

**PARENTAL COACHING AT HOME IMPROVES PRESCHOOLERS'
ENGLISH READING SKILLS**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the effects of parental involvement in coaching preschoolers' English at home. It studies the parents of 19 preschoolers for parental coaching in reading at home. Preschoolers' parents attended a sharing session to discuss how they spent time to help their children in English reading. The main problem faced by parents was they did not know how to coach their child to read in English. The children also could not concentrate on reading for a long time and felt bored reading alone at home. Parents were introduced to the 'Pause, Prompt, Praise' reading technique and were requested to coach their children to read 'Peter and Jane' books for at least ten minutes a day over a period of three months. The preschoolers' reading skills were monitored and recorded. Out of nine preschoolers who had parental coaching, six of them showed improvement in their pronunciation, fluency and/or understanding meaning of words. The findings of this research indicated that preschoolers with parental guidance at home showed significant improvement in reading skills.

Keywords: parental involvement , preschoolers, English reading skills

1. Introduction

In view of Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), the education transformation will take place over 13 years and each period of transformation is classified as 'waves'. The focus of Wave 1(2013-2015) are raising teaching quality by up skilling the existing pool of teachers, raising school leadership quality by improving how the education system appoints and trains principals, and improving student literacy (in both Bahasa Malaysia and English language) and numeracy through intensive remedial programmes. The Ministry will also strengthen and empower state and district offices to improve the quality of frontline support provided to all schools. By the end of Wave 1 all teachers, principals, and schools should have achieved the minimum quality standard. The aspiration and target for Bahasa Malaysia and numeracy is 100% students after 3 years of schooling; target for English literacy to be determined after baseline is established: 92% preschool, 98% primary, 95% secondary enrolment and 25% reduction in the urban-rural gap.

Parents play an important role in this education transformation. They are expected to see tangible and sustained improvements in the educational experiences of their children. Most children have two main educators in their lives: their parents and their teachers. Parents are the primary educators until the children starts schooling and they exert a major influence on their children's learning throughout school and beyond.

Parents have the right to be fully informed about the school's mission, current performance, and annual improvement programme. They are able to provide input on matters related to teaching and learning, and curriculum quality via their Parents-Teachers Association (PTA). They are welcomed and valued for their commitment in their children's learning in school. In return, parents are expected to support their children in meeting their learning potential (for example, coaching and reading English at home), and to model commitment, engagement, and openness for their children. Parents need to communicate their input and concerns to schools in a constructive manner and actively participate in activities at school.

2. Background Of The Study

The medium of instruction in the preschool under study is mainly the national language except during English lessons. The preschoolers are taught by one permanent preschool teacher. The national curriculum allocated 1200 minutes of learning per week and the time allocated to English is only 420 minutes. Obviously, the time for learning and teaching of English is very much limited compared to the Malay language as a whole. Apart from that, the teacher has to teach two different age groups and different levels of children in the same class. The total of 25 children in a class can be challenging for the teacher to manage. It is particularly hard for the teacher to coach 25 children who are by nature very energetic and easily distracted during lessons and activities. As a result, it is not possible for the teacher to give personal attention to the progress of each child in learning English.

To read English is a problem for the children because it is a second language for all the children. The children are mainly Malays from nearby villages and their parents are also local residents. Even though the parents can read English, most of them did not coach their children to read in English at home. Thus, there is no motivation among the children to learn reading in English.

Based on the issues mentioned above, the collaboration among volunteers and the preschoolers' parents thus came into light. Apart from the school teacher and volunteers, parents have to actively support and participate in the preschoolers' learning process. Parents will have to spend 10 minutes each day to coach and read English together with their preschool

children at home. Parents are also taught to use ‘Pause, Prompt, Praise’ method to coach their children at home.

3. Objectives of The study

The objective of this research is to find out the effects of parental involvement in coaching preschoolers’ English at home.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 *Parental Involvement In Schools In The Western Countries*

A survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research International in the United States of America in 2011 examined parents’ involvement in schools and their knowledge of basic education issues. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source in 2011. The Parents’ Involvement Survey obtained telephone interviews with a sample of 846 parents of children in public school. The survey showed that parents wanted to be involved in children’s education but didn’t understand the key factors affecting public education quality. Large numbers of parents were unfamiliar with what their children should be learning and don’t want them to be further challenged. The survey also found that almost two thirds—65 percent of parents surveyed said they wished they could be doing more when it comes to involvement in their child’s education and only 34 percent were satisfied with the way things are. Another 50 percent said other parents they know are involved too little. Parents are even less involved during later grades. Education leaders across the nation have advocated for parents to be more engaged in their child’s education. In a 2010 speech to parents, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “It is well-documented—and plain common sense—that parental involvement in a child’s education boosts student learning and improves both behavior and attendance.”

4.2 *The Benefits of Parental Involvement*

Researchers have evidence for the positive effects of parent involvement on children, families, and school when schools and parents continuously support and encourage the children’s learning and development (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Illinois State Board of Education, 1993). According to Henderson and Berla (1994) in Olsen M. L. Fuller (2010), the most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is the extent to which that student’s family is able to:

1. Create a home environment that encourages learning
2. Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children’s achievement and future careers
3. Become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community

Income or social status has been noted to be not as important as family’s involvement in children’s learning. Review and analysis of eighty-five studies have documented the comprehensive benefits of parent involvement in children’s education. Parental involvement in activities that are effectively planned and well implemented results in substantial benefits to children, parents, educators, and the school.

Studies of effects of parent involvement on children’s academic achievement and the performance of schools found three broad approaches to parent involvement: (1) improving the parent-child relationship in the context of the family; (2) integrating parents into school programs; and (3) building a strong relationship between school, family, and the larger community. In regard to the first approach, it is noted that the bulk of the research finds that a positive learning environment at home has a powerful impact on student achievement. The second approach is illustrated by Rhoda Becher’s extensive review of parent education literature, which finds numerous studies documenting effects of school-based programs that train low-income parents to work with their children. Effects include significantly improved language skills, test performance, and school behavior, as well as important effects on the general educational process. The third approach is illustrated by studies of community involvement

which suggest that the degree of parent and community interest in high quality education is the critical factor in the impact of the school environment on the achievement and educational aspirations of students.

4.3 Parental Involvement In Malaysian Schools

It would be appropriate to have an overview of the Malaysian situation regarding parental involvement in education. There are limited literature on parental involvement in Malaysia mainly because parents in Malaysia are still adopting the client concept (Wolfendale, 1983) in their children's education thus leaving the educational process to the professionals and the remaining at the peripheral level of the education system. However, in Malaysia the need for parental involvement have been advocated for child-care centres particularly during the 'Children-Our Future' conference in 1991. Chiam (1991) suggested that home and child care centres should complement each other. Yong (1991) and Khoo (1991) advocated that parents should be involved in preschool.

A survey was done by Sharifah Zuraimah (2001) on parental involvement in nine secondary schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan and Melaka. There were unfavorable results of four aspects of parental involvement in school i.e. communication between home and school, the school promote and support parenting skills, parents were allowed to play integral role in assisting teaching and learning, parents are welcomed to school and parents as partners in the decisions that affect students. However, the school encourage collaboration with community seemed to be quite favorable. Meanwhile, a research done by Azizah (2001) indicated that the schools seemed to involve parents more in activities that are non-academic such as to inform parents regarding their children's misconduct in school, to invite parents to school functions such as the Sports Day or Speech Day and to ask parents for donation and funds.

A short study on a few schools in the district of Tanjung Malim and Ulu Bernam, Selangor in 2007 showed that there was minimal supportive relationship and co-operation between parent and teachers although the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) has been established at every school. Most head teachers and principals expressed their disappointment with the poor attendance and participation of parents during PTA's meeting which had a turnout of only 10 to 15%. From observation the researcher found that parents' involvement in educational activities was still unsatisfactory. Parents were not encouraged to go to schools especially to enquire about their children's academic achievement and discipline in schools. Parents would only come when they are called by the school to collect the children's report card after the mid-term examinations. There were teachers who felt uneasy with the presence of parents in schools and consider their coming to be an interruption to their teaching process. Many parents have reported that they did not get satisfactory treatment from the teachers (Kamaruddin, 2007).

According to a preliminary study exploring school teachers' perception and concerns on encouraging parents' participation in school to improve primary school pupil's academic achievement, Fatin et.al., (2010) investigated the aspect of parental involvement favoured by primary school teachers and to identify the type of parental involvement favoured by parents from the teachers' view. Findings indicated that the aspects of involvement preferred by teachers are parenting and communication, and the type of parental involvement favoured by parents from the teachers' point of view is parenting as well as communication. The teachers are more comfortable if parents are involved in their children's education via home-based learning activities. A variety of communication tools, such as telephones, letters and newsletters were used by the school to communicate with parents. The schools contact with parents were mostly pertaining to the difficulty faced by children in their studies and classroom disruptions, rather than informing parents of their children's success or soliciting parents to be involved in the children's learning activities.

Since 1984, preschools in Malaysia has come under the purview of the Ministry of Education. However, it was not until 1991 that the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has

produced curriculum guidelines for preschools throughout Malaysia (Fadzilah, 1992). According to a report by Ewe (1993), there was still little emphasis on parental roles in preschools. Parents are very much at the peripheral role in their children's education. She suggested that it would be better if both parents and preschool teachers work together to evaluate children's academic progress. However, these principles of preschool education have not been properly acknowledged in term of implementation. Majority of the Malaysian in the study agreed that parental involvement is important for preschool. Ewe (1993) further called for review of Parent-Teacher Association as the vehicle for parental involvement. Both teachers and parents need to be more proactive to engage each other more constructively for the good of preschoolers' learning process.

4.4 Parental Involvement In Reading

According to Cairney and Munsle (1992) parents play a dominant role in children mastering the complexities of spoken language before the age of five. They reported that some studies have suggested that the cumulative effect of home background variables alone, probably accounts for over 60% of the variance in students' literacy performance.

There have been countless studies conducted on 'The Importance of Parental Involvement in Reading Skill Activities for Your Child'. Research has found that the most important determinant of language and literacy comes from parents who are engaged with their children when it comes to learning to read. Parents that take an interest in reading activities at home create positive influences with their children when it comes to reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills. Research also shows that the earlier parents become involved in their children's reading practices the more profound the results and the longer lasting the effects. Parents that introduce their preschool aged children to books and read to them on a daily basis leads to greater reading knowledge and links them to school readiness in later years (Gayle, 2010).

4.5 Reading Techniques

There are many reading techniques that a teacher/parent can use to help the pupils to read English (Morrow, 2009). For examples, shared reading, echo reading, choral reading, paired reading, and pause, prompt, Praise (3Ps) techniques. The differences between the techniques were explained as follows

Choral Reading

The teacher holds the book together with the child and ask the child to read along with the teacher. First of all, the teacher begins reading in a voice that is slightly louder and faster than the child's. As the child becomes more comfortable with the reading text, the teacher lowers the voice and slows down the reading speed. If the child slows down, the teacher increase his volume and speeds again.

Echo Reading

The teacher reads aloud a line of context, and then ask the child to read the same line. The tutor and the child will continue taking turns reading and rereading the same lines. When the child begins to read with more expression and fluency, suggest that he reads aloud on his own. This is another way to help a child develop confidence and fluency.

Paired Reading

The teacher explains to the child that sometimes the teacher will read aloud together—duet reading, sometimes the child will read alone—solo reading. The teacher and the child agree on two signals the child can use to switch back and forth from solo to duet reading. When the child gives the duet signal, teacher will begin reading together. When the child feels ready for solo ready, she will give the solo signal and the teacher will stop reading.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is an adaptation of paired reading and is essentially a modelling technique. The teacher reads while the children are encouraged to read along. During the first reading, children should simply listen to the story. The teacher might use a pointer to demonstrate directionally in text and one-to-one correspondence. As the text is read multiple times, the children should participate by chanting, making predictions, providing key words that are important in the story or participating in echo reading.

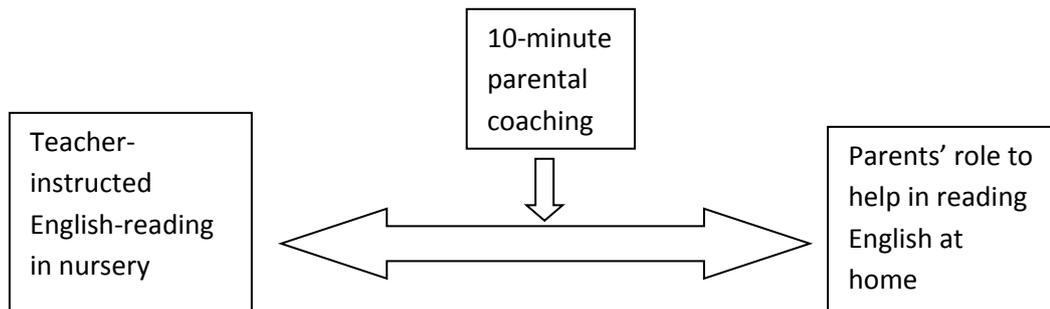
Pause, Prompt, Praise (3Ps)

This method was developed by Ted Glynn and McNaughton (1980) as reported by Ewe (1993), Wheldell (1987), and Docking (1990), emphasised on the importance of pausing for the child to correct errors himself, giving clues to meaning of words pronounced wrongly and praising for correct reading. Parents or teachers should pause (for 5 seconds) if their child gets stuck on a word to give the child the chance to work it out by himself. Initially, this is hard to do, as the natural inclination is to help as quickly as possible. If in this time the child cannot work out the word, parents or teachers are asked to give them a prompt (or clue) which may draw attention to the meaning, the sentence structure, the picture or the letters. There is a wide range of clues that help children learn to use the meaning, structure and visual cues in decoding new words. After two prompts, if the child hasn't worked it out, give the correct word. When the child does figure out the correct word after a prompt, be sure to praise the child for using a word meaning, letter sounds, pictures or rereading to figure out the word.

It is important to note that for each of these techniques, even though each techniques has its own theory and technicalities involved, however this study shall only emphasize on the benefits of parental involvement rather than on the procedures involved in the technique used.

4.4.2 Conceptual Framework

As the preschoolers under studied are facing problems learning English and parents are not coaching the children at home, the researchers decided to choose the 3Ps method to guide the parents how to coach the preschool children English at home. The parents were required to commit themselves by coaching their children 10 minutes a day to read 'Peter and Jane' books at home at home and record the children's reading skills. Thus, the conceptual framework of the study is presented as the diagram shown below:



5. Sample

As aforementioned, there were two age groups of children in the preschool under studied. There were eleven children in the age five group and nineteen children in the age six group. The age six group was selected as the sample of this study because they were older and they would be going to elementary schools the next year. All the children in this group had no background of English and no exposure to English.

6. Data collection and analysis

The reading skills of preschoolers were recorded before and after parents' coaching at home. Preschoolers were assessed in their pronunciation, fluency and word understanding. Short interview with parents were conducted to get their feedback on how they helped their children at home. Parents were asked the following question during the interview:

- a) How much time do you spend helping your child with his/her study at home?
- b) In what way do you help your child in his/her study?
- c) What problems do you face while helping your child in his/her study?
- d) Are you with happy with the reading program the nursery is conducting?
- e) Any suggestion on this program?

7. Results and Discussion

Out of 19 preschoolers' parents invited to participate in the three-month parental coaching, only 11 parents (57.9%) actually coached their children to read in English at home (Table 1). Low parental involvement such as this was consistent with the findings of Ewe (1993) and Kamaruddin (2007) about the poor participation of parents in their children learning at home. The client concept (Wolfendale, 1983) of Malaysian parents to leave their children's education in the hands of teaching professionals in schools are still very much prevalent. Two of the eleven preschoolers were absent during reading assessment either before or after parental coaching at home. Therefore they were not accounted for influence of parental coaching on reading improvement. Six of the nine preschoolers (75%) who were present for complete assessment showed improvements in pronunciation, fluency and/or understanding the meaning of the words the read in 'Peter and Jane' books. Two preschoolers (22.2%) were readily good in reading, owing to the high frequency of parental coaching at home. Another preschooler performend worse in reading after three months of parental coaching due to unknown reason. Average frequency of parental coaching was among the 11 parents were 6.6 times. Parents coaching their child as little as 4 times were able to help improve their children's reading skills.

The importance of parental involvement to help children to read was also reflected in Eccles & Harold (1993) Henderson and Berla (1994), and Gayle (2010), that creating home environment conducive for learning and family involvement help children to perform better academically. Family income and social status is not as important as family involvement. However family background was not taken into consideration in the present study.

Interview with parents revealed that 11 out of 17 (64.7%) parents helped their children in their study at home for only five minutes a day. The number of parents who spend 10 minutes for their children was only three (17.6%). Again this minimal time of parental involvement reflect how much parents are really leaving education to the sole responsibility of teachers in schools. Overall, parents in this study spent not more than ten minutes to help their children at home in their study. Some parents found it hard to help their children in English because they were not good in English as well. Problems faced by parents to help their children were children were bored to read by themselves and some children gave up easily. Four parents (23.5%) helped their children in writing. Majority of parents helped their children in reading. As expected all parents were happy with the home coaching program introduced to them despite not all of them actually carried out the coaching at home. Parents were also supportive of the idea for the program to be continued.

8. Conclusion

The involvement of parents coaching the children at home showed positive results. Children who were coached by parents at home have made improvement in English. On the contrary, children who were not coached by parents at home did not make any improvement in English. This has proved that parents play an important role in children's reading skills in English. With the parents' commitment and methods of coaching, even though it's only ten minutes a day at home, the effects were obviously seen after three months.

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Table 1. Preschoolers' reading performance before and after parental coaching at home.

		P	F	M	Attention needed		Freq.
					Reading	Meaning	
1.	NHH	**	***	***	and, has, here likes	in	9
		***	***	***			
2.	NA	*	*	*	Peter, Jane, and, here, is likes, the, toy has, ball, tree	and, here, is, likes, the, toy has, ball, tree	4
		***	**	***			
3.	DW	***	***	*		and, here likes, I	9
		***	***	***			
4.	AI	***	***	***	likes, is, has absent	and, I, has	9
5.	ZU	***	***	***	's' sound	in, has	9
		***	***	***			
6.	RY	***	**	**	here, like, a, the, has, is, trees	and, I, in tree, and likes, in is, a, here has, toys	4
		**	**	**			
7.	NA	***	***	*	's' sound	here is, here. likes, the, toy in has	5
		***	***	***			
8.	AD	***	***	**		here is, here, the, dog	5
		***	***	***			
9.	MA	***	***	***	has, likes, shops, is, has, toys	likes, shops, is, has, toys	0
		**	**	**			
10.	HH	*	*	*	(very poor)	(very poor)	0
		*	*	*			
11.	NS	*	*	*	(very poor)	(very poor)	0
		*	*	*			
12.	MA	*	*	*	(very poor)	(very poor)	0
		*	*	*			
13.	BA	***	***	***	has, likes, in	toy, has, in	9
		***	***	***			
14.	IS	**	**	**	here, likes	has	4
		***	***	***			
16.	AF	*	*	*	(very poor)	(very poor)	0
		*	*	*			
17.	ZF	*	*	*	(very poor)	(very poor)	0
		*	*	*			
18.	NDF	*	*	*	(very poor)	(very poor)	0
		*	*	*			

19.	AI	absent			(very poor)	(very poor)	5
		*	*	*			

	before parental coaching
	after parental coaching
	no parental coaching
Freq.	Frequency of parental coaching
P	Pronunciation
F	Fluency
M	Meaning of word
*	poor
**	average
***	good

