

PARENTS' ROLE IN FOSTERING YOUNG CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The evidence about the benefits of parents being involved in their children's education, and children's literacy activities in particular is overwhelming. It is therefore important that parents and careers are aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language. The objective of this research was to describe the parents' role in fostering young children's language development. The context of this research was in Medan, Sumatera Utara and the subjects were the parents of children aged 5-7 years old. Interview and observation were used in collecting the data. "Three aspects of parenting have been highlighted as central to children's early language and learning: (1) the frequency of children's participation in routine learning activities; (2) the quality of caregiver-child engagements; and (3) the provision of age-appropriate learning materials" (Tamis-LeMonda, 2009:2). After analyzing the data, it was found that parents still found the difficulties in encouraging the children's literacy and should use the appropriate media based on their need and want. Provision of various media also needs to be made to guide the parents to provide a literacy-rich and stimulating environment. Parents should have a great commitment in developing the children's literacy gradually.

Keywords: Parents' Role, Children' Language Development, Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Children in Islam's Perspective is the responsible of parents to be cared and protected. Allah the Almighty describes that a child is the light of the world. But, we have to remember that children can either be a trial or even be an enemy for the parents, if the parents are unable to perform their duties as a good parent and if they have less knowledge. Therefore, the role of parents is crucial to the development and future of the children. Childhood is the potential period for learning. The child is a little man who has the potential still to grow and has certain characteristics different from adults. This means a family has duties to prepare the means and the formation of personality since early childhood. In other words, the personality of the child depends on the thinking and the treatment of both parents and their environment.

"During the first years of life, children undergo major developmental changes across a range of domains. In particular, the entry into "formal language" is one of the most heralded achievements of early development. Language enables children to share meanings with others, and to participate in cultural learning in unprecedented ways. Moreover, language is foundational to children's school readiness and achievement. For these reasons, a vast body of research has been dedicated to understanding the social-contextual factors that support children's early language and learning. This work is also central to practitioners, educators and policy makers who seek to promote positive developmental outcomes in young children" (Tamis-LeMonda, 2009:3).

According to Davis (1975), parental involvement is a mental participation, along with the contributions and responsibilities. Some children aged less than 5 years old are able to read and write fluently. They can read some books with full of pictures that given by researcher with no spelling. The writings of those yet there are no missing letter in every word they wrote, although sometimes there are mixes uppercase and lowercase letters. One of the skills that must be developed by parents is literacy. Because of language skills is a resource for social skills and other life skills. Language skills or communication is very important in human life. Through the language, people can express desires, ideas, problems encountered in life to others. With a language people can give information about something, either orally or in writing. In addition, language is the medium in the association of fellow. We can identify a person even another nation with language skills that we have. No human activities carried out without the presence of language skills. Therefore, language is a basic requirement of human need.

If children can read they can write as well. The child must learn to read by listening to the sound of the letters and symbols, and then repeat it until they actually understands. But sometimes the child can read at the same time when he can write. Interest in literacy must be raised and built from an early age so they can maintain the reading habits when they are adults. Growing interest in basic literacy at early childhood is the main responsibility of the parent. According to Katz et al. (2010), children who receive support and assistance from both parents will be able to learn and achieve better progress than children with no support and assistance from their parents.

Based on the results of the initial interview conducted by researcher with the children and the parents, two of four children said that the mother has a greater role in teaching literacy and the rest said they have mothers who spend more time at home who are obliged to teach literacy. Here, it can be said that to be parents (in this case the mother) were instrumental in the development of children's literacy. There are several factors that can affect the literacy skills, namely intelligence, gender, motor development, physical condition, physical health, social and environmental differences in family status, including the involvement of parents.

Reese et al. (2010) concluded that parental involvement has a very large role in developing language skills and early childhood literacy. According to them, there are three things a parent can do to improve the language and literacy of young children. The first is that parents read books together with children, the second is parents have conversations with the child and the third is parent and children write together. These are effective ways to develop language skills and early childhood literacy. Saint-Laurent (2005) explained that to do "home literacy", parents and teachers should involve directly in order to improve the literacy skills of children in the first year of primary school. This intensive research described home fun activities created by parents and parents' efforts make a positive impact in developing children's literacy. This was confirmed by the results of research conducted by Park (2008) that showed the involvement or role of parents is one of the three components that were positive in improving basic literacy of preschool children in nearly all countries. He also explained that the involvement or role of parents discount positive influence in developing the literacy skills of children.

Deckner et al. (2006) examined the role of mothers in literacy development of children found that the child's interest in reading has a strong relationship with the mother in a way that is used to read a book. Another study conducted by Stephenson (2008), showed that home literacy (reading books, learning activity and the number of books), parental beliefs and behavior of children has a significant relationship with emergent literacy and word reading skills. It revealed that the majority of kindergarten students can register in the favorites primary school. The tests used reading and writing, one cause of this is lack of awareness and parental high expectations in their children mastery of literacy, the parents are involved in the provision of facilities and infrastructure or directly facilitate the needs of children in improving literacy skills.

“Three aspects of parenting have been highlighted as central to children’s early language and learning: (1) the frequency of children’s participation in routine *learning activities* (e.g., shared bookreading, storytelling); (2) the *quality of caregiver-child engagements* (e.g., parents’ cognitive stimulation and sensitivity/responsiveness); and (3) the provision of age-appropriate *learning materials* (e.g., books and toys)” (Tamis-LeModa, 2009:2).

“The benefits of parental involvement extend beyond the realm of literacy and educational achievement. Studies show that children whose parents are involved show greater social and emotional development” (Allen & Daly, 2002) including more resilience to stress, greater life satisfaction, greater self-direction and self-control, greater social adjustment, greater mental health, more supportive relationships, greater social competence, more positive peer relations, more tolerance, more successful marriages, and fewer delinquent behaviors) (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). It is therefore important that parents and caregivers are aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children’s learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading and writing as well as supporting at home the school’s literacy agenda, both during the early years as well as the primary and secondary years of schooling.

The role played by parent in early childhood literacy development implies the question in the minds of researcher, “How are the parents’ roles in fostering the early childhood language development?”. In this research, it was focused in literacy. Based on the problems that were stated previously, the objective was to describe the parents’ role in fostering young children’s language development. So, the significance of this research can be seen in two sides that were theoretically and practically. In theoretically, literacy can be as the national culture and it was needed in every aspect, not only in applied linguistics but also in science, anthropology and others. While, in practically, it can change the parents’ mindset to give best treatment and facilities in developing their children’s literacy, then it can be habit for the children in developing their literacy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a phenomenological qualitative approach to develop an understanding of the forms of involvement performed by parents in early childhood literacy development. This study used descriptive data analysis inductive. The informants were four mothers of early childhood whose ability of literacy is lower, medium and higher than their age. The informants reside in Medan.

The data collection tool in this study was direct interviews and observation. To collect the data, the researcher interviewed the informants directly using interview guidelines and observed literacy activities when the informant spent time together with the children.

In this study, the data obtained was qualitative data. That was descriptive narrative. To analyse the results of the study, the researcher conducted a data organization, carried out coding process, and drew conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, the obtained results which indicates the involvement of parents is a responsibility, contribution and participation of parents in literacy development are visible from the provision of facilities, directly involved in literacy activities and familiarize yourself or family to have a habit of literacy, parental involvement can be defined by means of stimulation (facilities) by parents to early childhood; one form of parental involvement is the participation, where parents are actively involved with the child; (Weigel & Martin 2006), the literacy habits of parents or characteristics of the parents is one of the aspects of this form of parent involvement. Complete facilities will stimulate the child to move literacy and instill interest in literacy, this is

due to the complete facilities will always spur children to always want to know the use of existing facilities. The shape of the facilities that can be stimulated interests of children is interesting, it can be used while play and educative.

The four informants in this study tried to provide facilities for children. However, only one informant (AS) who provided library room to fulfill the needs of her children. The informant is highly aware of child's interest in literacy. Awareness and direct involvement in the use of facility made children not bored with literacy activities. In fact, children feel attracted to new facilities so their interest in literacy increases.

Unlike others, informant AA provided books at home, however, the books provided are books for adults. Consequently, these books cannot attract the children attention. The other informant, ES, frequently used school books in literacy teaching and learning methods. The obstacles encountered by children who were taught literacy using school books were sometimes they are not ready and mature yet. As a result, they cannot concentrate on the lesson.

Katenkamp (2009) has made it clear that one form of parental involvement is the participation, where parents are actively involved with the child. In this study, five of six priority scheduling informants were observed when they performed activities to develop their children literacy skills. One informant, YH, chose a different way to develop literacy skills and interests of children. The informant did not require her children to learn through books and not to make learning schedule for children. However, the informant introduced literacy to children in their playing time using media in a fun way. Informants will replace the media if the children getting bored. The informant also regularly read a story every day so that children can enjoy the storyline.

Family habits can indirectly affect the child's interest in literacy activities. Families/parents with literacy habit have a greater opportunity to instill an interest in literacy in children. This is in line with what has been presented by Weigel & Martin (2006) who believe that the literacy habits of parents a form of parent involvement.

In this study, there were four mothers who tried to make literacy becomes habit in the family. The four informants only taught literacy skills to their children. Informants often asked children to read books, write or draw in their spare time. In addition, the informant and the family often used their spare time to read a book together. Informants always involved children in literacy activities in daily routine so that children are able to perform these activities without being asked.

Furthermore, there is one more informant who has a habit of family literacy, but the informant rarely involved children in the process. Informants often read or wrote a book and only spent 2-3 times a week to teach children to read and write. Informants often taught literacy according to the schedule although sometimes stimulated the literacy skills of children to play the role. The intensity of involvement with children is lower than the intensity of literacy activities themselves.

There are other things found in this study, the parental awareness of fostering literacy skills can be done early. Four informants in this study introduced literacy to children in kindergarten (TK), while informant AS introduced literacy to her children when they were 1 year old. Therefore, the children of informant AS better literacy skills and a habit of literacy that has been patterned.

How to teach literacy to children is important. Informants who taught literacy impatiently rudely and angrily made the children afraid and cannot absorb the material being taught. On the other hand, teaching the children gently and giving appraisal can keep the children mood and concentration. This requires patience, sensitivity, and creativity were adequate in guiding children.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis and discussion in this study, it can be concluded that the forms of parental involvement were: (1) provision of facilities by parents to stimulate children literacy skill, for instance: games and colorful pictures; (2) performing daily activity related to literacy to foster children literacy skill, including reading books on a regular basis, encouraging

storytelling, singing, and playing the role; (3) introduction to parent's habit of literacy. Parent's habit is a form of involvement that can affect children's interest in literacy. Families who have a habit of literacy and let the children involved are greater opportunities to foster interest in literacy than those who do not.

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