

Effect of Parental Involvement on the Reading Skills of Pupils in Lower Primary School in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the effect of parental involvement in reading skills development of lower primary school pupils. It evaluated the level of reading skills development by lower primary school pupils in a public primary school. It further determined the impact of parental level of education and involvement on reading skills development. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population for the study comprised all lower primary school pupils and their parents in a Nigerian State. The sample size for the study comprised 308 voluntary participants selected with the use of simple purposive sampling technique of boys and girls in lower primary classes from eligible schools. Reading Skills Assessment Test and Parental Involvement Questionnaire were validated with reliability coefficients of 0.72 and 0.84 respectively, and used to collect data. Mean percentage scores and ANOVA were used to analyze the data. Results showed the reading skill of the pupils is at average level (Mean=51.54, SD=15.96). Results further showed that while parental level of involvement had a significant impact on reading skills development of school pupils, ($F_{(2,151)} = 10.494, p < .05$); parental level of education had no significant impact on reading skills development ($F_{(6,133)} = 1.466, p > .05$). It was concluded that parental involvement was a significant success determinant factor in pupils reading skills development. It was therefore recommended that parents should step up their efforts towards encouraging their children/wards in the development of reading skills at homes.

Keywords: Reading skills, Parental involvement, primary school, development, public schools

Background to the problem

It is not in doubt that most parents desire the best for their children including to be top professionals in various fields of human endeavors in life. The fulfillment of such desires must of necessity be accompanied by committed investment on quality resources that may include money, time, energy and human capacity. The pursuit of such desires by people in the developed nations of USA, UK, Canada and Australia has contributed to very high significant performance in numerous areas of scientific, economic and cultural endeavors, including language and literacy development (Iroegbu and Ifedayo, 2020). The idea of early home parental involvement in children education and more importantly in language and literacy development is believed to have catalyzed the achievement of Nationals of the developed nations in numerous areas of learning (Hotz and Pantano, 2015). Researchers have found that children are motivated when their families or parents are interested in their school work and are consequently spurred to higher achievements (Ramirez, Lytle and Kuhl, 2020). These authors found that parent involvement in the educational progress, homework and overall performance of children were beneficial to the learners, teachers, schools and the entire community. Ramirez, Lytle & Kuhl, (2020) gave further confirmation that children in general exhibit greater probability of success in school work when their families get actively involved in their school work.

Most Nigerian families are interested in providing education for their children, but unlike the parents in the developed nations of the world, Nigerian parents are not known to devote appreciable level of interest in the daily performance of their children at school. There are no available literature or research evidence to counter the stand that Nigerian parents are not showing sufficient interest in promoting to a high degree parental participation in daily school work of their children/ward and therefore incremental improvement in learner achievement.

Education has a significant role to play in the life of every child and reading is an integral and essential education that every learner, especially young children need.

Reading has been described as a complex process involving different mental operations in which reading related cognitive skills play important roles (Adedigba, 2019). In order to read, children should be able to perceive sounds, store the information they hear, analyze them, recall and recombine them in the memory and then employ the results in problem solving (Onukaogu and Arua, 2003). Children with good cognitive abilities tend to become fluent readers earlier with more ease than those with poorer cognitive abilities. It is however regrettable that most Nigerian family fails to give the essential home support that early learners deserve for improved performance. Further still, Reading research is of the view that ability to read depends on language-specific cognitive abilities, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary and most strongly decoding: the ability to associate sounds and symbols with meaning (Garbe, 2016); and these are language skills that are deficient in most local Nigerian society.

Reading is a basic life skill which acts like building block in a child's school-based learning environment; and without it, the chances for academic and occupational success would be highly limited. Maduiké, Okezie and Ugorji, (2012) also pointed out that reading is the foundation stone of functional literacy, a tool for dissemination of ideas, a stimulus for imagination and creativity and a beneficial habit for the realization of personal self - fulfillment. Reading could be fun for children especially when incorporating imaginative activities since it opens doors to all kinds of 'new worlds'. Reading provides avenue to learning about other people, their history, social and economic activities; the language arts, science, mathematics and other subjects of the school curriculum. Reading could be employed to make young children active in many ways such as thinking, verbalization and other activities. Educational research literature has shown that most Nigerian primary school children have difficulty in reading (Mahuro and Hungi, 2016; Iroegbu and Iroegbu, 2018), and when children are deficient in reading, their general knowledge, spellings, writing abilities and vocabulary development suffer Iroegbu and Iroegbu, (2018) asserted that there is 88% chance that a child who struggles in first grade will struggle with reading in fourth grade.

Sofowora (2011) identified problems like: overcrowded classrooms, stereotype in applying methods of teaching, poor facilities/infrastructure and lack of relevant instructional materials; as leading to poor performance being observed at the secondary school level. Maduiké, Okezie and Ugorji, (2012) had similar findings with Sofowora (2011). In public examination Candidates' performance was inexplicably disappointing. This could be attributed to students' inability to read and write simple structural English. There are many problems associated with primary education in Nigeria and especially in English language. Several scholars have attributed these problems to lack of qualified teachers, heavy workload on the few available English Language teachers, and dearth of relevant English textbook and poor attitude of pupils to English Language (Sofowora 2011).

Muhammad & Usman (2017) asserted that some misconceptions also hinder efficient teaching and learning of reading skills, these are: reading is the academic business of primary school, content area reading is different from subject matter reading, remedial work alone is enough to meet the needs for reading hence sidetracking developmental reading, and that the teaching of reading should be left for the English teachers alone. In order for children to develop and master the art of reading, the role of parents is very crucial as they are the first teachers who can initiate the actual process of developing reading skills.

Parental involvement has been described by researchers as a variety of activities that allow parents to participate in the educational process of their children at home and in school. Activities such as information exchange, decision sharing, volunteer services for schools, home tutoring/teaching, and child/school advocacy could be used to involve parents in school learning (Tarraga, Garcia and Reyes, 2017).

UK Essay (2018) citing (Al-Awabdeh, 2011) described parental involvement as the activities occurring between a parent and a child or between a parent and teachers at school that may contribute to the child's educational outcomes and development. It further explained citing (Liontos 1992) recent beliefs about parents and families, that schools should consider when involving themselves in the education of children: "1) All families have strengths, 2) parents can learn new techniques, 3) parents have important perspectives about their children, 4) most parents really care about their children, 5) cultural differences are both valid and valuable, and 6) many family forms exist and are legitimate. These observations appear to strengthen the position that parental involvement could be applied to promote young children's participation, improved achievement and enjoyment of both school and general education.

According to these researchers Desforges & Abouchaar (2003), and Jeyes (2016), parental involvement has a significant effect on children's achievement and adjustment. In addition to higher academic achievement and greater cognitive competence, parental involvement leads to greater problem-solving skills development, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance, fewer behavioral problems at school, and greater social and emotional development. In addition, it has the benefits of higher test scores and grades, better attendance, increased levels of completed homework, and motivation, and a more positive.

Research has also shown that the most accurate predictor of a pupil's achievement is not parental income or social status but the extent to which parents are able to create home environment that encourages learning, communicates high yet reasonable expectations for achievement and future careers; and where parents become involved in their children's education at the school and in the community Lara and Saracostti (2019) in their research considered parental involvement along three clusters – high, medium low, and also parental factors at home, school and through invitation. The results show that there are differences in children's academic achievement between the parent's involvement profiles, indicating that children whose parents have low involvement have low academic achievements, while other parents with high involvement have their children having higher achievement. The foregoing are positive benefits that are too compelling to be ignored, and is in line with international research evidences.

Reading has been found to be the most sensitive to parental influences of all the subjects. These researchers (Hanemann and Krolak, 2017) also asserted that success in reading is a gateway to success in other academic areas as well. Similarly Xiaofeng, Wenhui and Aibar, (2018) opined that interactions, such as being read to; and exposure to books, newspapers and environmental print, impact children's progress in learning to read and that children who come from rich literacy home environments show higher levels of reading knowledge and skills at the start of kindergarten and throughout primary school. Since these are findings from the education of young children in developed nations of the world, there is a possibility that similar results may be obtained if young children from the developing nations are similarly provided for.

Several researches reveal that parents who promote reading as a valuable and worthwhile activity have children who are motivated to read for pleasure (Akinbote, Kolawole and Kolawole, 2008). The researchers further opined that Parent-child activity, such as reading stories to children at an early age, a popular form of parental involvement, has significant positive influence not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills, but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom. It is also believed that, parents who introduce their children to books give them a head start in school and an advantage over their peers throughout primary school because with books, children encounter a broader range of words and can construct imaginary worlds using the text and pictures as a springboard. In addition, early reading skills acquisition is strongly related to young children's phonological sensitivity. Children's increased knowledge of phonological sensitivity is believed to be related to parental involvement in literacy activities in the home, such as the frequency of parents reading for pleasure. Young children learn these skills (letters of the alphabet, phonemic awareness) by observing and participating in different print literacy activities that are important part of their own communities. The frequency of children's experiences with genres of literacy in their environment, such as shared book reading or parents reading newspapers in the child's presence, as well as oral language use, (such as mealtime conversations and storytelling) are related to children's language and literacy development in the early grades (McMahon, 2010). These findings exemplify activities and common experiences that provide home learning opportunities for young children and that parental involvement increased children reading achievement. This things done should constitute models for parents to adopt with their children/wards.

Vygotsky (1978) observed that learning is enhanced when interacting with a more knowledgeable other, parents scaffold or assist children's performance by modeling the types of responses expected to particular questions with the goal that children will eventually respond by imitation. This pattern is often noticeable in storybook sharing. Parents also support children's understanding of text by rephrasing and explaining the meaning of the text and sequence of events. Older siblings of young children sometimes assume responsibility for reading to children, which exposes children to a function of print, new vocabulary, as well as question-answer patterns which children will often experience in early schooling. However social resources, including the quality of the parent-child relationship, are important for children's literacy development. Xiaofeng, Wenhui and Aibao, (2018) pointed out that there is a link between parental absence and poor reading comprehension. These authors asserted that the quality of interactions in storybook reading between parents and child is dependent on the security of the parent-child relationship. That is, high quality book reading (such as initiating interactions around the meaning of pictures or text) depended on the interactional context where less secure relationships between parent and child resulted in fewer meaningful interactions. Furthermore, parents who absent themselves do not read frequently to their children and are less likely to initiate conversations to make texts enjoyable or to find ways of making them comprehensible for young readers. What has become obvious is that what is needed is positive parental involvement and less absenteeism. This will produce learning gains and not the reverse.

Scholars like Lara *et. al.* (2019) and Mudzielwana (2014), have made several attempts to explain how low achievement in reading can be traced to the role and attitude of parents in children's learning. They noted that variables in the home contributes to the children's early literacy success and may even outweigh those in the school setting.

Parents who are of low income generally do not read to their children, let alone read themselves (Cassidy, Garcia, Tejada-Delgado, Garrett, Martinez-Garcia, & Hinojosa, 2004). In addition, if parents or other adults do not have the necessary skills for providing literacy-rich experiences or exposure to varied and extensive vocabulary, then their children will be lagging behind other students of the same age. Along with this, a positive correlation exists between the child's school performance, education and income level with that of the parent. The results of research confirm that children usually achieve a literacy resembling that of their parents, suggesting that there may be an "inter-generational transfer of literacy within families" (Hanemann and Krolak, 2017). Like researcher Tarraga, Garcia and Reyes (2017) have shown that positive parental involvement would promote learner performance in numerous ways and that is what is needed for majority of the children. It is not possible that all the young children in school would have their reading skills enhanced through a single strategy. What is needed is to obtain optimum benefit from this strategy, then another strategy could be developed for those who could not profit from parental involvement strategy.

With the very low level of literacy in this country, it is evident that the best practices situations for parental involvement in reading development for children may not be obtained in Nigeria. This is because the impact of the efforts of the limited number of educated parents involved in assisting their children at home will probably manifest in this study. Many researchers seem to agree that pupils are more successful if their parents are involved in their study (Castro, Exposito – Casas, Lopez – Martin, Lizasoain, Navarro – Asencio and Gavina 2015, Sebastian, Moon and Cunningham(2017, Tarraga, Gracia and Reyes ,2017). Therefore, when parents demonstrate interest in their children education, the children will hopefully do well in their education. Iroegbu (2013) also found that parental support and intervention with at-risk children produced improved achievement levels and self confidence. If the literate parents strive to participate in their children's/ward's education, and specifically the level of reading skills development will hopefully show positive improvement among the population of children. Attention will then shift to the children who could not benefit from parental interventions.

Statement of the Problem

From the foregoing researches, parental involvement could be seen as an important factor in the development/ acquisition of reading skills by young learners in developed nations. In developing countries, parental involvement in children's reading development has been hampered by poverty, illiteracy, and other social and economic practices, which are different from what obtains in developed nations. This study therefore investigated the extent to which parental involvement in reading skills development and parental education affected the reading skills development performance of primary school children.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed at determining the impact of Parental Involvement on Reading Skills of Lower Primary Pupils in a developing country.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the average level of reading skills of lower primary school pupils in a public primary school in this study
2. Examine the effect of parental involvement on reading skills development among lower primary school pupils in this study.
3. Determine the effect of parental level of education on reading skills development among Lower Primary School Pupils in this study.

Research Questions

1. What is the average level of reading skills among sampled lower primary school pupils?
2. Does parental level of involvement affect reading skills development among sampled Lower Primary School pupils?
3. Does parental level of education affect reading skills development among sampled lower primary school pupils?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were stated and tested in this study. They are as follows:

HO₁: There is no significant effect of parental involvement on reading skills development of lower primary school pupils.

HO₂: There is no significant effect of parental level of education on reading skills development of Lower Primary School Pupils.

Method of study

Descriptive survey research design of a cross-sectional type was adopted in the study. This design involves obtaining information from a representative sample of a particular population of interest. According to Ary, Jacob, Razavieh and Sorensen (2010) cross-sectional survey type is appropriate for a study where the intention of the researcher is to gather the data on certain phenomenon of interest at one point in time. The population for the study comprised all lower primary school pupils and their parents. The sample size for the study comprised 308 participants who consented to participate in the study. This consisted of 154 primary school pupils (57.1% males and 42.9% females with mean age of 7.79 and SD of 1.61) and 154 parents. The participants were selected with the use of purposive sampling technique. Due to the nature of this study, parents of the pupils selected were those that have submitted the required data. Researcher designed instruments were used to collect the data for this study. These were Reading Skills Assessment Test (RSAT) and Parental Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ). The Reading Skills Assessment Test (RSAT) had four sections. Section "A" addressed demographic information of the pupils, while sections B through D comprised 30 objective items each with four options, drawn from three aspects of reading comprehension. Section "B" consists of 10 items that focused on comprehension, section "C" consists of 10 items focusing on vocabulary development ability, while section "D" consists of 10 items that focused on phonemic awareness.

The Parental Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) has two sections. Section 'A' of the questionnaire consists of items that addressed demographic information of the parents while section 'B' contains 20 items designed to elicit parents' behaviour at home as regard their personal effort towards reading skill development of their wards. Items on PIQ were generated from extensive review of studies on parental involvement. PIQ had a five-point Likert scale format ranging from 'Never' to 'Very Often'. The minimum and maximum scores obtainable from the 20 items on PIQ are 0 and 60 respectively. Scores of 0-20 were adjudged as low level of involvement, 21-40 as moderate level while scores of 41 through 60 were adjudged as high level of involvement. Items on RSAT and PIQ were validated by experts in early childhood education, Languages, and Test and Measurement. A test-retest approach was used to determine the reliability of items on RSAT. The test was administered on 20 primary two pupils twice with interval of two weeks. The two sets of scores generated were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.72. For the PIQ, this instrument was administered once to 20 parents of selected pupils that were used to validate RSAT. Internal consistency approach based on Cronbach's Alpha was adopted and the reliability coefficient found was 0.84. The two research instruments were found reliable enough given their respective reliability indices. The data obtained were analyzed using Percentages, mean and One-Way Analysis of Variance statistical techniques.

Results: The results of data analysis are presented following the order of research questions.

Research Question1: What is the average level of reading skills among sampled lower primary school pupils?

The data for answering research question 1 is contained in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Reading Skills of Lower Primary School Pupils in sample

Reading Skill Level	Score Range (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Poor	0-49	64	41.6
Average	50-69	66	42.9
Good	70-100	24	15.6
Total		154	100.0

Mean = 51.54, SD= 15.96

Result in Table 1 shows that the average reading skills development of the primary school pupils is 51.54. In addition, 41.6% and 42.9% of the pupils exhibited poor reading and average reading skill levels respectively while 15.6% had good reading skill level. The mean average reading skills score of the sampled pupils is 51.54 with a SD of 15.96. This suggests that reading skills of the sampled pupils is at average level of development on the scale adopted for this study.

Research questions 2 and 3 were captured by null hypotheses 1 and 2 respectively.

Null Hypothesis 1: This hypothesis states as follows: There is no significant effect of parental involvement on reading skills development of lower primary school pupils.

The result of data analysis is contained in Table 2.

Table 2: One-Way Analysis of Variance Test of Significance of Parental Involvement on Reading Skills Development of Lower Primary School Pupils

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	4722.322	2	2361.161	10.494	
Within Groups	33975.794	151	225.005		.000
Total	38698.116	153			

Result in Table 2 shows that there was a statistically significant effect of parental level of involvement on reading skills development of lower primary school pupils in the sample as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F_{(2,151)} = 10.494$, $p < .05$). This result reveals that there was a significant effect of parental level of involvement on reading skills development of lower primary school pupils of this study. The result of post-hoc test conducted to find out where the differences exist is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Post-Hoc Test of Multiple Comparisons of Pupils' Reading Skill on the basis of Parental Level of Involvement

(I) involvement	(J) involvement	Mean Difference (I-Std. Error J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Low	Moderate	-4.15972	3.06190	.365	-11.4074	3.0880
	High	-17.23731*	3.96049	.000	-26.6120	-7.8626
Moderate	Low	4.15972	3.06190	.365	-3.0880	11.4074
	High	-13.07759*	3.31630	.000	-20.9274	-5.2277
High	Low	17.23731*	3.96049	.000	7.8626	26.6120
	Moderate	13.07759*	3.31630	.000	5.2277	20.9274

*Low-Mean=46.04, SD= 16.02; Moderate-Mean=50.20, SD= 14.09; High-Mean=63.28, SD= 17.81

Result in Table 3 shows reading skill mean score of pupils whose parents had low level of involvement (M=46.04, SD=16.02) was not significantly different from the scores of pupils whose parents were moderately involved (M=50.20, SD= 14.09) but statistically significant different from pupils whose parents were highly involved (M=63.28, SD= 17.81). There was also a significant difference in the reading skill mean score of pupils whose parents were moderately involved (M=50.20, SD= 14.09) and those whose parents were highly involved (M=63.28, SD= 17.81).

HO₂: There is no significant effect of parental level of education on reading skills development of Lower Primary School Pupils. The result for data analysis for the evaluation of this hypothesis is contained in Table 4.

Table 4: One-Way Analysis of Variance Test of Significance of Parental Level of Education on Reading Skills Development of sample

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	2166.835	6	361.139	1.466	
Within Groups	32755.438	133	246.281		.194
Total	34922.273	139			

Result in Table 4 shows that there was no statistically significant impact of parental level of education on reading skills development of Lower Primary School Pupils as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F_{(6,139)} = .194$, $p > .05$). This result shows that there was no significant impact of parental level of education on reading skills development of Lower Primary School Pupils in this study. Thus parental level of education appeared to be of negligible effect in pupils reading skills development.

Discussion of results of data analysis:

One of the results of this study is that the lower primary pupils possessed average level reading skills development on the scale of the instrument employed. The level is considered as not good enough. The reason for this rating is because less than 16% of the sample exhibited evidence of good level of reading skills development.

A higher proportion of respondents ought to perform more creditably than was observed as over 84 percent of respondents exhibited reading skills between poor and average level. Parents need to put more effort to ensure that more pupils attain higher levels of reading skills development at lower primary school level.

In the case of parental involvement, the data analysis revealed that children whose parents were highly involved in their reading skills development manifested higher reading skills attainment than either those whose parents showed moderate or low involvement. This result is suggestive of the need for greater parental involvement in young children's reading skills development. This result tends to agree with the findings of Desforges & Abouchaar (2003), Akinbote et al, (2008), Iroegbu (2013), and Lara and Saracastti, (2019). The result is instructive in the sense that more positive skills development among young primary school children would accrue to parents who devote a higher amount commitment to their children's reading skills development.

Another finding in this study was that parental education did not affect young children's reading skills development. This is because they can employ teachers to coach the children. This result runs contrary to general expectations and the observation of Iroegbu & Ifedayo (2020), Ramires, Lytle and Kuhl (2020). One would have expected that parental education would have strong influence on the acquisition of reading skills by young school children. It is probable that parents in this study fall into the group that abandons the work of language skills development of their children to the school teachers. It is therefore likely that educated parents in this study had not used their education to influence language skills development of their children/wards.

Recommendation: Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations appear necessary:

In order to improve the level of reading skill among young schoolchildren, the Government and school management Boards should train specialist teachers for language skills development at the primary level of education. This will assist in producing young children that will acquire higher proficiency in reading, especially now that the parents are unable to assist their children meaningfully in this regard.

Classroom teachers in the nation's primary schools should periodically assign homework to the children that will demand the parents' supervision, support and even critique. This demand will help ensure that parents show more interest in their children's schooling progress. In addition parents should be made to review periodically their children's/wards school work together with their ward even the teacher. This action will hopefully engender greater interest and participation of parents in their children's/wards' school achievement and progress.

In addition, the government should promote adult literacy classes for parents as well as parenting education for all adults in order to promote all round education in the future as well as improve the effect of parental education on the children's school performance.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the children in the early classes of the primary schools require help in order to promote their reading skills development to acceptable levels. The parents need also to be encouraged to provide greater support towards reading skills development of their young primary school children.

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