

Research Article

Parents' practices in promoting pupils' critical thinking skills in pre-primary schools

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Parents' daily practices in pupils' learning are a prominent contribution to promoting critical thinking skills among pupils worldwide. This study explored parents' practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils in pre-primary. The study employed a qualitative research approach with a phenomenography research design. Data were collected from 25 informants through in-depth interviews method and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that parents' practices contribute to promoting critical thinking skills among pre-primary pupils. It was revealed further that parents promote critical thinking skills in various ways including social activities and the creation of home learning environments. The study recommends that the district educational authorities should empower parents and strengthen their involvement in the promotion of critical thinking skills among pre-primary school pupils through parent-school partnerships.

Keywords: Parents' practices, Critical thinking skills, Pupils

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1. Introduction

With the fundamental global changes from the industrial age to the knowledge age, critical thinking skills are among the 21st-century skills that are highly needed in all aspects of human life (Erdem, 2019). Other skills include creativity, communication and collaboration which aim to equip individuals with the ability to understand logical connections between ideas, and identity, and build and analyze arguments. Critical thinking is defined differently by various scholars, psychologists, educationists and philosophers. For example, Heard et al. (2020) define critical thinking as the ability to analyze and evaluate information, reasoning and situations, according to appropriate standards, to construct sound and insightful new knowledge, understandings, hypotheses and beliefs. Visande (2014) define critical thinking as the process by which a person examines assertions and arguments to determine which are valuable and which are not. On the other hand, Carroll (2004) define critical thinking as the process that involves the use of standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance and competencies. It requires evaluating evidence, considering alternative views, and being genuinely fair-minded in accurately presenting opposing views. Therefore, from these views on the meaning of critical thinking, it can be observed that critical thinking is a mental process that helps an individual judge the quality of information, arguments or situations based on the appropriate standards. Thus, critical thinking skills have to be nurtured from the early years of education with the support of parents as it is very important in the new knowledge economy which is determined by information and technology (Kong, 2014). Based on this fact, people are required to be flexible with intellectual skills, problem-solving skills and skilled in analyzing information.

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Critical thinking involves the idea about any subject content or problem in which the pupil improves the quality of their thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures in imposing intellectual standards (Fisher, 2001). Giacomazzi et al. (2022) noted that a critical thinker is expected to demonstrate curiosity, objectivity, introspection, and analytical ability, and identify biases with open-mindedness, compassion and empathy. Also, a critical thinker is an effective communicator, who should be aware of common thinking errors, determine relevance and be willing to challenge the status quo. Fisher (2001) indicates that a critical thinker recognizes unstated assumptions and values and can comprehend and use language with accuracy and clarity. This implies that critical thinking skills should be enhanced due to their role in human life.

The promotion of critical thinking skills is important to pupils because it involves a variety of skills such as judging, perceiving, analyzing, clarifying, reflecting, determining, comparing and synthesizing (Dwyer et al., 2014; Paul & Elder, 2002). Pupils can gain numerous benefits from mastering critical thinking skills such as helping them to build a base of science and liberal democratic society, promote creativity, and enhance their academic performance, and self-reflection. Also, critical thinking skills enable pupils to assess their learning styles, strengths and weaknesses and allow them to take ownership of their education (Saadé et al., 2012). By developing critical thinking skills, pupils learn how to assess information and assumptions, ask questions and develop diverse ways of thinking by recognizing and assessing issues that influence their attitudes and behaviors including their beliefs, values, and information from various sources (Nosseir, 2015).

Parents' daily home practices in pupils' learning have a prominent contribution to the promotion of their critical thinking skills across the world (Erdem, 2019). During the early years a pupil spends most of their lifetime within the family and parents are their first educators (Sidola & Dhanda, 2018). It is widely known that the home environment and parents' practices usually help to promote critical thinking skills among pupils by stimulating their desire to discover, think and explore new situations and exchange opinions. Sidola and Dhanda insists that parents and the home learning environment have a strong impact on helping a pupil's development and promotion of critical thinking skills through parents' attitudes, behaviors and parents' involvement in home learning activities. Therefore, relying only on the methods of formal school-based instruction will not help much to enhance the promotion of critical thinking skills among pupils.

In African contexts including Tanzania, different forms of parenting styles lead a pupil to be a responsible citizen who acquired the cultural values of a specific place that promotes thinking skills among him or her (Mawus, 2013). Some of the known forms of parenting are through folktales, extended family, traditional rites, mothers' care, attention and love. This means that parenting is the sensitive process of taking care of and supporting pupils since they are born to adulthood involving their physical, emotional, social and intellectual capabilities as the basis of enhancing critical thinking skills among them. As Oyinloye (2021) noted parents hold cultural beliefs about pupils' lives, which transcend schooling and integrate other valued forms of learning including learning at home, religious schooling and formal apprenticeships which are expected to motivate their critical thinking skills.

In Tanzania, the education system recognizes the contribution of other stakeholders including parents in children's learning to create a well-informed Tanzanian with knowledge, skills, ability and attitudes that add value to the national development plans (URT, 2014). Through that recognition, several efforts have been made by the Tanzanian government through the Education for Self-reliance [ESR] of 1967 and the National Development Vision 2025. One of the aims of ESR was to develop in each citizen an inquiring open mind, the ability to learn from others, confidence in one's position and the ability to learn and contribute to society (Sanga, 2016). Furthermore, in Tanzania, the current education system focuses mostly on schools and teachers as the key educators in children's learning with little concentration on the parents' practices and the home learning environment in promoting children's learning including critical thinking skills (Kigobe, 2019). Also, various studies done in Tanzania on the aspect of critical thinking skills focus on the teachers only (Kavenuke, Kinyota & Kayombo, 2020; Mkomele, 2015; Tandika, 2020). However, one of the areas that have been inadequately addressed by these studies (Kavenuke *et al.*, 2020; Mkomele, 2015; Tandika, 2020) is how parents' practices promote critical thinking skills among pupils. Therefore, the study aims to fill this knowledge gap by seeking answers to the question of what the parents practice in promoting pupils' critical thinking skills.

2. Methodology

This section presents the methodology that had been used to elicit the findings of this study. The section comprises research design, participants, data collection tools, and data analysis as follows.

2.1. Research Design

The current study employed a qualitative method to inquire about parents' perspectives, beliefs and attitudes towards their practices that foster critical thinking skills among pupils. The study was guided by phenomenography study design which aimed to understand different ways in which people experience phenomena in their world. The design suited well this study as it aimed to find out parents' practices in promoting pupils' critical thinking skills. The choice of the design was vital as it allowed the study to capture the critical differences in parents' practices in pupils' critical thinking skills.

2.2. Participants

The study was undertaken in Kongwa District due to the fact that the District had the opportunity to host several educational programmes that empower parents in their support of pupils' education. Purposively, the study interviewed 25 parents comprising seven males and eighteen females. Parents were involved because they were thought to have more knowledgeable and experience related to the parents' practices in promoting critical thinking skills at home. The interviews helped to explore the parents' practices in promoting pupils' critical thinking skills.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

In-depth interviews with parents were used to gather information on parents' practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils. Parents were interviewed face-to-face about how do they promote critical thinking skills to children. Face-to-face interviews with parents allowed for better observation of non-verbal cues. We used interview guides to elicit data from parents about their practices in promoting critical thinking skills among children. In-depth interview were suitable for this study because it provided rich and detailed information which enabled a comprehensive understanding of the promotion of critical thinking skills for children. During the interview parents were given freedom to proceed or refrain from the interview. Also, the parents were allowed to ask the researchers for clarification of any question. We sought parents' consent to tape-record data from the interviews for further analysis. On average each interview lasted for 30 minutes, the time which is sufficient to elicit rich data.

2.5. Data Analysis

Qualitative data arising from in-depth interviews were typically transcribed and analyzed thematically. We identified recurring patterns, themes, and insights emerging from the interviews, often using Microsoft Office Excel worksheet (Pivot) to analyze data. Interpretations and findings are then drawn based on the analyses.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings on parents' practices in promoting pupils' critical thinking skills. The study sought to investigate the parents' practices in promoting pupils' critical thinking skills. From this theme, one sub-theme emerged from the finding which was practices in promoting critical thinking skills which had four categories namely; social activities, creating home learning environments, shared tasks at home and family-social relationships.

3.1. Social Activities

The findings generated from the interviews with parents on their practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils revealed that parents promoted critical thinking skills to pupils through various social activities at home settings. In the analysis of their practices, the key arguments were established as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 demonstrates parents' practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils through social activities. They are giving children time to play, questioning various issues that expand their thinking skills and giving instructions about various things such as waking up early in the morning, brushing their teeth and taking a bath. Also, parents interview pupils about normal issues of their daily lives such as job preferences, sports and their interests. They also, direct pupils about various issues; interact with them and have daily conversations that motivate their critical thinking skills. Further, parents share life experiences with pupils that enable them to reflect on their social lives and give them leisure time to reinforce their critical thinking skills. In their support parents understood that in the school there are outdoor activities that

Table 1
Social Activities in Promoting Critical Thinking Skills

<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Key arguments</i>
Practices in promoting critical thinking skills	Giving time for children to play Questioning about various issues Giving instructions to perform a task Interviewing about normal issues in life Directing various issues Interacting with children Having daily conversations with a child Sharing life experiences Giving a child leisure time
	In the school, there are activities outside the class that support children's critical thinking skills such as sports and educational games. Plenty of playing and learning materials help a child to develop critical thinking skills. The community supports a child's critical thinking skills through social events such as circumcision for boys.

Note. Source: Field Data (2022)

support extending critical thinking skills for pupils. Also, they bought and made local playing materials and learning materials that are used by pupils to enhance critical thinking skills among them. They further believe that the community supports a pupil's critical thinking skills through various social events such as initiation ceremonies for them. In pre-primary school "S₁" parents had this to say,

Sometimes I ask him a few small questions and I support the child by giving him/her the instructions and I ask for what he needs. I always interview or question him/her about what he/she learned at school. After coming back from school I teach him or direct him things he has not done well at school, also I help the child develop critical thinking skills by giving him or her the opportunity to interact with other peers in sports and extra exercises (Interviews, Parent "S₁", 11th, July 2022).

The above narrative depicted that social activities at home are very important in the promotion of critical thinking skills among pupils. This implies that parents should be sensitive to home social activities in the promotion of critical thinking skills among their pupils.

3.2. Creating Home Learning Environments

The findings generated from the interviews with parents on their practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils revealed that parents promoted critical thinking skills to pupils through creating a home learning environment. In the analysis of their practices, the key arguments were established as presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Learning Environments in Promoting Critical Thinking Skills

<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Key arguments</i>
Practices in promoting critical thinking skills	Teaching at home Motivating pupils when doing the right things Providing learning materials Guiding pupils on what to do Buying learning facilities that enhance thinking skills

Note. Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 2 indicates that parents promote critical thinking skills through creating enabling learning environments at home by teaching pupils how to read, count and write. Further, parents motivate pupils when they are doing good things in learning by giving praise or gifts to encourage them to do better. They provide learning materials that motivate pupils to think critically such as buying books, syllable cards and charts and educational games. Parents guide pupils on what they are supposed to do and what they are forbidden. They also buy learning facilities that enhance critical thinking skills for pupils such as Television and radio that motivate them to learn and think critically. In pre-primary school "S₅" parents had this to say,

I teach and direct a child so that he/she can develop critical thinking skills. I give a gift to the child so that he/she adds more effort in thinking during learning and I bought syllable cards and charts to help the child to think critically about those letters. Additionally, I support a child to think critically by guiding him/her to observe school and home rules (Interview, Parent "S5", 21st, July 2022).

The above illustration indicates that the creation of an enabling home learning environment had positive impacts on the learning and promotion of critical thinking skills among pupils in home contexts.

3.3. Home Shared-tasks

The findings generated from the interviews with parents on their practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils revealed that parents promoted critical thinking skills to pupils through home-shared tasks. In the analysis of their practices, the key arguments were established as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Home Shared-tasks in Promoting Critical Thinking Skills

<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Key arguments</i>
Practices in promoting critical thinking skills	Reading with children during evening and weekend days Counting objects or bottle caps together Drawing pictures with pupils Singing gospel songs and dancing together Supporting pupils' homework

Note. Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 3 demonstrates that parents promoted critical thinking skills among pupils through various home-shared tasks. The findings revealed that parents were reading with children during the evening and weekend days, the practice that motivates pupils to think critically and develop the culture of reading. They also count various objects surrounding home environments such as bottle caps to expand pupils' critical thinking skills. Parents stress that they usually sing gospel songs and dance together with pupils, a practice that they believe promotes critical thinking skills for them. They also supported pupils' homework; they thought that it helped pupils to model thinking skills from their parents. One parent from school "S₃" said the following;

I have developed the behavior of reading storybooks with my pupils during the evening time when we have finished the domestic activities. We count together objects such as eggs and oranges sometimes we also count bottle caps. During the weekend days, we had enough time to read, draw pictures together and sing as well dancing gospel songs which made pupils excited. Also, I used to support them with their homework (Interview, Parents "S2", 14Th, July 2022).

The above statement indicates that sharing tasks with pupils' helps pupils acquire skills from parents that enhance their capabilities to think critically with the people surrounding them it also enhances parent-child interactions in learning.

3.4. Family Social Relationships

The parents revealed that family social relationships promoted critical thinking skills among children. In the analysis of their practices, the key arguments were recognized as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Family Social Relationships in Promoting Critical Thinking Skills

<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Key arguments</i>
Practices in promoting critical thinking skills	Positive interaction with pupils at home Upholding positive behavioral norms at home.

Note. Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 4 indicates that family-positive social relationships help pupils build up critical thinking skills. A family with positive parent-child interactions enhances critical thinking skills among pupils. Further, a family that observes behavioral norms such as respect, greetings and appreciation for others helps a pupil to build up critical thinking skills. In pre-primary school "S₂" parents had this to say,

There should be a positive parent-pupil interaction that promotes critical thinking skills for a pupil such as reading and playing together. Home values like greetings and respect for others help a pupil to think critically about how to live with other people in the family and outside the family (Interview, Parent "S2", 14th, July 2022).

The above-quoted statement portrays that positive parent-child interactions and behavioral norms at home are important in influencing the development of critical thinking skills among pre-primary school children.

4. Discussion

Studies by Kamarulzaman (2015) and Muliastari (2017) are consistent to the findings of this study. They supported the idea that critical thinking skills can be promoted through social activities. They believe that playing is suitable for pupils as it gives them chances to experience activities in a meaningful, purposeful and fun way. Noviza (2020) affirms that many things help to promote pupils' critical thinking skills at home such as the availability of games, socio-dramatic play and technology. Plays help pupils construct their knowledge, meet socio-emotional needs and acquire various skills by interacting with the physical world and other peers. Law (2012) agrees that pupils' critical thinking skills are promoted when adults or parents ask pupils open, thought-provoking questions that impel pupils to challenge their ability to think about another person's perspectives. Several studies declared that parents' practices of asking pupils "how and why questions" help them to promote skills in critical thinking (Atkinson, 1997; Law, 2012; Leon, 2015). Deng et al. (2020) supported that parents can teach children in various ways to promote critical thinking skills. Firstly, encouraging curiosity, by asking questions about why they think what they think. Secondly, encourage active reading at home by discussing and reflecting on books. Thirdly, parents should expose pupils as much as possible to different environments to stimulate critical thinking skills and lastly, expose pupils to adult conversations. Rolland (2022) views that, parents need to help pupils develop critical thinking skills by reinforcing the work of teachers. Mokuia (2012) added that the provision of learning materials to pupils is important since it helps them acquire new experiences and motivates them to learn from one another understand abstract concepts, solve problems and develop critical thought processes. A study by Yu and Daraganova (2014) supports the idea that a motivating home learning environment that provides educational interactions and activities such as playing games, singing songs, shared reading and playgrounds as well as the availability of learning materials at home expands children's skills on critical thinking. Mwenje et al. (2020) noted that parental involvement in home learning activities helps in enhancing a pupil's confidence, motivation, self-esteem, communication skills and interests that trigger their critical thinking. Additionally, children's participation in learning activities at home, positive parent-child interactions, and the presence of learning materials are the three key features of a home learning environment that help to promote pupil's education and critical thinking in particular (Lehr et al., 2020). Mwenje et al. (2020) hold that the quality of parent-pupil interactions is the key feature of the home learning environments that helps to promote children's educational development and critical thinking skills.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study sought to explore parents' practices in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils in Kongwa District. It was found that parents' practices at home promoted critical thinking skills among pupils in various ways including social activities, the creation of friendly home learning environments, home-shared tasks and family social relationships. Furthermore, it was disclosed that parents are the first mentors of the pupil, who have a role in supporting the development of critical thinking skills in pupils at home settings. However, there are some limitations that hinder parents' practices in promoting the development of critical thinking skills in pupils. The limitations include; limited awareness of the importance of critical thinking skills among parents, time constraints due to multiple responsibilities in the family, and limited resources that facilitate the promotion of critical thinking skills among pupils at home settings. Therefore, the study recommended practices for parents to promote critical thinking in pupils. It was recommended that parents should provide pupils with a supportive environment, model critical thinking skills at home and provide opportunities for critical thinking skills to pupils.

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