



Home Environment and Literacy Skills Development in Pupils in the Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating home environment and literacy skills development in pupils in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve this objective, three research questions were asked, one of which was answered and two hypotheses were formulated and tested. An instrument titled, Home Environment Questionnaire was developed, faced, validated and used in collecting data from a sample of 200 primary five pupils drawn from a population of 2,528 through the simple random sampling. The data obtained was analyzed using population t-test analysis at a 0.001 level of significance. The result of the analysis showed that availability of literacy materials in the home is significant. Parental involvement in pupils' literacy skills development is significantly high. The study was concluded with some recommendations, urging parents to always provide literacy materials for their children's literacy activities.

INTRODUCTION

The environment, in which a child grows, has a great impact on the literacy skills development of that child. In other words, the family is the root of a child's early literacy experiences. Sharon Darling (2004) maintained that when young children acquire literacy skills on time, their chances for later school success improves. Reading for instance is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Moat (1999) maintains that a child who does not learn the reading basics is unlikely to learn them at all. Also, any child who does not learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge, and is unlikely to ever flourish in school. This means that the child's earliest experiences with reading are crucial, they lay the foundation for development along a continuum of ability that expedite future success.

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To affirm this, the International Reading Association and the U. S. National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) in their joint effort stressed that, learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. According to these bodies, one of the best predictors of whether a child will function completely in school and go on to contribute actively in our increasingly literate society is the level to which the child progresses in reading and writing. This means that, the early childhood years of a child are the most important period for literacy skills development. While formal education has a tremendous impact on a child's development, researchers have shown that parents are the originating source of their children's literacy experiences.

According to Shonkoff and Philips (2000) in Sharon-Darling (2004:382),

What young children learn, how they react to the events and people around them, and what they expect from themselves and others are deeply affected by their relationship with parents, the behaviour of parents and even environment of the home in which they live. Even when young children spend most of their working hours in child care, parents remain the most influential adults in their lives.

In the same vein, the value placed on literacy in the home, time spent reading with children, and the availability and use of reading materials have been identified by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) as important elements in children's reading success. This implies that access to reading materials are consistent vital elements in enhancing the reading development of children. It is also proved by Herbert who (1994) asserted that preschool children who show a high interest in literacy activities tend to come from homes and schools where parents and teachers provide supportive literacy environment. In addition, since children learn literacy in a social context; the literacy environment of young children according Morrow and Paratore (1993) is critical to their successful literacy and language development. This goes to say that parents themselves need to be literate to be able to read to their young children.

In U.S., pediatricians are trained to teach parents the importance of reading to their young children. Mothers and other adult care-givers must therefore be involved in their children's education. Thus, the level of education of parents can affect the literacy skills development of children. That is, when parents increase their level of education, they are more likely to provide an economically stable home environment. Bush (2006) during the White House Conferences on Global Literacy, maintained that when parents are literate or educated and read to their children, children become readers from an early age. When mothers and fathers can read food labels and follow prescriptions, the health of the whole family improves, and when a parent can read and write well enough to have productive job, the family can be economically self-sufficient. Literacy therefore makes both family and communities stronger.

Morrow, Kuhn and Schwanen Flugel (2006) maintained that the success of a literacy programme depends to a large extent on the literacy environment

at home. The authors stressed that home school connections can support fluency development for all kinds of readers including at-risk students and English language learners.

Seneschal (2003) in a meta-analysis of 20 interventions involving 1,583 families showed clearly that parents' involvement had a positive effect on children's reading acquisition.

In another related study on pre-school literacy experience and later reading achievement, Scarborough, Dobrich and Hager (1991) said that, during their children's pre-school years, parents were asked about the frequencies of adults' reading, parent-child reading and solitary book activities in the home. Parental responses were compared for three groups of children defined according to the parents reading skills and the children's reading skills and the children's reading achievement in grade 2. The result indicated that the 22 pre-scholars who become poor readers had less frequent literacy related experience than the 34 children who become better readers.

Darling and Westerberg (2004) asserted that the effective form of parent's involvement, which can produce the best result, was training parents to use specific reading strategies that their children were working on in school. Furthermore, the authors added that parent's involvement in their children's literacy skills development is very important because schools often do not recognize the knowledge that linguistically and culturally diverse students bring with them to the classroom.

Research by Bailey-White and McClendon (2006) has shown that children's literacy development occurs under the same conditions that are present when children's spoken language develops. In other words, when children learn to speak, they do so in an environment where language is accepted and encouraged and not criticized or corrected. It is also highly effective for children to be immersed in reading and writing, that is, to be exposed to print and to see it being used functionally in their daily life in order for them to develop the skills of reading and writing.

Also, Researchers such as Clark (1984) Cochran-Smith (1986), Morrow (1993) and Teale (1984) supported the above view that there is a strong link between home environment and children of school-based literacy. The authors maintained that practices such as shared reading, reading aloud, making a variety of print available and promoting positive attitudes towards literacy have been found to have a significant impact on children's literacy learning. It is against this premise that this study seeks to investigate home environment and literacy skills development in pupils in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Literacy skills development is one of the complex things that require a systematic approach to instruction. This is because when that approach is linked to a child's home environment and interaction with parents, the

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likelihood for success is enhanced. But sometime, parents do not spend quality time with their children.

This they do by neglecting them, not reading with them as well as not checking their books on return from school etc. This attitude of parents depletes children's reading zeal thereby affecting their literacy skill development. It is against this background that this study is embarked on. The question then is, what impact does home environment have on the literacy skills development of pupils?

Purpose Of The Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine home environment and literacy skills development in pupils in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to find out if:

1. Parental educational qualifications of the pupils studied contribute to their literacy skills development.
2. Literacy materials are available in the home.
3. Parental involvement in children's literacy skills development is high.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are posed to guide the study.

1. What are the educational qualifications of parents of the pupils studied?
2. To what extent are literacy materials for literacy skills development available in the home?
3. How adequate is parental involvement in their children's literacy skills development?

Hypotheses

In order to find solution to the problem stated, two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. The availability of literacy materials in the home is not significant.
2. Parental involvement in children's literacy skills development is not significantly high.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Study Area

The research design used in this study was the causal comparative, otherwise known as Ex-post facto research design. The reason being that the variables under-study are not manipulable because their manifestation have already

occurred. That is, the researcher does not have direct control of the independent variable.

The research area is Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises all primary five (5) pupils in the public primary schools in Calabar Municipality. Statistics from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) as at January 2009 revealed that 2,528 pupils make up the total population for the study from twenty two (22) schools, with 1,239 males and 1,289 females.

Sampling Procedure and Sample

The simple random sampling through the hat-and-draw method was used in drawing the sample for the study. Out of the 22 schools in the area, 10 schools were selected. Twenty (20) pupils were selected from each of the 10 school selected, making a total of 200 pupils.

The sample for the study therefore comprises 200 pupils. This represents 5% percent of the total population.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire titled Home Environment Questionnaire (HEQ). The questionnaire was made up of three sections – A, B & C. Section A measured parents educational qualification, section B measured availability of literacy materials in the home and section C measured parents involvement in their children's literacy skills development. It was a two point Likert scale-type of questionnaire. See appendix. This instrument was thereafter face validated by an expert in the area of test and measurement.

Results of the study

Three questions were asked in the study; one of the questions was answered directly while two of the questions on availability of literacy materials parental involvement were turned into hypotheses and tested. The results are as follows;

Question 1 was stated thus: what are the educational qualifications of parents of the pupils studied. The answer to this question is presented in Table 1. From Table 1, the pupils whose parents have B.ED/B.A/B.Sc/HND were high in number (58) with 29% and the lowest are pupils whose parents have none of the above educational qualification which are (9) with 4.5% indicating that educational qualification of parents is a portent factor in pupils literacy skills development.

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Table 1: Distribution of parental education qualification

Qualification	Number	Percentage
FSLC	11	5.5%
WAEC	13	6.5%
TC II	22	11.00%
NCE/OND	15	7.5%
B.ED/B.A/B.Sc/HND	58	29.0%
M.ED/M.Sc	37	18.5%
Ph.D	35	17.5%
None of the above	9	4.5%
Total	200	100%

Hypothesis 1

The hypothesis stated that the availability of literacy materials in the home is not significant. In order to test this hypothesis population t-test was used. This is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Population t-test analysis of the availability of literacy materials in the home.

Variable	N	Df	Test value	X	SD	Std error mean	t- value
Availability of literacy materials	200	199	6.5	7.3	2.20	.16	5.24

Significant at .001, critical t-value = 1.96

The result in Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of 5.24 exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at .001 level of significance with degrees of freedom of 199. The implication of this is that, the availability of literacy materials in the home is significant. That is, if literacy materials are available in the home, they will enhance literacy skills development of pupils. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 2

The hypothesis stated that parental involvement in pupils' literacy skills development is not significantly high. To test this hypothesis population t-test analysis was employed. This is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Population t-test analysis of parental involvement in pupils' literacy skills development.

Variable	N	Df	Test value	X	SD	Std error mean	t- value
Parental involvement	200	199	5.5	6.73	1.88	.13	9.27

* Significant at .001, critical t-value = 1.96

From Table 3, the population t-test analysis gave a calculated t-value of 9.27, which was observed to be higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 with degrees of freedom 199 at 0.001 level of significance. This result implies that parental involvement in pupils' literacy skills development is high. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected meaning that when parent get involved in

pupils reading and writing activities at home their literacy skills development will be enhanced.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the analysis of hypothesis 1 showed that availability of literacy materials in the home is significant. This result is in consonance with Clark (1984), Cochran-Smith (1986), Morrow (1993), and Teole (1984) who found out that providing a variety of print materials at home will promote positive attitude towards literacy and this has impact on children literacy learning.

This finding also is in line with Barley-White and McClendon (2006) who maintained that it is highly effective for children to be immersed in reading and writing, that is to be exposed to print materials, to see it being used functionally in their daily live in order for them to develop the skills of reading and writing. This goes to say that a variety and abundance of reading materials in the home would give the pupils the idea that reading is worthwhile and useful.

The result of hypothesis 2 revealed that parental involvement in pupils' literacy skills development is significantly high.

This finding lead credence to Seneschal (2003) whose finding showed clearly that parent's involvement in their children's reading and writing activities has a positive effect on their reading acquisition.

The finding is also in agreement with Bush (2006) who maintained that when parents read to their children, children become readers from an early age.

Furthermore, this finding is supportive of Darling and Westerberg (2004) who found that parents' involvement in their children literacy skills development is very important. Also, the finding is in line with Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) who said that the value place on literacy in the home and the time spent reading with children are important elements in children reading success.

It is therefore pertinent to note that when parents are involved in their children's education, they tend to excel in their academics.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings it is concluded that when parents are educated, they would see the need to get involved in their children's education as well as provide adequate literacy materials, which will improve the children's literacy skills.

It is therefore recommended that,

1. Parents should always provide enough reading and writing materials for their children as they develop. They should also give books as gifts to their children especially on their birthdays as this will enable their children form a reading habit.

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2. Parents should endeavor to be continually involved in their children's reading and writing activities at home.
3. Parents should organize exchange of books between families and inculcate in their children the habit of collecting, reading and returning books owned by others.

HOME ENVIRONMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (HEQ)

SECTION A

Instruction: Tick the appropriate ones

Parent's Educational Qualification

My parents have the following qualification

1. First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)
2. WAEC
3. TC II
4. NCE/OND
5. B.ED/B.A/B.Sc/HND
6. Masters Degree
7. Doctorate Degree Ph.D
8. None of the above

SECTION B

Instruction: Please tick the most appropriate option that suits your situation at home.

Availability of materials at home

We have the following literacy materials in our house.

S/n		Available	Not available
9	Library		
10	Book shelf		
11	Computer		
12	Notice board		
13	Puzzle games		
14	Carton magazines		
15	Story books		
16	Wall calendars		
17	Reading tables		
18	Video tapes		
19	Comic books		
20	Computer games		
21	Reading corner		

SECTION C

Parents' involvement

Instruction: Please tick yes or no as it applies to your situation

S/n	Statement	Yes	no
22	My parents read to us before we sleep.		
23	My father reads to us.		
24	My mother helps us to read our books.		
25	My parents organize family reading time for us.		
26	My mum always asks us to read labels on food package.		
27	My parents take us to children's section of the library to get books.		
28	I only learn how to read in the school and not at home.		
29	My parents get angry when we tear books.		
30	My parents have book boxes where our old books are kept.		
31	My parents keep out old books safe for us.		

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