

Assessment of Parental Involvement in Children's Literacy Development

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Abstract

The place of children in the developmental structure of any society makes them a critical factor in the development of the society. Thus, it is their inalienable right to be enabled by their parents and society to develop their full potentialities and grow for the full realization of their individual personality. And as such, the importance of parental involvement as an accelerating and motivating factor in their children's literacy development cannot be over emphasized. However, the general observation is that parents in this part of the country are too busy with their economic pursuits, thereby leaving their children in the hands of teachers and nannies. On this premise, the paper examined the level of parental involvement in the literacy development of their children in Anambra State. It also focused on the extent gender and type of parents determined their level of involvement. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The sample comprised 862 parents who are members of Parents Teachers Association of the sampled schools in the study. This sample was drawn using multi-stage sampling technique. A 22-item instrument tagged "Parental Involvement in Children's Literacy Development Questionnaire" was developed by the researchers and used for data collection. The instrument was duly validated by two specialists and the reliability was determined using Cronbach Alpha Statistic which yielded reliability coefficient of 0.78 for home-based/school-based involvement. The data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistic tested at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that parents expressed very low level of involvement; male and female parents did differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent of their involvement $t(860) = 2.91, p = .05$; single-parents and two-parents did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent of their involvement $t(860) = .28, p = .05$. Based on these findings, the study recommended among others that: government through the relevant agencies should ensure that parenting education programme such as family-centred curriculum and instruction is enshrined in the school programme for this will make parents to be better parents and teachers of their children; Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) to subsidize schools to initiate activities such as workshops, seminars/conferences to help parents change the home environment because parents need specific information on how to help and what to do since some of them did wish to be more supportive and involved in their children's education but felt ill-equipped to do so; teachers to empower parents by training them as mentors and home work helpers; parents to participate in any parenting education programme organized by their children's schools to help them learn ways to create supportive learning at home and parents to model reading and writing in order to encourage the children to read and write at home as well as providing a variety of reading and writing materials at home. Moreover, the trained serving teachers should be engaged in in-service courses that will provide them with relevant knowledge on parental involvement skills and strategies. It is hoped that if these recommendations are given due consideration, parental involvement would be enhanced.

Keywords: children literacy development; parental involvement and education.

INTRODUCTION

Most children have two main educators in their lives, their parents and their teachers. Parents are the first teachers and role models for their children and as such, parents have a significant effect on their children's development. It can never be overemphasized that parental attitude and behaviour, firstly notable at the home front, strongly influence the children's physical, intellectual and socio-emotional development as affirmed by Papalia, Olds

and Feldman, 2002; Harwood, Miller, and Vasta, 2008; Mercer, 2009. The active role of parents as an accelerating and motivating factor in their children's literacy acquisition is well supported by worldwide research (Primavera, 2000; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Children actively build their own understandings of reading, writing, listening and speaking around the activities they engage in daily. It has been observed that, children who are supported and encouraged from an early age

to include literacy as part of their surroundings are anecdotally more confident in learning new concepts and exploring the perimeters of what they already know (Annie, 2010).

Parental involvement in their child's literacy practices positively affects children's academic performance (Fan & Chen, 2001) and is a more powerful force for academic success than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004). Parental involvement in learning activities in the home is strongly associated with children's better cognitive achievement, particularly in the early years (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 1999; Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Sirah-Blatchford & Taggart, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2007). The earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer-lasting the effects (Mullis, Mullis, Cornille, Ritchson & Sullender 2004). Although, parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children's educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Despite the significance of parental involvement in their children's literacy development, studies show that many parents are not aware of the importance they play in their children education and have a limited understanding of their role in their children's learning (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

Literacy according to Harris and Hodges in Cecil and Gipe (2003) is a continuum of skills, including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, visually representing and critical thinking, applied to a social context to enable a person to function effectively in his or her group and community. The social constructivists believe that literacy is constructed across the larger learning environment, encompassing the school, the home and the community; thus literacy must be considered everyone's responsibility and not just the schools (Wright, Bouchard, Bosdotter & Grandberg, 2010). A child is a human being who is under the age of eighteen and as such should be taken care of by an adult. The United Nations Convention in the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1993) defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen, unless under states own domestic legislation majority is attained earlier. The convention acknowledges that every child has certain basic rights including the right to be raised by his or her parents within a family or cultural group, and to have a relationship with both parents, even if they are separated. Furthermore, the convention obliges countries to allow parents to exercise their parental responsibilities.

A parent is a caretaker of the offspring in their own species (wikipedia.org/wiki/parent) who shapes the child through interactions in the family. Wikipedia also defines parenting as the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Therefore, the parents have the responsibility to help their children grow and develop year by year so that they can realise their full potential at adulthood. It cannot be doubted that, children begin developing literacy long before they enter school. This is because, they have seen their parents read books, magazines, newspaper, letters and bills and have observed them writing notes or letters and filling out forms. They may also have initiated some of these activities. Parental involvement is the participation and support of parents at school and in the home, which directly and positively impacts the educational performance of their children. Dixon (1992), Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), and Gonzalez-Mena (2011) define parental involvement as a combination of commitment and active participation of the parent to the school and in support of the child at home

Epstein (1996) offered six types of school and family connections as a framework that schools can use in developing programmes to encourage relationships with parents. This widely accepted framework is proposed as a guide to help educators develop comprehensive family-school partnerships. These include:

- Parenting (helping families with child-rearing and parenting skills);
- Communicating (developing effective home-school communication);
- volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school);
- learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula);
- decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-site councils, communities, etc) and
- collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community).

The framework suggests that parents should participate in a wider range of activities with their children and parents should see their children's education as mainly their responsibility now. Fathers have a critical role to play in ensuring positive outcomes further children. The role of fathers and mothers in the lives of their children are changing. While mothers are children's primary caregivers, fathers make major decisions concerning children's healthcare, education and social life. Ho, Chen, Tran and Ko (2010) asserted that taking care of one's family and raising children are typically deemed

maternal duties and involvement in children's literacy is often considered an extension of these responsibilities. They viewed fathers as typically the family disciplinarians and financial providers; traditionally, they have been less engaged than mothers in aspects of their children's education. However, the dynamic socio-economic and political transformation in the country has given rise to a more liberal, gender-conscious middle class advocating for gender equality especially with respect to women's status and roles. Many women now engage in all sorts of economic ventures to improve the financial status of their families. This has posed many challenges to the mothers roles on the literacy development of their children. Indeed, fathers find some time for childcare irrespective of the hours they work. Hurrell and Davies, (2005) reported that on the average, fathers of under fives spend 1 hour and 20 minutes a day on childcare activities during the week and 2 hour and 30 minutes a day weekends (Hurrell and Davies, 2005). They further observed that, fathers of under five spend about the same amount of time than mothers on reading, playing and talking with their children at weekends.

Meanwhile, many of the children in the classroom come from single parent families. Every society recognizes that two-parent family is ideal and any variation of this form is seen as flaw. In African context, single-parent families emerge with the death of a parent or divorce or separation. Single-parents vary in age and in education. Parents with babies also range in age from the teen years to the early forties and in education from less than a senior secondary to degree graduate. All these conditions affect the parenting skills, income and lifestyle of a family. The single-parent must assume most of the responsibilities of both father and mother. These include the jobs of economic provider, disciplinarian, nurturer and adult role model, hence, single parents frequently suffer from the stress of task. Thus, Kissman and Allen (1993) referred the single-parent family as incomplete dysfunctional or a family with great potential for problems in child rearing. It is pertinent to note that the burden of assuming the roles of both parents, the lack of adequate economic resources (particularly for women) and creating time for children's literacy development activities at home and in school can be overwhelming. Research has found that single parents are less likely than average to feel very involved in their children education (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein & Coleman, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the fact the policy framework and national guidelines for childhood education as expounded in the National Policy on Education emphasize partnership between school and parents' in the provision of education, the situation in most childhood centres does not reflect active parental

involvement. Therefore, the importance of parental involvement as an accelerating and motivating factor in their children's education is something that cannot be debated. It is against this background that this study investigated the extent parents were involved in their children's literacy development in Anambra State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are male and female parents involved in the literacy development of their children?
2. To what extent are single-parents and two-parents involved in the literacy development of their children?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance further guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of single parents and two-parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive survey. This design is adjudged appropriate since it was employed to determine the extent of parental involvement in the literacy development of their children from a sample of parents' population. The sample used for this study was eight hundred and sixty two (862) teachers and parents. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to choose the subjects. The sample consisted of two hundred and forty two (242) male and six hundred and twenty (620) female parents; five hundred and seventy three (573) two-parent and two hundred and eighty nine (289) single parent families;

A 22-item instrument entitled "Parental Involvement in Children's Literacy Development (PICLD)" questionnaire was developed by the researchers.

The instrument was given to two specialists each of childhood education, measurement and evaluation to validate. They made useful comments and inputs and based on their comments and suggestions, the instrument which originally consisted of twenty five (25) items was reduced to twenty two (22).

To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on thirty (30) Primary School Teachers of a school who are parents and twenty (20) Parents who are members of the PTA. They were from school that did not participate in the main study. The

reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Statistic which measures the internal consistency of the items. This yielded reliability coefficient of 0.78 for home-based/school-based involvement.

During the schools' PTA meetings, the researchers with the help of six (6) trained research assistants administered eight hundred and seventy (870) copies of the instrument and these were retrieved on the spot. A total of eight hundred and sixty-two (862) copies of the instrument which were correctly filled were used for data analysis. The administration exercise lasted for a period of four weeks which was based on the time the sampled schools scheduled PTA meetings.

The data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the two research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. While the mean ratings of 2.50 and above were accepted as indicative of agreement for research questions, mean ratings below 2.50 indicated disagreement.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

To what extent are the male and female parents involved in the literacy development of their children?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of male and female parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children

S/No	Items	Male N = 242			Female N = 620		
		\bar{X}	SD	Remarks	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	I read stories aloud to my child.	1.30	.35	Very low extent	1.62	1.01	Low extent
2	I teach songs to my child.	1.84	1.02	Low extent	1.74	.36	Low extent
3	I discuss family history or ethnic heritage with my child.	1.55	.20	Low extent	1.48	.82	Low extent
4	I provide a variety of reading and writing materials at home for my child.	1.94	.05	Low extent	1.58	.98	Low extent
5	My child observes me read and write.	1.88	1.02	Low extent	1.25	.66	Very low extent
6	I encourage my child to read and write at home.	1.61	1.02	Low extent	1.41	.49	Very low extent
7	I set rules and limits particularly for TV viewing in my home.	1.52	.20	Low extent	1.15	.49	Very low extent
8	I encourage my child to describe pictures and events.	1.56	.87	Low extent	1.66	.90	Low extent
9	I visit library with my child to identify and pick picture books to read.	-	-		-	-	
10	I visit museums/historical site/zoos with my child.	1.62	1.01	Low extent	1.63	.48	Low extent
11	I take my child to park to have fund.	1.51	.20	Low extent	1.27	.45	Very low extent
12	I encourage my child to tell stories and recite poems at home.	1.64	1.01	Low extent	1.08	.39	Very low extent
13	I provide meaningful learning activities at home for my child to enhance what is taught at school.	1.72	.36	Low extent	1.56	.87	Low extent
14	I monitor my child's school progress.	1.50	.20	Low extent	1.69	1.10	Low extent
15	I attend my child's school PTA meetings.	1.79	.36	Low extent	1.45	.91	Low extent
16	I attend my child's school programmes such as special events, award ceremonies and school fund raising.	1.88	.02	Low extent	1.26	.44	Very low extent
17	I attend my child's organized parent education programmes such as family centred curriculum and instruction that help me learn ways to create supportive learning at home.	-	-		-	-	
18	I commit my time and energy in a wide array of school activities like helping out in the office/classroom.	.73	5.67	Very low extent	.12	9.68	Very low extent
19	I attend informational workshops on parent-child interactions.	-	-		-	-	
20	I respond to newsletters, calls and other communiqués from school representatives.	1.15	.49	Very low extent	1.06	.24	Very low extent
21	I respond immediately to my child's teacher's call.	1.66	1.01	Low extent	1.37	.58	Very low extent
22	I participate in school decisions, governance and advocacy through PTA/ school committees	1.44	1.20	Very low extent	1.05	.22	Very low extent
Grand total		29.84	16.25		25.93	21.07	
Grand mean and SD		1.36	.74	Very low extent	1.18	.96	Very low extent

As can be seen in Table 1, male parents showed very low level of involvement (M = 1.36, SD = .74) as well as the female parents (M = 1.18, SD = .96) in the literacy development of their children. Interestingly, no parent indicated that he/she has visited the library with his/her child to identify and pick picture books to read; no parent indicated haven attended parent

education programmes and informational workshops on parent-child interactions.

Research Question 2

To what extent are the single and two-parent families involved in the literacy development of their children?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of single-parents and two-parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children

S/No	Single parent N = 289			Two-parent N = 573		
	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	1.88	.77	Low extent	1.43	.34	Very low extent
2	1.72	.82	Low extent	1.82	.86	Low extent
3	1.66	.63	Low extent	1.32	.98	Very low extent
4	1.57	.49	Very low extent	1.22	.41	Very low extent
5	1.33	.47	Very low extent	1.16	.57	Very low extent
6	1.29	.45	Very low extent	1.11	.31	Very low extent
7	1.24	.43	Very low extent	1.14	.12	Very low extent
8	1.38	.49	Very low extent	1.34	.48	Very low extent
9	-	-		-	-	
10	1.67	.47	Low extent	1.22	.41	Very low extent
11	1.48	.50	Low extent	1.37	.48	Very low extent
12	1.19	.39	Very low extent	1.16	.37	Very low extent
13	1.43	.49	Very low extent	1.14	.35	Very low extent
14	1.33	.47	Very low extent	1.11	.31	Very low extent
15	1.14	.35	Very low extent	1.03	.18	Very low extent
16	1.09	.29	Very low extent	1.04	.20	Very low extent
17	-	-		-	-	
18	1.50	.60	Low extent	1.88	.02	Low extent
19	-	-		-	-	
20	1.11	.12	Very low extent	1.30	.05	Very low extent
21	1.15	.09	Very low extent	1.06	.07	Very low extent
22	1.25	1.08	Very low extent	1.10	.01	Very low extent
Grand total	26.41	9.4		25.32	6.82	
Grand mean and SD	1.20	.43	Very low extent	1.15	.31	Very low extent

Results in Table 2 revealed that there was very low level of involvement of single-parents (M = 1.20, SD = .43) and two-parents (M = 1.15, SD = .31) in the literacy development of their children. Again there was no indication that single-parents and two-parents visited the library with their children, attended parent education programmes and informational workshops on parent-child interactions.

Table 3: t-test analysis of significance between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	Standard error	t-cal	t-crit
Male	242	1.36	.74	860	.061	2.91	1.96
Female	620	1.18	.96				

The result of t-test analysis on the above table revealed that the t-calculated of 2.91 is more than t-critical of 1.96. Therefore, there was a significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children. The result suggested that the difference between the mean ratings were statistically significant in favour of male

parents (M = 1.36, SD = .74); female parents (M = 1.18, SD = .96); t (860) = 2.91, P = .05.

In other words, the male parents have proved that they are more involved in the literacy development of their children than their female counterparts. The H₀ is therefore not confirmed.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of single-parents and two-parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children.

Table 4: t-test analysis of significance between the mean ratings of single parents and two-parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children

Type of parents	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit
Single-parent	289	1.20	.43	860	1.75	0.28	1.96
Two-parents	573	1.15	.31				

t-test analysis as displayed on table 4 indicated that the t-calculated of 1.75 is less than t-critical of 1.96, hence there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of single-parents and two-parents on the extent of their involvement in the literacy development of their children. The result suggested

that the difference between the mean ratings of single-parents and two-parents were not statistically significant at the 5% significant level, $t(860) = 1.75$, $P = .05$. The H_0 is thus confirmed.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that low mean scores were recorded by male parents ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .74$) and female parents ($M = 1.18$, $SD = .96$) indicating very low level of involvement in the literacy development of their children, thus suggesting that the children are being denied of the numerous benefits they stand to gain when parents are fully involved in their educational activities as were found by Harvard Family Research Projects (2006) that family involvement makes a difference in school success. They also observed that children whose parents read to them at home recognized letters of alphabets sooner than those whose parents did not; children whose parent taught them how to write words were able to identify letters and connect them to speech sounds and children whose mothers used complex sentences in their everyday conversations achieved higher scores in literacy related tasks in kindergarten. It was also observed that Male and female parents did differ significantly in their level of involvement $t(860) = 2.91$, $p = .05$. The male parents were more involved than their female counterparts. This is in-line with South Lanarkshire Home School Partnership survey (2007), which indicated that, the majority of fathers are involved in their children's education. The survey also reported that 60% of the fathers help out with their child's school work often, 86% read books/newspaper with their children at home and also involve with their children watching TV, and playing physical games. This finding was not consistent with results reported by Ho, Chen, Tran and Ko (2010) that mothers participated more in reading stories, teaching songs, visiting libraries, museums and zoos than fathers. The study also found out that both male and female parents did not visit libraries with their children, attend parent education programmes or informational workshops on parent child interactions. This observation was in agreement with that of Ya (2009) who found that 56% of fathers and 42% of mothers had never attended school activities.

The second hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the extent of involvement between single-parents and two-parents in the literacy development of their children was confirmed. Both single-parents and two-parents did not differ in their level of involvement $t(860) = 1.17$, $P = .05$. Nevertheless, their low mean scores of 1.20 ($SD = .43$) and 1.15 ($SD = .31$) respectively implied that single-parents and two-parents expressed very low level of involvement in the literacy development of their children. This result however contradicts the findings of Fantuzzo, Tighe and Childs (2000) who

observed higher levels of home-school conferencing and home-based involvement in two-parent families than in single-parent households. The observed differences in the earlier studies and the present one may be attributed to problems of response set as well as faking by the subjects (Osegbo, Ifeakor & Enemuo, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to examine the extent of parental involvement in their children's literacy development. From the statistical results of the study, it is glaring that parents in this part of the country showed very low level of involvement in the literacy development of their children. The results also revealed that male parents were more involved than their female counterparts. However, type of parents did not determine parental level of involvement in the literacy development of their children.

LIMITATION TO THE STUDY

The major limitations of the study were that, data collection took a lot of time as the researchers waited until the sampled schools scheduled their PTA meetings. Again they had to plead and convince the parents before they could respond to the instrument during PTA meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With respect to the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

Government, through the relevant agencies should ensure that parenting education programme such as family-centred curriculum and instruction is enshrined in the school programme. This will make parents to be better parents and teachers of their children. To support parents in these roles, schools and teachers should provide materials on parenting, conduct parenting classes and furnish parents with the ideas about teaching their children reading and mathematics skills through daily activities at home.

Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) to subsidize schools to initiate activities such as workshops, seminars, conferences to help parents change the home environment because parents need specific information on how to help and what to do since some of them did wish to be more supportive and involved in their children's education but felt ill-equipped to do so

Schools to work in collaboration with parents and community leaders in a cohesive way to implement effective involvement at all levels through the Parents Teachers Association (PTA). Teachers to provide frequent, open communication and feedback on children's progress including good news. Teachers to empower parents by training them as mentors and home work helpers as well as identify resources that

individual parents can use to help solve family and personal problems.

Parents to participate in any parenting education programme organized by their children's schools to help them learn ways to create supportive learning at homes. Parents to model reading and writing in order to encourage the children read and write at home. Parents to provide a variety of reading and writing materials at home to enhance their children's literacy development. Parents to visit museums/zoos/ park with their children to have fun and enhance their literacy development as well as to visit library with the children to identify and pick picture books to read and have book conversation with children.

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