

Where Literacy Begins: Developing A Needs-Based Parent Handbook for Early Childhood Literacy Skill Development in a Rural Filipino Community

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the present study was to design a parent handbook about early childhood literacy skills development at home in Filipino. The study was conducted as a study based on a simplified version of the ADDIE Model (Analysis, Design and Development stages) to collect data in ten (10) mothers of kindergarten children in a rural community in Barangay Nazareth, General Tinio, Nueva Ecija through the use of an interview guide designed by the researcher. The results showed that parents were the most consistent in the development of Letter Knowledge (M = 9.6), and least consistent in the Narrative Skills (M = 7.6) and Phonological Awareness (M = 8.4). The participants all revealed the necessity of a handbook in Filipino or Tagalog in a bid to ensure that they could easily use it at home to teach early literacy skills. This was followed by the creation of a ten-page handbook that would encompass all six early literacy skills namely Print Motivation, Print Awareness, Letter Knowledge, Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness, and Narrative Skills but with the focus on the activities that considered the gaps identified. The article finds that a culturally and linguistically

responsive handbook can be used as a useful intervention in the home-school literacy gap of underserved Filipino populations.

Keywords: *Early literacy skills, parent handbook, early childhood education, home literacy environment, ADDIE Model, rural Philippines.*

INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills are the foundation of education and are extremely crucial in all aspects of life. Effective reading and writing skills help children to understand the information, communicate their ideas, and orientate in different school subjects. Moreover, the ability to think critically, be creative, and communicate is a prerequisite of success in the contemporary world; and this is the result of literacy skills.

The development of literacy skills in a child at an early age determines the future level of academic success and overall cognitive abilities of the child. Early literacy is a recent pattern of relations between writing and reading. These relations have a larger communication system of talking and hearing, the elements of which interact to enable negotiating the world and give meaning to experience by the learner (Thelen and Smith, 1995; Lewis, 2000; Sieger, 2000). Young children must become successful readers and life-long learners, and to achieve this goal, six early literacy skills should be developed (Colorado Libraries, 2011): (1) Print Motivation, the desire and enjoyment of books and reading (Idaho Commission for Libraries, 2009); (2) Print Awareness, the knowledge about the functions and conventions of written language (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2023); (3) Letter Knowledge, the skill that consists in recognizing, naming, and understanding the letters and

The education of early literacy skills in the home context is the most important because it provides a child with the foundation of the lifetime learning process. The skills mentioned above are best developed by the parents and caregivers in nurturing them and in offering an environment where early literacy development can take place. The parents can promote the reading of their children by using phonemic awareness, rhyme, pointing at the word they read and reading it over and over again, all of which are helpful in early literacy development (Milly, 2010).

Literature Review

The roots of children literacy are developed as early as in infancy and develop all the way up to early childhood, when the brain is at its highest plasticity levels (Hutton et al., 2020). The ability to read and write early on is the cornerstone to further achievements in education and lifetime learning, and as such, it can be considered as building blocks in the educational journey of the child.

In the formative years of a child, parents play a key role in building such abilities, and they determine the ability of their child to read, write and communicate effectively. Literacy acquisition and language awareness in children occur long before an even earlier age when children can read. Such language abilities are associated with academic achievement as language growth is the core of every learning field. Young children who are not well equipped with the knowledge of language and literacy skills at a tender age tend to lag behind at school (Reading to Young Children, 2012). In accordance with previous studies carried out by the Institute of Education, pleasure readers children are certain to excel in school compared to others. Learning to read is not only significant, but also it is important to develop a taste of loving to read, as far as further academic performance is concerned (Battye & Rainsberry, 2013).

The experiences of students at home and in school are very important in the development of literacy. It has been indicated that most of the language and vocabulary-related knowledge that children acquire is learned at home in interactions with their caregivers and siblings, whereas the code-related knowledge, such as phonemic awareness, is learned in school (Horowitz-Kraus and Hutton, 2015). A number of studies demonstrate that children have an advantage when the language of first literacy instruction is the same as the language of the home language. Home language advantage is observed in the base skills in literacy, especially vocabulary (Karlsen et al., 2017; Scheele et al., 2010) but those competencies that are especially susceptible to home-school language disconnection are those connected to reading comprehension (Lesaux et al., 2006; Melby-Lervåg and Lervakt, 2014).

The home literacy environment contributes to a variety of opportunities to learn the language due to a number of such factors as the amount of shared adult-child reading, the number of books in the house, interaction with print (Horowitz-Kraus and Hutton, 2015). Parents can also promote learning by participating in homework and being interested in the academic programs of their child (Dor & Rucker Naidu, 2012). A supportive parenting style enables imposing limits and rules and considering the autonomy and the self-responsibility of the child. On the other hand, an emotionally detached style but requiring high academic performance may result in low self-esteem that has adverse effects on academic performance (Emerson et al., 2012). The fact that parents and caring individuals can play a very vital role by creating a challenging environment in the areas of language, reading and writing is therefore important during the initial years of education.

Statement of the Problem

The role of parents cannot be overestimated when the promotion of early literacy skills takes place because parents are the first and the most significant teachers of the child. This study aims at making a handbook that will assist parents in building the early literacy skills of their children at home. In particular, the research questions were the following ones:

1. What are the home activities of parents to enhance early literacy skills of the child?
2. What should they do back home to build the early literacy in their child?
3. What can parents do to prepare their child to acquire early literacy skills at home?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to create a handbook in assisting parents to develop the early literacy skills of their child at home, a simplified ADDIE Model was applied. The Analysis, Design

and Development stages were the only stages achieved in this study. The handbook is yet to be implemented and tested in the latter stages.

Locale of the Study

The needs analysis data was collected by collecting information about the selected parents of kindergarten children in Nazareth Elementary School, one of the public schools in Barangay Nazareth, General Tinio, Nueva Ecija. Barangay Nazareth is a rural area with some 6, 265 households, majority of which are engaged in agriculture and farming as well as other traditional jobs. Services like mobile health clinics, internet access centres and educational outreach services are not easily accessible. Certain parents have just basic or primary education and those with secondary or vocational training are few as higher education is not readily available because of access to schools.

Participants

Ten (10) parent-participants were selected through random sampling. All participants are parents of children enrolled at the Kindergarten level.

Research Instrument

An interview guide was prepared and designed in Filipino language so that the parent-participants can understand it easily. The initial section of the instrument identified the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and the second sections will consist of questions that should be answered by the respondents with either Yes or No to establish the early literacy skills that the parents are presently supporting to develop at home. There were also two open ended questions to find out the assistance the participants require and the language they preferred in the handbook. Two early childhood education practitioners validated the questions and pretested them with one of the parents with a kindergarten child.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to data gathering, randomly selected parent-participants were provided an Informed Consent Form to read and sign. The researcher met with each respondent in

a designated classroom at Nazareth Elementary School. Using the interview guide, each participant was interviewed for 20 to 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

The researcher tallied the number of "Yes" and "No" responses per item and computed the average per early literacy skill category. Responses to the two open-ended questions were gathered and thematically analyzed to identify common patterns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Participants

All ten participants are mothers of kindergarten-aged children residing in the community. Seven (7) participants have five-year-old children, while the remaining three have six-year-old children. Three (3) participants are elementary school graduates, six (6) completed high school, and one (1) is a college graduate.

Early Literacy Practices at Home

Table 1 presents the frequency of parent responses per early literacy skill domain.

Table 1. Parent Responses on Early Literacy Practices at Home (n = 10)

Early Literacy Skill / Survey Item	Yes	No
I. Print Motivation		
1. Reads to child every day at home.	9	1
2. Encourages child to choose favourite books and participates in story time.	8	2
3. Has a bookshelf/storage easily reachable by child.	9	1
4. Demonstrates how reading and writing are used in everyday tasks.	10	0
5. Connects books and reading to activities and play to broaden knowledge.	10	0
<i>Average</i>	9.2	0.8
II. Print Awareness		
1. Labels places, objects, or household items for quick recognition.	7	3
2. Shows child how to hold a book correctly when reading.	10	0
3. Helps child recognize and write their own name.	10	0
4. Points to words on the page while reading so child can follow.	8	2

5. Teaches that reading goes from left to right, top to bottom.	10	0
<i>Average</i>	9.0	1.0
III. Letter Knowledge		
1. Reads alphabet books and helps child identify letters.	9	1
2. Provides specific help in learning letters and their sounds.	10	0
3. Teaches how to pronounce letters and words.	10	0
4. Distinguishes between uppercase and lowercase letters.	10	0
5. Looks for ways to teach correct writing of letters.	9	1
<i>Average</i>	9.6	0.4
IV. Vocabulary		
1. Helps child learn new words.	9	1
2. Introduces new vocabulary and concepts to child every day.	8	2
3. Responds to child's actions and speech by building on their ideas and language.	10	0
4. Writes and shows child various names and words that interest them.	10	0
5. Gives child opportunity to handle and manipulate objects in surroundings.	9	1
<i>Average</i>	9.2	0.8
V. Narrative Skills		
1. Asks child questions and responds to their questions.	8	2
2. Re-reads stories repeatedly so child becomes familiar with them.	6	4
3. Encourages child to retell or re-enact stories in their own words.	7	3
4. Gives child opportunity to act out favourite stories.	8	2
5. Helps child tell stories in various ways.	9	1
<i>Average</i>	7.6	2.4
VI. Phonological Awareness		
1. Draws child's attention to sounds heard in every word.	9	1
2. Plays with child emphasising beginning sounds and rhyming words.	8	2
3. Re-reads stories with particular sound-pronunciation patterns.	8	2
4. Sings or recites rhymes together with child.	8	2
5. Sets aside time daily to discuss songs, syllables, and words.	9	1
<i>Average</i>	8.4	1.6

To answer the initial research question, the findings indicate that most of the respondents are most consistent in their activities that encourage Letter Knowledge (M = 9.6), then Print Motivation and Vocabulary (M = 9.2 each), Print Awareness (M = 9.0), Phonological Awareness (M = 8.4) and Narrative Skills (M = 7.6). All in all, the findings have shown that parents have been actively involved in most of the early literacy activities enumerated in the instrument.

As an answer to the second research question, the findings reveal that the areas where parents require further support the most are Narrative Skills (M = 2.4), Phonological Awareness (M = 1.6), Print Awareness (M = 1.0), Print Motivation and Vocabulary (M = 0.8 each), and Letter Knowledge (M = 0.4). These results show that parents are doing well in most areas of literacy although systematic instruction, particularly in storytelling and sound awareness exercises, is required.

The qualitative answers to the open question on what would be useful in teaching parents to teach early literacy skills at home revealed the following general themes: (1) the availability of books that can assist children learn how to read; (2) the availability of a teaching guide that can be used to develop knowledge in children; (3) demonstration of children with a variety of pictures and naming them; (4) the availability of libro or workbook as a valuable tool in teaching children how to develop their skills. These reactions highlight practical orientation of parents - they require convenient, low-cost and convenient-to-use resources.

Where they were questioned on the most preferred language to be used in the guidebook, all participants expressed preference to use Filipino or Tagalog. This result aligns with the literature on the home language advantage in early literacy acquisition (Karlsen et al., 2017), and support the need to create culturally and linguistically responsive educational resources to be used by Filipino parents in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The Analysis, Design, and Development stages of this research were effectively completed through the simplified ADDIE Model to design a ten-page parent handbook in the Filipino language to assist in the early childhood literacy

development at home. The six early literacy skills are covered in the handbook, namely; Print Motivation, Print Awareness, Letter Knowledge, Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness, and Narrative Skills, although activities pertaining to Narrative Skills were more numerous in the handbook, a skill area where parental support was identified as lowest ($M = 7.6$). This conscious focus is indicative of a needs-responsive design of the handbook so that it is not just a dispensation of generalized information but a carefully calculated intervention at the specific points that were identified during the participatory needs assessment that was done on ten mothers of kindergarten-aged children in the Barangay Nazareth, General Tinio, Nueva Ecija.

The results highlight an important and remarkable fact, parents in this rural Filipino community are not passive and uninvolved participants in early education of their children. Quite the opposite, the performance on this area shows that these mothers are actively and actively involving themselves in early literacy activities in the six skill areas, with the highest mean scores in Letter Knowledge ($M = 9.6$), then Print Motivation and Vocabulary ($M = 9.2$ each). This questions the deficit discourse that is frequently related to low-income or rural caregivers and validates the fact that parents are involved in early literacy development - but it is structurally inadequate. The problem that parents have is not their readiness to do it, rather the lack of access to systematic, linguistically and culturally responsive instructions, which reflect the realities of their home settings.

The fact that a handbook should be written in Filipino or Tagalog is itself an important discovery and has a wide ramification on educational policy and material development. This is consistent with the literature that has been well-established on the notion of home language advantage in the context of acquiring literacy, including how children acquire better preparatory literacy skills (especially in vocabulary and reading comprehension) when instructional materials are presented in the language that the family knows the best (Karlsen et al., 2017; Scheele et al., 2010). One of the most stable structural barriers to the process of early literacy development among underserved communities has been declared the linguistic gap between the school-based instruction and home communication (Lesaux et al., 2006; Melby-Lervak and

Lervak, 2014). The handbook that was created in this study specifically answers this gap in the aspect that it places Filipino as the focus of design.

The qualitative responses also demonstrated that parents would appreciate practical, low cost, and tangible resources that comprise books, illustrated materials, and guides to activities which they can do at home without the need of professional facilitation. This field practical orientation underscores the significance of crafting educational resources to be theoretically comprehensive, and practical in the real world application in resource-limited rural contexts. The conceptualized handbook is intended to be available to parents at the point of need and that is accessible, free, illustrated and plain Filipino to maximize on understanding and independent use.

The findings allow concluding that parents in rural Filipino societies are more likely to engage in the practice of early literacy at home, but they may require the systematic, accessible, and linguistically professional instructions to address the gaps observed. The handbook that will come out in this study will serve as a practical and free tool that will facilitate bridging the home-school literacy achievement gap since parents and caregivers will be informed as active participants in child early literacy development. In filling this gap, the handbook does not place parents as passive observers to the teaching process but as competent co-teachers whose involvement in home learning setting is critical to the literacy achievement of their children (Horowitz-Kraus and Hutton, 2015; Milly, 2010).

After all, the present study adds to the emerging body of literature that upholds the community-based, language-responsive, and parent-empowering models of early childhood literacy in the Philippine context. It shows that material growth based on research, despite the focus on a particular barangay, shows the possibility of replication and expansion to other similar rural communities where the necessity of the availability of early literacy resources and the cultural context exists to date. The next step of the handbook implementation and evaluation in the remaining stages of the ADDIE phases, Implementation and Evaluation, will be crucial in justifying the effectiveness of the handbook, and the subsequent improvement and broader spread of the handbook.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended based on the findings and conclusions of this study as follows. The handbook needs to be more popular in schools where parents encounter similar issues of encouraging their children to develop their initial literacy skills, making it necessary so that it is not only expanded to the initial community to use but also applied to a larger group of kindergarten age students. The Implementation and Evaluation stages of the ADDIE Model must also be fulfilled in future studies to determine the sheer performance of the handbook in enhancing parental practices and early literacy of children since the current research was only on the Analysis and Design and Development phases. Moreover, other rural communities, where such needs assessment is performed, should evaluate the applicability of the results as well as create context-sensitive literacy resources sensitive to the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic peculiarities of various territories. Lastly, parents need to be sensitized by training or orienting them on the use of the handbook so as to maximize its utilization and effectiveness so that the parents are not only given the material but also properly oriented on how the activities can be effectively applied at home.

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