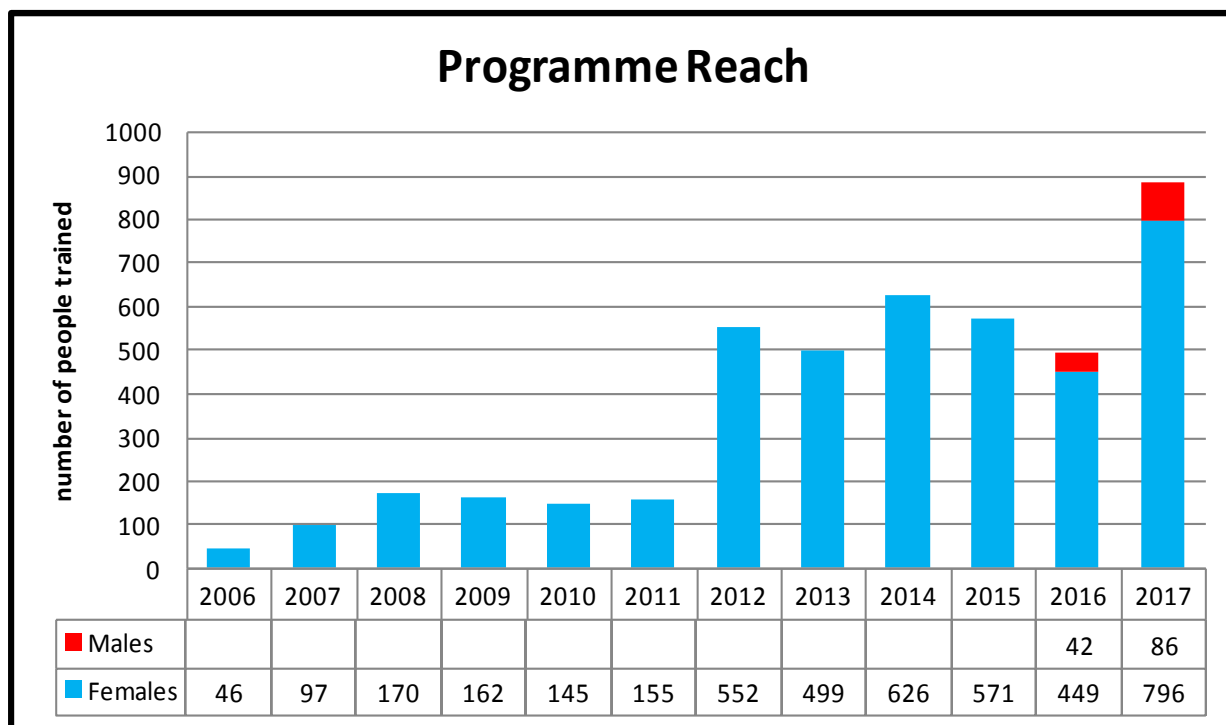
Figure 10. Number of Trained Parents

Financial Stability

It was acknowledged that all the schools still get support from Wordworks in terms of the training material and all other resources like learning material for children. However, the study sought to establish if there are mechanisms in place for schools to continue with the programme even if Wordworks is to stop supporting. It was acknowledged that it will be a setback if Wordworks was to withdraw its support. Presently no school indicated that they have a clear plan in place to garner resources to support the programme. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the interviewees indicated that they would continue with the programme but they might fail to get all and up to standard resources required. In terms of the training manuals and some of the child learning resources they will resort to photocopying as a cost reduction measure. Fifty percent of the schools indicated that they

have some champions who are willing and have the ability to fundraise resources to support the programme. This was proven by their success in mobilizing cash for refreshments and snacks during the training sessions. This kind of support is really critical in examining the sustainability of the programme. In one of the interviews the principal was quoted:

"….and what we have done is that, teachers they raise money, like funds and the school also contributes a part and they gave the parents treats, you know snacks and also a meal."

The study also sought to establish the funding stability from the programme staff and the findings indicated that they were receiving funding from different donors. As such they are expanding their coverage each year without being over stretched resource wise. One of the interviewees indicated that the intervention is designed in such a way that it does not require a lot of resources. The intervention type operates with a light budget.

Programme Evaluation

Programme evaluation is an important domain of sustainability as it directs programme towards improvement and ensures that the programme continues to benefit future generations. This study sought to establish if there were mechanisms in place to keep the programme on track, recording of success stories, feedback systems in place and the overall flexibility of the programme to embrace recommendations for modifications and improvement. Results revealed that the Home-School Partnership was only evaluated once since inception 12-years ago. It was indicated that the programme has been going through some modification with the last major change being splitting the final training week with the graduation of parents. This was done after the realisation that on the last day parents were excited with the graduation and this was negatively affecting their concentration and participation on the last, but equally important, components of the sessions.

Teachers were aware and making use of programme tools like feedback reports, training checklist and parent feedback forms. Teacher feedback reports are summarised

comments about each learner's changes in terms of confidence, participation, behavior, attitudes and overall performance. This is an important tool as it enables stakeholders to reflect on the programme relevance. This evaluation also used the feedback forms in addressing the first evaluation. The checklist is an important tool which is supposed to be completed by facilitators during the trainings. It is meant to ensure that all training sessions are structured and all topics are covered. Parent feedback forms are meant reflect on their assessment of the trainings and recommendations if any for programme improvement.

Discussion of Findings

This discussion chapter will be based on the results of the study presented in the previous chapter. The presentation will follow the same format used in presenting the results, as the evaluation questions will form the main discussion topics. This chapter will also include the limitation and recommendations tied to each evaluation question.

Evaluation Question 1

How do teachers (facilitators) perceive the programme with regards to how it has impacted on students' language and literacy learning in and out of school, in terms of performance, participation, confidence and self-esteem?

The findings of the study show some positive changes in child confidence, participation, engagement which leads to improved language and literacy levels. According to Ballantyne et al (2008) learners need lots of opportunities to engage in social interaction with others and should also receive support from adults in order for them to acquire the language skills which they need for negotiation in the interactions. Therefore, the results depict improved engagements and participation as learners acquire more communication skills which are important for cognitive development.

An interesting finding to note is that 90% of the sampled learners showed a positive change in at least one of the several academic assessment areas. Forty-six percent of learners showed some notable improvements in writing, 32% in drawing, 31% in reading and about 30% showed some improvement in vocabulary. Based on the teachers' feedback reports, these improvements can be attributed to the HSP programme. These results are in line with those of an evaluation conducted by Chowa, Masa & Turker (2013). The evaluation revealed that greater parental involvement was related to higher academic performance by learners. There are greater achievements when parents are involved in their child learning at home. However, these results need to be accepted with some caution because the evaluation design which was used was weak and based on subjective teacher perceptions prone to bias. Internal validity is at stake as there are alternative explanations which cannot be dismissed in accounting for the noted

improvement amongst learners such as the issue of individual learner maturity and the effect of teacher intervention even without the programme. As such an experimental or quasi-experimental design could have managed to counter such limitations and give an estimate of the actual programme effect. However, as presented in the study limitations, such an evaluation design could not be adopted because of time and resource limitations. Be that as it may, the study shows that there are notable changes which teachers attributed to the HSP programme although it is difficult to measure the actual effect size.

According to Riley (2006), the engagement of children in literacy activities, such as storybook reading or listening to rhymes, requires a meta-linguistic focus in which oral or written language is the object of attention. Wordworks gave parents who come for training the reading material which can be credited in improving language skills. Parents now have resources to facilitate learning at home. This cannot go unnoticed especially in the poor communities where parents cannot afford to buy these resources and are always grappling with food-related household expenditure. The developing propensity towards considering language as an object of attention and ongoing engagement in language and literacy activities become primary routes for language development (Buckley, 2003).

Based on the feedback reports, the results indicated a notable improvement in reading ability for 31% of the sampled learners which the teachers attributed to the HSP programme effect. Although there is an alternative explanation that can be given as discussed above, such as teacher and maturation effect, it is important to note that the teachers who interact with the children on day to a day basis acknowledge the effect of the programme. This is a major step in improving child performance in school. Buckley (2003) states that as children start to read, even at the most basic level, their ability to read text becomes the greatest source of novel words and concepts, complex syntax and narrative structures. All this will further propel their development in language and literacy. In light of all this, literacy is an essential medium for improving child competencies in language for both those in the foundation learning phase as well as the late schooling. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the relationship between language and literacy is not only one way. Conversely, language proffers a foundation from which to explore and

experience written language. This will, in turn, additionally build children's language competencies.

The results revealed an improvement in confidence and self-esteem levels for 49% of the students in the sample. It is important to note that confidence and self-esteem are pre-requisites for improved participation and engagement. As children's vocabulary improves, they start interacting more and can express themselves better which boost their participation and engagement. This is in congruency with the results of the study carried in New Zealand which revealed that there was a positive effect of parental involvement on children's development as it managed to improve learners' engagement, attitudes, confidence and literacy (Brooking & Roberts, 2013).

Children acquire more language and literacy skills through being involved in rich experiences and practical activities promoted through play. Parents should be part of this play with the right attitude and willingness to listen to children talk and take into account their experiences and interests (Riley, 2006). Storch (2001) suggested that, home and family involvement in child learning account for approximately 40% of the variance in pre-school skills such as vocabulary development and conceptual knowledge. The HSP programme supports the involvement of parents and children in these processes. It was indicated during the focus group discussions that parents now engage more into play with children at home. Among the package of the resources which the parents received from Wordworks during the trainings were animal playing cards and 'snakes and ladder' games which are educative.

Based on the teacher feedback reports, the results indicated that there were 10% of children who did not show any signs of improvement and the proportion is huge enough to warrant some probing into the reasons behind the children not showing any signs of improvement. The data collection tool was not designed in a manner that teachers could indicate the challenges which such children are facing. It is an area that calls for further probing so as to understand the major impediments. This in turn will enhance programme effectiveness across the target population. There are no mechanisms in place to take note of issues of fidelity and the levels of parental involvement vary from parent to parent. There is a possibility that some parents may not have applied what they were taught at

school. An alternative explanation could be that; the children are generally not interested in any of the measured learning outcomes. This is supported by one parent quoted:

"The programme didn't work for my child. I found out that he is not academic like me. He is creative…. the programme seems it was designed for perfect child".

It is therefore worth noting that whilst the programme has been applauded by the majority of those who were interviewed, it did not benefit all the children across the target population.

Limitations

Regardless of the notable improvements accredited to the HSP programme, caution is advised when attributing changes in learners directly to the intervention itself. Due to the fact that this study used a descriptive design and the language and literacy improvements were based on teacher perceptions, the design does not control for various threats to internal validity. Evaluators often find it interesting to talk in terms of the 'effect size' of an intervention. In face of limited time and resource constrains, the evaluator had to resort to a qualitative approach which is not the best in measuring the programme effect (Stack, 1995). The feedback forms were based on subjective perceptions of teachers on children and there were no other objective means to verify the comments. Nevertheless, this approach has its advantages like the ability to probe for underlying attitudes towards innovation of supporting informal learning at home and draw individual and group perceptions on the relevance of the intervention in improving language and literacy level of children. Another important advantage of qualitative approach is that the inquiry is broad and open-ended, thus allowing the participants to raise issues that matter most to them.

Whilst the majority of learners showed improvement as discussed above, it is important to note that, the observed improvements in vocabulary, reading and writing skills, were partly a result of other confounders apart from the HSP programme such as teacher effect and maturation. Due to the qualitative nature of this evaluation it is difficult to measure the actual effect size of the HSP programme. The internal validity is at stake as the design cannot eliminate effects of maturity and other factors.

Recommendations

Wordworks should consider having a budget for measuring the effectiveness of the HSP programme on specific intervals which could be annually or after two years. Planning for an evaluation usually prepares both the responsible people and the programme itself for evaluation readiness. This also gives evaluators enough room to make use of evaluation designs with high internal validity such as experimental of quasi-experimental designs.

Considering the positive benefits of the intervention it is time for Government's Department of Education to embrace the Home-School Partnership approach and spread it across the country. This will contribute a lot in ensuring that more parents enroll for the programme and all school across the country benefit from the innovation. Such a stance will go a long way in improving language and literacy levels in South Africa.

Evaluation Question 2

To what extent has the Home-School partnership programme managed to change parents' attitude towards child learning and improve their involvement in child learning at home?

Most parent involvement programmes that have conducted formal evaluations have limited their measures of programme effects to changes in parental behaviors or attitudes (Ellis et al., 1983; Menard, 1993 & Mangano, 1981). The findings revealed that the Home-School Partnership programme is having some positive effects on learners with parents who have participated in the HSP programme. Parental involvement in facilitating learning at home is important for children's performance on different learning outcomes in school.

The study revealed that the HSP programme has led to improved parental involvement, improved attitude toward child learning and generally improved interaction between parents and their children. The findings are supported by Morrow (1995) who states that the child's environment, particularly the support they receive from those around them, is supremely important in nurturing their language and literacy. Therefore, it is justifiable to acknowledge that the HSP programme is playing a significant role in enhancing child

development particularly on the learning outcomes like language and literacy. All these linkages proffer some evidence to the effectiveness of the HSP programme.

Swick (2008) acknowledged the importance of a close relationship between parents and children. It is through the unfailing and loving interactions with their parents, that children experience a sense of goodness. This forms the foundation upon which parents and children can train each other in better relating to and interacting with the environment. Parents therefore need to form a bond with their children so as to construct a sense of security and love. This is significant when influencing children's growth and learning. Mui & Anderson (2008) continue with his argument by stating that homes and families are influential sites for literacy learning.

A large body of research on attitudes indicates that parental warmth, together with reasonable levels of control, combine to produce positive child outcomes. According to the psychological model proposed by Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995), there are three constructs primarily influence parents' involvement decisions, namely;

- The parents' understanding of their role in the child's life: what they believe that parents are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and educational progress. Parents become involved in schools if they hold the belief that they should be involved. The HSP programme helped parents to realise the important role which they have in helping their child at home to develop some of the critical skills that are directly or indirectly linked to their language and literacy.
- The second construct is on parents' sense of efficacy in helping their child succeed in school. The HSP programme made parents to realise and believe that their involvement can exert a positive influence on children's learning outcomes.
- The last construct is of invitation, demands, and opportunities for parental involvement by both the child and the child's school. The HSP programme made parents to realise that their child and the school want them to be involved. The use of teachers to cascade the trainings is a clear invitation of parents by schools.

At the foundation phase there are a plethora of studies mainly from the developed world which demonstrates an association between parental involvement and improved child learning outcomes. In particular, more parent involvement has been found to be associated with lower dropout rates (NCES, 1992), higher student achievement (Kohl, 1994), fewer behavioral problems (Comer, 1984), and increases in children's perceived level of competence (Wagner & Phillips, 1992). All these references support the approach and generally the effectiveness of the HSP programme.

The results of the study indicated that parental involvement in child learning at home has been on the rise as a result of the HSP programme. Main notable improvements were around patience, engagement, assistance and facilitating playing at home. In the early phase of the programme only females were coming for trainings. This can be an indication that men were either less involved or less interested in helping their children at home. However, in the past two years, men are now coming for trainings although the numbers are still low compared to those for females. This could be a sign of attitude change in men and, considering that change is gradual, this is a positive sign. However, there are no mechanisms in place to fully track what happens in the home environment. This makes it difficult to the evaluator to posit with certainty that men's attendance to these trainings reflects a complete change of attitude on their part towards helping their children at home.

The finding of parents who indicated that they do not have time to support child learning at home is also a critical aspect of the study. This is particularly a result of long working hours and appalling public transport in Western Cape leading to late arrival at home. Parents get home late when children are already in bed. The root problem can therefore be traced back to issues of poverty as majority of parents are employed in low paying and poor working environments. As a result of poverty and high unemployment rate in South Africa, owners of the means of production take advantage as employees are required to work long hours.

Limitations

The evaluator had proposed to conduct four focus group discussions with parents. However, only three FGDs were conducted as parents failed to turn up for the forth. Despite efforts to reschedule the FGD, only two parents turned up. Considering the limited

time, the evaluator had to work with the three focus groups as all the major themes had been discussed to the level of saturation. As such it was less likely that new themes would have emerged from the failed focus group discussion.

To address the second question, the evaluator used information from self-reports which were made by parents. This is not an objective source for evaluating the significance and relevance of the programme. This leaves one wondering if the parents who attended the FGDs were the most engaged. However, it is worth noting that, the approach which was used was the best possible to measure the role of the HSPP in changing parents' attitudes towards child learning.

Recommendations

There is need to set up a system to monitor what happens in the home environment. Home visits can enable the implementing organisation to check how parents are managing and having some discussions for any possible challenges they might be encountering. This can be done through providing parents with log books highlighting the things they have done with their children which are related to literacy development. The system can also be strengthened by designing a tool where by parents provide feedback on children performance in the home environment. This will create a better platform for expression of emerging ideas for improved programming.

Evaluation Question 3

What early indications are there to suggest that the Home-School Partnership programme will be sustainable once Wordworks has fully withdrawn its support?

The main focus here is to assess the types and extent of sustainability achieved by the HSP programme and summarise the key findings concerning factors that were found to contribute to greater programme sustainability.

Environmental Support

The ability of any intervention to continue reaping the benefits heavily depends on the support it garners from the operational environment. In the context of HSP programme,

the operational environment encompasses the relevant key stakeholders like school management, teachers and parents. For the programme to gain support of the three listed groups there is need to prove that the programme really works that is the plausibility of the theory of change. The results presented in the previous chapter indicate that school management, teachers and parents fully support the programme. There is a common consensus that the programme can really make a difference to child learning. This enables the programme to receive support from the relevant key stakeholders. The number of schools and parents who enrolled in the programme has been growing each year. More interestingly, unlike in the past, men are also coming to be trained.

However, the slow uptake of the programme is worrisome. In a class of more than twenty children an average of four learners would have parents who have enrolled for the HSP programme. This can be an indication that, not all parents are aware of the programme. As such Wordworks and schools should market the programme more throughout the year. If they can share some success stories with parents, it can positively change their attitude. More parents can turn up if they have confidence in the effectiveness of the programme and this can only be through sharing some documented evidence. However, as indicated in the results chapter this low parental participation in the programme could be due to the parents' work commitments. It came out from the three focus group discussions (100%) that the time when the training sessions are scheduled, some parents will be at work hence they fail to attend the trainings. Low attendance can also be attributed to long working hours and appalling public transport in the Western Cape. After busy days some parents find it difficult to commit for the after school parent programmes.

Organisational Support

The commitment and level of support given by Wordworks are important in determining the sustainability of the Home-School Partnership programme. The results revealed that the schools are receiving all the necessary support for continuity of the programme. As schools continue to roll out the programme each year, it is prudent that more teachers be trained each year. Most schools, on average, had five trained teachers which is a good number for ensuring programme continuity. This set-up ensures that any attrition of trained teachers in future, either due to transfers or career changes, will not stall the

programme since there will be other trained teachers ready to take over. For the schools with at most three teachers there is need to ensure that more teachers are trained. Not all teachers are willing to be trained to become facilitators as this is voluntary work for which no incentives are given. The facilitator role is an extra responsibility without any additional incentives and most schools conduct the eight weeks training sessions on Saturdays when teachers are supposed to be resting, spending some time with their families and doing other things apart from work. It might be prudent to consider giving some small incentives as a way to motivate those who get involved in the programme. This way the programme may maximize its benefits and receive wider support.

Programme evaluation

The programme designed some important tools such as parent feedback forms and teacher feedback reports. These enable Wordworks to reflect on the effectiveness of the intervention and receive views of the key stakeholders with regard to areas that might need modifications. According to Brundeirs & Weik (2011), it is an important step for programme sustainability to design a data collection system that accommodates two sets of data, that is; information on processes and information on outcomes. Process data is mainly used to reflect on the implementation of the programme while the outcome data is used in assessing the effectiveness of an intervention in achieving its intended goals. Both sets of data are important for determining whether an intervention is a success or not. From the findings of the study, it was noted that there is more collection of information on process, particularly tracking of outputs and there is very little being done on tracking of outcomes such as the learners literacy performance before and after the intervention, which is the second step equally important for the sustainability of the programme.

It is important to note that designing, collecting and using of data are three linearly linked but different steps in a programme cycle. The findings indicated an inconsistent and less robust system of ensuring that feedback forms are completed across the target population. There are some schools with properly filed and completed feedback reports while others still lag behind. The proper completion of the forms could be linked to the level of maturity of the school in the programme. There is a possibility that there was some selection bias of the schools that took part in this study. The study strictly selected schools

which have been in the programme for at least three years with some level of stability and maturity in the programme. As such there are schools that have been in the programme for more than three years are committed in completing the feedback forms compared to the new ones. This can also be a result of the voluntary nature of the programme which makes it difficult to put a water tight system around the completion of these feedback forms. Understandably, for these volunteering teachers, the additional demands from the programme are not easy to adjust to.

There is not enough documented evidence to showcase the efficacy of the HSP programme in changing parents' attitude or improve the language and literacy level of learners. Documentation of success stories plays a significant role in increasing the numbers of parents who enroll for the programme. The programme started more that eleven years ago and the number of parents who enroll each year is still low which is worrisome. Regardless of the challenges stated in the previous chapter like work commitments, many parents can only enroll for the programme when they are convinced with some evidence that shows that the programme can really make a difference on their child's learning outcomes. Therefore, the documentation and sharing of success stories can be used to lure more parents to enroll into the programme.

Funding Stability

The results chapter indicated that Wordworks is still supporting all the programme activities through provision of training material and resources for child learning at home. The study provided some responses from school key informant interviews (50%) which indicated that they will be able to garner resources to ensure continuity of the intervention even in the event that Wordworks decides to withdraw its support. However, there is no evidence or mechanisms already in place to prove that the schools will be able to support financially the programme activities. This makes it difficult if not to conclude that there is funding stability. Two out of the six interviewed schools indicated that they never thought of the programme continuity in the event that the implementing organisation decides to completely withdraw its support. As such they could not confirm the capability and capacity of their school in ensuring HSP continuity. Two schools (33%) out of the six schools which were interviewed indicated that without Wordworks support, they will not

be able to continue with the programme. This is worrisome and it calls for Wordworks to start preparing the schools for the period beyond the current funding.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of evaluation question three, the following recommendations can be made:

1. There is need to prepare schools for the period beyond the current funding phase. Considering the scarcity of resources in the donor community it is prudent that schools have a plan in place to garner their own resources to ensure continuity in the event that Wordworks fails to get funding from donors.

2. Provision of some incentives to facilitators (teachers) will help to garner support from many teachers. The arrangement can motivate the teachers and more schools will enrol into the programme.

3. More programme success stories need to be documented and shared with all the relevant stakeholders. For the programme to garner more support from different stakeholders there is need for some documented evidence to showcase the significant role that the programme can play on the learning outcomes.

4. There is need to design and make use of tools that track the programme outcomes as the current tracking is more on the programme outputs. The outcome indicators enable the organisation to reflect on the effectiveness of the programme. This is an important component for every intervention as it enhances the process of developing future programming, budget, fundraising plan and overall programme goals.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the Wordworks Home-School partnership programme has been a somewhat successful initiative in improving language and literacy level of learners as supported by teacher feedback comments on learners. Although it is difficult to determine the actual effect size of the Home-School Partnership programme on learners, the design used was able to triangulate information gathered through different data collection sources and the results proffer some evidence that the HSP programme is making some positive effect. Regardless of the alternative explanations that can be given for the results of the evaluation, literature provides some evidence for the Home-School Partnership programme to yield the results presented in this study.

From the study, it can be concluded that the home-School Partnership programme has managed to change attitudes of parents towards child learning. This is an important step for the programme to be able to achieve its intended objectives as depicted in the theory of change. It is through the change of parental attitudes that the programme is able to garner wider acknowledgement and support from its operating environment. Such results justify the relevance of the intervention and, if resources permit, there is need to expand to all provinces of South Africa.

On the sustainable part, there is more that needs to be done since all school are still dependent on Wordworks for financial support. More should be done in a bid to prepare schools for programme continuation without Wordworks support. Programmes that are able to sustain themselves are more likely to produce lasting outcomes.

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Appendix A

Introduction

Hello, how are you? My name is……………. I am a Masters student at University of Cape Town. In partial fulfillment of my study, I am doing an evaluation of the Home-School Partnership programme. You have been chosen to take part in this exercise and I would like to thank you for taking time out of your day to come here and discuss your ideas.

Section A : Environmental Support (10minutes)

1. In your opinion what do you think about the HSP programme? (Strength & weaknesses)- Probe on the attitude of other different stakeholders (teachers, school departments, community & parents

2. What factors do you think can contribute to the sustainability of this programme?

Section B: Funding Stability (10 minutes)

3. For teachers and school heads,

   What are the plans in place to source/mobilise resources in the event that Wordworks decides to withdraw its support?

4. What mechanisms are or can be put in place to ensure sustained funding?

5. What potential risks do you foresee if Wordworks decides to fully withdraw its support?

Section C : Organisational Support (10 minutes)

6. From your opinion, do you think schools have adequate staff complement willing to support the programme activities?

7. Do schools have enough teachers who have been trained to facilitate the programme even when Wordworks withdraw its full support? Probe if there are plans to cascade trainings to other teachers.

Section D: Program Evaluation (10 minutes)

8. How does the programme monitor and track its outcomes?

9. In the event that Wordworks decides to withdraw its full support how are you going to monitor and track its outcomes?

10. Based on previous monitoring and evaluations if any, were the results used to inform planning and implementation and if so how?

11. What evidence is there to prove to the public that the programme works?

Appendix B
Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

How are you all and welcome to this group discussion? My name is**……………** I am a student at the University of Cape Town working on an evaluation of the Home-School Partnership programme which you have all enrolled in (introduce the other people you have come with). My role is to help get a conversation going and to make sure we cover a number of important aspects which can help in making this evaluation a success. I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to come here and discuss your ideas. This discussion will take approximately 45minutes. The overall goal is to hear your thoughts about the Home-School Partnership programme. So, I will be coming up with different questions to discuss on and please feel free to participate as there is no wrong answer. The information you give us is completely confidential, and we will not associate your name with anything you say in the focus group.

Seek Consent to tape record the discussion and ask if there are any question before starting the discussion.

Engagement (20minutes)

1) Before you enrolled into the HSP programme, say a year ago were you involved in your child's school work? Probe how?
2) How is it like to be a parent of a child between the ages 4 & 8? – any support around child learning at home
3) Did your routine with your child changed after doing the parent programme? Probe for aspects like story-telling, playing with children, reading for children etc.
4) Since you started HSP training sessions, have you noticed any improvement in your child's school work? (For example: teacher's comments or child's report)
5) What are some of your concerns regarding your children learning and the education they receive?

Attitudes (15minutes)

6) What has changed in your family after attending HSP training?

7) What changes have you noted in your child from the period you have enrolled into the HSP programme? Probe for attitude, interaction, playing, confidence)

Recommendation (10minutes)

8) What do you think should change or improve for the HSP programme to be more effective?

That concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us.   If you have additional information that you did not get to say in the focus group or you want to talk about regarding this evaluation; please feel free to contact me on +27608214614 or email: mzrmuf001@gmail.com

Appendix C
Teacher Feedback

School: .... Teacher's Name:
.... Grade: .... Are you an HSP Facilitator: Yes
/ No

Please answer the questions separately for each child.			
First name of the child	**_Question1: Since the parent programme, are the child's parents/care-givers more involved with his/her learning? Please explain in what ways._**	**_Question 2: Have you noticed any changes in the child's behavior, confidence or participation in class. Please give details._**	**_Question 3: Have you noticed any improvement in the child's language, drawing, reading, writing or number work. Please give details._**

School: ....

Teacher's Name: .... Grade: ....

Are you an HSP Facilitator: Yes / No

Appendix D
School Consent Letter

Home-School Partnerships
Supporting informal learning at home in the early years
An early literacy programme by Wordworks

CONSENT FOR THE HSPP UCT RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Please complete and email to Mufudzi Muzire: mzrmuf001@myuct.ac.za

Mufudzi can also be contacted on 0608214614

SCHOOL NAME: …………………………………………………………………………….

PRINCIPAL: …………………………………………………………………………………

HSPP COORDINATOR: …………………………………………………………………

Our school hereby grants permission for the UCT MASTERS STUDENT, MUFUDZI MUZIRE to conduct his research interviews at our school.

We have selected the following Date: …………………………………………………………………………..

1. **TIME FOR INTERVIEW OF PRINCIPAL/SMT MEMBER:** …………………………………………..

2. **TIME FOR INTERVIEW OF HSPP COORDINATOR/FACILITATOR:** ………………………………

3. **DATE & TIME FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH 6-12 PARENTS:** ……………………….

DATE ………………………………   **TIME: …………………………**

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

School of Management Studies
University of Cape Town. Private Bag.
Rondebosch 7701
Telephone: +27 21 650-5218
Fax: +27 21 689-7570
8 February 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Thank you very much for your willingness to enable one of our Master's students to work with a programme from your organization. I appreciate your contribution to the education of our students.

The student will need programme information from you and we request that you or a designated person meet with them regularly to provide access to this information. Your cooperation in this regard will ensure that the student meets deadlines and provides you with a high quality evaluation. In order to keep track of the student's interactions with your organization, we request that you copy the supervisor on all correspondence to the student.

Please note that our students are required to work within the ethical framework of the Faculty of Commerce when collecting information from programme documents or programme recipients. This framework deals with anonymity of data sources, sensitivity when requesting information from people and responsible reporting of results.

We also undertake and ensure you that the student will display professional behaviour at all times while working in your organization or on your programme. At the end of the process, you will receive a useful report which will enable you to make informed decisions regarding your programme.

In order to comply with the rules of the Faculty of Commerce, we request you to sign below to indicate that the student will have access to programme data and records and where applicable, to programme recipients.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

ADIILAH BOODHOO
ACTING CONVENER: MPHIL PROGRAMME EVALUATION

AGREEMENT TO ACCESS PROGRAMME RECORDS AND/OR RECIPIENTS:

Carrol	Wordworks	07/03/2017
AUTHORISED PERSON	**ORGANISATION**	**DATE**