



## Assessing the Relationship between Children's Early Language, Home Literacy Environment and Reading Performance in Early Grades in Rural and Urban Areas of Bauchi State

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### ABSTRACT

*The importance of parental involvement in children's learning has never been in doubt. Recently, the issue has received increased attention among scholars. The job of teaching children at the early grade level is therefore easier when teachers take into cognizance and utilizes their background knowledge, skills and attitudes, which they must have acquired from home. This research work aims at addressing the question, "How can parents support teachers in teaching early language and reading skills to their students?" This is with the view to revamping the perception of parents, teachers, and communities regarding their roles toward the literacy of children. Methodologically, the study adopts descriptive research approach, through purposive sampling technique. In addition, interviews and questionnaires were the tools used for data collection. 600 Participants/respondents (200 children and 400 adults) were used for this study from the 20 Local Government Areas of Bauchi. Mean was used to analyze the data gathered. The findings of the study revealed that parents do less to improve their children literacy skills either by themselves or proxy as a result of lack of time, knowledge or even finance. Also, the results indicated that parents have a place in improving early literacy skills in their children by guiding, reading, speaking to them and even attending to their problems. The study therefore concludes that home, parents and immediate environment are essential to children early reading skills.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in the development of children's emergent literacy has been an undiscovered treasure in most communities, especially in northern part of Nigeria. This may not be unconnected with insufficient researches in the country regarding the roles of parents and communities in enhancing pre-school and school age children's literacy.

The importance of early grade reading is unarguable. It has proven to be the cornerstone of educational outcomes and is in direct correlation with the future social and emotional wellbeing of children as well as a

country's economic welfare (Barnes, A. 2017). Research over many years repeatedly proves the value of reading and literacy education prior to formal education. Of course, after good access to language and a balanced diet of conversation, one of the best ways to help young children create the required building blocks for literacy acquisition is to read aloud to them (Douglas, F. 2021). But in Nigeria, especially in rural areas, few parents understand that telling children stories, having children read back is just as important as the teacher pupil classroom interaction. That is to say listening to, and telling stories, is a strong learning experience for children, especially when these experiences

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occur in the loving arms of a parent or caregiver. Marlowe, (2019) opines that, in addition to the great power of associating books and reading with the warm, nurturing, and loving embrace of a caring adult being read to, enhances children's understanding of the structure of language and introduces them to how books "work". They learn about how to hold books, about their proper orientation, that we read from left to right, that books tell stories with a beginning, middle, and end, and that stories often have a problem to be solved. Similarly, Daniel, (2006) maintain that parents who combine conversation and lap reading, who refer back to the books they have read together in their daily discussions with children, lay the strongest possible footing upon which literacy skills can be laid down. This means that parents should talk to their children about the books they read together, about how the things children feel, see and hear and touch are connected to the experiences of the characters in the stories they share together. That is why the American Academy of Pediatrics says; "Every early experience – from birth through age of five – helps to build a foundation for school and life success. Children introduced to reading early by their parents or caregivers, tend to read earlier and excel in school compared to children who are not exposed to language and books at a young age."

Little is known, however, about parental support regarding the literacy development of their pre-school and school aged children and about how those supports are connected with other aspects of the home literacy environment and with children's literacy outcomes. For instance, some parents may feel strongly that it is their role to actively encourage and raise their children's emerging literacy skills, whereas other parents may not hold those same beliefs. Likewise, some parents may value sharing books with children as a way of enriching children's development, whereas other parents may not. Creating a better understanding of parental support is particularly important because of the presumption that exposing children to a home environment rich in literacy opportunities is beneficial to young children's literacy and language development. Yet, if parents' beliefs do not align with such practices, children's

development may be impacted (Burgess et al., 2002).

### Problem Statement

Traditionally, in most Nigerian communities, children are not allowed to take part in conversation or dialogue with adults. This situation in turn, deprive the children the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and improve on their emergent literacy skills. Ironically, instances of children's poor academic performance, especially those in the early grade are currently generating a lot of concern in Nigeria. In a society where people are ignorant of the contributions of parents and communities toward the literacy skills development of their children, a research of this kind will be of great importance, especially now that reading is becoming an integral component of Nigerian educational system. Based on the aforementioned, this study will facilitate children's education by revealing possible causative factors that contribute to the poor performance of children in the early grade. The aim is to minimize and if possible remove such unfounded beliefs among parents and other stakeholders in the cognitive and psychological development of a child.

### Research Questions

- (a) To what extent do parents provide literacy support for their children when at home or after school?
- (b) Do children's early language and reading skills develop based on home literacy environment and parental support?

### CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Rathus, (2013) opined that a child is a human being between the stages of birth and puberty, or between the developmental period of infancy and puberty. The general definition of a child therefore entails a person younger than the age of puberty. Children generally have less responsibility than adults. They are classed as unable to make serious decisions, and legally must be under the care of their parents or another responsible caregiver.

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### ***Significance of Early Language in Children's early Reading Skills***

In the view of Douglas, (2021), children's early literacy starts very early, in the most natural of ways, in the language of the cradle, in soothing words from mother to child, and then later with rich conversation, with rhyming games, and language play, stories, and songs. Perhaps most importantly, Children are made readers on the laps of their parents. Researches have shown that the two most important keys to giving children the power of the word are early and plentiful conversation, and lap reading. That is why Barnes, (2017) suggests that it is never too early to speak to one's children. In fact, babies begin learning the sounds and rhythms of language while in the womb! Talking to babies, toddlers, and young children is an essential component of their later literacy development and it matters a lot that parents talk often to their children and that they engage them in conversation at every opportunity. Before children receive even a single day of formal instruction in school, they soak up the language around them, and their growing vocabularies and increasing familiarity with the cadence and syntax of language becomes the keystone for all of their subsequent learning. In fact, early language exposure is so critical to later literacy development, that even profoundly deaf children introduced to a sign language early are significantly more likely to become skilled readers than deaf children who are not. However, In Nigeria, especially Northern part of the country, many parents assume that the job of educating children is the sole responsibility of the teacher and the school. This in turn make them neglect their role of supporting children to acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills they would require to fit into the formal school system.

### ***Impact of Home Literacy Environment on Children's Emergent Literacy Skills***

The importance of the home environment to children's early literacy and language skills has been receiving great attention in recent years. For instance, characteristics of the home and family, such as income and parents' literacy levels, have been shown to be associated with children's literacy development

(Christian et al., 1998; Snow et al., 1991). Parents' own literacy habits, such as personal enjoyment of reading and time spent in reading, also have been related to positive reading outcomes for children (Sonnenschein et al., 1996). In addition, parent-child engagement in literacy activities in the home has been found to help children develop oral language and precursors of literacy (Burgess et al., 2002; Snow et al., 1998). Less is known, however, about parents' beliefs regarding the literacy development of their pre-school aged children and about how those beliefs are connected with other aspects of the home literacy environment and with children's literacy outcomes

### ***Parental Literacy Beliefs and the Home Literacy Environment***

Parents' beliefs regarding the literacy development of their children are connected with other aspects of the home literacy environment. Numerous researches in Europe and America have demonstrated that the home environment serves as an important influence in the development of emergent literacy skills in young children (e.g. Beals and De Temple, 1993; Dickinson and Tabors, 1991; Teale, 1987). The importance of the home environment is grounded in the fact that the home serves as a setting in which language, reading and literacy is typically first encountered (DeBaryshe et al., 2000). Burgess et al. (2002) identified three key aspects of the home literacy environment. The first aspect is the demographic characteristics of parents, which help set the parameters within which literacy and language occurs. Social demographic variables such as parents' level of education and school experiences (Christian et al., 1998; Snow et al., 1991), as well as household income (Brody et al., 1994; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Mantzicopoulos, 1997) and parents' literacy levels (Gilger et al., 1991) have been correlated with children's literacy and language development. A second key aspect of the home literacy environment is the parental literacy habits that expose children to models of literacy (Burgess et al., 2002). For example, parents own reading behaviors, such as personal enjoyment of reading and time spent in reading, have been related to positive reading outcomes

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for children (Sonnenschein et al., 1996). The third key aspect of the home literacy environment specified by Burgess et al. (2002) is parents' efforts that directly engage children in activities designed to foster literacy development, such as shared book reading and language activities

## METHODOLOGY

This research is empirical in nature. Its data will be drawn from the target population, using questionnaires and structured interviews which will be administered on the participants of the study. To simply put, its data would be collected from twenty (20) Local Government Areas of Bauchi State (7) LGAs from Northern, (7) LGAs from Southern, and (6) LGAs from the Central Senatorial Districts of the State. In the

same manner, two hundred (200) families will be used for the study, 10 from each LGA (5 from urban and 5 from rural areas). In each family, three (3) participants (father, mother and any of their child between the range of 5-8 years) would be used as source of data for the study, thereby making the total of 600 participants for the study. The questionnaire (400) would be administered to the parents while the structured interview to the 200 children. The questionnaire is rated on a four point scale (strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly dis agreed) while the children interview have the 'yes' or 'no' response to be filled by the researcher and the research assistants. The responses would be analyzed using mean and decision rule

## RESULTS

Table 1: Mean Response of Parents on the Extent to Which They Provide Support to their Children on Reading Activities at Home.

S/no	Variables	Mean (X)	Decision Rule
1.	Parents understand the importance of home Literacy and parental in developing children's Early language and reading skills	2.01	Disagreed
2.	Parents provide all types of support at home and School to improve children's reading skills.	2.29	Disagreed
3.	Parents read story books to their children at night	2.29	Disagreed
4.	Parent improve children's reading culture through exchange of reading materials	2.30	Disagreed
5.	Parents discuss stories and lessons from books With their children	2.17	Disagreed
6.	Parents provide different reading/literary materials to their children	2.29	Disagreed
7.	Parents interpret difficult areas in books to their children	2.17	Disagreed
8.	Parents evaluate children's ability in reading skills	2.17	Disagreed
9.	Parents employ lesson teachers to help their children with their reading problems	2.28	Disagreed
10.	Parents allow children to convers freely with them	1.97	Disagreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.19</b>	

Source: Field Work 2022



**Table 2: Parents' Responses on how Home Literacy, Environment and Parental Support Develop Children's Early Language and Reading Skills**

S/no	Variables	Mean (X)	Decision Rule
1.	Children's Literacy skills develops at home	2.57	Agreed
2.	Children's early language and reading greatly improve with parental support	2.90	Agreed
3.	Good environment help develop children's language and reading skills in particular	3.15	Agreed
4.	Children perform wonderfully in reading with		
5.	The support of a lesson teacher	3.18	Agreed
6.	Home literacy help develops early reading Skills in children	3.07	Agreed
7.	It is important for parents to develop children's Reading skills at home	3.17	Agreed
8.	literate parents assist more in developing their children's		
9.	Literacy skills than the non-literate ones	3.17	Agreed
10.	Good peer group improve children's literacy skills	2.99	Agreed
9	Early reading skills of children is developed at home	2.99	Agreed
11.	Children who have their parents' attention/time at home learn to read earlier than those with less attention from their parents	3.20	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.04</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Source: Field Work 2022

**Table: 3 Children's responses on Extent of Parents' Efforts on Improving Children's Reading Skills at Home**

S/no	Variables	Mean (X)	Decision Rule
1.	Do your parents always read with you?	2.33	Disagreed
2.	Do your parents provide story books for you?	2.40	Disagreed
3.	Do you have a lesson teacher?	1.09	Disagreed
4.	Do you discuss stories you have read with Your parents?	2.13	Disagreed
5.	Do your parents ask you questions based on stories you have read?	2.13	Disagreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.02</b>	<b>Disagreed</b>

Source: Field Work 2022

**Table: 4 Children's responses on Environmental, Home Literacy and Parental Support Develop and Improve Early language and Reading Skills in Children**

S/no	Variables	Mean (X)	Decision Rule
6.	Do you improve your reading skills at home?	2.3	Agreed
7.	Do you think it is important for your parents, brothers, or sisters to assist you with your reading task?	3.06	Agreed
8.	Do think support from outside one's home can help help him/her manage his/her reading problems?	3.06	Agreed
9.	Do you think lesson teachers can improve children's reading ability?	2.90	Agreed
10.	Reading with parents help solve one's reading problems?	2.88	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.05</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Source: Field Work 2022



## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of this study indicates that most parents in the area studied do not find time to support their children with their reading activities at home, this is seen in table 1 and 3 with a grand mean of 2.19 and 2.02 which are all negatives subjecting the researcher to believe this. This cause of this problem which is a gap for another research may be due to lack of time, finance, adequate educational background of the parents and even culture.

Conversely despite recognizing its importance and admitting that children from a learned home, that are assisted and provided with different learning materials on reading tend to develop good language skills and do better in reading than those with limited chances at home. This shows that the basis to literacy skills starts at home with the support of those around the child. This goes in line with Douglas, F. (2021), who suggested that children's early literacy starts very early, in the most natural of ways, in the language of the cradle, in soothing words from mother to child, and then later with rich conversation, with rhyming games, and language play, stories, and songs. Perhaps most importantly, Children are made readers on the laps of their parents. Researches have shown that the two most important keys to giving children the power of the word are early and plentiful conversation, and lap reading.

Parents who expresses positive attitude towards reading and actively engage their children in literacy enhancing activities are in turn creating favorable atmosphere of enthusiasm for literacy and learning. This is in line with responses in table 2 and 4 where respondents admitted that

Home literacy help develops children's reading skills, through appropriate support by the parents, caregivers/lesson teachers and even allowing the children to join parents' conversation. This is supported by a mean of 3.04 from the parents and 3.05 from children's responses accordingly.

## CONCLUSION

Though many parents are ignorant of the importance of home literacy to early reading ability of children, the importance of the home

environment to children's early literacy and language skills has been receiving great attention in recent years. For instance, characteristics of the home and family, such as income and parents' literacy levels, have been shown to be associated with children's literacy development. Hence it can be concluded that parents' ability to support their children by providing reading materials, talking and reading to them aloud and as well evaluating their progress in reading improves children's language/literacy activities and above all their educational achievement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this work, the researcher therefore makes the following recommends;

1. Parents should as a matter of fact find time to spend with their children to talk and read with them for a minimum period of 30 minutes. This will go a long way in not only developing their reading but language skills.
2. The parents should try as much as possible to provide to their children a conducive environment where they interact with nature and other forces that will enhance their language skills.
3. Parents should provide story books and find time to guide their children to not only read but understand it.

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