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Television's Role in Early Childhood Development in Vhembe District, South Africa

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Abstract

This article examines how television supports the cognitive and social development of young children in early childhood education centres located in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Although television is mostly seen as a form of entertainment, it can also be a useful educational tool when used correctly. The main issue identified in this article is that many rural schools do not use television effectively to support learning and development, partly because of limited access to resources and a lack of teacher training. This research followed a constructivist approach and used a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 early childhood teachers and 5 centre managers from five early learning centres. Data were analysed thematically to identify patterns related to how television is used and its impact. The article focused specifically on the Vhembe District. To ensure trustworthiness, the article used techniques such as triangulation, member checking and thick descriptions. Ethical measures included informed consent, privacy, and voluntary participation. The article found that when television content is related to the curriculum, it helps improve children's language, problem-solving skills, and social behavior. The lack of training and resources also makes it difficult for educators to use television effectively. The article recommends that training for teachers should be provided on how to use educational television, and rural schools should be supported with equipment and suitable content. The research shows that television, when used correctly, can be a powerful learning tool for young children.

Keywords: Educational television, Early childhood education, Cognitive skills, Social development, Rural schools

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1. Introduction

Children learn a lot during the early years of their lives. Their thinking, language and social skills grow rapidly during this

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time. Today, television is a big part of children's lives. Even though it is often linked with entertainment, television can be used as a tool to support learning in classrooms. Television is one of the most accessible sources of information, which can be used to reach out to educate children and can also enhance their cognitive development. Television is an audio-visual aid that appeals to both the senses of hearing and seeing at the same time. Broadcast media like television have brought the reality of children's development directly into our homes, helping parents engage children in television programmes that can aid their cognitive development. Television viewing by children has become so popular to the extent that children have formed the habit of watching television on a daily basis. Television appears to have become the child's way of life educationally, socially, emotionally, etc. Television is one of the most important means of. This article looks at how television helps early learning, especially in rural areas like the Vhembe Circuit. Early childhood education is very important in South Africa. However, many children in rural areas face challenges such as poor resources and limited learning opportunities. Television can help reduce these challenges by offering quality educational programmes. But many early childhood centres in rural areas do not have proper plans or equipment to use television for learning. This article explores how television supports the mental (cognitive) and social development of children in these areas.

The role of television in the education of young children is a complex and debated issue, and this typically revolves around the potential positive and negative impacts of television on early childhood learning and development. Addressing the role of television in the education of children in the Foundation Phase requires a nuanced examination of these factors, considering both the potential benefits and risks, and exploring strategies to maximise the positive influence of television while mitigating its potential adverse effects. The article examines how educators perceive and utilise television programming in their classrooms. It also evaluates the quality of the educational content available and develops strategies for better integration into the curriculum (Imran, 2025). By understanding these dynamics, the research aims to offer valuable recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of television as a learning tool, ensuring that students have access to quality educational resources.

The role of television in early childhood education is both promising and problematic, especially within the Vhembe District of South Africa. While educational television has the potential to support literacy, cognitive development, and classroom learning, it also poses risks such as exposure to inappropriate content and reduced social interaction if not properly managed. In the Foundation Phase, where children are at a crucial stage of development, little is known about how teachers perceive and integrate television into their teaching. This article aims to explore educators' use of television, assess the quality of educational content available, and develop strategies for effective curriculum integration. The goal is to offer practical recommendations for enhancing television's positive impact on young learners (Imran, 2025).

The aim of this research is to explore how television helps young children's thinking and social development in early childhood education centres in the Vhembe Circuit. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were identified:

- To find out how television is used in classrooms.
- To examine how television affects children's thinking and learning.
- To understand how television influences children's social behavior.
- To identify challenges and opportunities in using television in early learning.

2. Theoretical Framework

This article is based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which explains how children learn through social interaction and by using cultural tools like television. Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development shows that children can learn more when guided by teachers or through well-designed educational content. Thinking is of social origin and cognitive development is impossible without the social environment, so thought Vygotsky (Tryphon and Vonèche, 1996). He suggested that interaction with others is an indispensable factor in cognitive development. Learning is particularly connected with the acquisition of higher order thinking skills. Interactions between a parent and child (or a teacher and a learner) are not just temporary moments of social activity, rather they "set a stage" for how the child will think and act in other settings. According to Vygotsky (2012) the second very important concept is about the function of language in the learning. According to Vygotsky, societal constructs are responsible for establishing the working conditions and interpersonal dynamics of people, which influence their thought process, beliefs, attitudes, and reality perception. Also, human agency is mediated by tools and signs, i.e., semiotic agency (i.e., language, counting systems, conventional signs and artefacts).

Vygotsky suggested that through the use of these tools, knowledge is facilitated such that people's social and individual thought processes are developed. This means that children and learners do not need to reinvent already existing tools in order to be able to use them. The idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is arguably the most widely accepted sociocultural theory notion. It is a learning zone that lies between tasks that are simple enough for the learner to complete independently and those that are extremely difficult for them to accomplish (Vygotsky, 1978). Here, learners learn by doing or observing. Vygotsky was certain that a child's ZPD should be linked with their learning.

3. Conceptualizing Cognitive Development

According to Gauvain (2022) cognitive development refers to how a child's brain grows in terms of thinking, understanding, remembering and solving problems. This article focuses on how educational television supports these mental skills in young children. The cognitive, social, and emotional development of youngsters can benefit greatly from educational programming. This article demonstrates how excellent instructional television programs can foster cultural awareness, strengthen language proficiency, and increase problem-solving skills. With its wide range of educational programming aimed at promoting learning and cognitive development, television has become an essential component of contemporary childhood (Yue and Shen, 2024). Television is a powerful medium that can immerse kids in interactive experiences, making difficult ideas more approachable and pleasurable.

This article repeatedly demonstrates that children's learning, social skills, and emotional intelligence may all be significantly impacted by well-designed instructional media (Bara, 2018). Parents and teachers can give kids a well-rounded education that goes beyond conventional classroom instruction by using television's potential. Additionally, instructional media may accommodate a variety of learning preferences, enabling kids to take in knowledge at their own speed and in accordance with their own requirements. We can build a more effective and inclusive learning environment that meets each child's individual needs by utilising television and other digital media.

According to Birla (2023) the importance of media as a useful teaching tool must be acknowledged as we continue to negotiate the challenges of contemporary education. We can enable kids to realise their full potential and prosper in a world that is becoming more interconnected by embracing its promise. Through captivating plots and likeable characters, top-notch children's TV series provide a special fusion of education and entertainment, encouraging social skills, emotional intelligence and cognitive development while cultivating a lifetime love of learning. Educational television programs can greatly improve cognitive abilities, including memory, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Lamrani and Abdelwahed, 2020). Programs that include games, puzzles, and challenges encourage brain activity, strengthening neural connections and enhancing young learners' general cognitive abilities.

4. Literature Review

Television has become a common feature in children's lives and holds potential as an educational tool in early childhood settings. This review explores how educational television supports cognitive and social development while considering associated risks and its role within South Africa's early childhood curriculum.

4.1. Television as a Learning Tool in Early Childhood

Television has increasingly been recognized not merely as a source of entertainment but as a valuable educational resource in early childhood settings. Well-designed educational programmes like *Sesame Street* have demonstrated significant benefits for young children's early literacy and numeracy skills by delivering age-appropriate content that uses repetition, colourful visual cues, and interactive elements that invite children to participate actively (Anderson and Subrahmanyam, 2020). Such programming supports emergent literacy by introducing letters, numbers, and basic problem-solving in an engaging and memorable way. In classrooms, especially in resource-limited rural areas, television can supplement traditional teaching methods where books, manipulatives, or trained staff may be scarce, providing consistent exposure to language and foundational numeracy concepts. Studies show that programmes which incorporate principles from developmental psychology—such as scaffolding, repetition, and narrative storytelling—are more successful at capturing children's attention and facilitating learning (Linebarger and Piotrowski, 2018). However, it is important to note that television's effectiveness depends heavily on how intentionally it is used; passive viewing without adult guidance or connection to classroom activities limits learning potential (Rideout and Hamel, 2019). For many rural contexts where access to diverse and quality educational resources is limited, educational television represents a practical tool that can

help bridge learning gaps and introduce young learners to new ideas and concepts that may not be easily available otherwise (van der Merwe *et al.*, 2022).

4.2. Impact on Cognitive Development

Research consistently highlights the positive impact of educational television on several facets of cognitive development among young children. Exposure to curriculum-aligned television programmes has been linked to improvements in vocabulary growth, reasoning abilities, and general conceptual understanding by presenting material through multisensory methods such as combining audio narration, visual animation, and repetitive songs or rhymes, which enhance memory and comprehension (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2021). Cognitive benefits are most noticeable when children view content that is interactive and designed to challenge their current knowledge and skills, effectively extending their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a concept developed by Vygotsky which emphasizes learning that occurs with appropriate support beyond what children can achieve alone (Noble *et al.*, 2020). However, the literature also warns against excessive or unguided viewing of non-educational or fast-paced programming, which has been associated with reduced attention spans, poorer executive functioning, and diminished self-regulation in young children (Anderson and Pempek, 2018). To maximize cognitive benefits, experts recommend combining television viewing with active adult involvement such as discussions, questioning, or related classroom activities, which helps children process and apply what they see (Smith *et al.*, 2023). This guided interaction is especially important in rural and under-resourced areas, where television might be one of few sources of educational stimulation.

4.3. Television and Social Learning

Television also significantly contributes to social development in early childhood by modelling behaviors and social norms that children can observe and imitate. Social learning theories, particularly Bandura's observational learning framework, suggest that children learn many social skills by watching and copying behaviors demonstrated by characters on television (Bandura, 2020). Research shows that children exposed to programmes which highlight prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution tend to display these positive social skills more frequently in real-life peer interactions and play (Roberts and Foehr, 2019). In this way, television acts as an additional socializing agent alongside family and peers, offering culturally relevant examples of kindness and emotional regulation (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2018). The presence of adult mediation—where caregivers or teachers discuss characters' behaviors, ask questions, or encourage role-play—strengthens these effects by helping children understand and internalize social lessons, thus supporting the development of emotional intelligence and social competence in early childhood settings (Mares and Pan, 2018). Conversely, unsupervised television viewing may expose children to inappropriate social cues, stereotypes, or aggressive behaviors, making adult guidance essential to ensure children interpret and apply what they watch in healthy ways.

4.4. Risks of Television Use

Despite its many benefits, television viewing presents several risks that may negatively affect children's development if not managed carefully. One of the main concerns is excessive screen time, which has been linked to decreased physical activity, disruption of sleep patterns, and difficulties with attention and self-regulation in young children (Domingues-Montanari, 2017; Chassiakos *et al.*, 2019). Exposure to age-inappropriate content, such as violent or frightening scenes, can increase anxiety, fear, or lead to the imitation of negative behaviors (Wright *et al.*, 2020). The risk of passive consumption—where children simply watch television without any interaction or cognitive engagement—can reduce the educational value of television and limit the development of critical thinking and language skills (Valkenburg and Piotrowski, 2020). Research highlights that parental and teacher mediation plays a crucial role in mitigating these risks by setting clear screen time limits, selecting appropriate programmes, and discussing content to foster understanding and critical reflection (Lauricella *et al.*, 2020). In rural contexts, where access to diverse, high-quality media content and professional guidance is often limited, these risks are more pronounced, emphasizing the need for targeted policies and training to promote responsible and educationally beneficial television use in early learning centres.

4.5. Television in the South African ECD Curriculum

The South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) acknowledges the role of media and technology as valuable tools to enhance teaching and learning in early childhood education (Department of Basic Education, 2019). However, the practical integration of television as an educational resource in classrooms varies widely, especially between urban and rural areas. Many rural early childhood centres face infrastructural challenges such as insufficient or

broken television sets, unreliable electricity supply, and a shortage of teachers trained in media use, which severely limits the potential of television as a learning medium (Mothibi and Fongwa, 2021). Nonetheless, pilot projects and community initiatives within rural provinces have demonstrated that educational television, when linked explicitly to curriculum objectives, can enrich children's learning experiences by providing exposure to concepts and languages that might not be accessible otherwise (Ngobeni and Nyika, 2023). The Department of Basic Education has recognized the importance of building teacher capacity in digital and media literacy and continues to promote professional development programs aimed at improving teachers' skills in integrating media such as television into their pedagogical practices (DBE, 2022). Although policy frameworks support the educational use of television, addressing the significant infrastructural and training barriers in rural settings remains a key challenge to realizing its full potential.

Educational television can positively influence young children's learning and social skills when used intentionally and with proper guidance. However, challenges such as limited resources and inadequate teacher training in rural areas must be addressed to fully realise the benefits of early childhood education.

5. Methodology

This article employed a qualitative case study approach framed within a constructivist paradigm to explore the role of television in early childhood development in the Vhembe District. This method was well suited for gaining a deep understanding of participants' perspectives and the contextual factors affecting television use in rural early learning centres (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The constructivist lens facilitated examining how teachers and centre managers interpret television as a cultural tool that mediates children's cognitive and social growth, consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. This theory highlights the importance of social interaction and the use of cultural tools like educational media within a child's learning environment to support development (Vygotsky, 1978). Through this lens, learning is seen as an active, socially constructed process.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten early childhood teachers and five centre managers purposively selected from five early learning centres in the Vhembe Circuit. This sampling ensured participants had direct experience with television use in education and knowledge of the local context (Palinkas et al., 2015). Complementary classroom observations were conducted to corroborate interview findings and provide a fuller picture of television's role in practice. The data were analysed thematically to identify patterns relating to television use, its impact on cognitive and social development, and associated challenges. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, triangulation of data sources, and detailed contextual descriptions, while ethical considerations included informed consent and participant confidentiality.

6. Presentation of Findings and Discussion

This section presents key themes that emerged from the data regarding the use of television in early childhood centres in the Vhembe District. It discusses how television is employed, its effects on children's cognitive and social development, and the challenges faced by educators in using this medium effectively.

6.1. Theme 1: How Television is Used in Centres

Participants generally indicated that television is used infrequently and not always for educational purposes. Most teachers described its use as ad hoc and dependent on power availability or special occasions. In many cases, the television sets were available but not fully integrated into the daily curriculum or lesson plans.

"We only use the television when there is electricity and when we have a DVD that fits the topic. Otherwise, it stays off," (Participant 3, Teacher).

"Television is more for relaxing time than learning. Maybe after outdoor play or when it's raining," (Participant 6, Teacher).

Several participants noted that even when televisions were available, their use was not guided by any formal pedagogical framework or schedule. Rather, teachers resorted to television when no other activity was feasible or when they needed to keep children occupied. There was a general sense that television was considered a supplementary or optional resource, not a core instructional tool.

"We do not have a timetable or weekly plan that includes watching television. It just happens when we have something to show or when it's convenient," (Participant 2, Teacher).

This finding suggests that the use of television in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres is inconsistent and lacks structured integration into daily teaching activities. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, tools such as television can support learning if they are used intentionally within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). However, the sporadic and informal use described by participants fails to harness its full potential as a cultural tool that mediates learning.

The integration of media as a teaching resource requires deliberate planning and scaffolding from the educator. Without this intentionality, television risks becoming mere background noise rather than a meaningful instructional aid. Some teachers also mentioned that they were unsure about how to choose appropriate content or link it to the curriculum.

"Sometimes we are not sure which shows are actually educational or how to make sure it fits with what we are teaching," (Participant 7, Teacher).

The literature supports this observation. Fisch (2019) argues that educational media is most effective when it is integrated into a structured educational context with teacher mediation. Similarly, Lemish (2018) emphasises that passive exposure without guided interaction rarely results in meaningful learning. The lack of strategic planning around television use in these centres highlights the need for policy intervention and teacher training.

Studies by Naigles and Mayeux (2021) highlight that young children's cognitive and language development is greatly enhanced when media is accompanied by adult engagement and interactive teaching strategies. Simply playing educational videos without teacher involvement or follow-up activities does not lead to sustained learning outcomes.

The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four (2015) recognises media and digital tools as part of modern teaching. Yet, participants revealed that no formal guidelines exist at the centre level to guide such use. This suggests a disconnect between curriculum intentions and practice, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is limited.

While television is present in some centres, its educational use is minimal. This theme reveals that without planning, training, and support, television remains an underutilised tool in early childhood education. A structured approach, supported by professional development and clear policies, is essential to shift television from an occasional entertainment device to an intentional and effective learning aid.

6.2. Theme 2: Cognitive Development Through Television

Most participants observed that when educational programmes were used intentionally, children demonstrated noticeable cognitive gains such as improved vocabulary, better concentration, and enhanced reasoning abilities.

"When we show programmes like Takalani Sesame, the children start using new words and even ask questions about what they saw," (Participant 1, Teacher).

"After watching number songs and alphabet shows, learners remember better. Even those who struggle begin to participate," (Participant 8, Teacher).

"Sometimes we pause the show and ask them questions. That's when we see real learning happening," (Participant 4, Teacher).

These responses suggest that interactive use of television, when paired with teacher mediation, can support active learning. This reflects Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which views learning as socially mediated and facilitated through the use of cultural tools like language, symbols, and media. When used within a child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), educational television can scaffold understanding and deepen cognitive development, especially in early childhood.

Research supports these observations. According to Anderson and Subrahmanyam (2020), high-quality educational media enhances early literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills when it complements classroom instruction. Mares and Pan (2019) found that children who regularly watched educational programmes like *Sesame Street* showed measurable improvements in vocabulary, school readiness, and cognitive flexibility, particularly in low-income or under-resourced communities, contexts similar to many areas within the Vhembe District.

However, not all television viewing led to learning. Several participants noted that passive viewing, without follow-up activities or discussion, had limited benefits.

“If we just let them watch without explaining or asking questions, they forget quickly,” (Participant 2, Teacher).

“Some children just copy what they see but don’t understand it unless we talk about it,” (Participant 7, Teacher).

This highlights a critical distinction between television as an educational tool and television as entertainment. From a constructivist perspective, children learn best when they actively engage with content, ask questions, and relate new information to prior knowledge.

While some centres used television strategically to reinforce numeracy and language concepts, others lacked the training or resources to do so consistently. There is a clear need for guidelines and professional development to help educators effectively integrate television into the curriculum.

This theme highlights that educational television can positively impact cognitive development, especially in literacy and numeracy. However, its effectiveness depends largely on how it is used, emphasising the role of teacher facilitation, age-appropriate content, and alignment with learning goals. With the right support, television could serve as a valuable pedagogical aid in early childhood development across Vhembe and similar rural settings.

6.3. Theme 3: Social Development through Television

Participants widely reported that educational television programmes that model prosocial behaviors, such as empathy, kindness, turn-taking, and cooperation, had a noticeable positive impact on children’s social interactions within the classroom environment.

“After watching a show about helping friends, I noticed children became more willing to share toys and help each other during playtime,” (Participant 2, Teacher).

“Some learners who were shy began expressing themselves more after watching stories where characters make friends and talk about feelings,” (Participant 10, Teacher).

“When they see characters apologising or taking turns, they begin to copy that, especially during group activities,” (Participant 6, Teacher).

These observations suggest that television can serve as a powerful tool for modelling socially desirable behaviors, especially when the content is developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant. This aligns with Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, which highlights the importance of social interaction and imitation in early learning. Television acts as a cultural artefact, transmitting norms and values which children can internalise, especially when content is mediated by adults who encourage reflection and discussion.

This theme strongly echoes Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, which asserts that children learn behaviors through observational learning by watching others, particularly figures they admire or relate to. According to Mares and Woodard (2020), consistent exposure to prosocial television content has been associated with increased empathy, cooperative behavior, and the ability to regulate emotions, especially when paired with adult commentary and classroom-based reinforcement.

Participants emphasised the importance of guided engagement to strengthen these effects. Teachers who actively discussed the themes or encouraged role-playing activities based on the programmes found that children were more likely to apply the lessons in their interactions with peers.

“We talk to the children after the show. I ask them, ‘What did you learn? What would you do if your friend was sad?’” (Participant 4, Teacher).

“When we act out the story from the show, they enjoy it and remember it better,” (Participant 7, Teacher).

This reinforces the constructivist idea that children benefit more when they actively construct meaning from media content, rather than just passively observe it. Media becomes a springboard for real-life application when adults mediate the learning process through dialogue, questioning, and practical demonstrations.

However, participants also raised concerns about inconsistent reinforcement and the potential for children to misinterpret messages in the absence of adult guidance. For example, one teacher noted that some children became confused about when to apply certain behaviors, especially if the programme context was not adequately explained.

This points to a need for educator support and training on using television as a social development tool. Integrating social-emotional learning objectives with media use could enhance the developmental impact, especially in early childhood settings where prosocial habits are still forming.

This theme highlights that television can play a valuable role in shaping social behavior, particularly when the content models empathy, communication, and cooperation. However, its success hinges on active mediation by educators who help children connect media messages with real-life social contexts. With strategic use, television can be a catalyst for social-emotional development, especially in under-resourced schools where such programming may be one of the few consistent exposures to structured social learning.

The findings call for collaboration between policymakers, education departments, teacher training institutions, and content creators to create an enabling environment where television can play a meaningful and consistent role in early childhood education, especially in underserved communities.

6.4. Theme 4: Challenges in Using Television

While participants acknowledged the many benefits television can offer in early childhood education, they also identified several challenges that limit its effective use in rural early learning centres. One major concern was that television can easily become a distraction, especially when it is used too much or without a clear educational purpose. As one teacher explained:

“Sometimes, children just watch TV passively and lose focus on their class activities afterward” (Participant 1, Teacher).

This concern is supported by Irwin *et al.* (2022), who warn that excessive screen time can reduce children’s attention spans and negatively affect their academic performance. The risk is that, rather than engaging children actively in learning, television viewing might lead to restlessness and difficulty concentrating on classroom tasks.

Another challenge mentioned by participants was the problem of inappropriate or non-age-appropriate content being shown to children. Due to limited control over what programmes are available, some centres struggle to provide suitable educational material. One centre manager said:

“We don’t always have access to the right educational shows, and some advertisements or violent scenes are upsetting for young children” (Participant 8, Manager).

This reflects concerns raised by Ali *et al.* (2023), who highlight the negative emotional impact that exposure to unsuitable media content can have on young learners. Such content may cause fear, confusion, or anxiety, which can undermine children’s social and emotional well-being.

Participants also pointed out infrastructural challenges that affect the use of television in rural areas. Many centres face unreliable electricity, broken or outdated television sets, and poor internet connectivity, all of which limit access to high-quality educational programmes. Without proper equipment and infrastructure, teachers cannot consistently use television as a learning resource.

Many educators expressed feeling unprepared to integrate television into their teaching effectively. They cited a lack of training on how to select curriculum-relevant programmes and how to guide learners during viewing sessions. One teacher explained:

“We don’t know how to choose programmes that fit our curriculum or how to guide learners during viewing” (Participant 10, Teacher).

This lack of confidence and knowledge means television often remains underused or misused in classrooms.

Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory highlights the critical role of social mediation in learning. According to Vygotsky (1978) and Learning (2012), television should not be used passively; instead, it must be scaffolded by teachers or caregivers who can help children make sense of what they watch. Without this mediation, television risks becoming mere entertainment rather than a tool for meaningful learning.

Therefore, to overcome these challenges, professional development for educators is essential. Training can help teachers select appropriate programmes and use television purposefully to support learning. Additionally, investments in infrastructure and resources are necessary to provide reliable access to educational media in rural early childhood centres. Addressing these barriers will enable television to reach its full potential as a valuable educational tool.

The findings highlight both the potential of television as a tool to enhance learning and social skills and the significant barriers limiting its optimal use in rural early childhood settings. Addressing these challenges through training and resource provision is essential to maximize television's educational benefits in the Vhembe Circuit.

7. Recommendations

Based on the article's findings, many Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners lack the necessary training to effectively use television as an educational tool. Therefore, targeted professional development programs should be implemented to equip educators with skills to integrate television into their teaching practices. Such training should emphasize selecting age-appropriate and curriculum-aligned content, facilitating active viewing through discussions before and after viewing, and using television to reinforce literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. Continuous professional development could help bridge the existing gap in media literacy among ECD educators.

The successful use of television in early learning centres also depends heavily on reliable infrastructure. Participants highlighted challenges such as inconsistent electricity and the lack of functional equipment, which impede regular and meaningful use of television. To address this, government bodies, NGOs, and school governing bodies must prioritise the provision of basic infrastructure, especially in rural and under-resourced centres. This includes ensuring a consistent power supply, providing televisions or digital projectors, and making educational programs available in multiple formats, such as offline USB or DVD content for centres without internet access. Such investment in infrastructure is fundamental for effectively integrating television into the ECD environment.

Another significant issue identified was the absence of a formal policy guiding the use of television in ECD settings. The Department of Basic Education should develop comprehensive guidelines to standardize educational use of television across schools and centres. These guidelines should recommend appropriate content selection, suitable screen time for different age groups, and best practices for integrating television into lesson plans. A clear national policy or toolkit can promote consistency, reduce misuse, and empower educators to use television in a structured and pedagogically sound manner.

To enhance cultural relevance and learner engagement, collaboration between education stakeholders and media content creators is essential. Educational television programmes should reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of South African learners. Partnerships between the Department of Basic Education, local schools, public broadcasters such as SABC Education, and independent producers can foster the development and promotion of educational shows in indigenous languages like Tshivenda, isiZulu, and Sesotho. Locally produced content aligned with the South African curriculum would not only improve learner comprehension but also promote inclusion and foster a stronger learner identity.

These recommendations are crucial for unlocking the full educational potential of television in early childhood development while addressing challenges related to training, infrastructure, and policy, thus ensuring television can become a consistent and effective learning resource in rural and under-resourced settings.

8. Conclusion

Television has the potential to be a powerful educational resource for young children, particularly when its use is intentionally aligned with curriculum goals and teaching objectives. In the Vhembe Circuit, this article has highlighted both the opportunities and challenges associated with using television in early childhood education. While the benefits of educational television, such as enhancing cognitive skills, language development, and social behaviors, are evident, significant barriers remain. These include inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent access to electricity, limited availability of appropriate content, and a lack of teacher training on how to effectively integrate television into learning activities. Despite these challenges, when television is used thoughtfully and supported by skilled educators, it can serve as a valuable tool to stimulate children's curiosity, promote active learning, and foster social-emotional growth. In rural communities where educational resources are often scarce, television has the potential to help bridge gaps in learning opportunities and contribute to more equitable educational outcomes. To realise this potential, it is essential that stakeholders provide targeted support through training, infrastructure investment, and clear policy guidance. With such measures in place, television can become an integral part of early childhood education in Vhembe and similar rural contexts, ultimately supporting children's holistic development and laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

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