PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN STIMULATING EMERGENT LITERACY AMONG CHILDREN

CATHERINE ASHASIM
PhD, Faculty of Education Taraba State University, PMB 1167, Jalingo, Taraba State Nigeria

ABSTRACT
This study examined parental involvement in stimulating emergent literacy among children. The study was carried out in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State. The descriptive survey design was employed on 300 parents sampled using the stratified sampling technique in Jalingo metropolis. Findings of the study show that most parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children. Also, the homes do not provide sufficient stimulus for pre-reading and parents in do not provide sufficient pre-reading materials for their children. Finally, parents do not sufficiently write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience towards stimulating emergent reading and ability of child to read. It was concluded that that the involvement of parents towards stimulating emergent reading among children in Jalingo metropolis is not sufficient. The study recommends that Reading teachers can enlighten parents at PTA meetings, on suggestions on how to encourage their children. Also, parents should guide their children towards readiness through discussions of objects, pictures and games.

Keywords: Reading Assessment, Parent, Child

INTRODUCTION
The home is the first place of contact for the child. A child's first friends are her parents and other siblings in the family. Calorado (2008) assert that parents are the first and most important teachers to their children. Reading for children is good for success in early literacy development as they learn to enjoy and respect books from an early age. These are the people the child interacts with and they provide the experiences for him to acquire his first language. Olaogun, (2012) notes children watch their mothers closely and learn their first language by imitation. The child grows up using his first language without any formal language. Yet he learns enough of his first language to be able to communicate and react to situations. If the home has this stimulating effect on the language acquisition of every child, then it is a strong factor that must be considered in second language teaching. Most Nigerian children are able to speak their first language fluently without being able to read in it. This disparity can be attributed to the fact that children do not see the need to read in their first language because the use of the first language is limited to the family and the immediate environment.

Again, the orthography of many Nigerian languages is not available and where it is available, it has not been given enough attention for reading materials to be written in them. This gap between first language and the second language reading has been a disadvantage as reading in the classroom is perceived as an unusual activity. Most children come in contact with reading only in the classroom and it is not surprising that it is seen as a difficult task, thus the poor reading attitude among Nigerian children.

The term parental involvement has been given different meanings. It has been used to mean parental expectation of school performances (Oluwatelure and Oloruntegbe, 2009). Therefore parents who show interest in the reading activities of their children assist them in achieving school success. Children who are academically successful hold positive attitude to reading and are well adjusted emotionally and socially. Udosen and Igbokwe (2011) observed that parents are children's most important teachers and models; thus their attitudes to values, seem to enhance the success or otherwise of their children's future. Nebor (1976) says research seems to indicate that parents who take active and positive part in their children's education, have children who turnout well. Parents involvement could be just reading aloud and get involved in parents -teachers relationship (Udosen and Igbokwe). In Nigeria it is common knowledge that parents tend to leave this responsibility nannies. Academic success is due to the children's innate abilities and reflects the advantage of being in positive socio economic level. Children who are economically advantaged receive enough stimulation at home thereby enhancing their academic achievement. Parents’ high aspiration does have additional benefit over and above the advantages children enjoy from being capable and receiving adequate stimulation and resources. Oluwatelure and Oloruntegbe identified five dimension of parental involvement, these are:

(i) Non-participation - Parents are not involved in their children's learning. These active non-participant parents may have decided not to be involved. They may either be satisfied with what the school is offering, or are too busy at work, or want time away from their children. Some of the parents are passive simply because they lack
confidence or may be unhappy with the form of partnership the school offers.

(ii) Support - This dimension of parental involvement occurs only when parents are invited to attend events, e.g. parent/teachers’ meeting, contributing to developing school policies, or to provide money for learning resources. This is a form of direct involvement.

(iii) Participation - Parents may wish to participate as helpers providing assistance on outings, running a toy library, supporting children’s learning in the setting and providing indirect support at home, that is, keeping informed about what happens to their children at school, monitoring their academic progress, reading to them and providing intellectually stimulating activities for them at home and within the community.

(iv) Partnership - This dimension of parental involvement is a wide scope, comes in form of partnership with practitioners. As a result of equal access to information and records some parents may share in the diagnosis and assessment of their children, or involve in the selection of practitioners, or become practitioners.

(v) Control - In this case, parents determine and implement decisions.

The home can become a bridge for developing positive reading attitude so that the classroom can build on the experiential background of the child. Unfortunately, most homes have left the task of reading to the teacher who has not got enough training on emergent reading. This is the reason why children bark at words in the classroom instead of actually reading (Umolu 1998). If the home provides all the experiences the child needs to be able to speak his first language it means also that the home can also provide similar background to encourage reading Umolu. After all, reading is one of the basic skills of language. If a child can speak a language, invariably he has the potential to read in the language.

I. Factors that enhance reading in the home

The home provides the informal guide for reading because there are situations that stimulate positive response to print. Print shows that spoken language is the same as the written form which can be read. The interpersonal relationship between a child and his parents helps to develop reading. As adult members of the family interact with print, the child observes that print is a useful material. Sometimes, he imitates what the adults do and he mimics the act of reading (Aaron, 2005). This is a natural occurrence in the home. This act sometimes does not end at this point. The child imitates a discussion of what he thinks the adult is reading. Such actions show the child is reading. Aaron (2005) sees this readiness as a dynamic unfinished process. It is a functional potential and a motivator for action. Since the homes cannot provide all that the child needs to be ready for reading, it is important to make conscious preparation for reading readiness. This conscious preparation helps the child to meet the reading goals in the classroom (Allphin, 2011).

Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing (Whitehurst and Loningan, 2009). Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environments that support these developments (for example, shared book reading). This parental involvement in a child’s literacy development presupposes to lay the literacy foundation of the child (Otagburuagu 2007).

The term “emergent literacy” is used to denote the idea that the acquisition of literacy is best conceptualized as a developmental continuum, with its origins early in the life of a child, rather than an all-or-none phenomenon that begins when children start school. This conceptualization departs from other perspectives on reading acquisition in suggesting that there is no clear demarcation between reading and pre-reading. For instance, the “reading readiness” approach, which preceded an emergent literacy perspective and is still dominant in many educational arenas, has as its focus the question of what skills children need to have mastered before they can profit from formal reading instruction. Such perspectives create a boundary between the “pre-reading” behaviors of children, and the “real” reading that children are taught in educational settings. The basic components of emergent literacy as highlighted by Aaron (2005) include: Print motivation: Being interested in and enjoying books. Vocabulary: Knowing the names of things. Print awareness: Noticing print, knowing how to handle a book, and knowing how to follow words on a page. Narrative skills: Being able to describe things and events and to tell stories. Letter knowledge: Understanding letters are different from each other, knowing their names and sounds, and recognizing letters everywhere. Phonological awareness: Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words. However, emergent literacy is of critical importance in early education in light of research showing that children learn skills that prepare them to read years before they start school. A child is said to be ready when he has acquired the pre-emergent reading abilities such as the power of auditory and visual description, making sound-symbol relationship, listening and understanding oral language. This is usually between 2-6 years (Aaron).

The home setting provides the stimulus for a child to get ready for reading in his daily interactions with members of the family, the child acquires a lot of vocabulary, numbering and sorting. All these are signs of readiness. The ability to ask questions, recognize print and make auditory discriminations show the child’s readiness. Readiness also includes talking to children about what is happening in a story, encouraging the child to read individually. It is important to show pride when a child reads even a few words (Schifferdecker, 2007). The home offers the ideal setting for the child to get ready at his own pace. So the child masters readiness skills in his daily interactions. The nursery schools only simulate what happens at home. This suggests that homes should tap the readiness of their children so that they go into pre-school with ease. Reading is one of the life’s most important skills. It gives advantage in school and life, parents can do a lot to prepare their children to read (Schifferdecker). Therefore, parents have a great role...
to play through their involvement to stimulate emergent reading.

Parental involvement refers to parents’ participation in a wide range of reading-related activities that parents and their children engage in at home geared towards helping children learn to read. In this study, it is categorized under the modeling, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. The modeling dimension refers to parents acting as positive role models through constantly reading or requesting someone to read for them various materials in their children’s presence. Children then strive to emulate this behaviour on their own. While the cognitive dimension refers to parents engaging in reading-related activities with their children at home in order to promote reading skills. This includes reading to the child, listening to the child read aloud, discussing what has been read with the child or supervising the child as he/she does homework, the behavioural dimension refers to parents’ public reading related actions that motivate the child to read various materials. These actions include reminding the child to read, taking the child to the library, museum or book stores, reinforcing the child’s effort to read or acquiring several reading materials for the child (by buying or borrowing).

Umolu (1998) observed there are three reasons why it is important for children to develop a reading culture, reading is a skill which, like any other skill, is developed through practice. This means that children should be motivated to learn to read through constant practice. Secondly, she states that, children should learn to learn not for examination purposes only but reading should be done to fulfill practical requirements of daily living. She further says that children should also read for pleasure and entertainment thus keeping them from depending wholly on watching television and video films to the detriment of their learning. The importance of reading cannot be over emphasized. It can be seen that lack of seriousness by children at the elementary school level has resulted into poor performance at the tertiary levels. For children to be good readers, they must use the appropriate range of their capabilities in reading materials. They should be able to get literal and implied meaning of authors so that gradually, they will be able to do critical and evaluative reading.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed globally that reading has not been a pleasant activity for children because the initial reading seems not to be handled properly by parents. The reading attitude of Nigerian children is deteriorating as homes have laid emphasis on providing recreation for children only through the medium of the television. Reading stories, newspapers and reading for pleasures seems to have been overtaken by the television and other technological devices in the home. The ripple effect of this can be seen in the abysmal performance of students, particularly in external examinations and in our tertiary institutions where students are unable to do independent reading which is necessary for academic success. If students cannot read and make meaning on their own from text at this level, then it becomes a more disturbing problem, now that we are in the world of the internet where access to information is now in electronic print. The world is moving to the stage where the student should be able to learn without the teacher. This raises a concern for concerted efforts on teaching reading and the home is the first classroom for encouraging reading. Thus, in view of the above and the contribution of the home towards stimulating emergent reading among children, this study assessed the involvement of parents in stimulating literacy among their children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out:
(i) the extent to which parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children in Jalingo metropolis.
(ii) the extent to which the home provides a stimulus for pre-reading among children in Jalingo metropolis.
(iii) the extent to which parents provide pre-reading materials for their children in Jalingo metropolis.
(iv) the extent to which parents write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:
(i) To what extent do parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children in Jalingo metropolis?
(ii) To what extent does the home provides a stimulus for pre-reading in Jalingo metropolis?
(iii) To what extent do parents provide the pre-reading materials for their children in Jalingo metropolis?
(iv) To what extent do parents write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive research design of the survey type. A survey is a planned collection of data over a large area for the purpose of analyzing the relationships between variables (Oppenheim, 1992). The target population of the study comprised parents with children of age one to six (1 - 6) years in Jalingo metropolis. The stratified random sampling technique was used because the research can only be useful with parents who are educated and should be able to encourage readiness. A sample of 300 parents was used for the study. A questionnaire tagged Emergent Reading Questionnaire (ERQ) was prepared based on Awoniyi (1985) suggestions on how to stimulate readiness. The suggestions are:
1. Reading to the child every day for enjoyment stimulates him to want to read.
2. Reading and using books also stimulate children to want to handle books.
4. Writing stories together with children based on their vocabulary and experience.
5. Develop a rich pre-reading environment

The ERQ has 4-point rating scale to determine the extent of parental involvement in stimulating emergent literacy among their children. The values of the scales are: very high (4), high (3), moderate (2) and low (1). They are used to elicit responses from parent on the extent of their
involvement towards emergent reading among children. The
ERQ was validated by experts in the fields of literacy
education and measurement and evaluation. Both content
and face validation were carried out with experts’
suggestions on the improvement of the instrument. The
contributions were noted and integrated into the instrument
to further enhance its validity. The outcome of the validation
exercise indicated that the instrument is valid and suitable
for the study. A pilot study was carried out to determine the
reliability of the instrument. A total of 25 parents who are
part of the population but not part of the sample were used
for the pilot study. Result of the pilot study was subjected to
the Split-half reliability formula and its attendant correction
formula to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.77. Data
collected from the main study using the instrument were
collated and subjected to analysis. The research questions
were answered using descriptive statistics such as mean and percentages.

RESULTS

Table 1 Summary Analysis of Responses on Parental involvement in Stimulating Emergent Reading among Children
(Acceptable High Extent is a mean ≥ 2.50 and Low Extent is a mean < 2.50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extent parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>101</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extent to which the home provides stimulus for pre-reading</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Extent parents provide pre-reading materials for their children</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Extent to which parents write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Mean 1.86

Research Question 1:
To what extent do parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children in Jalingo metropolis?

The extent to which parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children in Jalingo metropolis as presented in Table 1 shows a mean of 2.55. The mean of 2.55 is greater than the stipulated mean of 2.50. This indicates that the extent to which parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children in Jalingo metropolis is high. This result seems to imply that most parents encourage pre-reading by reading to their children in their homes.

Research Question 2:
To what extent does the home provide a stimulus for pre-reading in Jalingo metropolis?

Table 1 also shows the analysis of the extent the home provides a stimulus for pre-reading in Jalingo metropolis. A mean of 1.87 was obtained from the responses. This value is less than the acceptable mean of 2.5. This indicates that the extent the home provides a stimulus for pre-reading in Jalingo metropolis is low. This seems to imply that most parents do not provide sufficient stimulus for pre-reading among children in Jalingo metropolis.

Research Question 3:
To what extent do parents provide pre-reading materials for their children in Jalingo metropolis?

Responses on the extent parents provide pre-reading materials for their child in Jalingo metropolis has a mean of 1.61 as shown in Table 1. This value is less than the acceptable mean 2.50 for high extent. Thus, the extent parents provide pre-reading materials for their child in Jalingo metropolis is low. This seems to suggest that most parents in Jalingo metropolis do not provide sufficient pre-reading materials for their children.

Research Question 4:
To what extent do parents write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience in Jalingo metropolis?

The extent to which parents write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience in Jalingo metropolis as presented in Table 1 shows a mean of 1.44. This value is less than the acceptable mean of 2.50. This indicates that the extent to which parents write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience is low. The implication of the result is that most parents do not write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience. This seems to suggest that parents in Jalingo metropolis do not sufficiently write stories together with their children based on their vocabulary and experience.

DISCUSSION

Summary of findings

The finding of this study is a representative of the extent of parental involvement with their children at home towards stimulating reading. It seems that a few parents make conscious effort to make their homes friendly for reading. Majority of the respondents make a chance of opportunity to encourage reading. This could be because parents do not know that they have a role in stimulating readiness. However, the home is the first place to encourage reading readiness because what the classroom does is to simulate the home in training.
readiness. If homes are reading friendly, it helps the child develop a reading culture. The child grows enjoying reading for the pleasure of it. Reading does not become a task for him. The child uses reading as a daily practical requirement for survival (Umolu 1998). Children with friendly reading culture go beyond reading to pass examinations. This is what homes should encourage in their children from childhood.

CONCLUSION
Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that parental involvement towards stimulating emergent reading among children in Jalingo metropolis is low (mean = 1.86).

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Based on the findings of this study, there is need for parents to stimulate emergent literacy among their young children. However, many parents might not be aware of what they can do and how they should go about it. Reading teachers can enlighten parents at PTA meetings, on suggestions on how to encourage their children. They can also organize a forum where such suggestions can be discussed and even be practical-based.

2. Parents should guide their children towards readiness through discussions of objects, pictures and games. Parental involvement in a child’s literacy development presupposes cohesion and sharing idea, and experiences to lay the literacy foundation of the child, (Otagburuagu 2007). Parents should read at home so that children know that reading is a form of leisure and relaxation. While they are reading, they should provide similar experience for their children. They could produce “little books” and diagrams. Parents can also read stories for the children during meals and bedtime. They can also stimulate conversation from activities, colour, objects, sorting, write their stories for them and read for them. Wisniewski and Keith (2015) suggest that parents can ask children to say something and they should write for the children. This shows a relationship between reading and writing. All these suggestions could go a long way towards motivating readiness.

REFERENCES