

Assessing Child's Literacy and Language Development Using Home Literacy Environment Dimensions: A Study of Select Nursery Schools in Owerri West, Nigeria

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Abstract

Research findings have consistently emphasized the importance of home literacy environment (HLE) in the life-long learning goals of a child. They proposed that the language and literacy skills of a child are best developed and nurtured in the child's familiar environment, in this case, the home. To achieve this, there are necessary HLE dimensions which should be put in place. It is against this backdrop that, this study set out to ascertain the availability of these indices (HLE Dimensions) in the HLE of children. Against this backdrop, a twenty five – item questionnaire was administered to fifty parents of nursery pupils randomly selected from five private schools in Owerri North Local Government Area. The data collected were analysed using the frequency count and simple percentage method. Amongst other findings, it is discovered that in as much as HLE dimensions thrive to a commendable extent in many of the respondents' homes, however, there are no quality parent-child literacy interactions as well as no study stations for quality literacy activities which aid language and literacy development of the child. In view of this, this study thus recommends that as a matter of urgency, parents should devote quality time to their children's home literacy interactions for success in the child's literacy and language development.

Keywords: Literacy, language development, home literacy environment, literacy development.

Background to the study

Developing a child's cognitive and learning ability at an early age provides fertile ground for later literacy development. What is a child's earliest start time for literacy development, one might ask. This should be as soon as the child has developed to the stage of recognizing faces and being conscious of his/ her environs. By implication, a child is meant to develop literacy skills while still at home. At this earliest stage, it could be termed informal literacy. Informal because learning will not follow any stipulated pedagogical approach; neither will it be modelled after an approved educational curriculum. Learning is done at this stage through exposure of the child to the environment viz-a-viz- pictures, shapes, colours, sound recognition and identification of letters. These are relayed on various toys, games and story books they have access to. Since it is at home, they do this under the supervision of the adults present. Research has it that a child's literacy skill starts to develop and expand at home as responsive adults put them through. When a child is exposed to and guided through quality literacy resources at home, his familiar background, learning becomes fun for the child. Learning under such a

familiar setting is magical to a child's language and literacy development. Simply put, Home Literacy Environment (henceforth HLE) provides a relaxed and familiar setting for a child's first literacy grooming and experience especially in language development. To effectively harness the gains of HLE, there are indices that must be put in place. They include- physical (literacy) setting, -parent's and child's literacy habits, parent-child quality literacy interactions and parent's belief about literacy (Currenton and Justice, 2008). All these when maximized culminate into rich literacy output. The problem now is how practicable are these in a child's HLE especially in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. It is on this note that this paper, through a survey study, examines how well these indices are present in the homes of parents whose children attend five different private schools in the selected scope of study.

Statement of the problem

Despite the effort of the teachers to inculcate literacy and language skills in pupils, there seems to be a lot of task to be performed. Odey in Moudumogu and Terwase (2016: 29) has it that, many children graduate from schools without being able to read, even when Aliyu (2010) has emphasized the importance of reading not only in improved students' performances but in all spheres of life. Reading, as proposed by the researchers, may refer to reading intensively or extensively. However, to get to this level requires great nurturing which starts from the home, when children are still very young, being the age at which they learn the letters of the alphabets and the sounds that unite to form two-three letter words. At this age and level, they require the guidance of the adults and parents to put them through. They also require the availability of the needed learning facilities to help nurture their interest in reading and writing for competence in language skills and other literacies across border. The problem now is how well are these learning facilities provided in the homes? How dedicated are the adults around towards ensuring that the phrase 'catch them young' is actualized? To investigate the availability of these indices becomes the problem of this study.

Research questions

The following research questions will guide this study.

1. How available are literacy resources and study stations to the child at home?
2. What are the parents' literacy practices at home as well as their perceptions of home literacy?
3. What are children's literacy practices at home?
4. To what extent do parents participate in and influence their children's literacy and language ability?
5. What are the parents' perceptions of the impact of HLE on their kids' academic performances in language, and their belief in their responsibility towards the child in this regard?

Objectives of the study

This study's objectives are to:

1. verify the availability of literacy resources and study stations in the home.
2. ascertain parents' literacy practices at homes which include reading and writing, and their perception of HLE.
3. assess the children's literacy habits at home.
4. ascertain the extent of parents participation and influence on their children's literacy and language ability.
5. assess parents' perception of the impact of HLE on their children's academic performances in language as well as their belief in their duties in this regard.

Literature Review

Language and literacy: An overview

Literacy is an age-long concept. Its definition has been approached from two angles. One is the narrow sense of it, which refers to the traditional or conventional notion. The other is from its broad sense, which includes various literacies that cut across disciplines and competencies. Traditionally, the concept is synonymous with the ability to read and write. It was also seen to have a close association with *“the alphabets and its role in written communication, while at the same time being contrasted with oral communication”*, (Lawal, 2016: 4). However, today, it is no longer confined to only the reading and writing domain, rather, it has evolved to accommodate various disciplines such as digital literacy, cultural literacy, computer literacy, etc. It has also cut across borders to include a person’s literacy in any sphere of human endeavour, being what we know today as ‘new literacies’. Be that as it may, the traditional literacy, to a great degree, is the focal point of this paper due to its indispensability in achieving the objectives of this paper.

Literacy, from the traditional perspective, is crucial to the discourse here for obvious reasons. The first is that the HLE, as viewed here, refers to the availability of the requisite indices for the early nurturing of a child’s literacy capability. What this study looks at is the ability to learn the basics of reading, writing and thinking, which are language composites, at a tender age. Just as Lawal above argues, literacy from the traditional perspective involves *“the ability to read, write and compute at a specified level of performance”*, (4). The earliest literacy and language development of a child starts from the home where reading (pictorials) and writing (scribbling) is initiated.

Secondly, in the traditional notion of literacy, the four basic language skills are also emphasized. As a matter of fact, literacy and language walk hand in glove when it comes to its conventional underpin. Traditional literacy, otherwise known as conventional literacy (Mkandawire, N.D: 39), to a great extent has bearing on a child’s academic performance and success. Such simply means that, the outstanding performance of a child in learning is largely dependent on the various literacy dimensions they are exposed to at home. More so, the child’s competence in language learning is largely dependent on how well the home literacy is handled. For clarity of purpose here, the perception of literacy as used in the study is the conventional literacy. It has nothing to do with other literacy underpin nor does it undermine their usefulness or currency. The understanding of this point would help a critical mind to deduce the argument in this research.

Furthermore, when reading and writing is mentioned here, it is also necessary to ask the question- reading and writing what, at least for the stipulated age bracket. Reading and writing, for this study refers to the child’s ability to identify numbers and letters of the alphabets which are often displayed on their building blocks, wall charts, pictures etc. Their ability to also hold chalks/pencils to scribble on papers and boards is also considered literacy development which would in turn impact their language skills. The notion of the conventional literacy as the *“abilities of decoding and composing symbols on paper”*, (Mkandawire, ibid) also buttresses the above. However, symbols on paper for a child could mean the letters of the alphabet especially in their identification and formation of two-letter words, etc.

Reiterating, the traditional notion of literacy as well as the concept of language is intertwined, and as such, it is viewed so here. As literacy conventionally refers to reading and writing, it is quite impossible to engage in a traditional literacy discourse without recourse to language. Therefore, a child’s literacy formation which should start at home also impacts the language skills. Language and literacy are important to a child’s success in education as well as other literacies. In order to achieve this, learning must begin at home where the required HLE dimensions are put in place. The familiar setting encourages the child to see learning as fun.

Home literacy environment

A strong foundation of language and literacy skills essentially depends on the child’s literacy experience at home, especially during both formal and informal interactions with parents as well as siblings. The HLE is the first point

of contact a child has in his or her life's emergent literacy skills. It intervenes positively in the development of a child's learning capabilities which in turn impacts the future quest of attaining various literacies across border, that is, if and when all the indices necessary for such literacy acquisition are adequately taken care of. It is very vital that, from birth to about age four, children should be guided to take their first important steps in developing their language and literacy skills towards a life-long learning journey. Catching them young presents them with passports for future world of new literacies. Therefore, literacy skills should be developed as soon as a child begins to see, to be aware of the environment and to experience text with the guidance of adults around him/her in the home.

The HLE according to Hamilton, Marianna, Hulme and Snowling (2016:206) is "an umbrella term used to describe the literacy-related interactions, resources and attitudes that children experience at home". This definition emphasizes the home as a point of contact in a child's learning process. Furthermore, they see HLE as "the three way interactions between children, parents and text that take place in the home". These interactions may be formal or informal. The literacy interaction models for the pre-schoolers are basically informal at the initial stage. They are informal because at this level, the focus may just be on initiating, engaging and sustaining the child's interest in listening, speaking, asking questions and making a mental picture of what is in the environment as well as the parents' explanations of them. For instance, a child listening and patiently following a parent's gesticulations, change in pitch of the narrator's voice etc., in story telling is developing his/ her language and cognitive abilities. The above is captured succinctly in Senechal and Lefevre (2002) who made the distinction between formal and informal literacy model in home-based literacy interactions. They stated that, the primary focus of informal literacy interactions is on shared story-book reading and not on the printed words. Then, the formal model refers to teaching a child to write names and, link letters and sound. Be that as it may, this study posits that, every interaction which leads to the child's cognitive development and nurtures the interest in language learning is very crucial to the child's literacy development and thus should be initiated at home.

Early literacy learning and development of a child is best initiated at home. The HLE presents that familiar and relaxed setting required for literacy grooming and experience. Interactions at this setting initiate and nurture a child's love for learning in the latter years. That is why Vygotsky (1978:71) stated that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment..." Vygotsky's assertion supports the fact that a child's literacy interactions at home serve as a spring board to the overall literacy development. The home presents a child with the first exposure to various literacy resources such as toys, building blocks, computer/video games, televisions, home art work decorations, picture story books, family pictures etc. Exposure and explanations to all these impact the child's literacy and language development. Having said all these, HLE would be conceptualized in this study to involve creating that needed relaxed environment for quality parent-child literacy and language learning activities with the aim of preparing the child for future world of literacies. This relaxed environment also includes the provision of requisite literacy resources, literacy stations and quality time for the literacy activities.

Home literacy environment dimensions

A cursory study of various researches on HLE leads to the identification of several indices needed in a HLE. As often discussed in these literatures, the five dimensions which would be briefly examined include:

- a. Physical (literacy) environment.
- b. Parent literacy habits.
- c. Child's own literacy habits.
- d. Parent-child interaction for language and literacy activities.
- e. Parental beliefs about literacy.

Physical (literacy) environment

The physical literacy environment as studied in various researches which include Currenton and Justice (2008) typifies the literacy resources and learning spaces available at homes. By implication, it refers to the availability of these things viz-a-viz story books, pictorials, games and toys, as well as the available spaces provided in the homes for such adaptation. The spaces refer to mini libraries, bookshelves, study rooms/corners and tables. The availability of these in the physical literacy environment facilitates a child's learning. It is important to have suitable and appropriate literacy materials for a child's literacy age bracket (Rodriguez et al, 2009) in the home literacy environment. All these ensure parent-child quality literacy interventions and interactions.

Parents' literacy habit

This is another factor necessary for facilitating and nurturing children's literacy in the home. Habit as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary means "behaviour pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased faculty of performance". The point to note from this definition is that habit is something performed regularly, frequently or repeatedly. Habits are synonymous with practice, pattern, custom etc. Therefore, parents who have the practice of reading will surely have good reading habits and rich libraries, and will in turn inculcate similar habits in their children. Parents' literacy habits include but are not limited to their love for reading and acquisition of reading materials in their libraries. Just as Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) opined, any parent who has the habit of reading would likely read to and with their children regularly. Weigel et al (2006a and 2006b) also posit that mothers of children with "*typical development who have higher education levels enjoy reading more, model writing to their children more often, read to their children more often and regularly engage in drawing pictures, singing songs and telling stories with their children*". In consonance with this, Odiaka, (2016: 59) has it that "*the first thing a family has to do to initiate literacy and learning in the life of any child is to immerse such a child in literary tradition*". Judging from the above, the parents' literacy habits are major parts of the literacy traditions present in HLE.

Child's own literacy habits

The child's own literacy habits contribute to the gains of the home literacy environment. Buvanewari and Padekannaya (2017) posit that a child's interest and participation in literacy activities is closely related to his/her emergent literacy skills. Literacy habits such as drawing, painting, picture puzzle, writing, etc. are formed at childhood, and just as Frijters et al (2000) stated, these literacy habits of children contribute to their literacy achievement.

Parent-Child interaction for language and literacy activities

This dimension of HLE is very pivotal to the success of home literacy activities. On one hand, even though a parent and a child possess good literacy habits; there is still need for quality interactions and literacy activities for optimal success. In other words, the development of a child's literacy at home is greatly impacted by the quality of interactions between the child and the parent. In their researches, Roberts, et al (2005) and Bingham (2007) stated that, quality parent-child interactions during literacy activities have remarkable impact in language and literacy development of children.

On the other hand, researchers have identified these factors relating to parent-child interactions. They include: how parents impact literacy skills on to the child, their understanding and sensitivity towards the child and how they express their positive regard towards the child, (Clingenpeel & Pianta, 2007, Neuman, et al, 2009, Merlo et al, 2007). The expression of positive regard should mean acknowledging and commending the child's little effort at success. Similarly, Odiaka (2016:59) has it that, "*the child should through interactions with parents*

and all others, learn how to speak, read and write even at preschool age". There is no gain saying the fact that a child's language and literacy development is to a great extent dependent on the parents' own level.

Parental beliefs about literacy

HLE provides setting for the initial literacy coaching of children as earlier noted. It then means that, this coaching can or should be done by parents who are the child's family members. . However, some parents believe that teaching and learning should only be done in school. The above postulation is captured in Weigel et al (2006a and 2006b) where the facilitative mothers and conventional mothers are identified as two profiles of parent (maternal) literacy belief. For conventional mothers, literacy activities are the responsibility of the school system rather than the parent/s, while facilitative mothers believe and play active roles in the HLE. The crux of the matter is that, literacy and language skills development first starts at home. Of course, Barchers as noted in Odiaka (2016: 56) confirms that *"the family is the first place meant for the education of the child"*

The above typology is classified under maternal literacy belief. Therefore, positive maternal literacy belief stipulates that, mothers should facilitate and nurture early childhood literacy acquisition. The negative maternal literacy belief opines that, the school is solely responsible for teaching their kids. This implies that parental belief about literacy has positive impact on the HLE, all things being equal. Just as Buvaneswari and Padakannaya (2017:86) affirm, "parents' belief and attitude toward literacy, as well as their personal literacy practices, play very important roles in creating literacy-rich environment at home".

Methodology

Research design

This study combined the quantitative and qualitative research approach in its design. The data used were of a primary source. As a survey research, the questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample size. The population of the study consists of parents of pupils of the Nursery and Pre-Nursery sections of the chosen five private schools in Owerri North Local Government in Imo State, Nigeria.

Population size

The population size of the study comprised a total number of five hundred and four (504) parents of Nursery and Pre-Nursery pupils from the selected five schools. (The Glory of God School Owerri- 97, Word of Faith Mission School Owerri - 104, Nobleseed Montessori School Owerri - 98, Matilda Carol Schools Owerri - 105, Diamond Special Schools Owerri - 100).

Sample size/ Sampling technique

The respondents comprised fifty (50) parents of the population size who were selected using the Systematic Sampling Technique of the Probability Sampling Method.

Data collection instrument/Method

A twenty five-item questionnaire was administered to the respondents. The questionnaire comprised two sections, A and B. Section A consisted of questions that elicited responses on the demographic data of the respondents. While section B captured questions that addressed the five research questions of this study. The respondents were assured of the purpose of the data collection which is purely research. The researchers administered the structured questionnaire on the sample size, supervised the exercise and

afterwards retrieved the instrument. At the end of the exercise, all the 50 administered questionnaires were returned. For confidentiality purpose, the demographic data of the respondents were not presented here.

Data analysis method

The generated data were presented in tables and charts, and analysed using the frequency count and simple percentage method. The percentage score of the number of similar responses in each of the items over the total number of questionnaires distributed was calculated. This implies-

$$\frac{\text{The number of parents with similar response}}{\text{The total number of parents}} \times 100$$

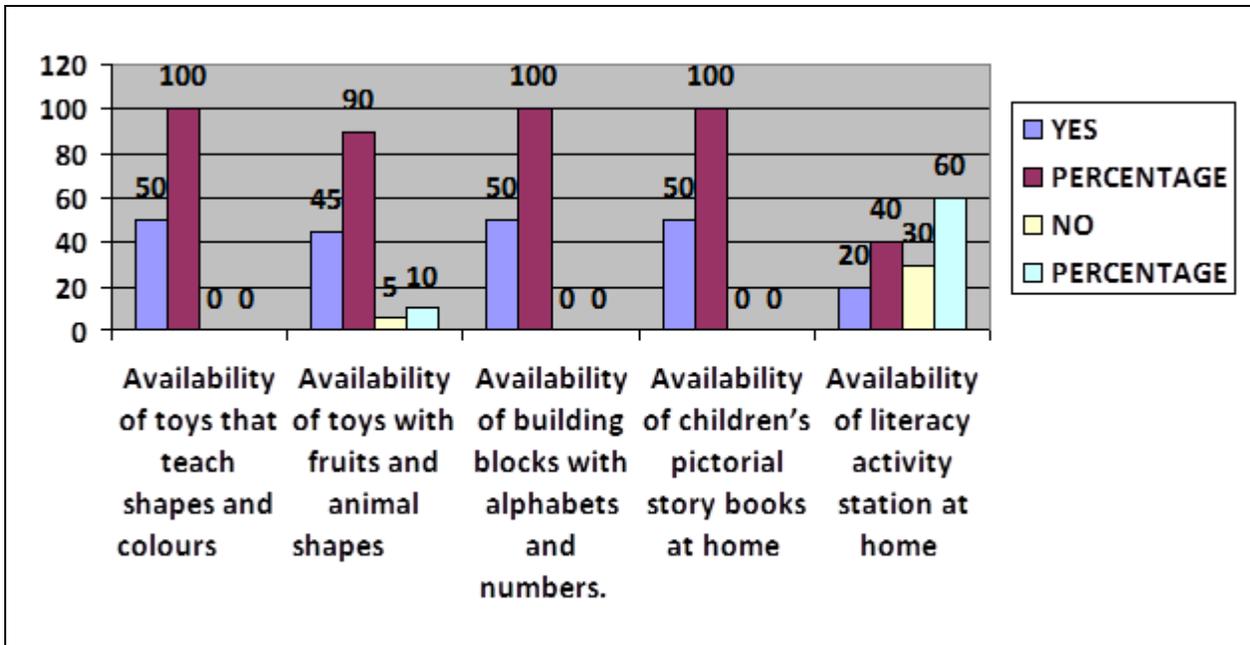
The total number of parents

Data analysis and discussion

Table 1: Represents respondents’responses on the availability of children’s literacy materials as well as literacy stations at home.

	ITEMS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE	YES NUM	%	NO NUM	%
1	Availability of toys that teach shapes and colours	50	100	0	0
2	Availability of toys with fruits and animal shapes	45	90	5	10
3.	Availability of building blocks with alphabets and numbers.	50	100	0	0
4.	Availability of children’s pictorial story books.	50	100	0	0
5.	Availability of literacy activity station.	20	40	30	60

Table 1 represents data which addressed the first research question of this study. The respondents affirmed the availability of literacy materials in their homes. Such include toys that teach shapes and colours, toys with fruit and animal shapes, building blocks with alphabet and numbers as well as children’s story books. The frequency count yielded 100%, 90%, 100% and 100% respectively. However, thirty out of fifty respondents representing 60% of the data revealed the unavailability of literacy activity stations such as library, study room etc. The result revealed that although there is a high percentage of available resources which should impact the child’s language and literacy skills in these homes, however there are 60% of respondents without literacy stations conducive for learning activities. From these findings, this study therefore states that, to a great extent, there are available literacy materials which should encourage literacy in the home environment. However, it postulates that, the recorded availability of literacy stations should be increased to harmonize the gains of learning. It therefore posits that, if these resources are made available and properly utilized by the children and their parents, the language and literacy skills of these children will be enhanced.



Fi

g. 1: The above is a bar chart indicating the respondents' responses on the availability of children's literacy materials as well as literacy station at home, as shown in table 1.

Table 2: Represents the respondents' responses on parents' literacy practices at home.

S/N	ITEMS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE	YES NUM	%	NO NUM	%
1	Parents access to daily newspapers.	50	100	0	0
2	Parents read newspaper every day.	25	50	25	50
3.	Parent discusses headlines with spouse in the presence of the child/children.	20	40	30	60
4.	Child observes parent reading and writing.	50	100	00	00
5.	Parents play crossword & puzzle section with child/children.	5	10	45	90

Table 2 represents data which also addressed research question two of the study. A hundred percent(100%) of the responses affirmed that, they have access to daily newspapers, however only fifty percent (50%) of them indicated that they read these papers every day. Again, forty percent (40%) said they discuss the headlines of the dailies where their children are, while five percent (5%) go through the crossword and puzzle sections with their kids. The entire respondents admitted that their children see them at one point or the other whenever they read or write.

From this analysis, it is deduced that, parents unconsciously have rich literacy practices at home. If half of the respondents read the newspapers every day, it entails that their children are likely going to emulate this literacy habit. This also includes the unknown percentage who read newspaper but not every day. Parents' habits are usually emulated by children. However, minimal 5% go through the puzzle section with their children. This indicates the fact that, these parents do not make conscious efforts to teach their kids. This is in consonance with Odiaka (2016) who discovered in his research that some families build up literacy awareness unconsciously

while others simply take it for granted. Below is a bar chart representation of table 2 which indicates a pictorial of the respondents' responses in the retrieved questionnaires.

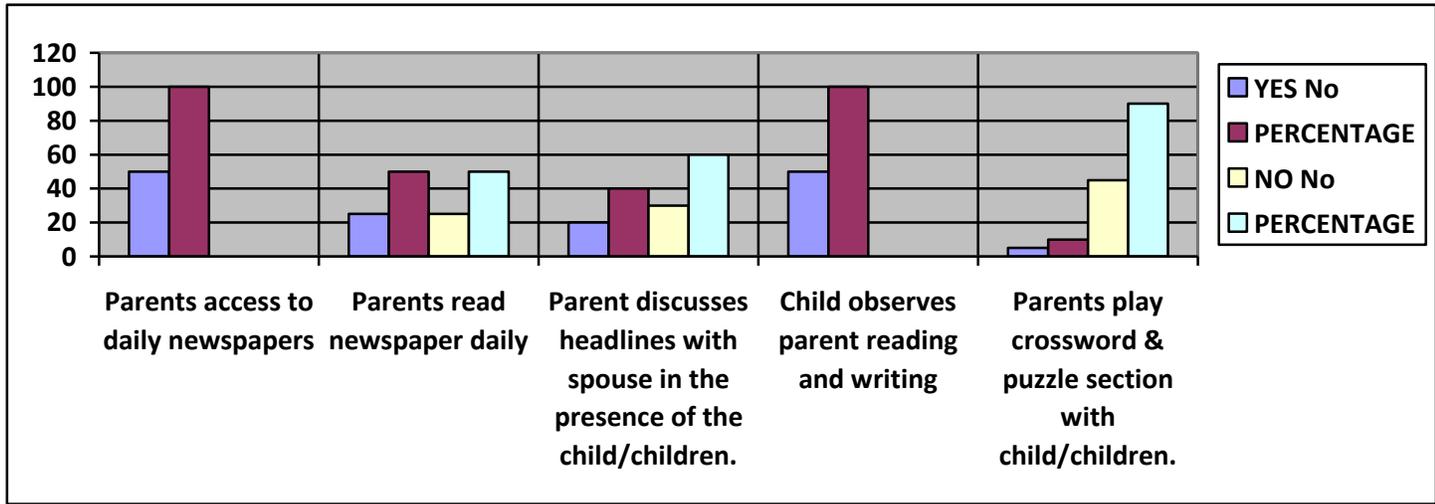


Fig. 2: A bar chart representation of the respondents' responses on parents' literacy practices at home.

Table 3: Represents the respondents' child's/ children's early literacy activities at home

S/N	ITEMS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE	YES NUM	%	NO NUM	%
1	Child always asks for pencil and book to draw	50	100	0	0
2	Child always draws and shows to me	50	100	0	0
3.	Child always asks me to tell him/her the letters of the alphabets seen in the story books and on the building blocks.	38	76	12	24
4.	Child asks me to explain charts, decorations and pictures in the story books and on the room walls	47	94	3	6
5.	Child asks me to hold his/her hand when writing	18	36	32	64
6.	Child flips through the pages of a book muttering & mimicking me	49	98	1	2

Table 3: The data presented in the above table capture the respondents' child's/ children's literacy activities in the home environment. There are 100% positive responses to the children's engagement in home literacy activities such as asking for pencils and books to draw and also showing drawn pictures to parents. The data interpreted also reveal the children's enthusiasm in home literacy activities. It was gathered that children on their own seek knowledge from their parents through asking questions. 94% of the respondents agreed that their children request explanation of pictures, charts and decorations in the story books and on the room walls. 76% agree that their kids seek explanation of letters of the alphabet in their story books and on their building blocks. There are also 98% of the responses which depict the child's/ children's awareness of their parents' literacy habits. It has been noted earlier by Buvaneswari and Padakannaja (2017) that, parents' literacy habits influence their children's own. True to this, 98% of the respondents affirmed their children's mimicking of their reading habits. In addition, children who see their parents write, make attempt to also write and call for help from their parents when needed, even though the thirty six percent(36%) of the response is not encouraging.

Below is a bar chart representation of table 3 which indicates a pictorial of the respondents' responses in the retrieved questionnaires. Below is a bar chart representation of table 3 which indicates a pictorial of the respondents' responses in the retrieved questionnaires.

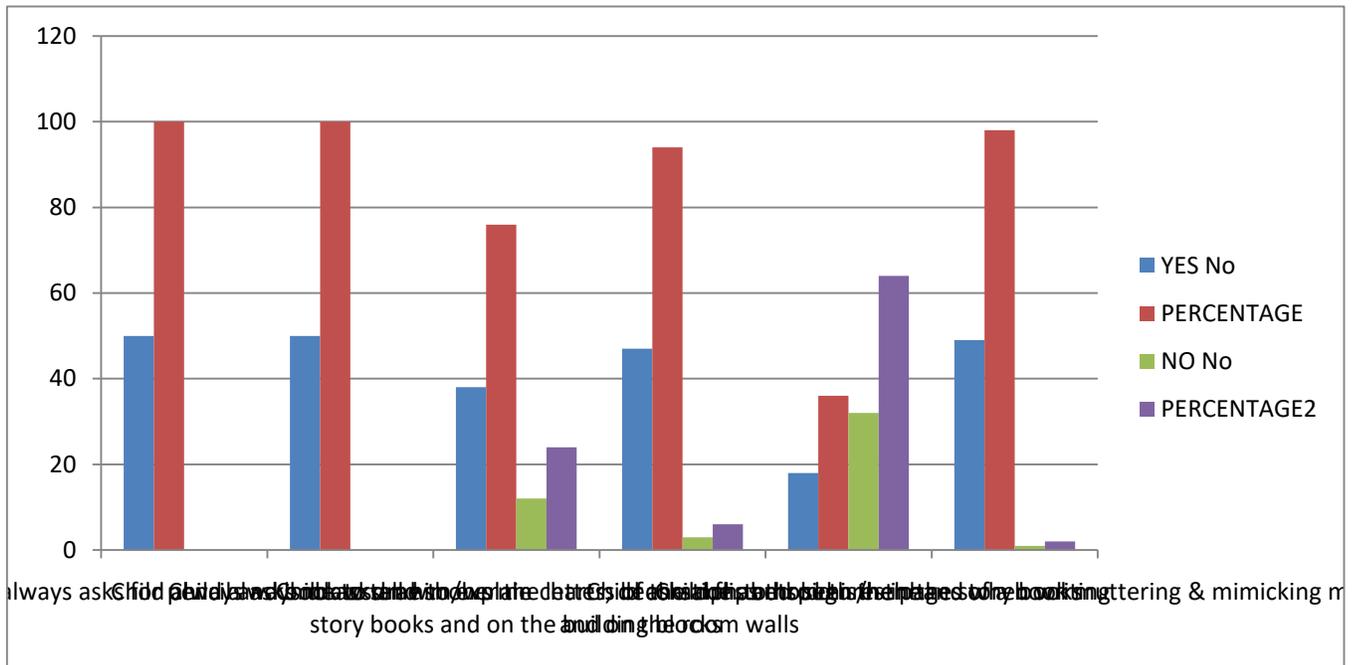


Fig 3: A bar chart representation of the child's/ children's early literacy activities at home

Table 4: Represents parents' participation and involvement in their children's early literacy and language development.

S/N	ITEMS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE	YES NUM	%	NO NUM	%
1	Parent teaches the child/children the letters of the alphabet and two-three letter word formation.	20	40	30	60
2	Parent teaches the child/ children songs, nursery rhymes and tells them stories.	17	34	33	66
3.	Parent applauds/rewards the child's/ children's drawings and writing.	50	100	0	0
4.	Parent explains to the child/ children whenever it is sought for.	46	92	4	8

Research question 4 which sort to know the parents' participation and involvement in the language and literacy development of the child generated these findings. Table 4 records that 92% of the respondents' feed their children's inquisitive nature by offering explanation when needed. There is also 100% acknowledgement of the fact that, they encourage their children by applauding and commending their drawing and writing efforts. In teaching songs and nursery rhymes as well as telling stories to the child/ children, and teaching of the letters of the alphabet, with a 60% and 66% responses respectively, it is deduced that, there is no active engagement of parents in this regard. Succinctly, the deduction made forthwith includes, that these parents are passive rather

than active participants in the HLE. This is due to the fact that, their responses revealed they seldom initiate teaching, rather they respond to their children's questions only when asked. This study would have preferred the response to these items to be hundred percent (100%), and thus would draw attention to this in the recommendation. There should be a conscious effort to get involved in home literacy activities by parents. Language learning and literacy acquisition start with the knowledge of the letters of the English alphabet, their combinations to form two to three letter words; as well as expansion of the child's cognitive ability through storytelling etc. Below is a bar chart representation of table 4 which indicates a pictorial of the respondents' responses in the retrieved questionnaires.

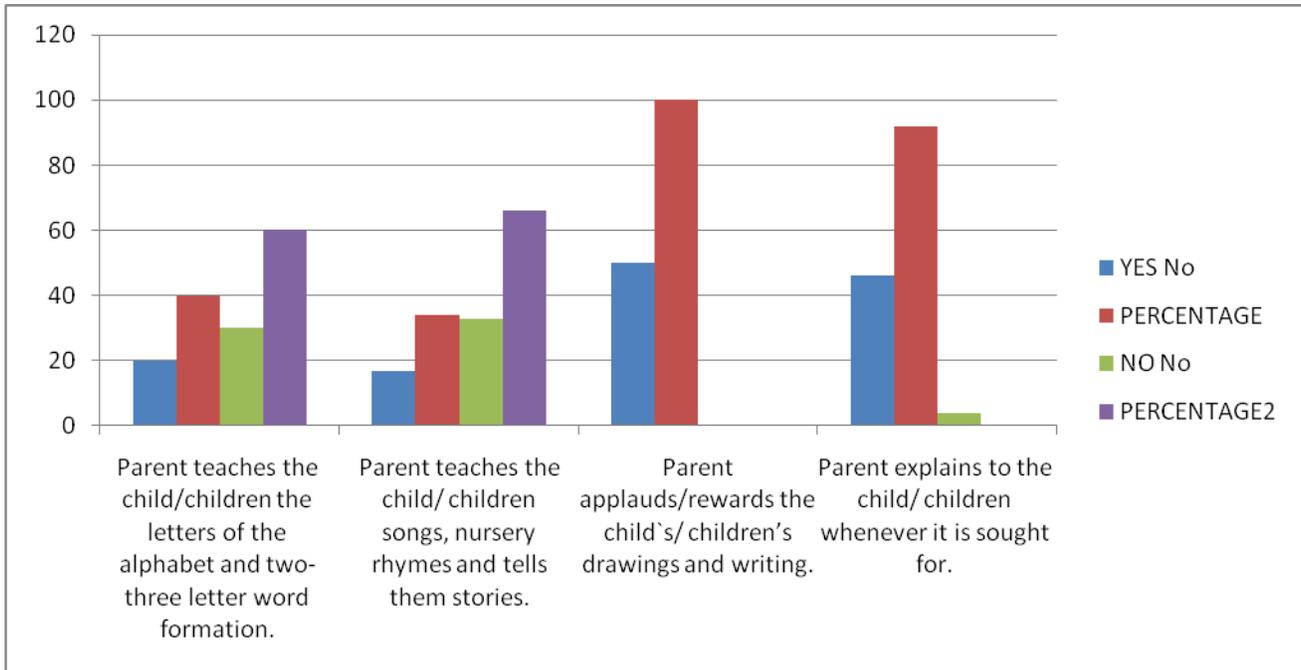


Fig 4: A bar chart representation of parents' participation and involvement in their child's/children's early literacy and language development.

Table 5a: Represents parent’s belief on who should be responsible for the child’s early literacy as well as their perception of home literacy impact on them.

S/N	ITEMS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	
		NUM	%	NUM	%
1	Teachers are solely responsible for the literacy foundation of the children	30	60	20	40
2	Parents should actively participate in the early literacy development of their children	30	60	20	40
3.	Home literacy is fundamental to a child’s emergent literacy skills	45	90	5	10
4.	Literacy activities in my home have greatly impacted my child`s/ children’s language learning and over all academic performance in school	45	90	5	10

Table 5b: Represents age that the child started to read

Age		2yrs – 3yrs		4yrs -5yrs	
		NUM	%	NUM	%
1.	At what age did my child start to read	20	40	30	60

Finally, the tables above represent the data of the responses on whether parents are actually aware of their responsibilities in the HLE. The responses revealed such interesting answers. While 90% of the respondents acknowledged the positive impact of HLE activities in their child’s/ children’s academics, a high 60% still believe that teachers should shoulder the responsibility alone. Ironically, 60% believe that parents should be active at the home literacy front. This leaves us with questions that seek clarification of the confusion these responses might elicit in a critical mind.

The first is that, if parents have seen that the little effort put yielded positive result in a child’s literacy growth, why then do they still wish to leave the grooming for the teacher alone? Second, if they opine that parents should participate more in the HLE, why do they not practice what they preach? The possible answers to the above may be that parents have not taken their children’s early literacy and language development as their priority. More so, they may still not understand that, raising a child also involves taking care of the HLE where there should be parents` active involvement in the coaching of their children. Just as also stated in Bingham (2007), this study postulates that, a child’s language and literacy development involves quality coaching, quality parent-child interactive learning sessions, active re-creation of school literacy environment in a familiar literacy setting etc. All these would greatly impact a child’s language and literacy development. Below are bar chart representations of tables 5a and 5b which indicate pictorials of the respondents’ responses in the retrieved questionnaires.

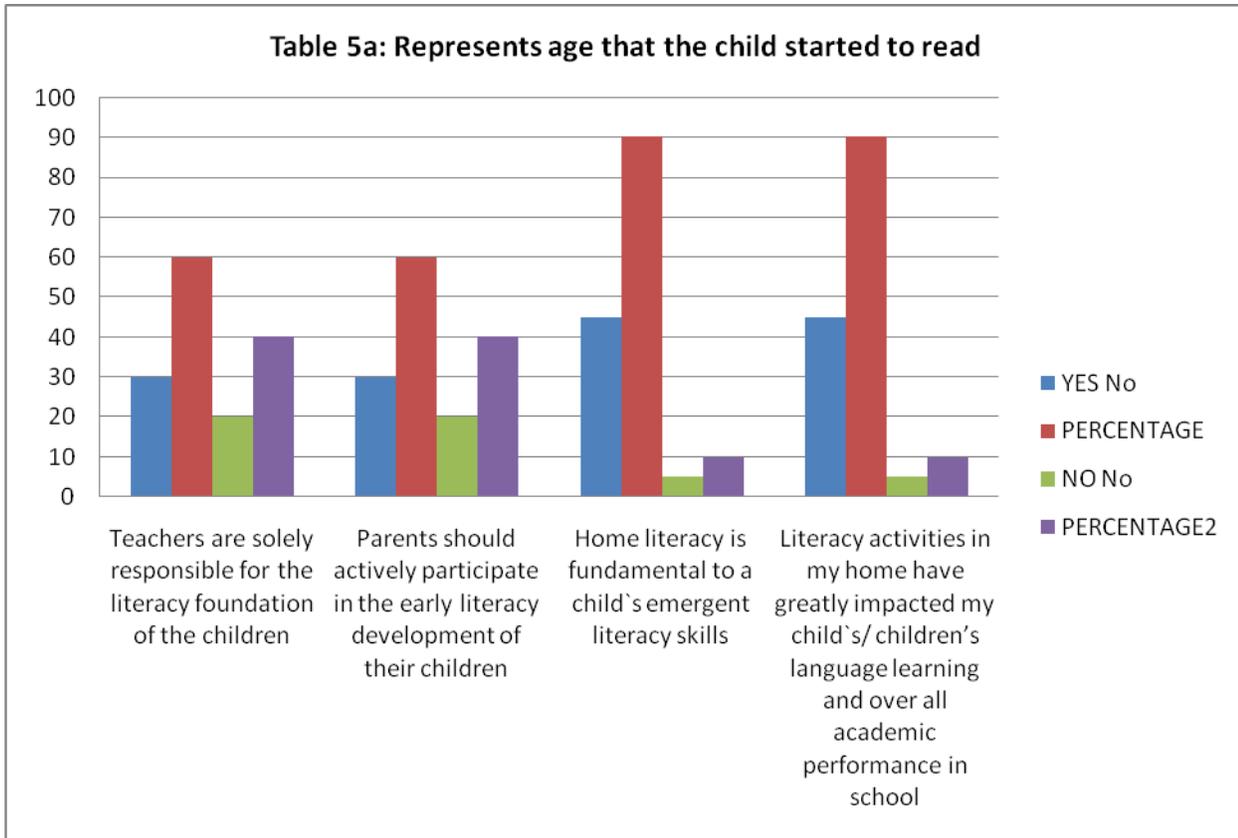


Fig 5a: A bar chart representation of parent's belief on who should be responsible for the child's early literacy as well as their perception of home literacy impact on them.

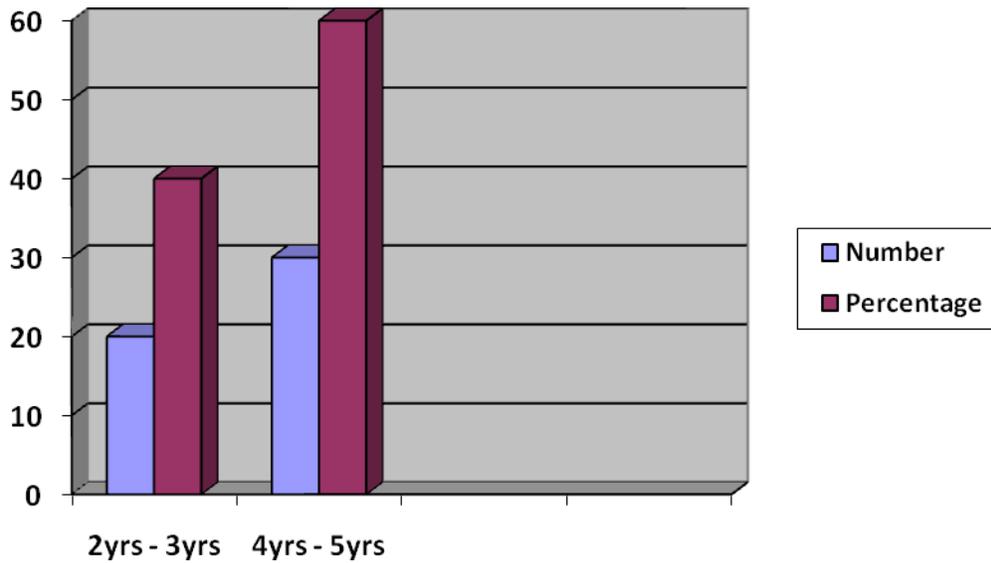


Fig.5b: A bar chart representation of the age bracket which the child started to read.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper was to x-ray the HLE as a crucial factor in achieving a strong language and literacy learning foundation for children, with emphasis on the needed quality parent-child literacy interactions at home. Through the literature review, the tenets of HLE in achieving academic excellence as well as the general literacy cravings of children were brought to the fore. The HLE, from the definitions studied, involves an active three-way interaction between the child, the parent and home literacy activity. To find out how well these three indices operated in the achievement of language and literacy development from the selected study samples, a twenty-five item questionnaire elicited responses which led to these conclusions. Firstly, parents provide physical (literacy) environment where there are available literacy resources, although there is a higher percentage (60%) of respondents with no literacy stations for literacy activities. Secondly, they participate in their HLE activities, although they unconsciously or passively do so when they respond to their children's enquiries. To this end, the parents need to actively engage in their children's literacy activities by consciously creating study time with them. Again, the children are enthusiastic about learning as they constantly work with provided literacy resources and, seek guidance and encouragement when needed. In addition, 90% of the respondents seem to acknowledge the impact of HLE on their children's over all literacy and language learning performance, even when they do not devote quality time to their children's home literacy activities. This study, therefore, practically states that, to a good extent, the dimensions of HLE thrive in all the respondents' homes. However, parent-child literacy interactions seem not to be made a priority nor given quality attention. This particular HLE factor is crucial to the acquisition of language and literacy skills. Against this backdrop, this paper therefore recommends the following:

- (a) Parents should create more literacy stations such as study rooms, study corners etc., and study time for home literacy activities which should be strictly adhered to.
- (b) Learning in a familiar setting awakens a child's internal literacy capabilities; therefore quality interactive sessions with the child/ children should be given a priority placement on the parents' daily schedule.
- (c) Parents should pay attention to their children's identification and formation of two-three letter words so as to enhance the children's language and literacy development. In summary, this research postulates that parents should actively participate in the child's/ children's HLE by initiating the teaching of the letters of the alphabet and their permissible combinations in forming mono-syllabic words. This would greatly improve their language and literacy skills.

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