

## FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE TO PROMOTE YOUNG CHILDREN EMERGENT LITERACY TO START TO LIKE READING

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### Abstract

Early Childhood Education is considered to be the most critical level for social (relationship to others), emotional (self-image and security), cognitive (thinking and reasoning) and physical development of children. Therefore, the teachers and parents of early years need to play a significant role in the teaching and learning process through providing a child friendly environment in their schools and homes. The study employed a case study approach in which the information was gathered through documents analysis. The document analysis was taken from analyzing any relevant references related to early childhood education and curriculum. This study explored the significant of environment created in schools and homes and how people in the environment can promote child wellbeing in their emergent literacy. The results of the study revealed that (1) Institutional supports, especially from teachers as the main caregivers at schools in creating friendly atmosphere can promote children emergent literacy. (2) Parents (adults) supports through setting up routines at home also has significant role in promoting emergent literacy for young children. (3) Schools and home literacy activities and printed environment can be the best atmosphere to promote young children emergent literacy. The contribution of this study is that institutional and home have significant role in providing a friendly environment for the child wellbeing in their emergent literacy.

**Key words:** *children-friendly atmosphere, emergent literacy, reading*

### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is the state where young children begin to learn; as they are active learners and thinkers (Piaget, 1980, Vygotsky, 1934) they need a place or surrounding to promote their thinking (cognitive and reasoning) as well as their social and emotional development in their environment. Environment represents all the conditions and surroundings affecting the children and adults in an early childhood setting. As Gordon & Browne (2008) stated that the environment is the stage on which children play out the themes of childhood including their interests, accomplishments, problems, and anxieties or concerns. Children need environment where they can actively explore their interests, success, as well as their problems and anxieties since they learn through process which developed gradually through explorations or experimentations, interactions, thinking and solving their problems (Peaget,1980,

Vygotsky,1934), and others (teachers and parents) can promote their development by preparing what they need for learning through scaffolding (Bruner, 1960). It means that the adults (teachers and parents) have a very significant role to create and prepare a "child friendly environment" which will be appropriate and accessible for children in their learning which will eventually promote their learning outcome.

Having the child friendly environment can be achieved by preparing a friendly atmosphere in the environment itself. This can be done both at schools, mostly by the teachers and at home by the parents and the other family members. At schools environment should be welcoming, means that wit will invite anyone (children) to enter and stay in it. Plan and rearrange the room and any ornaments whenever necessary to create appropriate learning environment (Klein, 2007). Friendly and welcoming staff members, including teachers is also advised

to welcome the children in teaching (Young, 2002). In addition, Bath (1990) postulated that nothing in the school has more impact on students in terms of skills development, self confidence or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. Classroom is not simply a place in which learners learn academic lessons. It is a social context in which learners learn social lesson such as friendship, cooperation and appropriate behavior. All this takes place provided a teacher has the capacity to attract the students by demonstrating care and making the classroom fun for young children (Lee, 2006). According to Edgington (1998) the starting point of making the classroom child friendly is to capture the interest of a child and then to sustain and extend it. This can lead to curiosity among the children for further learning. The attitudes of teachers and students are also very important in a child friendly environment. They have to be friendly towards the children. It is important that they are able to represent a secure world in which children are encouraged to take risks knowing that they will be supported if necessary (Skinner, 2007). Make sure that the environment tells the children how to act and respond, therefore we need to arrange the furniture and any tools to in regard to their height and safety (Essa, 2007 and Isbell, 2007).

Young children also need to have the learning outside the rooms; they need to have outdoors activities as a part of their learning for they need to move a lot. Outdoors environment should suit to their needs; therefore it should have a special design appropriate for them. As Forst (1992) stated that the design should (1) allow wide range of movement; (2) stimulate the senses; (3) offer novelty, variety, and challenge; and (4) be safe and comfortable. Therefore he added that the selection of outdoor equipment should always emphasize safety, durability, and age appropriateness for all children (Jackman, 2012). Adults should think creatively to bring the indoor activities outside and the outdoor activities inside, while at the same time keeping in mind the skills to be developed (Christie, & Ywkey,

1987). This again supports the idea that teachers and adults have very significant roles to set a child friendly environment for young children. Reviewing the above definitions on child friendly environment, it can be defined that a child friendly environment is a place prepared by adults where children are invited, safe to act, interact, and explore their interests, achievements, problems, and anxieties or concerns and being treated accordingly to their needs and uniqueness to have fun in learning (Jackman, 2012; Skinner, 2007; Young, 2002; Christie, & Ywkey, 1987; Essa, 2007 and Isbell, 2007; Gordon & Browne, 2008)

The problem is that not all adults, especially parents realize how important environment is for young children to develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially. This study will discuss further on how adults, teachers and parents, can create child friendly atmosphere in the learning environment to promote emergent literacy in early childhood education, especially in starting the reading readiness for young children.

## DISCUSSION

The concept of reading is known to be the ability to sound out symbols in the form alphabet and also to comprehend what have been sounded (Linse and Nunan, 2005). This can only be achieved when one has the ability to recognize (decode) the alphabet as well as figure out its meaning. For young children age of 3 to 5 years old, most of them are not really good at reading and understanding what they read. The adults' assistance is required to help them sound out the symbols and figure out its meaning. What adults can do is to sound it out by reading the words loud enough for everyone to listen and make the words meaningful through illustrations by using pictures, gestures, or movements. It is in line with Scott and Ytreberg (1990, 2) statement that children's understanding comes through hands, eyes and ears. This means that their senses work better in understanding words when it is associated with the help of their senses by

touching it with their hands, seeing it with their eyes and hearing it with their ears. The physical world is dominant at all times.

Learning needs to be meaningful, when one is able to sound out a symbol without knowing what the symbol means, it cannot be considered that he has a meaningful learning. For young children who cannot sound out the alphabet, others, the adults can assist them by providing aids to help them to get the meaning of what is written. The adults can help the young children by sounding out the words and provide them with illustration to make it meaningful for them. As young children learn through hands and eyes and ears, it means that only the ears is not enough, they need more to make their understanding complete and meaningful. They need to use their hands and eyes; therefore, the adults' assistance is required. By the help of adults, young children can do something with their hands and eyes. When young children are able to see what they hear and to feel what they see by touching it with their hands, their understanding is then complete. The use of gesture, movement, visualization of the words or sentences can all assist young children to have a better understanding and comprehension on what they hear from others' loud reading. Jiang and Grabe cited in Joan Kang Shin (2006) also support the idea of providing visual aids for reading comprehension. They add up that providing visual aids such as illustrations, charts, tables, and graphic organizers can support text comprehension. Reading has purposes, Anderson (2003) cited in Linse and Nunan (2005) stated that the aim of reading is comprehension. Some individuals equate decoding with reading. Just because a child knows how to pronounce written words correctly, doesn't mean that he can read. This statement proposes the idea that reading is not merely sounding out the words, but rather to comprehend what beyond the sounded symbols. Also, those who are able to sound out the words correctly do not guarantee that they know what they have sounded. Comprehension is the process of making meaning from written text. Research has taught us how to support struggling and

developing readers to become more proficient and take control of their own reading comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2001). It means that adults (parents and teachers) are the agents to assist young children gaining more opportunities by providing more exposure to any literacy. In line with the previous suggestions, he proposes ways of how to support learning, he says that as we read to and work with young children, model and demonstrate different strategies. Give young children direct feedback, encouraging them to think about what they are reading and what they understand.

### **Young Children Emergent Literacy**

When young children are not yet able to read, they develop their language through listening and imitating utterances made by the adults (oral skills). Teale and Sulzby (1986) in Paula M. Rhyner (2009) describe that there is an interrelationship between oral language skills (listening and speaking) and written skills (reading and writing) such that the skills develop simultaneously and interrelatedly rather than in some sequence (e.g., oral language development preceding written language development, etc). Other expert points out that young children's first knowledge about the words of their language is acquired through the development of oral language skills. In turn, the word knowledge that young children acquire via oral language development is important to learning about printed words. It even has been suggested that "without oral language, it might be impossible to develop the ability to read and write" (Glazer, 1989, p.19). Young children build up visual literacy skills even before they are able to read (Jackman, 2012). These statements imply that young children starts listening and speaking a language before they are able to read and write; and that young child are able to comprehend a language from utterances they listened from the adults. In addition, Glazer (1989) also adds; print rich environment and children's social interaction with adults (particularly their parents and teachers) within reading and writing contexts can provide significant

opportunities for adults to model literacy behavior for young children to learn. By doing some “literacy activities” such as daddy reads books or newspapers or daddy reads books together with the young child, mom interactively follows the cookies recipe with the child; they model literacy activities to their children and introduce the children to the printed or written version of a language even if they are not yet able to read. Parents can assist their young children to prepare them to go further when they are later going to pre-schools or kindergartens. The same thing can be done at school, when young children are already going to a school, which is by setting the classroom or school environment with print rich decorations to help young children familiar with words, symbols, pictures which represent meaning of a language. In school curriculum, school can apply curriculum which includes child friendly activities as parts of classroom lesson, such as having book sharing with the young children in the class, story-telling and story acting with the teacher’s guidance to help young children comprehend the meaning beyond the story. In addition, these also add fun during the learning. The aural or oral sources of literacy through listening and speaking out the language are the foundation for further literacy competence when young children are prepared to emerge with the visual forms of a language; that is the printed words in readings or writing. The statement implies that environment plays an essential role in developing young children literacy skills and knowledge. Also, adults involve in it will determine the effectiveness of the environment for the young children. Learning a language is a developmental process which includes both sending and receiving information; print rich environment young children exposed is the place where information is sent and it is also a place where young children receive information and learn how language is used (Jackman, 2012)

Environment can promote learning; however, it depends on how the people in the environment utilize it. As environment tries to facilitate the learning for young children

by providing a young children friendly atmosphere for them to start to like reading, even if they are not yet able to decode the symbols in the forms of alphabets. This provides rich literary environment for young children to develop their literary skills and knowledge by providing a lot of young children easy-to-read books, conducting hands on project activities and young children-centered learning activities.

### **The Role of Environment for Young Children Literacy Development**

Environment influences how young children learn. Paula M. Rhyner (2009) states that the stages of progressions in child are determined by the child and the interaction with numbers of environmental factors. The environment includes (1) the physical settings in which the child typically functions (e.g., home, day care, preschool), (2) the people with whom the child interacts somewhat regularly (e.g., parents siblings, day care providers, preschool teachers), (3) the literacy materials to which the child is exposed consistently (e.g., books, magazines, signs, crayons, pencils, paper), (4) the literacy experience and opportunities that are provided within the child’s environments (e.g., joint book reading with an adult, group book reading with a teacher, ordering from the menu, drawing a picture of a favorite activity. Family with the parents all other members of the family, the environment where a child first encounter their social life can shape the child’s emergent literacy.

According to McNaughton’s Framework (1995), a child emergent literacy development is structured within initial family experience, built from specific activities, and formed into systems of expertise, which then are applicable in some way to all of the child’s primary environment. He suggests that the activity in which the family engages with the child and resulting system of learning and development are based on four components of family literacy practices: (1) family practices, (2) activities (child and family), (3) systems for learning and development, leading to expertise, and (4) relationship between

settings.

Family practices are how young children are socialized, thus creating ways of thinking, acting, and using language that are considered appropriate by the various cultural and social communities with which the family identifies. It depends on the family status, those in the developed countries have more exposure on large functions of written language within different contexts, and therefore young children are exposed to varieties of different usage of written language (e.g., watching siblings read a book) and being involved in many different events (e.g., book sharing with parents). Variety of contexts used within the family help young children to get more exposure on the use of the written language, even before they are able to read. The more the family apply these practices with their young children, the more young children are exposed to literacy, orally (spoken) or written. These exposures help young children to accomplish the activities on their own, with their siblings, or with the entire family, and eventually help young children to develop their literacy knowledge and skills.

System for learning and development, according to McNaughton's Framework (1995) occur within the family and interact with the activities that provide learning context. He depicts two systems of learning and development. The first takes place when family is involved the young children directly in the activity, such as book sharing. The second takes place when the child explores writing and reading alone. Both can develop child's expertise in the areas that are being introduced through participation in various activities. Through reading with parents, child knows what a book is, how it is read, and the purpose of reading. The child knows how to turn the pages and begins to understand that the pictures represent the text being read. The literacy practices can also be found in day care centers, preschools, playgroups, and other community settings. And therefore there is a relationship between settings that influences how the child learns and develop different areas of expertise when participating in similar activities within and

across a variety of settings.

Wasik and Hendricson (2004) describes four major variables influence the child's literacy, they are (1) parental characteristics, (2) Child characteristics, (3) home literacy environment, and (4) parent-child relationship. According to Wasik and Hendricson (2004), parental characteristics include culture and ethnicity, parental beliefs, and socioeconomic status. Culture and ethnicity influence areas such as expectation for education, the patterns for language use, the preference for types of literacy activities, and the structure of tasks. Parental beliefs include the family beliefs about the importance and role of the educational system in the literacy development of their young children. The family socioeconomic status has an influence on factors such as the amount of time spent in literacy-related activities, financial resources available for literacy-related materials and experiences, the underlying purpose of family literacy activities, and other factors that support young children's literacy development. These may include parents' educational background and the quality of parent- child interactions.

Child characteristics include the child's level of engagement and social interaction in literacy-related activities and other factors that might affect language and literacy development. Wasik and Hendrickson (2004) claim that every child's characteristics can interfere the way the child to utilize the supports provides by the environment to assist the child with the early literacy learning competence. The home literacy environment includes such aspects as book sharing between parents and young children, parents reading aloud with their young children, print materials being available to the young children, and parents' positive attitudes toward literacy activities (Wasik & Hendrickson, 2004). The home literacy environment comprises of two, direct and indirect literacy-related events. Direct home literacy environment takes place when a child takes part in book sharing with the parents or labeling the printed letters of the alphabet. While indirect is when a child is observing the other members of family

reading newspaper, writing notes, etc.

The last aspect is social-emotional and interpersonal aspects of parent-child relationships that relates to literacy practices. These factors can be the central to fostering child's emergent literacy skills for it is generally characterized by warm, supportive, and compassionate parental interactions with the child to develop their literacy skills.

An environment which provides young children-friendly environment where they can access any literary works they are interested in. Easy-reading books for young children are provided in many interesting and eye catching performance to attract young children to at least look at them if they are not yet able to read. Adults are always ready to assist them to know more about what is written in the books by reading them aloud for the young children. Illustrations in the books help young children to have a better comprehension mediated through pictures and gestures of the other adults. The young children's needs are well-accommodated.

### **School Environment**

A school is a place where children obtain their formal education. It is a place where children and staff members, mostly teachers interact and communicate in doing the teaching and learning activities. Having the quality of good schools, well-trained teachers and good facilities can help the schools with the teachers as the main agents to promote the young children developments, one of which is the literacy development. The literacy development starts with the emergent literacy phase; that is a process in young children to develop awareness about reading and writing before they can actually read or write. These skills are the building blocks for later reading, writing, and communicating (Jackman, 2009).

Some ideas are proposed to prepare young children to develop their literacy skills in the phase of their emergent literacy. Teachers as the one who take the vital roles in working with young children at schools can create good and friendly atmosphere for them promote their emergent literacy skills. The first is by introducing young children to

alphabets called as letter recognition (Hill-Clake & Cooley, 2002; National Institute for Literacy, 2002; Wasik, 2001). This alphabets letters recognition is a clear prerequisite for learning to read (M.J. Adams, 1990; M. Harris & Giannouli, 1999). National Institute for Literacy (2009) also mentions several skills essential for children's literacy development includes: knowing the names and sounds associated with of printed letters, manipulating the of spoken language, rapidly naming a sequence of letters, numbers, objects or colors, writing own's name and remembering the content of spoken language for a short time (Jackman, 20012). In regard to those skills, numbers of activities can be done, such as learning to recognize and produce their names; by doing so young children begin to see the similarities between their names and the letters in the alphabets. Start introducing alphabet books and reading storybooks; this will create additional awareness of letters. Set any thematic activities with alphabets; this will add up fun for young children to help them recognize letters more deeply. Set a rule to be included into the curriculum to have a program related with letter recognition, such as having "the letter-of-the-week" to extend the connection of alphabets. The last activity will lead the young children to "phonic recognition" which emphasizes the sound-symbol relationship or "sounding out" unfamiliar syllables and words (Newman, 2000). Teachers can emphasize the sounds of language by providing opportunities for young children to practice with the phonemes through singing nursery rhymes, jingles, and songs and reading stories. Having this activity with the children at school can help children to learn and make connections between letters and sounds in a meaningful way to them as what has been suggested in the whole language learning that learning language should not be treated separately with its context where the language is naturally used (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997). The rhyming sounds in the songs, nursery rhymes, jingles and stories will be the foundation of phonological awareness which lead them to the ability to hear and identify

the individual sounds and spoken words to help them with their listening skills. Learning new words allows children to accurately label objects and people, learn new concepts, and communicate with others. In addition, vocabulary development is closely linked to children's progress in school and, in particular, in their success in learning to read (Wasik, 2006). Teachers and staff members of schools can display the words children learn by providing words walls as a part of print rich environment in the schools and classrooms. Labeling objects in the schools area as well as the classroom equipments to help young children learn more intensely with the language and get them familiar with printed alphabet letters.

Another way is teacher provides literacy artifacts such as wallpapers with alphabet letters and print, nursery pictures, picture books with print, stickers with print, cereal box, mail and letters, signs, newspapers, and may other things with print correspond to oral language and represents ideas that can be read ( Eliason & Jenkins, 2008). These literacy artifacts can be used for alphabet instruction and reading practice activities (Gerard, 2004; Xu & Rutledge, 2003). Encouraging reading of environmental print helps children to recognize that reading helps us to survive and reading is everywhere. Canizares (2002) added that each child who comes to us has already been busy; he is actively creating his own definition of what it means to interact a literate society. Through shared reading experiences, young children are developing their literacy skills at their own pace. We are building on what they already know and able to do, while creating a developmentally appropriate language and literacy environment by providing literacy practices to help them develop their sound- symbols awareness. Some proposed literacy practices are: talking with the young children in standard spoken language clearly and giving simple explanation; reinforcing their native language, try to understand the words they say while communicating with them, speaking and listening to them in communication, reading or telling stories to

children, offering book shared experiences with reading and rereading stories for repetitions will help children to have a better retention, providing a wide selection of books for children, etc (Jackman, 2012).

### **Home Environment**

Family members are a child's primary teachers of language. They are the first people a child hears speak, the first adults spoken to, and the most important people a child will communicate with throughout his life (Jackman, 20012). Children need opportunities to use language in both the spoken and the written form. Children should frequently see a written copy of what they are hearing or what is spoken to them (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004). Family can help providing this by setting up print rich environment at home, so that children can frequently expose to the printed or written version of language. Besides, it also helps children to recognize alphabets more intensely at home. They can be successful readers in school from having written language as a dominant part of their daily activities (Eliason & Jenkins, 2008). Print-rich environments provide opportunities for children to see and use written language for a variety of purposes, and teachers and parents can draw children's attention to words of specific letters (Bennet-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2006; IRA & NAEYC, 1998; Strickland & Schickendanz, 2004; Vukelich & Christie, 2004). We can always find ways of creating print-rich environment regardless of what activities or materials we are using, the important thing is that the print must be making sense (Adams, 1990). Frequently exposing children with printed words in their environment, they learn, whether they read or not, that things have spoken and written labels.

Durkin (1960) studied home of many children who had learned to read before entering kindergarten, and found out that children received on average of 1,000 to 1,500 hours of preschool literacy experience. The home experiences can be done through shared reading accompanied by questions

and answer between parents and children (Panofsky, 1994), providing help whenever children ask for it, or doing reading-related activities by playing magnetic letters on the fridge to create some words. Durkin emphasizes her research on home literacy activities for children spent their time more with their family before they entered a school and it means that the family has more opportunity to prepare their children emergent literacy long before they entered the school by exposing the children to print-rich environment and get them engaged into intentional literacy activities. The roles of adults in family is crucial, they give assistance to promote the children emergent literacy, even though it seems like they acquire the ability on their own, but without any guidance and instructions from adults, they might be "lost" (IRA & NAEC 1998; Schickedanz, 1994).

Many parents put a high priority on reading and writing, these parents promote their children literacy skills, they can have it in many ways- by providing easy access to reading and writing materials, modelling the reading and let them know that the activity is enjoyable (McLane & McNamee, 1990; Teale, 1978). Moreover if the parents regularly read to their children, this will directly affect to the children that reading activity is a lot of fun (L. Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). In short, print rich environment and home literacy activities can promote young children emergent literacy to start reading.

#### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIO

Early childhood is the bridge where children learn and develop their language competency. This is the period when the literacy awareness is built up and developed within a child. Even before a child is able to read or write, they are aware of their surroundings. Environment becomes crucial factor to foster the early emergent of young children literacy. Providing young children with the literacy-rich environment and activities both, at home and schools will enormously promote young children emergent literacy. To sum up, the physical

and emotional environment by parents and schools teachers and staff members will uphold the literacy to emerge in the early life of a child.

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