



## **Home Literacy Practices: A Focus on Dominican Families**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The majority of the current research regarding home literacies practices are explored through North American family structures. For this reason, there is a lack of knowledge about what Dominican families, a subgroup within the Latino culture, do at home to assist their children in their literacy acquisition in the Dominican Republic. This qualitative research study provides insight as to what literacy practices take place within the Dominican household by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 Dominican parents. Findings from this research indicate literacy practices include parents participating in the following: (1) helping their children with homework; (2) reading with their children at home; (3) helping their children practice proper diction with everyday conversation; (4) using singing and music to build language development; and (5) providing access to different modes of technology to support literacy learning. Instructional implications are discussed based on these findings.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The majority of the current research regarding home literacies practices are explored through North American, Eurocentric family structures. Yet, there is a significant population of Latino immigrants in the United States with Dominicans being one of the fastest growing of the Latino population. Between 1998 and 2002, roughly 20,000 Dominican immigrants came to the United States each year to live (The Dominican, 2004). Even though there is a large influx of Dominicans in the United States, there is still currently little to no accessible research regarding this culture's home literacy practices. The lack of this information leaves educators unprepared to teach Dominican children when they enter the United States school system (Rodriguez, 2000). It is therefore crucial to investigate what Dominican families do to support literacy development within their homes so this knowledge could be used to better support Dominican students in United States K-12 settings.

Much of the research today has been limited since most research has not differentiated Dominican home literacy practices from the broader scope of "Latinos." It should not be assumed that all cultures that fall under the group "Latino" engage in the same home literacy practices, or even use similar ones for a common function. Thus, the purpose of this study is to acquire information regarding what home literacy practices are being utilized by Dominican families.

Given the importance of looking specifically at Dominican home literacy practices, this study will address the following research questions:

- (1) What literacy practices do Dominican children engage in within their home environments?
- (2) How do Dominican parents support their children's literacy development within their homes?

## **RESEARCH ON DOMINICAN HOME LITERACY PRACTICES**

Despite significant evidence pointing to the importance of home literacy environments, much of the current research has not examined home literacy practices and how they differentiate across cultures (Bingham, Jeon, Kwon & Lim, 2017). Thus, consequentially, few studies have investigated what Dominican families do in the United States and what literacy practices Latinos, in general, utilize at home with their children so they can develop necessary emergent literacy skills. This is interesting considering that, "Spanish speakers are by far the largest group of language-minority students in the United States" (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007, p. 568). However, an even more limited number of research studies are available that describe what Dominican families do within their homes in the Dominican Republic to encourage, thus boost, the acquisition of literacy skills.

Recent studies suggest that parental literacy instruction can aid in the development of writing skills and other emergent literacy skills for young children (Puranik, Phillips, Lonigan, & Gibson, 2018). Research has further demonstrated that Latino parents emphasized their interest in being more closely involved in the literacy attainment of the children inside and outside of school (Ramirez, 2003). Ramirez found that both Mexican and Guatemalan parents felt more included in their children's education and more educated on what they needed to do to help their children when the teachers communicated with them. This was accomplished through notebook communication on homework pages, phone calls, and individual meetings. Parents desired this communication and wanted to use it as a method to help their children at home. Also, it is through this collaboration that teachers can become cognizant of what their students' specific needs are, which allows home literacies to have value in schools (Ramirez, 2003). Schools that consider the home literacies of their student population would have the capability to create a more enriching curriculum, involving the parents as active participants in their children's education in both school and home environments.

In what follows, we review research specifically on Latinos' home literacy practices. All studies discussed below were conducted within the United States, regardless of whether the population studied were Dominicans, Mexicans, or any other Latino group. We were unable to find studies on home literacy practices conducted in the Dominican Republic.

### **Functional Literacy Practices**

Several articles explored functional literacy practices within the homes of Dominican families living in the United States (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Rodriguez, 2006; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). They describe how different practices are prioritized based upon what the family needs to do in order to make it through average daily functions in the home. For instance, Rodriguez (2000) conducted a qualitative study to examine how a Dominican family with three young children utilized reading and writing in their home. Through observations and

interviews, Rodriguez found that many of the functional literacy practices utilized include doing homework, paying bills, filling out forms, reading labels, watching television, making phone calls, reading street signs, and following directions. The participants in these studies used specific literacy practices that helped them navigate their life in the United States. However, this study did not take into consideration whether those skills would be different had the families not immigrated. Thus, it is vital to determine what functional literacy skills are used and emphasized by families while still living in the Dominican Republic to determine what practices may have been overlooked in Rodriguez' studies.

### **Parent Education as an Influence on Practice**

Other studies focused on the influence of parental educational achievement to home literacy practices (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Tamis-Lemonda, Sze, Ng, Kahana-Kalman, & Yoshikawa, 2013; Bingham et al., 2017). These studies indicated if a parent has a higher level of education (high school graduate or above), the probability of them reading with their children and having more books in the household increased. The focus of Rodriguez' (2006) study was on the presence or absence of literacy materials within the homes of Dominican families. More specifically, she wanted to know if materials were accessible, what kinds were seen, and how they were implemented within the home environment. In regards to education, "in the homes of the two families in which the mothers had some college education, there were more books in general and more children's picture books in particular" (Rodriguez, 1999, p. 21). Thus, Rodriguez concluded that a higher level of education resulted in more books being present in the home.

Tamis-Lemonda et al. (2013) also reinforced this theme by highlighting that if parents have a higher education, they are more likely to provide a richer literacy environment for their children. Their research focused on parental language experiences and how those experiences impacted their children's language development. Specifically, their longitudinal case study focused on diverse family cultural backgrounds and how each parent interacted with their children during block play wherein blocks had letters and other symbols on them. The goal was to observe and record the types of literacy learning that took place and the types of positive or negative reinforcements that were present. Among the different variables, level of education was one aspect taken into consideration. Tamis-Lemonda et al. (2013) found that tools for their children to use for assisting in their literacy development were more readily available for these parents who had higher levels of education.

The studies described above demonstrated that parents' language ability influences their children's language acquisition. Since these studies were conducted in the United States, research needs to be done to determine if these findings hold true for families currently living in the Dominican Republic. It is possible that parents in the Dominican Republic would have vastly different ideas of what meaningful literacy practices look like if they were living in their native country.

### **Conversation**

Use of language through conversation is a third theme identified as being of high value to Dominican families (Rodriguez, 2006; Rubinstein-Alvia, 2007; Song, Tamis-Lemonda, Yoshikawa, Kahana-Kalman, & Wu, 2012; Rodriguez, 2006). There is a positive correlation

between the amount of conversations exchanged between family members and children's language development, particularly vocabulary knowledge (Song et al., 2012). The more parents interacted verbally with their children, the more their children learned. They could hear what fluent language sounded like and how to use new, acquired vocabulary within a meaningful context because their parents modeled fluent language and speech patterns. Song et al. (2012) assert in their article that Dominican families who live in the United States are more apt to use code-switching (switching from one language or dialect to another according to situation and circumstance) within their home between Spanish and English more than other Latino populations. Meanwhile, Rodriguez (2006) found that Dominican mothers in her study all had a desire for their children to be bilingual; consequently, the older siblings would help the younger children do their homework in both English and Spanish.

In Rubinstein-Avila's (2007) article, the participant, Yanira, lived in the United States with her Dominican family. The study was conducted during Yanira's transition into high school. Rubenstein-Avila described what Yanira's perceptions were of the literacy practices in her life. Yanira shared that while there were usually few print resources available in the home, the radio shows and music were always on in the background. The family would listen and converse regarding what they heard. This provided rich conversation within the home and gave a good example about how conversation was used as a tool for acquiring literacy. Yanira also explained that the radio frequently addressed politics and religion. Each topic had its own set of vocabulary associated with it, so she and her family had access to many words. Even though Yanira recognized the radio and conversations that arose from it as being helpful for language acquisition, the practice itself was not supported with reasons as to why it was valued as a literacy practice. This is where a qualitative interview from the parent's point of view could have been beneficial.

### **Music and Singing as Verbal Language Acquisition**

Music is valued in the Dominican home, and it incorporates verbal language (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). Rodriguez (1999, 2000) states in two of her studies that the few Dominican families who participated in her research had listened to *bachata* and *merengue* all the time; these songs usually had an important message that supported culture, beliefs and values. Thus, not only were children exposed to cultural values through the music, but they were also able to learn new and relevant vocabulary in the form of lyrics.

A second example of an oral language practice utilized in Latino households is a practice called sing-song (Song et al., 2006). This is the term that refers to children learning songs and singing them aloud, which helps children to understand meaningful concepts and recall important ideas. Even though a few families in Song et al.'s (2006) study reflected that singing during the day or before bedtime was crucial to their children's literacy acquisition, this study did not express why it was effective and valued nor how it became effective. More importantly, the practice that was briefly expounded upon was not examined in enough detail to understand how Dominican children acquire vocabulary using this practice. Furthermore, there is little information regarding how exactly sing-song functions in the everyday life of a Dominican family. This was not found to be something that was common in studies done on home literacy practices in the United States.

### **Research Summary**

In sum, there is very limited research which specifically examines the home literacy practices of Dominican families, even in the United States. As mentioned previously, interactive literacy practices are meaningful in Latino homes as well as activities that are found to be useful and culturally relevant to the family (Perry, Mitchell, & Brown, 2008; Saracho, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2013). Furthermore, just as Song (2016) argues in her research, the home literacy practices parents incorporate into their daily routine derive from their own experiences with literacy. Consequentially, these broader studies suggested that the family's culture and beliefs impacted what parents exposed their children to and how they assisted their children's learning. An important question would be whether this belief accurately portrays the Dominican population. It would be unrealistic to assume that every culture that falls under the category of "Latino" engages in the same practices or are guided by the same cultural views and beliefs. This study attempts to hone in specifically on Dominican home literacy practices.

## **METHODS**

### **Design**

This qualitative research study used an interview design to investigate what literacy practices families used at home with children in the Dominican Republic. An interview design is well-suited to answer the research question because it allows the researcher to delve into the topic with in-depth questioning. As Seidman (2013) stated, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Meanwhile, Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain that specific strengths of using qualitative research is that it places value on the context and setting of the research, and it also permits researchers to acquire the realization that participants lived experiences are important and can provide great insight. Conducting interviews also invites and encourages participants to share their attitudes and beliefs so that the researcher can explore beyond surface level interpretations.

### **Participants**

In order to participate in this study, parents had to currently reside in the Dominican Republic and have at least one child between the ages of two and 13. Subjects were then recruited through snowball sampling, which is appropriate when conducting research with hard to reach groups (Shaghghi, Bhopal, & Sheikh, 2011). Initially, the first author located personal contacts who met the criteria for potential participants. Those participants then referred her to further contacts of theirs that may have interest in the study and meet the study criteria.

The mothers and fathers in the study were selected to provide a variation in educational achievement. One of them has a high school diploma, four of them have a bachelor's degree, two have a master's degree, and three of the parents have law degrees. Eight of the participants currently live in Santo Domingo, which is the capital of the Dominican Republic and the most highly populated section of the country, while two others live in Santiago, the second largest city in the country. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants' demographics (all names are pseudonyms.)

## Data Collection

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol which was generated in English and in Spanish, depending upon the participant's predilection. Duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 90 minutes. Interviews with two participants were conducted in person while they were visiting the United States, while the rest were conducted via Skype. Each session was audio recorded so the interviews could later be transcribed during the analysis phase. Field notes were also recorded.

**Table 1.** Study Participants

Participant Name	# of Kids	Ages of kids	Level of Education	Marital Status	Location
Julia	2	9 & 11	Masters (in process)	Married to Roberto	Santo Domingo
Roberto	3	9, 11, & 19	Masters	Married to Julia	Santo Domingo
Morena	2	2 & 5	Law Degree	Married to Kevin	Santiago
Kevin	2	2 & 5	Bachelors	Married to Morena	Santiago
Lucia	1	8	Bachelors (in process)	Single	Santo Domingo
Leonel	3	6, 18,22	Bachelors	Married to Maria	Santo Domingo
Maria	3	6, 18,22	Bachelors	Married to Leonel	Santo Domingo
Mency	2	7 & 7	Masters	Single	Santo Domingo
Nicolas	3	5, 6, & 13	Law Degree	Married to Evelin	Santo Domingo
Evelin	3	5, 6, & 13	Law Degree	Married to Nicolas	Santo Domingo

## Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed, and afterwards, a thematic analysis was applied to each transcript. The information explored from the interviews allowed the researcher to analyze common themes that appeared (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). Each transcript was read several times so the researcher could gain a good sense of the data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1996). Two levels of coding were applied to all transcripts. Examples of level one codes were homework, technology, and music. After triangulating themes and codes across all interviews, the researcher discovered several patterns. Thus, the researcher was able to collapse these codes into focused level two codes. Table 2 shows a detailed example of one instance how codes were changed through the analysis phase as five initial codes were collapsed under one code entitled *technology*. After arriving at a final list of codes, the first author then reviewed the transcripts again to ensure that all information was coded correctly. An Excel file was then used to compile codes in order to more easily identify patterns from the data.

**Table 2.** Example of Coding Process

Example	Initial Code	Revised Code
1	Radio	Technology

2	Television	Technology
3	WhatsApp/Social Media	Technology
4	Word Games	Technology
5	Movies	Technology

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## FINDINGS

Based on the interviews, all parents reported being very active in their children's education. They made education a priority since their goals for their children were to be college-educated professionals who would then contribute to Dominican society. All parents in this study wanted their children to achieve a higher educational level than they did. Additionally, it was imperative to them that their children have as many opportunities as possible to be successful. As an example, Lucia stated,

*Ósea, mis padres no eran muy dedicados así. Yo estaba en el colegio y hacía mis tareas pero no es lo mismo. Ósea son tiempos diferentes. Entonces ahora uno trata de hacer lo que no hicieron con uno para la mejoría de sus hijos. (My parents were not very dedicated like that. I was in the school, and I would do my homework, but it is not the same. These are different times. So now one tries to do something that their parents didn't do for them for the betterment of their children).*

To reach these goals, the Dominican families developed and currently use many practices within their household to help their children acquire literacy. The most prevalent literacy practices were the following: (1) helping their children with their homework; (2) reading with their children at home; (3) helping their children practice proper diction through the use of everyday conversation; (4) using singing and music to build language development; and (5) providing access to different modes of technology to support literacy learning. Each of these themes assist in the building of literacy in their home environments.

### Homework

All 10 participants expressed how crucial it is to help their kids with homework. Maria and Evelin asserted they help more with homework than their husbands. However, both fathers in these households help in other ways and with other literacy practices. For instance, Leonel, Maria's husband, indicated that he provides support when his daughter has homework questions specific to something that is giving her difficulty, while Nicolas, Evelin's husband, supports his children by checking in on them while they complete their homework. Checking in reinforced to the children that their father prioritizes their success and is available to assist in whatever way is most beneficial and appropriate for the child, given the task at hand.

For all 10 parents, it is valuable to give their children extra homework assistance. The methods used to help their children with their homework is different depending upon available resources in the home. For example, Julia, Roberto, Lucia, and Mency have a computer or tablet in their home and use it frequently to help their children understand ideas when they are

confused. Meanwhile, Maria, Leonel, Morena, and Kevin help their children understand their homework by reading their textbooks with them so they can explain things using the specific material given from school. Other ways in which parents help their children with homework includes reviewing the homework once it is completed or sitting down next to their children while they do their homework so they are available if their children need help. Lucia explained how sitting with her eight-year-old daughter is particularly useful because she can correct her so she can write things professionally. Lucia can explain in that moment why what her daughter wrote was incorrect and how to fix it so she does not continuously make the same mistake. However, for all 10 parents, there was not one strict method they followed in every circumstance to help their children with homework.

Through these methods, parents took it upon themselves to do the best they could to supplement what their children were learning at school. For their children to be successful, each parent recognized they must devote the necessary time to ensure they were understanding what they needed to accomplish in their classes. Parents said they emphasized to their children how important it was for them to practice at home what they were doing in school and to always give their best effort. As Julia stated,

*La respuesta ideal es que todos debemos trabajar igualmente en la educación de nuestros hijos porque si el maestro quiere ayudar a los niños en la escuela, y el padre no ayuda, no hay mucho que el maestro pueda hacer.* (The ideal response is that we should all work equally in the education of our kids because if the teacher wants to help the kids in school, and the parent doesn't help, there won't be much that the teacher can do).

Julia's statement shows there needs to be a commitment between both the educational and home spheres of each child's life. This means that parents and teachers should allocate time to collaborate with each other regarding how to help their children so they can be successful in both spheres. This also suggests that Julia recognized that teachers are not the only people responsible for helping children; parents also have a critical role. Julia indicated that when done successfully, each space builds on the strengths that the other has presented. In other words, not only can teachers learn from parents, but parents can learn from teachers and they can use similar practices when helping their children with their homework.

### **Reading with Children**

Reading is a literacy practice that all 10 participants affirmed using with their children as they indicated that reading helped their children acquire new Spanish vocabulary in valuable and authentic ways. Moreover, they read a variety of genres and types of texts, and the selection depended on their purpose for reading. Types of texts mentioned included the Bible, storybooks, magazines, and dictionaries, among others. Within the various texts, story books were the most common, with six participants indicating they used them at home.

Some sources used by the families were influenced by the parents' religion and culture. For example, when Maria talked about reading with her daughter, she stated, "*Le tenemos una biblia de niños que la enseña a ella la historia de Jesús, pero de una forma que ella pueda comprender.* (We have a Bible for her that shows her the story of Jesus, but in a form that she can understand.)" It was because of her religion that she and her husband Leonel made sure an



appropriate level of the Bible was accessible for their daughter to use.

Although all parents use books as a means to interact with their kids and pose questions, there are slight variations in regards to what their focus was while reading. Thus, certain methods for reading would be taking place as a result. For example, Julia, Robert, Nicolas, and Evelin mostly read with their children so they could acquire good diction and new Spanish vocabulary. The types of questions they would ask their children would be grounded more in word recognition and word articulation. In Morena and Kevin's home, they used reading as a way to help their children practice speaking and to help them with their homework. Maria, Leonel, and Mercy used reading to practice language, but it was also used as a way to promote new vocabulary development. Meanwhile, Lucia primarily focused on helping improve her child's comprehension. Thus, the way in which she helped her daughter was through various questioning strategies and active dialogue throughout the story.

Morena and Kevin elaborated on another practice related to reading in which their two daughters played word games to help them learn and practice words they may come across in their textbooks, homework, or daily reading activities. Both parents explained further where they get their ideas from for the reading word games. Morena said, "*El libro nos da ideas de juegos que pueden ayudar a las niñas con la lectura.* (The book gives us ideas about games that can help the girls with reading)." The book Morena was referring to is one called *Nacho*. Both parents used this resource for ideas regarding games that could support the reading achievement of their daughters. After practicing literacy strategies through games and using new vocabulary in creative ways, both daughters were able to directly apply the same strategies in their school and home activities. The transference of skill was apparent to the parents.

Using varied reading practices and materials discovered, parents have reinforced the idea that reading is extremely valuable to them and meaningful for their children. More specifically, among the 10 participants, three stated that reading has been the most powerful influence for helping their children become literate. Even though most participants did not say it was the greatest impact, they all acknowledged and reiterated its importance in their daily lives and set aside time for their children to read every day. For example, Nicolas and Evelin read with their children or had them read independently every day from 4:00pm until 6:00pm. For the other eight participants, they saved time during the day to devote to reading, but it was not necessarily at a fixed time. For example, Mercy stated that her two sons read throughout the day, and she read to them before they went to bed. Making time to read was seen to be effective in all participant's homes and valued for different reasons.

### **Pronunciation/Diction**

Having good diction due to being able to accurately pronounce words was seen as a useful and valuable skill according to seven of the participants. All seven parents who focus on diction wanted their children to speak Spanish professionally and fluently. Interestingly, several ways of practicing diction were seen across interviews. For example, Julia states,

*"La primera cosa que hacemos es corregirles. En Español, tenemos muchas palabras que usamos en una manera para comunicar. Entonces lo que hago para ayudarles es es corregirles y decirles que no hablen así; y escuchan lo que es correcto.* (The first thing is I correct them. In Spanish we have a lot of words that we use in a way to converse with

one another. So what I do is to help them improve is to correct them and tell them, “Don’t talk like that. Here is what is correct).”

It is important to Julia and Roberto that they constantly correct and encourage their children to speak professionally. Since Julia and Roberto want their children to be professionals in the future, they need to know how to use language appropriately. In the interview, these parents provided multiple examples of how proper language use will help their children in their education as well as future career paths.

Julia, Roberto, and Lucia explained how they enforce good diction with their children through conversations with them about multiple real-world topics and their future professions. When talking about these topics, the conversation became relevant and important to the children because the topics were tangible and relatable. The children recognized how the topics impacted them. On the other hand, Morena, Kevin, Maria, and Leonel helped their children improve their pronunciation and diction by correcting their child directly when they spoke through normal family conversations or reading. As Maria stated, “*Nosotros le corregimos lo que hablan, y cuando dicen algo mal, buscamos en el diccionario.* (We correct what they say, and when they say something wrong, we look in the dictionary).” The dictionary they use helps their six-year-old daughter visually understand better how words are pronounced and spelled.

### **Singing/Music**

Music and singing was important for six out of the 10 participants as they mentioned it being one of the most important practices they used with their children. According to the parents, music and singing has helped the children acquire more Spanish vocabulary, fluency, and expression in language. This practice can be seen through movies, programs, and songs. Morena and Kevin described their children as sponges who absorbed everything they heard. When they put music on, both daughters learned the lyrics quickly.

Maria and Leonel also expressed the importance of singing in the lives of their children because they are members of a Dominican Christian Band called *Chocolates Del Señor* (Chocolates from the Father). Maria shared, “*Ellos aprenden más palabras que están en las canciones. Ellos usan esas palabras en conversación con nosotros porque hablamos de las canciones antes que cantan en las misas de la iglesia.* (They learn more words that are in the songs. They use those words in conversations with us because we talk about the songs before we sing in the church).” Discussing the songs allowed the words to become valuable and important to the children because they could see how the words were applied. Thus, there is meaning attached to the words they learned in the songs which enhanced their children’s overall understanding and literacy.

Another way music was discussed through the interviews was through the act of playing music in their Christian band; Maria and Leonel encouraged their children to participate in playing instruments and dancing. They explained that playing an instrument involves discipline and concentration because the notes on a sheet of music need to be mentally converted into letters. Those letters then need to be thought of as keys or pieces on an instrument that can emit a specific, desired sound.

*Ellos saben tocar piano. El profesor me decía que era bueno que aprendieran de música porque eso le abría el entendimiento. Camelot no ha tenido una gran oportunidad de*

*aprender otra cosa que no sea flauta. Pero eso le ayuda mucho.* (They know how to play piano. The teacher would tell me that it was a good idea that they would learn about music because that opens their understanding. Camelot has not had a great opportunity to learn anything that was not the flute, but that helps her a lot.)

By playing music, all three of Maria and Leonel's children interpreted language in a different way.

## **Technology**

Technology is a big part of what helped all 10 parents help their children acquire literacy. The utilization of technology started in response to necessity. All participants stated there are few to no libraries around them and that libraries are not very common in the Dominican Republic. The interviewees said they have some books, but not as many as they would like to have for their children. To help fill these gaps, technology has been used in participant homes in various ways to help their children acquire a broader vocabulary and understanding of words. For instance, six out of the 10 participants stated they regularly used the Internet to help their children understand their homework or other language concepts when they were having difficulty. Due to the absence of libraries, the parents rely on the computer to provide them with the knowledge and understanding they need so they can assist their children. When discussing how the computer helps her assist her daughter, Lucia stated, *“Ella usa mucho la laptop y ella la usa para aprender cosas. Cualquier tarea que ella tenga, yo me ayudo de Google y le digo a ella que eso le ayuda mucho.* (She uses the laptop a lot and she uses it to learn things. Whatever homework that she has, I help myself understand by using Google, and I explain to her how it can help her).” The parents shared the Internet access has enabled them to learn the literacy content needed so they can assist their children with their schoolwork.

Another example of how the computer, tablet, or laptop have positively impacted literacy development was through the use of digital word games, which were frequently used in the homes of six participants. These parents have seen the usefulness of providing literacy games as meaningful opportunities to practice Spanish word knowledge. The games focused on their children learning words and using their background knowledge to predict words in different game scenarios. The parents indicated that games reinforced vocabulary, introduced new literacy concepts, and resulted in their children's literacy growth.

For example, Mency shared that while her two sons play word games on their tablet, they receive constant, instant feedback on whether or not they are acquiring the word concept. Also, she indicated she noticed her children's motivation increased through these digital word games. Some of the parents also noted the benefit of using word games on a tablet or computer is everything that was needed to play the game was incorporated in the application. No additional physical resources were necessary.

Texting and sending messages through social media or applications such as WhatsApp was another way parents incorporated technology to increase literacy for their children. Six out of the 10 parents said this was beneficial as it helped them monitor how their children wrote and interpreted information. Lucia explained that when her daughter writes something incorrectly, she can instantly see and helps her revise it. This offers Lucia and the other parents the ability to consistently check their children's grammar and whether they are communicating effectively.

Another source of technology often found in the homes of the participants was the

television. The television was used frequently by nine parents in their households. Children are exposed to different programs, movies, cartoons, and news. Julia explained how the television gave them an opportunity to question their children about the things they watched. She said she makes her two sons reflect on the program and what it was helping them to understand. This helped the boys learn that reflecting was crucial, and being an analytical thinker was important. When discussing a specific instance of using analytical skills with her son, Julia stated,

*Él me dijo el otro día “hay una planeta nueva” y más y más, no sé, y le pregunte, “¿Dónde has escuchado eso? ¿Cuál es el recurso?” y él dijo, “el internet,” y dije “Pues, eso fue un recurso fiable donde lo has escuchado?” Los tengo evaluar cosas porque quiero que ellos tengan sus propios criterios de cosas. Eso es una parte de sus crecimientos. Quiero que sean diferentes.* (He told me the other day “there’s this new planet” and so and so. I don’t know, and I asked him, “Where did you hear that? What is the source?” and he said, “The Internet” and I was like “Well, was that source reliable where you heard it from?” I have them evaluate stuff because I want them to have their own criteria of things. That is part of their growth. I want them to be different.)

Julia tries to instill in her sons the importance of not putting all of their trust in what someone or something says without knowing if the information is valid. She also believes that life is about thinking analytically and studying everything. Thus, her beliefs impact what she does with her sons.

Morena and Kevin also loved using the television so their daughters could watch a variety of movies. Morena stated, *“Ellas ven muchas películas de Disney y ellas ahí aprenden y dicen muchas palabras que son muy complicadas para ellas.* (They watch a lot of Disney movies and there they learn and say a lot of words that are very complicated for them).” For this family, the use of television to watch Disney movies has dramatically increased their daughters’ Spanish vocabulary and speech development because they watched movies that were engaging and adequate for their daughters’ level of literacy development.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

As the previous section has shown, all ten parents supported their children’s literacy development in various ways in the home. The five themes discussed are the most prevalent home literacy practices which have supplied the children with rich literacy environments. Since research has indicated that home literacy practices are important to consider in relation to literacy development, this study has the potential to add to the cultural body of research around this topic. Home literacy practices within the Dominican household is an example of a context in which literacy research has not been given much focus.

While previous studies on home literacy focused primarily on various reading practices, the results of this particular study illustrate how multimodality may be increasingly important in other home contexts. Participants in this study showed the importance of singing, dancing, and practicing diction as a part of the core literacy practices used in their homes. In addition, participants emphasized how technology was utilized in areas where print materials were not readily available.

As noted in previous studies, conversation was a crucial practice for children to develop as language users (e.g., Rodriguez, 2006; Song et al., 2006; Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2013). The

parents in this study also emphasized the importance of conversation so their children could have models of fluent speaking as well as opportunities to learn new vocabulary. The participants discussed how they used real world topics, books, technology, and music/singing to activate these conversations. For instance, parents such as Julia and Roberto used real world topics to facilitate conversations on issues that directly impacted their children. These conversations also allowed their children opportunities to express their opinions about meaningful issues to them.

It is also through music that conversations have been initiated. Maria talked about how her children were participants in their Christian band and would engage in discussions about what the songs mean before singing them or playing the music with instruments. These conversations exposed them to a specific vocabulary set while also engaging their background knowledge before studying the words. Furthermore, through the implementation of verbal literacy practices that were connected to culture and religion, parents were able to reinforce both as they honed in on specific skills. Thus, as Song (2016) would argue, an interest in, and an agency for learning about heritage, an important focus of home literacy practices, was maintained.

A significant finding that was often previously unmentioned in the literature was the emphasis of parents in correcting their children's diction and pronunciation through read-alouds. These books also become the focus of conversation while reading during interactive read alouds with parents. Together parents and children have meaningful conversations about story elements and their children's comprehension. Lucia explained raising questions about texts has proven to help her daughter's overall comprehension.

Previous studies, as well as the current study, have explained the importance of singing in the Dominican culture. Past studies explained singing was a common practice and was encouraged daily. It is an effective tool for children to learn new vocabulary. However, researchers had not previously reported the significance of singing being used in the home. For example, the reasons children sing or in what context they are singing had not been addressed in past research. This is where the current study helps to fill in the gap. For some participants, they played music from favorite movies or shows for their children so they could sing along. The children were automatically engaged because they loved the movie or show. Other times, singing was used as a way to teach new vocabulary. For example, if Maria and Leonel's children were learning a new song, they would go over the lyrics together and explain the meanings of all words. Singing was seen as a form of engagement as well as an opportunity to use new vocabulary.

Another aspect that this study has added is the idea of using technology to compensate for the lack of print resources. All parents stated there was little to no access available for them and their children to use public libraries because either there were not many or they were far away. Thus, technology has become a huge resource component for families in the Dominican Republic. Parents use their varied functions to help them consistently support their children in all aspects of literacy, especially writing.

## **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was that the first author was unable to recruit participants from all regions in the Dominican Republic. For this reason, it should not be assumed that all literacy practices discovered in this study can be generalized to all Dominicans. It is possible that home literacy practices could be different depending upon what city or sector the families live in

within the country.

Also, some of the interviews for this study were conducted through Skype. This could be a limitation for two reasons. First, participants were only those who had internet access at home, which limited the pool of participants. Second, this prevented us observing what the home literacy environment looks like in terms of the set-up and available literacy materials.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this research has provided descriptions of home literacy practices in the Dominican Republic, which is an underexamined context in the current educational literature. This study showed that home literacy practices are varied, and some of the examples of home literacy practices may look different from those used in the United States or other countries. These literacy practices could be in response to the economic situation in which the families lived, lack of resources such as libraries, or other daily life commitments one navigates through in order to survive. Practices could also be the result of cultural or religious affiliations as noted through reading religious texts such as the Bible. Just as Kevin states, “*La educación empieza en el hogar, uno le da la cultura, en la escuela yo pienso que se le complementa la educación que no les podemos dar aquí.* (Education starts in the home. One gives their children culture, and in the school, I think they complement the education that we cannot give them here).” The results of the study also indicated that these Dominican parents each saw their children as capable learners who thrived in their homes. This common belief guides them as they make decisions related to literacy practices because the goal they maintain is for their children to accomplish more and succeed in more ways than they have done. Thus, understanding home experiences and parents' perspectives on literacy are important prerequisites to building connections between both home and school contexts, especially when the cultures of the home and school are dissimilar (e.g., Perry et al., 2008). This balance permits understanding and enables educators with the opportunity to provide culturally responsive teaching through diverse literacy activities.

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