

Parental Involvement and Its Relationship to Literacy Skill of Pre-School Children

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Abstract — This research aims to discuss parents' involvement in early childhood literacy development. It stems from the importance of parents' roles in early childhood activities, especially those that develop literacy. So far, research on children development paradigm have only been done by looking at the factors within the family as an asset has not been investigated in the context of Indonesian culture. Therefore, research on parents' effort in early childhood literacy development needs to be conducted. This research employs quantitative approach by examining learners and parents as the participants. The use of interviews are implemented to collect the data. Then, the data is analyzed through descriptive and correlation technique. Bronfenbrenner ecological theory is served as the framework to discuss the problems and understand the data presented in this research. The results of the study indicate that parents' roles are tangible in early childhood literacy development. The conclusion can be drawn as follows: 1) parents perform literacy activities, for example, memorizing, using media and providing literacy-rich surroundings 2) supporting factors such as parents' motivation is associated with parents' involvement with the demand of school readiness and positive belief of the importance of early childhood education. The problems consist of unbalance roles between the parents, physical factor, and 3) the collaboration between the parents and school is actualized in the forms of meetings, giving information, creating parents' coordinator, and communicating between the parents and teachers. Parents must be able to take part in children's activities in order to modify them into the stimulus that develops children's literacy.

Keywords — Early Childhood, Exposure Literacy Skills, Parental Involvement, Relationship

I. Introduction

Early literacy skills start well before a child enters kindergarten, and this is where parental involvement becomes critically important to ensure that the child does not fall behind before he or she even starts school. In the year 2016 in the Philippines, 47% of eligible learners were not enrolled in preschool. This means that 47% of children are entering kindergarten and have never been in school before. In the past, these learners would not be as far behind as they would be now without having exposure to the foundational skills needed before entering kindergarten (Child Trends, 2019). This is when parental involvement even before school becomes increasingly important. When parents engage in family literacy with their learners, they are setting them up for success when it comes to reading and literacy skills in school.

It is so important to promote the importance of parental involvement in early literacy to the community by sharing this research. Families need to be aware of the importance of developing these skills at a young age. Parents may believe they do not have the knowledge to work with their learners on literacy, but they have a wealth of knowledge from their backgrounds and cultures that can benefit their child. This paper not only focuses on the benefits of parental involvement and how it affects the success of the child, but, more importantly, how schools can partner with parents and the community to promote early literacy skills within the home on a regular basis. This ensures that the child has the best opportunity to be successful throughout his or her educational career.

The researcher focused on New Visayas Elementary School of New Visayas, Matanao, Davao del Sur. The elementary learners and their parents provide for a rich study about parental involvement in the emerging literacy skills of the learners.

Why is research on parental involvement in early childhood so important? When a child is born, their brain begins to form immediate connections. Ninety percent of children's critical development occurs by age five (Make Way for Books, 2019).

Emergent literacy skills are skills that learners need to have before they can learn to read. If they are coming into kindergarten lacking these skills, then it is up to the teacher to teach them these early literacy skills before they are even able to read. This then already puts the child behind their peers, and it is harder to get caught up. Eighty-three percent of learners who are not reading on grade level by the beginning of fourth grade are at risk of failing to graduate on time (Shrier, 2019), which is why it is important that learners come into kindergarten with some early literacy foundational skills. Research indicates that children who are struggling readers in first grade are 88% more likely to be struggling readers in fourth grade. When children struggle to read in fourth grade, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Make Way for Books, 2019). Teaching children these early literacy skills can help ensure that all learners have the opportunity to blossom in their literacy education.

These early literacy skills begin early on in child development. Children first begin to develop language, both verbal and nonverbal. With this development of language, a child will begin to develop their vocabulary. Children learn vocabulary in many ways, such as reading books and having conversations with adults and other kids. Studies and research has shown that the larger a child's vocabulary, the quicker they will then learn to read (Shrier, 2019). Children will then also develop print awareness. Even though they are not able to read the words on the page, they should be able to hold a book correctly and have an understanding of when the story begins and when it ends. Two other early literacy skills that begin to develop prior to kindergarten are letter recognition and the understanding that each letter of the alphabet represents a particular sound (Shrier, 2019).

Parental involvement has come quite a long way in the past century and it has changed significantly; however, there is still ways to go for every parent to truly feel that they are in a

partnership with their child's school. The continued lack of parental involvement in schools can be narrowed down to a few factors. Many educators have limited training on how to properly and appropriately involve parents in their child's education. Poverty, language and cultural differences are also barriers to parental involvement; also not all educators and school leaders do not completely value the importance of parental involvement (Essays, 2019). There needs to be more training for educators on how to get parents fully involved because this will make the biggest impact.

There are many different ways to get parents involved in their child's education. According to Epstein (2021), there are six different types of involvement. The first type of involvement is parenting, which focuses on assisting families with parenting skills, family support, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Communicating is another type of involvement that focuses on creating a positive two-way communication relationship between home and school. Volunteering is also an important type of involving parents. This involves using recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to be able to involve families. It is also important to involve with their child's academic learning at home. Including families in homework, goal setting, and other curriculum related activities can allow for families to be more involved in child's education. Decision making and collaborating with the community are both important parts of parental involvement (Epstein 2021). By using all these strategies, it can greatly improve parental involvement.

It is important to provide parents with methods of instruction that have been scientifically proven. It is also important for educators to provide parents with training and support, so that they feel comfortable working with their child on literacy skills. The more that the parents feel comfortable than the more likely it is that they will work with their child regularly at home. Activities that are provided for parents should be enjoyable and should be easy to follow and not take a lot of time. Most families have very busy schedules, so it is important that the activities take around ten to fifteen minutes and is fun for the child as well as the parents. This will ensure that parents stick with the program at home (Crosby et al. 2019). Based on these factors Padak and Rasinski (2019) developed a literacy program for parents to work with their children at home that they named Fast Start. In this program, children are asked to master a daily poem that is appropriate for young children. By using a poem or rhyme, this helps the child work on fluency, which is important because fluency is a big indicator of reading achievement by grade three. Learners who have greater fluency are more likely to have better reading comprehension; therefore, they are more likely to be a stronger reader and to be able to read at grade level. This program requires the child to sit next to the parent and listen to the parent read the poem several times, while paying attention to the words as the parent reads and models fluency for the child. Then the child and the parent read the poem together two to three times as the parent points to the words throughout the reading.

Finally, the child will read the poem two to three times independently pointing to the words as he or she reads them. This program was then implemented into a kindergarten and first grade classroom at an elementary school. For each year of this study, it was discovered that children of parents that implemented the Fast Start program with them on a regular basis made gains in foundational literacy achievement, specifically in reading fluency, over children whose parents implemented fewer lessons or none at all (Crosby et. al. 2019). This program focused more on parents working with their child on fluency versus other literacy skills. It is not to say that other literacy skills are not important, but reading fluency is an indicator of reading success in other areas such as reading comprehension. It is predominately accepted by researchers, who have studies parental involvement, that parental involvement in their children's learning leads to better educational outcomes for those children (Berthelsen & Walker, 2020).

A parent that just reads daily to their child may not even fully realize all the benefits that reading aloud to their child offers, and it can greatly impact their literacy development. Parents can enhance the reading by engaging the child in phonemic awareness activities, rhymes, pointing to each word as they are reading, as well as rereading, all of these activities benefit their child in developing early literacy skills (Milly, 2019).

Family literacy programs are very important for preschool aged children. Swick discusses the benefits of family literacy programs during the preschool years. If learners participate in these family literacy programs, they are more likely to be ready for school compared to learners who did not participate in a program. Another benefit is that they are more likely to be successful throughout their school career because they are getting a head start on building their literacy skills. They are more likely to be at grade level at the start of kindergarten and continue to be on grade level in reading throughout their educational career (Swick, 2019).

Majority of research that has been done has shown a positive correlation between parental involvement and a positive increase in literacy skills and reading development. However, there has been a contradiction to the research. A study conducted by Hartas (2020) shows very little to no correlation between learning at home and a child's success in school. Hartas (2020) started his study by taking 19,000 children between the ages of nine and eleven months. The study followed these same learners two other times in early childhood, when they were three years old and again when the learners were five years old. The study had learners from various economic and racial backgrounds. It was determined that the number of educational activities done with the learners did not have a large impact on school success. However, the study did determine that if the child came from a wealthy home and the parents had a good educational background, they were more likely to be successful in school (Hartas, 2020).

There are theories of why parents of school-aged children become involved in their child's education. What are the relevant process variables according to research in psychology, sociology, and education, that motivate the decision by parents to become involved, and why does this involvement positively influence educational outcomes?

According to the psychological model proposed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler [2019], three (dynamic) constructs primarily influence parents' involvement decisions:

1) The parents' understanding of their role in the child's life: what they believe that parents are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and educational progress. Parents become involved in schools if they hold the belief that they should be involved.

2) The parents' sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school: do parents believe that their involvement can exert a positive influence on children's educational outcomes?

3) The general invitations, demands, and opportunities for parental involvement by both the child and the child's school: do parents perceive that the child and the school want them to be involved?

Scholars in this field have constructed scales, rooted in psychologic role and efficacy theories and assessed for reliability, that allow scholars to rank parents with respect to their role construction and their sense of efficacy; education scholars, following Epstein [2021] and Epstein et al. [2020], have established scales for measuring parents' perception of invitations to involvement and for assessing their level of involvement. A recent example of these scales, with references to previous work, can be found in Walker et al. [2019].

Using these measures, the importance of the three mentioned constructs in influencing the decision to become involved has been explored through multivariate analysis of questionnaire data. Although results vary depending on the specific context examined, a general finding is that all constructs appear to make significant contributions to explaining involvement (Reed et al., 2019); however, further results of these empirical studies have led to an important distinction of mechanisms guiding involvement at home and at school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2019). Specifically, for home-based involvement, efficacy seems to play a pre-eminent role, while for school-based involvement, invitations from teachers and children provide the biggest contribution in explaining levels of involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand [2019]; Green et al. [2021]).

If parental involvement is instrumental to children's outcomes, a psychological theory of parental involvement must also address the reason why parental involvement can positively influence the child's achievement.

The model by Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler [2019, 2020] allows for three primary mechanisms through which parents, by increasing their involvement in education, can bear an influence on children's educational outcomes: modeling, reinforcement, and direct instruction. Modeling theory predicts that children will emulate their parents' behavior; by devoting interest and time to activities related to schooling, parents thus enhance the possibilities that children do well in school. Reinforcement indicates the mechanism by which parent give their children interest, attention, praise and rewards related to behaviors that lead to school success. If these psychological incentives do not interfere with the child's intrinsic motivation and are valued by

the child, they increase the effort exerted by the child to behave in ways important to school success. Finally, parents can influence their children's educational outcomes by direct instruction.

Educational outcomes which are influenced by parental involvement through the cited mechanisms include both cognitive skills (especially through direct instruction, but also through modeling and reinforcement) and non-cognitive skills, among which the most significant – according to Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler [2019] – is the child's sense of efficacy for doing well at school. The theory predicts that children whose parents are involved in their education will be more likely to develop a strong, positive sense of efficacy for successfully achieving in school-related tasks than will children whose parents are not involved.

II. Methodology

The descriptive-correlational survey research design was employed to carry out this study. Since the aim of the researchers was to record, analyze and interpret the existing conditions between the non-manipulated variables, hence the choice of the research design. This design also accommodates generalization of the findings of the study upon the whole population from which only a representative portion was actually studied.

The target population for the study comprised of 15 grade five and 15 grade six learners in New Visayas Elementary School in New Visayas, Matanao, Davao del Sur. The school has cultural and educational aspects in the southernmost part of the Mindanao region. A random sample of 30 learners and 30 parents were involved in the study. From each of the selected grade level, fifteen (15) learners were randomly selected to make a total of thirty (30) learners and thirty (30) parents for a total of sixty (60) respondents that constituted the sample for this study. The average age of the pupils is 10.1 years.

Two (2) instruments were used to collect data for this study. Both questionnaires were downloaded from the internet. The first was a questionnaire named Literacy Skill of Early Childhood Questionnaire (LSECQ) which was taken from the study of Igweike (2020) and contained 24 items designed to elicit parents' behavior as regard their personal effort towards literacy skill development of their wards. This was considered appropriate because of the age, level of education and maturity of the respondents, being of primary school pupils. The researcher helped the respondents (learners) in interpreting the items and ticking their chosen responses. The other instrument, Parental Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) was also downloaded from the internet. The questionnaire was from a study of Ademola & Olajumoke (2019). The researcher validated the questionnaire for relevance and suitability to Filipino learners since the original questions were for Nigerian students. The questionnaire contained ten (10) questions for parents' involvement in the school.

The data collected with the above described instruments were analyzed using mean, t-test and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistics. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of confidence using a two-tailed test. The data was interpreted using the constructed Likert-scale.

III. Results and Discussion

This research aims to discuss parents' involvement in early childhood literacy development. It stems from the importance of parents' roles in early childhood activities, especially those that develop literacy. So far, research on children development paradigm have only been done by looking at the factors within the family as an asset has not been investigated in the context of Indonesian culture. Therefore, research on parents' effort in early childhood literacy development needs to be conducted. This research employs quantitative approach by examining learners and parents as the participants. The use of interviews is implemented to collect the data. Then, the data is analyzed through descriptive and correlation technique. The results of the study indicate that parents' roles are tangible in early childhood literacy development. The conclusion can be drawn as follows: 1) parents perform literacy activities, for example, memorizing, using media and providing literacy-rich surroundings 2) supporting factors such as parents' motivation is associated with parents' involvement with the demand of school readiness and positive belief of the importance of early childhood education. The problems consist of unbalance roles between the parents, physical factor, and 3) the collaboration between the parents and school is actualized in the forms of meetings, giving information, creating parents' coordinator, and communicating between the parents and teachers. Parents must be able to take part in children's activities in order to modify them into the stimulus that develops children's literacy.

Analysis

Literacy development is an important part of early childhood development. This research is intended to expose the urgency of environment's involvement in developing early literacy from the perspective of children's closeness. It explains that children's literacy development is an integrated effect of interacting activities as well as the effects of the surroundings starts from the nearest to the farthest.

In this study, the roles of family affect early childhood's literacy development. Early childhood mostly spends their time with the parents (Hakim, 2019). Children usually do not have a large area of socialization at the age of 4-5. Thus, their homes are called as the main micro system.

Parents' roles at home are crucial to children's development. Literacy stimulation can be done within the family (Bennett et al., 2022; Burgess, 2032; Bus et al., 2020; DeBaryshe et al., 2020; Ryan, 2019; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 2019; St Pierre et al., 2019). This study finds that parents are engaged in doing some activities together with the children. This act is

carried out to make sure the optimal children's development. In the aspect of literacy, parents stimulate children's literacy in many ways, such as letting the children learn to read and write, memorizing activities through singing songs, and providing educative media as well as literacy-rich surroundings.

It is important to note that there are pros and cons on whether reading and writing skills are appropriate for early childhood. It is also affected by parents' educational background. Theoretically, all participants do not know the prohibition of Calistung (Reading, Writing, and Operation). It is because none of them comes from childhood education or childhood psychology background. However, they know it practically even though they do not know the theory. The participants agree that early childhood education must be conducted in delicate situation and free of pressure.

The participants of this study are in the mid to low level economy. However, their economic status and background do not stop them from caring about their children's education. They fully pay attention by giving simple stimulating activities and providing creative learning media. Parents' economic conditions do not hinder them in providing a learning media. Furthermore, the learning media, such as posters of alphabet or numbers are mostly inexpensive.

In practice, most of the stimulating process of literacy is done by the mother at home. In a micro system, culture shapes the dominant roles of mother in child rearing. As a result, the roles of father do not get exposed sufficiently. In addition, some fathers in this study have bachelor degree. The higher educational background of the fathers should be seen as an opportunity to take part in stimulating the children. However, it is because of culture that adopts patriarchy so that the mother has more dominant roles in supporting children's education. Child rearing and education are mother's responsibility.

IV. Conclusion

After conducting the research and the analysis, the researcher recommends that the parents' engagement is very influenced by the parent's jobs. It is related to the available learning time with the children. The worker parents have little learning time with the children, furthermore, the parents feel that they already fully helped by enrolling the children to school. Some of the participants who has job believes in the teachers to teach their children, and feel that educating the children is the teachers' responsibility. The parents only support the children needs. However, parents' attention to the children is still the main point (Bangun, 2019).

Parents are supposed to be an educator for their children. (Wong, Hockenberry-Eaton, Wilson, Winkelstein, & Schwartz, 2021) stated that parents can educate their children directly to reach the expected behavior from the parents. Parents' engagement is important to support the children learning. Many researches proved that parents' engagement directly related to

achievement and motivation (Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2020; Yuliani, 2019). The Parents' factor is also influenced by their education, as Baker and Stevenson (2019) stated that parents' education is related to achievement. Meanwhile, the length of learning is strongly influenced by what type of jobs the parents' have (Sunarti, Atat, Noorhaisma, & Lembayung, 2021).

The family members' engagement is strongly related to the numbers of family members (Arisandi & Latifah, 2019). The family that has many members of family will have more options and people on who can engage in developing children literacy. If the focus on developing children literacy happens to focus on the younger siblings, the children can have their older siblings who can help them and ask them to learn together.

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