

# A Study of Parental Influence on Cultivating Young Learners' Reading Habit in Home Context

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## Abstract

Parents are universally accepted as the first educators of the children. Parental care and home context are crucial in child's life and that could lead them to social and academic success. Significant development of the brain, body and emotions happens in the early years of child's life, parents should cultivate good habits early in this period. In this paper, researchers aim to highlight the importance of parent's involvement in cultivating children's reading habits and to explore type of reading materials that foster their reading habits and to find out the enjoyable reading activity for young learners in home context. The required data was collected through the interview with ten families and their children. Schema Theory is used to analyze data. The data collected from the parents were analyzed and compared. It was found that there is a positive relationship between the involvement of the parents and child's early literacy development. The interactive books, reading through Smart Pen and colorful bookshelf for kids were found to be of great help in cultivating reading habits to young learners. Reading and reward activity for reading was unexpectedly found to be the most effective.

Key Words: Parental care, young learners, home context, reading habit, Schema Theory

## 1. Introduction

Reading is the most crucial skill in learning English as a foreign language. According to Harmer (2007), reading is crucial for two main reasons. First, it is beneficial to the students' personal life and has a positive impact on students' further studies. Second, it is beneficial to their language acquisition for reading improves students' writing abilities, spelling and vocabulary knowledge.

### Reading Habits

Habits are automatic routines of behavior that are repeated regularly, without thinking (Butler and Hope, 1995). The person may not be paying attention to nor be conscious of that behavior. Reading habit is generally defined as the manner in which an individual organizes his reading. It is generally acquired at an early age, between kindergarten and elementary school. It must be first introduced and encouraged

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to become a habit. It was generally cultivated and encouraged by their parents and their teachers. There is an association between students' reading habits and their demographic profiles, academic performance, and professional growth (Owusu-Acheaw, 2014). Reading is related to learning and learning leads to mental, professional, and human development in general.

### **Young Learners**

According to Slattery and Willis (2001), foreign language learners between the age of 7 to 12 years are called young learners (YL), and children under 7 years are called as very young learners (VYL). Ersoz (2007) argues that very young learners are 3- 6 years old and young learners are 7- 9 years old and 10-12 years old are late young learners. The way young learner learns is different from all others and depends on many factors: age, learning style, personality. Activities and methods used in teaching that suit a child will make him or her progress in learning.

#### **Aim and Objectives**

- To highlight the importance of the family relationship in young learners' literacy developing process.
- To explore the type of reading materials used by the parents to enable the children to foster interest in early reading.
- To find out the enjoyable reading activity for young learners in home context and family time.

#### **2. Literature Review**

There is general agreement among researchers that the child's early home experience is the basic foundation for his or her learning process. Bourdieu (1990) says children of well-to-do families are likely to get more facilities which contribute to learning process. In accordance with Hamid (2011), there are relationships between students' family socio-economic characteristics and their academic achievement. He conducted a research in Bangladeshi context which has investigated relationships between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement in English as a FL/L2. Christiansen and Herrera (1975) support a theory that unfavorable home environmental conditions may have a deleterious effect on the child's academic achievement. Many parents are not aware of the important role they play in their child's education and have a limited understanding of their role in their child's learning (Bonci, 2008).

### **Schema Theory**

The term 'schema' refers to an ability of a person to recall their past or present knowledge for future understandings. Schema theory describes in detail how the background knowledge of the learner interacts with the reading task in deciphering a text. It is based on the notion that past experiences lead to the creation of mental frameworks that help a reader make sense of new experiences. Comprehension is the process of "activating or constructing a schema that provides a coherent explanation of objects and events mentioned in a discourse" (Anderson, 1994). For Anderson and Pearson (1988), comprehension is the interaction between old and new information. They emphasize: "To say that one has comprehended a text is to say that she has found a mental 'home' for the information in the text, or else that she has modified an existing mental home in order to accommodate that new information" (Omaggio, 1993).

Schema theorists differentiate formal schemata (knowledge about the structure of a text) from content schemata (knowledge about the subject matter or message of a text). Reader's prior knowledge of both schemata enables him to predict events and meaning as well as to infer meaning from a wider context.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

Both the Quantitative and the Qualitative Research Design are used in this paper. The qualitative research method is mainly used in investigating the importance of the parental involvement in developing children's literacy skill. The quantitative method is used to find the effective reading activities and to discover certain aids that enhance reading.

#### **Research Question**

The research question is how parents could cultivate child's reading habit early at home. The researcher also wants to investigate things and strategies that could grasp child's interest and, wants to find the ways to upgrade reading skill through their interest even in their home atmosphere. The child's early interactions and social experience normally start at home and, the researcher also wants to find out how these habits and experiences could support to their teaching-learning process.

## **Research Method**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the parents' perspectives on reading and to find out what strategies or devices they used in dealing with their children's reading skill. Older children were also interviewed to listen to their responses. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Myanmar language and then transcribed in English later. Before interview, researcher explained the research topic and goals to the participants to foster their active participation. The participants' real names would not be mentioned in the current study in order to protect their privacy. The researcher took notes during the interviews and the interviews were recorded.

### **4. Data Collection and Data Analysis**

This research was conducted to the Grade-3 students of WSEC private school in Myingyan. The reason for choosing a private school is that parents of these students generally seem to be interested in education. Most of them are found to participate willingly in some social activities and other nonprofit NGOs. Their names would not be mentioned in this paper for the sake of their privacy. The researcher is happy to find that the interviewees are in different jobs, social types, background and educational levels. Interviews are recorded using the mobile phone. Sometimes, it was found that they chatter longer than expected. Researcher did not interrupt the parents' natural flow of speaking, even when their responses deviated slightly from the question topics. One good thing is that some of the interviewee are acquaint to researcher as a result researcher knows their families' nature and their kids' level to some extent. Some of the findings such as eagerness in reading activity and other social changes could not be expressed in terms of evidence numerical data.

This chapter will analyze the devices and activities that enhance children's reading activity in home context. There will be five categories.

#### **Making Reading Enjoyable with Interactive Books**

Reading materials is one of the major elements to instill interest in reading and to maintain the interest of the reader. Choosing the inappropriate materials for their kids may end up influencing a child's loss of interest to read. Colorful pictures can be striking and attractive for the kids. This will motivate them to do more readings by themselves. Books for kids should be different from other ordinary types intended for adults. Their favorite cartoon characters could influence them a lot, reading activity through them could grasp

kids' interest and drives them reading process go on and on. Pictures and visual aids make them ease in decoding the written text. Through pop-up books, characters come alive and let their action visualize.

Kids are naturally restless and reluctant and could not stand sitting silently all the time. Lift-the-flap book type is appropriate to kids' restless nature. It makes them move and lift the flap all the time, and through their movement and reading text on the flash card convey textual meaning. Besides, it always arouses their curiosities via covered flaps and makes reading go on unconsciously.



Fig.1. Photographs of the Lift-the-flap book and Pop-up book

### Technological Aids in Teaching Reading

Technology has already made great changes on almost everyone's everyday life in this early twenty-first century. The impact of technology on education is great and there meets a lot of changes in language teaching-learning process. Some audio books and reading pen (Smart Pen) ease language learning. With the aid of these devices, language teaching-learning process is fun, enjoyable and possible everywhere, even playing in bed. These devices unburden to both kid and parents. Those preprogrammed devices let the kids acquire second language unconsciously while they are playing with reading pen and colorful pictures. Besides, those audio books and reading pen could give students native like accent and pronunciation.



Fig.2. Photographs of Audio Book and Smart Pen

### Bookshelf Design for Kids

Whenever we think about something for children, what we should keep in our mind is that their nature and preferences are different from that of the adults. Children's library or bookshelf must be differed in almost everything from public library for adults. Bookshelf designs and the way displaying books on them could change the child reading habits. The library hour for kids and the way dealing with them during and after reading is very important in cultivating reading habit. The colorful front cover of books should be easily visible and reachable to them. Toys and other playing things should be together with them in their reading room as their attention span in reading does not last long by nature. Sometimes, they will do reading and playing simultaneously or alternatively. Let them do whatever they prefer to some extent. Some strict rules and regulations will discourage their reading habits.



Fig.3. Photographs of kids-bookshelf and ordinary-bookshelf

## Reading and Reward

Children naturally prefer reward and expect praise from elders to their efforts. Children could gradually upgrade confidence and through the guidance and encouragement of parents and teachers. Reading skill also could be upgraded through rewards and encouragement. Just a tiny sticker or an inch of color paper from their teacher is a great reward for them and could change their learning routine. That tiny reward declared in front of his friends is priceless to them. The more visible the reward is, the more effective it is. The reward should be always in publicly seen. It could not only enhance his learning process but also upgrade his confidence in social life as he has a chance to show his identity in his society. Widely known program for teaching reading is reading tree activity.



Fig.4. Photographs of Sticker Reward and Reading-tree Activity

## Bedtime Stories together with Parents

Bedtime stories are a great way to interaction between child and parents. Story reading helps child's communication skill, memory and language recognition skill. Illustration and stories usually goes hand in hand and child can easily be intelligible to them. Engaging bedtime stories to kids is an excellent way to help them get comfortable with reading habit. When story-reading is their daily routine, it becomes a habit. First, parents have to lead to start reading, later they will ask for more stories. Gradually reading becomes a pleasure and addicted to them when they grow up. Though they are unintelligible to every single word, they could get meaning to some extend through pictures and the way parents speak to them. Story books, cartoon movies and toys of famous characters in stories are not strange to children and easily available nowadays. Those bedtime stories could easily be seen as a film and, characters in famous story are familiar with them as a toy, sometimes in game. If reading activity is through their accustomed characters, it is more fun, meaningful and intelligible to them as if they met

their friends again in their book. Those cartoon movies and toys also have great impact on reading habit cultivation to young learners.

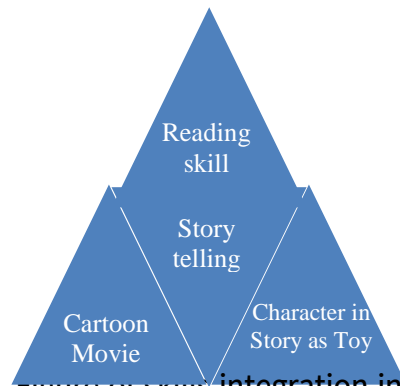


Fig.5. Figure of skills integration in story telling

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Two main crucial factors for cultivating reading habit in young learners are material support and mental support. Material support such as interactive books, technological reading aids and attractive books shelf could support child's reading habit cultivation. Insufficient material support is found to be one of the factors that discourage their reading habit of young learners. Student E, H, I and J are in need of physical apparatus for reading and their reading habits were significantly found to be poor.

Just only physical support is not enough; it was found in student A. The lack of parental care, reward and encouragement from parents demotivate student A's reading habit. Unlikely to adult learners, kids need supervision and interaction with parents. Student G could be said to have insufficient material support, but student G's reading habit is improving with parents' mental support, guideline and recognition. Giving psychology security and encouragement are also found to be effective. The significant candidate of this paper is the student B. Through the interviewed data, student B's reading hour per day is about two hours. He could not help reading when he sees his interesting books. His mother said he is addicted to books and reading. Student B is found to have born and grown up among book readers. Storytelling, poem reciting and kid- books are his daily routine and he was introduced reading through sigh word, and picture since he was in infant. Reading does not seem strange to him and does it as a daily routine. He likes reading and his parents support reading habit as a result his reading habit is developing day by day as if he were an inborn reader.



Table.1. Comparison of Data in Table

Student	Material Support				Mental Support		Reading Frequency	Support Percentage	Remark
	Book	Interactive Book	Techno-Aid	Bookshelf for Kids	Bedtime Story	Reward			
A	✓	✓	☒	✓	☒	☒	Seldom	50%	
B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Always	100%	**
C	✓	✓	✓	☒	☒	☒	Seldom	50%	
D	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Often	100%	*
E	✓	☒	☒	☒	✓	☒	Seldom	33%	
F	✓	✓	✓	☒	☒	✓	Often	67%	*
G	✓	✓	☒	☒	✓	✓	Often	67%	*
H	✓	☒	☒	☒	✓	☒	Seldom	33%	
I	☒	☒	☒	☒	✓	☒	Seldom	17%	
J	✓	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	Seldom	17%	

Table.2. Reading habit and support percentage

Student	Reading Habit	Support Percentage	Remark
B	Always	100%	**
D, F, G	Often	67% and Above	*
A,C, E, H, I, J	Seldom	50% and Under	

## 6. Conclusion

Parents play a crucial role in cultivating reading habit and developing a child's reading abilities. There is a positive relationship between the involvement of the parents, home atmosphere and early literacy development. Parents first cultivate children's reading habit at home and proper types of reading material and reading aids foster again their interest in early reading. Therefore, parent's involvement in early literacy development with the usage of suitable reading materials is a great impact in children's educational development. This research hopes to bring awareness to parents and public to initiate reading habits to young learners as early as possible and those young learners one day will bring good things to their community and will make the better world.

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