



An Overview of the Evaluation of the Book-Sharing Programme
Implemented by Living Hope in South Africa

*Evaluation Topic: An Assessment of Parents' Book-sharing Quality,
Children's Level of Engagement, and the Effects on Children's Verbal
Exchanges*

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The research for this report was conducted as a Dissertation in the **MPhil in Programme Evaluation**, based on a request for such research by **Living Hope**.

This summary report focusses on the findings and recommendations of the study preceded by a brief introduction.

The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project.

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Introduction

This report provides highlights of formative evaluation study that was conducted for the Book-Sharing for Families Programme, implemented by Living Hope in Capricorn, Ocean View and Masiphumelele regions in South Africa. The book-sharing for families programme aims to strengthen capacity of parents and caregivers to foster positive relationships and provide enriching environment for their children that enable them grow and develop pre-literacy skills (including language development, concentration development, and book handling skills) that are needed for children to be ready to acquire reading when they go to school. The programme targets parents of low socioeconomic status and children aged 30 to 60 months, and it is implemented using a seven-week curriculum. Living Hope is a faith-based organisation that was established in the year 2000 with a vision of reaching people for Christ, bringing hope, and breaking the despair of poverty and disease.

Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the extent to which the programme achieved its short-term outcomes (effect on children's verbal exchange) and to gain a deeper understanding of its performance. Specifically, the evaluations investigated:

- i) The effect of book-sharing on children's verbal exchange. This was assessed before and after the end of the programme using the Naturalistic Assessment of Verbal Exchanges (NAVE) tool.
- ii) Children's level of orientation to book-sharing. This was assessed using the Children Orientation to Book-sharing (COB) rating scale.
- iii) The quality of the programme implementation. This was assessed using data collected through interviews with the programme participants.

Table 1 below summarizes the short-term outcome and implementation evaluation *questions*.

Table 1: Short-term Outcome and Implementation Evaluation Questions

Short-term Outcomes Questions	• Implementation Questions
1. What effect does the implementation of the book-sharing programme have on children's verbal exchanges?	4. How do parents and facilitators implement the book-sharing programme?
2. Do parents conduct book-sharing sessions with children in the manner consistent with programme design? – quality of educator	4a. How is the programme tailored to the intended beneficiaries' expectations? 4b. Were the children participating in book-sharing sessions in appropriate ways?
3. To what extent are the children actively engaged during the book-sharing sessions with the parents? (children's engagement)?	4c. What aspects of the programme did the beneficiaries feel worked well and contributed to the attainment of intended results or did not work well and inhibited the attainment of intended results? 4d. Was the programme perceived to be challenging by participants?

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation assessed the short-term outcomes and quality of implementation of the Book-sharing for Family Programme. The purpose was to provide an elaborate description of the book-sharing programme, check the actual exposure of programme participants to the intervention and offer a description of the experience of such participants. Attempts were made to assess whether the programme was implemented according to the way it was designed (programme logic) and whether the implementation was of sufficient quality.

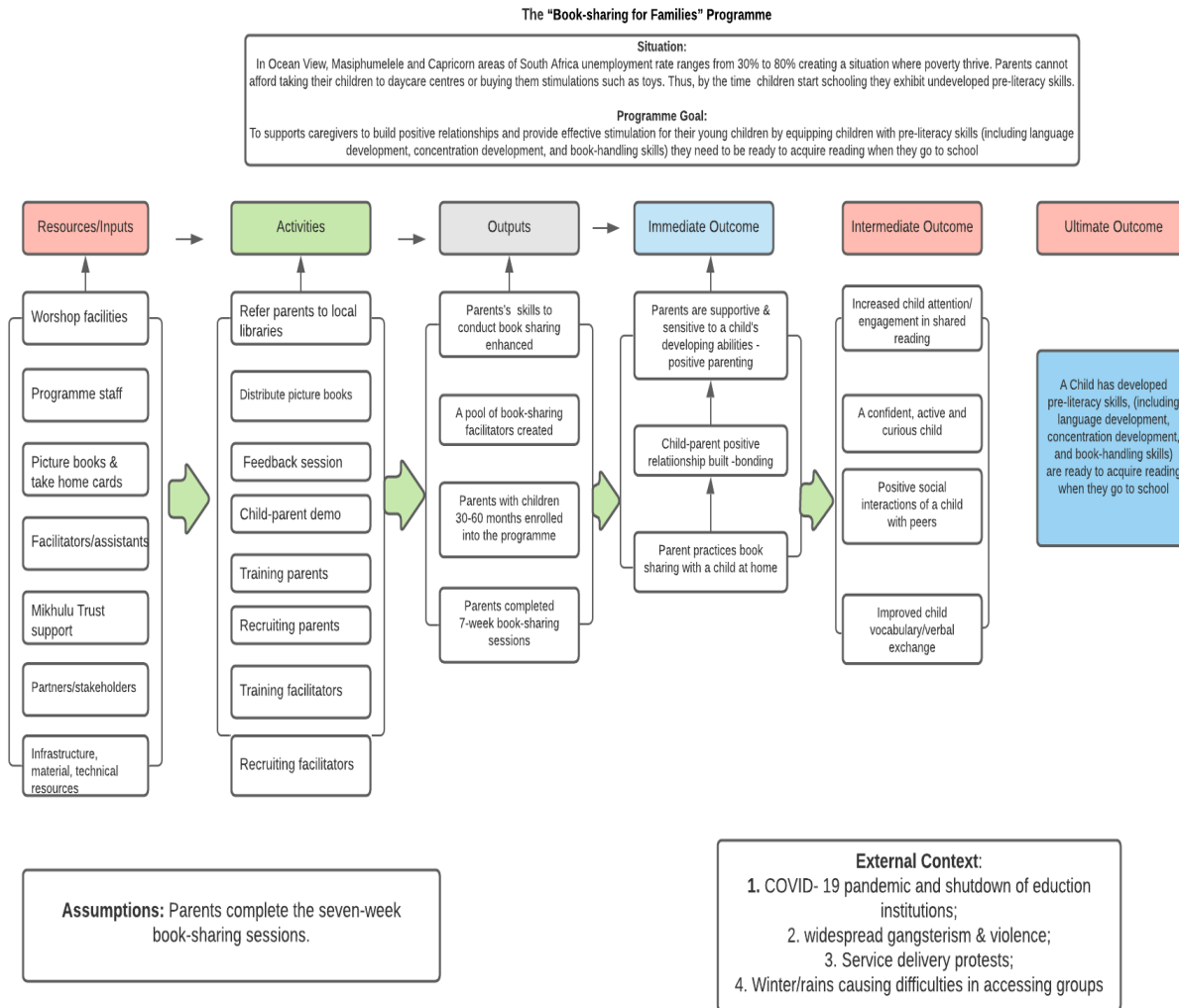
Understanding Programme Logic

Before the evaluation commenced, a range of programme documents were reviewed, and preliminary interviews were conducted with programme staff. These provided useful insights of how the programme was intended to operate. To note however, at the time of initial engagement with the programme, the Book-sharing for Families Programme did not have an explicitly documented logic model. Therefore, I developed the logic model, see Figure 1 below, using two approaches:

- i) Interactive engagements with programme stakeholders to understand how they envisaged the programme would operate to produce the intended results.
- ii) Review of formal and informal documentation about the problem the programme was intended to address, the causes and consequences of the problem, and wider research literature deemed relevant to the programme. The documents reviewed included the programme proposal, progress and annual reports, and searches on the organization's website

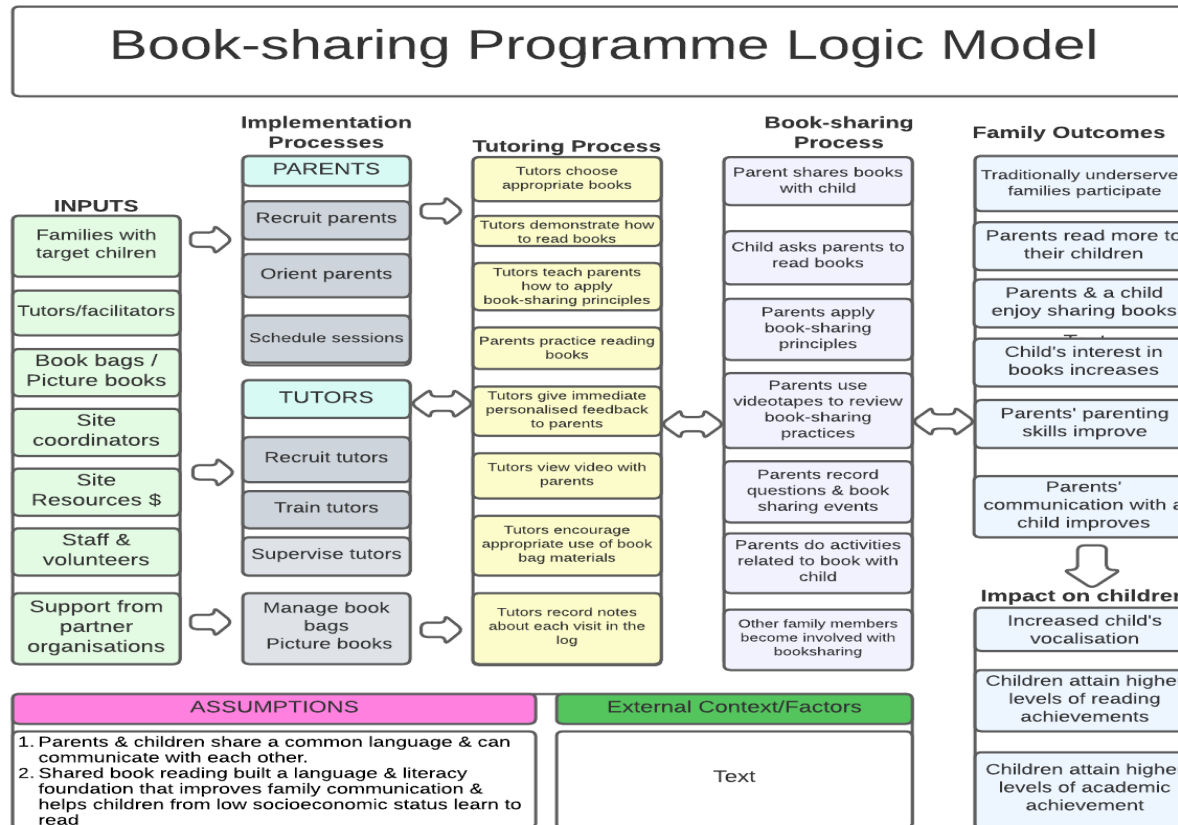
After developing the programme logic using the above two approaches, a plausibility assessment of the programme logic was conducted. This was intended to evaluate the soundness of the theoretical and operational bases of the intervention design using available scientific design. It further helped to understand the programme's strengths and weaknesses and assess whether the programme logic was robust enough to produce the intended results.

Figure 1: Visual Presentation of the Programme Logic Model



Basing on the programme logic plausibility assessment conducted, revisions were proposed for the logic model, see Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Living Hope Book-sharing Programme Revised Logic Model



Note: Living Hope Book-sharing Programme Revised Logic Model. This Logic Model has been revised and updated using the Logic Model from Shared Reading Project: Evaluating Implementation Processes and Family Outcomes. Sharing Results (p. 11), by Delk and Weidekamp (2001), retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED453519>.

Participants

Data were collected from a cohort of nine parents and their respective children aged 30 to 60 months who consented to participate in the programme. The inclusion criteria included: (1) being a parent/caregiver; (2) having a child between the age of 30 to 60 months; (3) residing within Living Hope programme sites; (4) being of low socioeconomic status; and (5) willingness to attend a seven-week book-sharing training. Living Hope recruited the programme participants, and baseline assessments were conducted in January 2022.

Measures

- i) The Naturalistic Assessment of Verbal Exchanges (NAVE) tool
- ii) Children's Orientation to Book reading (COB) rating scale, captures children's overall responses to literacy events by monitoring levels of engagement, nonverbal and verbal behaviours, persistence, and their focus of attention during book reading. The COB is a four-point global rating scale (with scores of one and two indicating overall low orientation and scores of three and four indicating high orientation).
- iii) An Assessment of Book-sharing Questionnaire (ABQ) tool. Focused on the way the parents conducted the book-sharing session with the children.
- iv) Interview schedule was developed to obtain qualitative data from parents, facilitators, and other programme staff.

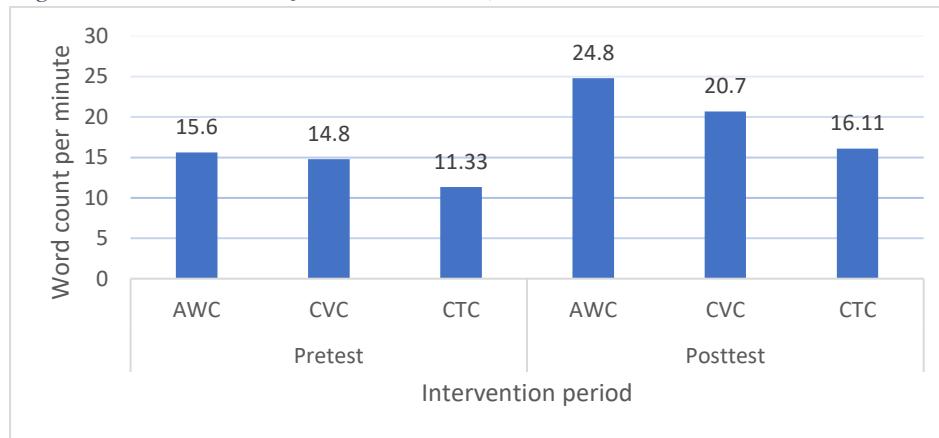
Evaluation Findings

The results of the evaluation are presented per the evaluation questions.

1. Evaluation question 1: What effect does the implementation of the book-sharing programme have on children's verbal exchanges?

Figure 3 below illustrates that for the current study, adult word count (AWC), child vocalisation count (CVC) and conversational turn count (CTC) were higher at post-test than at pre-test, implying an improvement in the child's verbal exchange over the intervention period. Children had more conversational turns per minute at post-test than at pre-test, $M = 16.11$, $SD = 5.302$ and $M = 11.29$, $SD = 7.404$, respectively. However, the group means are not statistically significantly different.

Figure 3: An Illustration of Adult Word Count, Child Vocalisation Count and Conversation Turn at Pre- and Post-test



2. Evaluation question 2: Do parents conduct book-sharing sessions with children in the manner consistent with programme design? - Quality of the educator results

Living Hope facilitators were asked to observe and rate the parents and their respective children during the last (seventh) book-sharing session. The intention was to assess how well the parents conducted the book-sharing sessions with the children. Ten parameters were used for this assessment, with responses ranging from never, rarely, sometimes, to always. The facilitator also recorded the overall rating, which ranged from a lot of improvement is needed; some improvement is needed; good; to excellent

Overall, the findings indicated that out of the nine parents observed, seven were excellent in conducting the book-sharing sessions with children, and two were good.

Figure 4: The ABQ - Assessment of Book-sharing Questionnaire

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Good	2	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Excellent	7	77.8	77.8	100
	Total	9	100	100	

On the 10 ABQ rating parameters, parents were observed to follow the recommended book-sharing procedures introduced by Living Hope. On each parameter, two parents sometimes and seven parents, respectively, always followed the procedures.

3. Evaluation question 3: To what extent are the children actively engaged during the book-sharing sessions with the parents? (children’s engagement)

To address this evaluation question, which focused on assessing a child’s engagement in book-sharing, I calculated the overall COB rating. On average, the children’s engagement in book-sharing activities was 3.78. This signifies a high level of children’s attention and interest in the shared book interactions because the COB is a four-point scale, with a score of one and two indicating low engagement while the scores of three and four imply high engagement.

This implied that the amount of time children spent interacting with the parents, children, or materials in a manner that is developmentally appropriate during the book-sharing session was high.

Implementation questions. How do parents and facilitators implement the book-sharing programme?

Implementation evaluation questions focused on understanding how the book-sharing programme was implemented; attempts made to meet the beneficiaries' expectations; perceived challenges of the programme; aspects of the programme that the beneficiaries thought worked or didn't work well; and aspects of the programme that the beneficiaries believed needed improvement to allow attainment of intended results. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with programme participants (both beneficiaries and programme staff). Below were the sub-questions asked.

4. Evaluation Question 4a: How is the programme tailored to the intended beneficiaries' expectations?

Programme participants, mainly parents and facilitators, were asked to describe what a regular book-sharing session would entail. The purpose was to gain a deep understanding of the key skills that the facilitators emphasized during the training of parents and how the parents integrated those skills during the book-sharing sessions with children. Two sub-themes emerged as key skills/competencies emphasized during the book-sharing sessions: (1) never say no to the child and (2) follow the child's interest.

5. Evaluation Question 4b: Were the children interacting with the environment (book-sharing sessions) in a manner that is developmentally appropriate?

Programme beneficiaries (parents) were asked to describe the changes that their children exhibited regarding attention and persistence during dialogic book-sharing sessions. This was intended to measure the progress of children's orientation/engagements with book-sharing and how the book-sharing experience made facilitators and parents feel. Parents reported the changes they observed concerning the children's posture, facial expressions, eye gaze, distractibility, verbal/nonverbal communication, and response to adult support during book-sharing sessions. In the responses of both the facilitators and parents, two themes emerged: (1) A child's ability to communicate, and (2) I feel excited.

6. Evaluation Question 4c: What aspects of the programme did the beneficiaries feel worked well and contributed to the attainment of intended results or did not work well and inhibited the attainment of intended results?

What worked and did not work well is yet another theme that both the parents and facilitator mentioned in their responses. Two themes emerged concerning what worked well and facilitated the attainment of programme results, and participants felt excited, as elaborated in question 4b above. The themes were (1) engagement and (2) robust training.

7. Evaluation Question 4d: Was the programme perceived to be challenging by participants?

Overall, the theme of 'challenges' in implementing the book-sharing programme manifested in the responses of parents, facilitators, and the Programme Manager. Four themes emerged regarding the challenging nature of implementing the programme, and these are: (1) waiting time, (2) turn out, (3) incentives and (4) programme monitoring.

Recommendations

The purpose of this evaluation was to inform the improvement of the Book-sharing for the Families Programme. The recommendations below are made based on the findings from this evaluation and evidence from the evaluation of similar programmes.

- i) The literature suggests that incorporating play into the book-sharing experience will encourage even more engagement and interest. The Book-sharing for the Families Programme currently does not have any interactive elements or play. Literature has shown that book-sharing interventions that added interactive components or play had more significant effects than those without. Select picture books that have manipulatives such as flaps and textures that keep the child engaged.
- ii) A revised logic model (Figure 2 above) is recommended for Living Hope to guide the implementation, review, and the design of other related book-sharing programmes. The programme logic should highlight interventions and results related to implementation, tutoring/facilitation, book-sharing processes, and these should show results related family outcomes and overall impact on children. The programme logic model should be regularly reviewed and updated to remain relevant to the changing programme context.
- iii) Living Hope should adjust the programme implementation modality by exploring new options. For instance:
 - a) The delivery of book-sharing sessions with parents should be conducted by local community workers. Living Hope should mobilize and train local community workers on how to conduct the book-sharing training with the parents. The use of local community workers will ensure community ownership of the programme, consistency of programme facilitators, save Living Hope the associated costs of recruiting distance facilitators, and ensure scalability of the programme.
 - b) The intervention should be delivered in a group format with relatively few sessions. This may require the facilitators to reach a group of parents or caregivers and assess them as a group, instead of assessing one parent and a child at a go. This is because of limited technical capacities and financial constraints. Available evidence has revealed that, on average, a skilled facilitator can observe three to five children/parents at a go using the NAVE or COB rating scales.
 - c) Kindergartens and child daycare centres should be targeted. In this case, caregivers at these centres should be trained so that they can conduct book-sharing interventions with the children. This will ensure that all target children are reached and reduce the risk of parents not turning out for book-sharing sessions.
 - d) Owing to the challenge of the failure of parents to turn out for book-sharing interventions and the long waiting hours for those who turn out on time, Living Hope should explore the possibility of having mobile facilitators to reach out to parents in their respective homes. Instead of inviting all the parents to come to one central place for induction into book-sharing experiences, the trained facilitators should be the ones to reach out to targeted parents. This will reduce the transaction costs and the rate of absenteeism, allow facilitators to monitor book-sharing practices in the respective parents' homes and minimize the possibility of losing participants because now there will be improved follow-up.

Limitations

- i) The sample was size (only nine children were assessed). it was therefore difficult to detect the effect of the book-sharing intervention. To overcome this limitation, it would be necessary to expand the sample size to at least 30 children and programme implementation sites in future studies for comparison purposes.
- ii) The research design did not have a comparison/control group. It was therefore difficult to tell the contribution of the programme to the results observed. However, previous evaluations conducted on the impact of shared-book reading contained control groups and already proved the effectiveness of book-sharing interventions.
- iii) I was unable to visit the programme sites to supervise the collection of or to collect data personally. This, in part, was due to COVID-19 and the subsequent travel bans. Therefore, the data used for this study were collected in the form of recorded voice notes. Moreover, the quality of the data generated through online interviews was compromised by poor internet connectivity and the failure of programme participants to show-up.
- iv) It was also a limitation that the study was conducted as a one-off activity and covered a short evaluation time (seven weeks). It is important to note that the experiences and perceptions of study participants are never static; they vary with time, and this at times warrants changes in programme design. A longitudinal evaluation would be required to capture changes in these experiences and perceptions over time.

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