THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN DEVELOPING
READING SKILLS AND TEMPERAMENT AMONG
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN:
A CASE STUDY IN JOHOR BAHRU

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SUMISSION OF DISSERTATION FOR
THE FULFILLMENT OF
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ABSTRACT

Broad knowledge is a key for success in the information age. Building the right reading habits is one of the effective ways to obtain knowledge, and it has become an essential task for educators at all levels, especially in preschool education.

The aim of this study was to identify and assess the involvement of parents in development of their preschool children's reading behavior, temperament and literacy skills.

The sample for study comprised the children in a pre-school located at Johor Bahru. Four sets of instrument were used to assess the children's literacy skills, children's preferred interest, parents' preferred interest, and also parents' and children's temperament. A total of 110 children were surveyed, and 66 of the children responded.

The study identified the effects of parents' involvement and their background on the children's literacy skills and reading habits. It had also identified the relationship between reading habit, literacy skill and temperament. The findings showed that the parental involvement and parental role model were very important to their children's reading habits and temperament. Parents should involve more into the children lifestyle, and set a good example for the children, in order for the children to acquire the right reading habits and temperament.

The findings of this study could become useful information for parents and educators to plan the most effective way to cultivate reading habit on the children. At the end of the report, the researcher puts forward recommendations for parents based on the findings. She had also recommended possible further studies on this issue, which involve conducting the study in different areas and ethnic groups.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations Employed in the Dissertation

SD - standard deviation.
PG - three years old Play Group children.
LP - four years old Lower Preschool children.
MP - five years old Middle Preschool children.
UP - six years old Upper Preschool children.
CC - category correct in environmental sign and labels reading.
WC - word correct in environmental sign and labels reading.
LS - literacy skills.
CLS - children's literacy skills.
H - high.
   middle.
L - low.
HLS - high literacy skills.
MLS - middle literacy skills.
LLS - low literacy skills.
CIR - children interested in reading.
CxIR - children not interested in reading.
NQT - normal quality of temperament.
BNQT - below normal quality of temperament.
ANQT - above normal quality of temperament.
1.1 Background to the Problem

1.1.1 Literacy and Reading — why reading is important

*The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.*

Archilochus (7th-century b.c.e.)

In our conventional education system, we are bringing up a huge group of hedgehogs, but in fact, we need the group of people who have a combination of foxes and hedgehogs' elements in order to face the challenges of the future. A combination of a fox and hedgehog implies to be a professional in an area and have wide knowledge in many other areas. The most effective way of complimenting our education system to achieve this goal is through reading (Handy, 2002).

The common family structure today comprises working parents and small family size. This greatly reduces the interaction between family members. Parents reading together not only become activities to develop children's reading and literacy skills, but also become important activities to close establish relationships within family members (Commonwealth Magazine, 2002).

Numerous research studies on the human mind have discovered that reading, imagination, creativity, memories, feeling and logical thinking have significant connections within each other (Commonwealth Magazine, 2002), (Shu, 2000), (Gao, 2000), (Chen, 2004), (Sousa, 2001). Based on studies related to the function of the brain and nerve cells it has been concluded that reading can increase the power of creativity, imagination, memory and logic thinking (Sousa, 2001).

Reading educators, school administrators, and community leaders have reached the same conclusion that reading is the most important accomplishment of a child's
early elementary school experience. As a result, family literacy intervention programs are become increasingly popular. Many of these programs are designed to teach parents and children to engage in family storybook reading. This activity will lead children to eventual school success (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998), (Boyse, and Simmons, 2004).

Children learning to read and write following a relatively predictable pattern. The success of the child in reading and literacy can be traced through if they have normal or above average language skills, their home provides them with a fair amount of motivating and pleasurable experiences with books and literacy, the schools they attend offer experiences that help them understand and use reading to make meaning with print, and offer frequent opportunities to read and write. Influences at home and school help these children build successfully on their early experiences with literacy (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), (Boyse, and Simmons, 2004).

In addition, reading can be a fun and imaginative activity for children, which opens doors to all kinds of new worlds for them. Reading and writing are important ways to communicate (Boyse, and Simmons, 2004), (Farstrup and Samuels, 2002). Another important finding is the time spent in reading is highly correlated with achievement in learning to read (Farstrup and Samuels, 2002).

Reading is important to the children because through reading activities, children learn the secondary resources and feelings from storybooks. They will apply and imitate similar situations in their daily life. They get to know how to express themselves, learn to analyze and solve problems by using imagination to experience the moral teaching the storybook. Their behavior, interpersonal skills, observation and team work also tends to be better (Huang, Lee and Wang, 2000), (Lim, 2003).
1.1.2. Common perceptions about reading

Parents are aware of the importance of reading in a knowledge based society. In the recent years, the early childhood education market in Malaysia is booming. Education centers like "Smart Reader", "Vital Years" and "Mind Research Centres (MRC)" have offered various "reading packages" for the parents to send their children to "learn to read". While some parents understand the need, most of the parents do not understand the need to join those packages. Without the correct information, many parents have wrong perceptions of reading.

Many parents use their own perceptions to read the storybook and ask the children to understand the story as they did. Very often parents like to test the understanding of their children. However, children find it difficult to meet the parent's expectations. These causes the children be frustrated and put off their interest in storybook reading (Lim, 2003).

There is another common perception about reading that "children do not know how to read, so before they attend school, they are not required to read." In fact, even before attending school, children already "learn to read" through their various senses. This can be seen from the concept of "Literature for Young Children", which is well accepted in most of the western countries (Huang, Lee, and Wang, 2000).

Many people will directly relate reading and literacy to phonics, flash cards or memorizing poems or rhymes (Huang, Lee, and Wang, 2000), (Gao, 2000). Phonics and flash cards seem to work well with most children. However if phonics are used in isolation or used in an inappropriate manner, children can misunderstand what reading is all about. For example, young children should not sit with a deck of flash cards for extended periods of time to drill phonics facts into their minds. Such inappropriate activities can cause a young child to dislike and avoid reading. We can teach a child the mechanics of written language; but without exposure to fine children
literature, they may not develop that love of learning we want for all our children (The potters.com, 2004) (Handy, 2002).

Handy (2002) mentioned also that when we wish to learn, then only we could learn the most and learn the best we can. Fiction of Harry Potter and SMS messages by mobile phones play a more effective role in encouraging the children to read, if compared to conventional language programs.

Many people think that reading can be done only through books, but in fact, reading can be done even through CDs, e-books, Internet or even during shopping through advertising panels and logos (Gao, 2000).

1.1.3. Need to start from young

We need to teach children to learn to read before formal schooling. Parents and caregivers should help to lay the foundation for the development of essential cognitive skills and positive attitudes. In a study on reading habits, where the majority of children are between the age of 4 and 7, it was found that illustrations were the single most important factor influencing choice of books (Eyles, 2003).

Research carried out in the United State shows that a pattern of school failure starts early and persists throughout a child's school career. Results show that there is an almost 90% chance that a child who is a poor reader at the end of Grade 1 will be a poor reader at Grade 4. These children grow to dislike reading and therefore read considerably less than good readers both in and out of school (Farstrup and Samuels, 2002).

Malaysia's pre-school system plays a role in providing basic education to the young children before they embark on the formal school system. In the year 2000, it was estimated that 64% of the young children attended pre-school classes (Hassan, 2002). Although the participation rate in the primary education is high, there are about
36% who did not attend pre-school before they officially enter primary school. The
different abilities of these two groups of children in term of literacy skills, gross and
fine motor skills, and social experiences are huge.

Another challenge to the Ministry of Education is to minimize the number of
students who drop out before completing the 6-year primary education. About 3.1%
of the group entering the primary schools in 1995 did not continue their secondary
education after completing the 6-year period in 2000. The reasons are believed to be
due to the poverty, accessibility and deaths. A huge percentage among them are from
the group that did not participate in preschool education (Hassan, 2002). It is thus
important to start literacy practice from young.

From the view point of brain development, it is highly recommended to start the
literacy practice of children as early as possible. Most of the human brain
development process is from birth to age 6. By the age of 6, the brain is almost fully
developed. Therefore it is essential to mold a child's mind set before the age of 6.
Research carried out by Tokyo Ministry of Education on 633 children in 1976 showed
that 65% of the poor result students start their learning at a very late age, The early
learners have their results three times better then the late learners. This clearly shows
that the age at which learning starts plays big role in children's achievement (Chen,
2004).

1.1.4. Malaysian pre-school education system

Pre-school education in Malaysia is provided by both government and private
organizations. The Ministry of Education started its pre-school education programs in
1992, and the number of classes had grown to 1131 in 2000. There were also 15
classes dedicated to the handicapped children. Besides the Ministry of Education,there are other ministries that operate the pre-school education, such as the Ministry
of Rural Development and the Ministry of Unity and Community Developments. Surveys show that 64% of the children were attending pre-school classes in 2000 (Hassan, 2002).

Pre-school education in Malaysia is not compulsory. Most of the children start pre-school education either in public or private kindergartens at the age of 4 or 5 years old and continue until they are 6 years old. The Ministry of Education provides the curriculum guidelines to the operators. There are also private international kindergartens under the supervision of Ministry of Education Malaysia, which enroll only the children of foreigners (StudyMalaysia.com, 2004).

Malaysian preschools are mainly run by private sector. There are various methods of teaching in preschool education market, on top of the basic curriculum syllabus printed by Ministry of Education. The curriculum of Malaysian preschools includes language subjects (Bahasa Malayu and English which are compulsory, Chinese and Tamil which are optional), physical exercise, moral or Religious study, science and humanities, mathematics, music and art.

In addition to the conventional preschool academic method, the Montessori Education Method developed by Dr. Maria Montessori is very popular in Malaysia. The Multiple Intelligence Method developed by Prof. Howard Gardner is a relatively new method which is gaining popularity in Malaysia. (Montessori centre International)

1.1.5. Reading in the Malaysian pre-school system

Reading activities as well as library is not one of the compulsory subject and facility listed in the Malaysian preschool curriculum. This reflects that the Malaysian preschool system does not put emphasis to encourage reading activities. However, some teachers do take the initiative to encourage reading. Most of the responsibility for encouraging reading falls on parents and family members.
1.1.6. Factors influencing reading habits

In one study on reading habits, the majority of children of age group 4 to 7 chose illustrations as the single most important factor influencing choice (Eyles, 2003), (Gallagher, 2000). In another study carried out by Harris (1998), the 6 years old children in a rural school were given six test-only story books. After reading the books, fur children were interviewed. The children were then given the illustrated picture books featuring the same story and the children were interviewed again. The children understood the stories equally well with or without illustration, but 58% preferred the illustrated stories.

Another factor influencing the choice of children is the appearance of the cover (Eyles, 2003). Similar results were obtained by other researchers as well (Gallagher, 2000), (Brooker, 1997), (Gravenor, 1996).

People are also involved in influencing the choice of children in reading. A study by Eyles (2003) showed mothers, peers and librarians do influence the children's choice. Studies carried out by Ivamy (2000), and Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) had the same results too. In investigation of the choices 10 to 11 year-old children make in recreational reading and the influences of teachers or librarians, it was found that the children read an acceptable number of books over the period of the investigation but did not challenge their abilities. They took out only a few of the books recommended to them (Grant, 1998). Another finding that was noticeable was that those who said they read stories "often" or "very often" frequently said a family member helped them to choose what to read (Reynolds, 1998). Gender also has an influence on reading choice. Boys are less likely to be avid readers than are girls (Reynolds, 1998), (Commonwealth Magazine, 2002).

Beside the people factor, research among young avid readers shows that their attitudes to books and reading and their home backgrounds influenced these attitudes.
A study of five children (three boys aged 6, 8 and 11 and two girls aged 9 and 11) from a small rural school demonstrated the paramount importance of parental reading habits. A large number of books in the home were also found to be an influential factor (Eyles, 2003).

Studies show the amount of time parents spend reading to their children is the single most important factor influencing children's literacy. It is known to be the best way to spend valuable time with the children. The love of reading can begin as early as the parent chooses. It has been recommended by the U.S Department of Education that parents should begin reading to children even before they are of preschool age for at least 20 minutes a day in order to create their interest to read (Attiyah, 2004), (Farstrup and Samuels, 2002).

Children use literacy and get things done in their daily routines. Political institution like the government and social institutions like churches and schools largely influence the use of literacy at home. Research done by Snow, Bums and Griffin (1998) showed that home and school do influence and help these children build successfully on their early experiences with literacy.

It is thus important to understand the factors influencing reading in pre-school children. With this knowledge, parents and educators can take effective actions to cultivate reading habit in children.

1.2 Statement of Problem

With the background that many factors influence reading in pre-school children, it is important to find out the positive influences towards their reading habits. The influences may be in the form of internal factors, such as the children's behaviors and their personal interests, and/or external factors, such as their home, social cultural activities, school, parents, peers, and teachers.
One of the aspects that has been identified in the literature is the parents of the pre-school children. Parents' factors include their background, temperament, reading habits, interests, and degree of involvement toward their children's lifestyle. These may be considered as the independent variables. The effects of these variables are likely to have an impact on dependent variables such as the children's reading habits, literacy skills, temperament and their preferences or interest.

While there is some literature from other countries on the influence of parents on pre-school children's reading habits, there is little from this country. This research was intended to find out the relationship between some of the variables. However, there is no study could be located on the influence of library on pre-school children's reading habits.

1.3 Aims of Study

This study was designed to identify and assess the involvement of parents in influencing the children's reading behavior, temperament and literacy skills. The study aimed to examine the reading behavior of preschool children and the factors, particularly the parental factors that influence the children's reading behavior. The study also aimed to examine the possible function of the library in nurturing reading habits among very young children.

1.4 Research Questions

The following two broad questions were used to guide this study:

1. How does the parents' background, temperament, reading habits, interest and degree of involvement toward their children's lifestyle influence their children's reading behavior?

2. What are the effects of the parents' involvement toward children's reading habits, literacy skills, temperament and their preferences?
1.4.1. Sub-questions

To examine more closely, the following sub-questions guided this study:

1. Is there any relationship between parents' involvement in their children's activities and the preschool children's literacy skills?

2. Is there any relationship between parents' involvement and the preschool children's reading interest?

3. Is there any relationship between parents' background, such as education level, occupation or income, and the children's literacy skills?

4. Is there any relationship between parent reading habits and children's reading habits?

5. Do the children's literacy skills have any influence on the children's reading habits?

6. What is the relationship between children's literacy skills and children's temperament?

7. What is the relationship between literacy skills and reading interest for preschool children?

8. What is the relationship between children's interest preferences and their parents' interest preferences?

9. Does the parents' temperament have any influence on the children's temperament?

10. Does the children's temperament have any relationship to their reading interests?

1.5 Significance of Study

While society is moving towards knowledge management, the younger generation is observed to have less interest in reading. This can cause them to be unprepared for the
Many scholars have stressed that formal teaching and practice of reading skills in the classroom or at home is not adequate. Children's leisure reading needs active guidance and encouragement. However, parents are often not aware of effective ways to guide their children. The findings of this study, when appropriately disseminated, will help parents and preschool teachers become aware of ways of providing encouragement and guidance.

Parents sometimes have only vague assumptions about what children like and dislike. The assumptions are derived partly from observing the type of materials selected and ready by a limited number of children, partly from their own experience and partly from some general notions of children's fondness for books. It is crucial that parents check their notions about their children's likes and dislikes, and are not recommending them a diet which they find unpalatable and unrelated to their needs, that they look elsewhere for sustenance. The best way to develop interests in reading is to build on interests that already exist. The findings of this study, when appropriately disseminated, will help parents become aware of the children's likes and dislikes.

This study examines the possible factors that can influence the reading interests of preschool children in various aspects, including the temperament behavior and lifestyle for both children and their parents. This would provide useful knowledge to parents and pre-school teachers.

With these considerations in mind, the present study hopes to make a contribution to the body of knowledge on reading among preschool children.

1.6 Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in carrying out this study:

1. It was assumed the children in the study stay only with the parents, and they have no other persons that will influence them, besides the parents. The study
1. The study did not consider influences from other relatives or someone else who has been employed to take care of the child.

2. It was assumed that the children obey the parents' instructions, mentally and physically.

3. It was assumed that the parents' educational qualification is based on the Malaysia's government approved standards.

4. It was assumed the Child's Literacy Skill test used in this study is able to assess the abilities of the child, and the child has never gone for any other reading programs.

5. It was assumed the evaluation of the rating for the temperament behavior was interpreted in the same way by all the parents. While the definition of "often" for Parent A may be 5 times per week, and for Parent B might be 3 times per week, but this assumption regards all parents will define "often" in the same or close ways.

6. In a section of the study, six activities had been photographed and the children were allowed to choose their preferences and interests. It was assumed that all the children had some prior experience of the activities shown in the photo.

7. It was assumed the children gave full support to the researcher to test them on their literacy skill, and really showed their full abilities.

8. It was assumed the life style and the temperament behavior of the parents and children between first test and second test did not have any major changes.

9. It was assumed parents answered the questionnaires honestly and personally as requested.

10. It was assumed that parents fully understood the questionnaires.

11. The IQ of the children was not taken into the consideration in this research. It was assumed that the children were having similar levels of IQ.
12. It was assumed the researcher's pronunciation of the alphabets was clear and children had no understanding the problem while answering the questions.

1.7 Limitations

The following limitations applied to the study:

1. The sample comprised only preschool children from age 3 to 6 in Tadika Sutera Johor Jaya and their parents.

2. Out of 110 children in the school there were only 2 Indian and 1 Malay students. The others were Chinese children. This may not able to represent the sample of other races in similar research studies.

3. The sample school is an urban kindergarten, and it may not represent all preschool children in Malaysia.

4. The majority of parent's were from the middle range income group (earning from RM1000 to RM4000).

5. All the children in emergent literacy skills were tested by the researcher alone. It took almost a month to complete first test. After half a year, another month was required for second test to be done. The performance by the child at the beginning of the month and the child tested at the end of the month may be different, as the child tested at the end of the month may have increased their his or her skills by having extra school sections.

6. No study could be located on multiple relationships within temperament behavior of parents, parents' involvement, temperament behavior of children and reading habits. This limited the information on this study, especially on the relationship between reading habit and temperament.

7. Due to Malaysia pre-school mostly don't have their own library, and the library usage of the parents and children were extremely low (around 4%), so this study can't really bring up the relationship between library and the reading habit or literature skill of the preschool children.
1.8 Definitions

The following definitions were used in this study:

1. **Parent's involvement**: refers to dedication of resources by the parents to the children acquisition of emergent literacy skills. It also refers to life style control or proper define by parents, included in controlling their television and video habits, besides also seen in outings to place like libraries, museums and supermarkets.

2. **School involvement**: refers to school section's syllabus, reading program and other educational activities introduced.

3. **Preferences interest**: is a list of activities chosen by them during their spare time.

4. **Literacy skill**: is the ability of reading, writing and even recognizing the environmental signs.

5. **Storybook**: refers to the picture storybooks, comprising mainly pictures, and involving very minimum wording.

6. **Reading Behavior**: refers to the time spent on reading, purpose of reading, and type of materials sources of reading materials.

7. **Temperament**: consists of nine groups to categorize parents and children into difference group based on their character. These include Persistence power, Attentive span, Reaction intensity, Reaction span, Emotional intrinsic quality, Adapting power, Braveness span, Sense of order, and Vigor span.
1.9 Summary

Reading is important because a knowledge society requires multi-tasking people, and children need to equip themselves to face the challenges ahead. Reading activities can also be an effective way to improve relationship within family members. Starting reading at young age is important because it helps in brain development. Children engage in family storybook reading eventually lead them to school success. Reading is also important to improve children's behavior, interpersonal skill, observation and team work.

Recognizing the importance of reading, parents generally wish to cultivate good reading habits in their children. However, wrong perceptions and lack of information may cause parents to use ineffective way to guide their children. Children are often demotivated by such inappropriate action.

This research aimed to discover the major factors that influence preschool children's reading behavior, temperament and literacy skills. With this information parents can have an effective way to guide their children to become avid readers.