



## Home Experiences that Foster Readiness for Letter and Sound Recognition: An Exploratory Study

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Knowing children's learning experiences at home is vital in understanding the child and how they learn in a kindergarten classroom. Families provide personal knowledge of the child that will guide teachers in letter and sound recognition. Families actually feel supported when included in the planning process of their child's learning. Personal stories of parents will give light to the following: (1) their current practices at home, (2) the reasons behind these practices, (3) the context of their practices, and (4) the implications of their practices. The stories of parents guided the teaching-learning process in a preschool classroom, most especially with regard to understanding of previous letter and sound recognition experiences, strategies in letter recognition, planning of letter and sound recognition experiences, implementation of letter and sound recognition activities based on experiences, and assessment of letter recognition activities.

This study aimed to explore the context of parent's teaching practices of letter and sound recognition, so as to draw implications for basing teaching on prior learning experiences of children. The description was based on interviews with fifty mothers. The study concluded that: (1) mothers used a variety of letter and sound recognition activities that were familiar to them to as a child; (2) mothers chose different practices due to promised results; (3) mothers used technology for easier teaching and reviewing; (4) diverse practices in teaching letter and sound recognition provided constant interest for the child; (5) mother's practices at home opened windows to other early literacy skills; (6) teachers planned for instruction based on home experiences.

**Key Words:** early childhood; learning; language; literacy; preschool

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Children's learning is always dynamic. However, it must be cautioned that the learning they experience is arbitrarily dependent on schools' capacity to give them basic learning. Though in terms of formal education, schools' influence has always been the primary source of learning for children, most especially in terms of their academic

success and formal progress in school (Morrison, 2012). In gearing towards a multi-faceted view of learning, a child's socialization within the context of homes should also be considered. Parents' role in making appropriate and high-quality environment are important to be noted in order to assess learning in its totality. Parents' involvement in children's early academic development is necessary to investigate in order to establish



the influence of family in a child's academic life (Blair & Salvage, 2006). In this way, the socialization of children is being contextualized further as the processes of support and enhancement of learning is being considered in the four corners of homes where family as a major institution plays a vital role.

In this regard, there is a prevailing notion among scholars that would give a clear consideration on parents' engagement on their children's learning. Thus, it is necessary to look at parent's involvement when it comes to issues of continued learning and consistent academic guidance. And there are substantial studies in literature (see Wiggins and Mctighe, 2007; White, 2006) that would substantiate these claims particularly expounding on the roles that parent's play in the process of acquiring knowledge. Moreover, the continued support coming from parent's active participation espouses their commitment in guiding their children specifically with academic intricacies, particularly, basic learning.

### ***1.1 Readiness for Language: Letter and Sound Recognition***

The problems with language are usually manifested by children having academic difficulties for letter and sound recognition. Treiman (1996) explains that, the problem of children with letters and sounds stems from their lack of memorization of paired association of letter to sound and they use their previous familiarity about a letter name and use the sound of the letter name to make a link with the letter and sound, thus making a more rapid recall of the letter name and sound (as cited in White, 2006, p.8). Same insight is being shared by Corradino (2009), in which he claims that, it has been apparent that kindergarten students were having difficulty in learning sounds specifically in recognizing the awareness of sounds in letters

and the understanding of a word's individual sounds or 'phonemes' that connects sounds to letters and letters to words. In addition, according to Blair and Savage (2006), based on their deeper analysis of studies, a child has a tendency to focus on reading the "context" and not the letters in finding meaning in the printed word.

In other words, based on Manolitsis and Tafa (2009), the concerns with children's predicament in language might be resolved through the enhancement of phonological awareness (referring to recognition of sounds through words by decoding or breaking the sound heard) and phonemic awareness (refers to sound recognition of rhymes, syllables, beginning and end sounds of each word). In this way, the practice of such connectedness might increase the child's recognizing capacity to coordinate sounds with letters and letters with words. Moreover, White (2006) argues that to assist children, particularly kindergarten students in acquiring letter recognition and letter-sound association, the use of mnemonic devices such as integrated pictures that would tickle the human capacity to associate pictures with letters and sounds.

There are many ways in which to device mechanisms in order to enhance the knowledge of children, specifically pre-school students, to grasp the letter-sound recognition to prepare them for further learning in the field of language dealing with reading and comprehension (White, 2006). However, to further foster such readiness, children are better trained if there are mechanisms that can be done in their own respective homes through parent's guidance and supervision.

### ***1.2 Fostering Readiness: Home Experiences***

Since it has already been an apparent observation that parental involvement is valuable in the early learning process of



children, it is also interesting to look at the potential practices that parents can capitalize in order to foster further readiness through home experiences.

Children begin their learning of language at the time of birth. Therefore, as they grow and develop, it is necessary for them to be in an environment conducive to maximization of learning and honing them for further challenges. In this regard, parents were viewed as the major socializing agent, can input substantial strategies whether, formal or informal. Wiggins et al, (as cited in Morrison, 2012) suggest that there may be ways such as proper communication of parents to children by using verbal inputs and employing comprehensible bodily gestures that would help in their literacy development. In the same way, Corradino (2009) claims that letting the children be exposed to music can also be an avenue for learning since it can be used as another method for increasing language skills among children. Moreover, it has been found out that music might be another factor in increasing letter identification and sound recognition. Another study conducted by Blaire and Salvage (2006) showed that, the frequency of letting children write their names is very much important in order to build their skills in letter recognition. The findings would show that letter recognition and phonological skills are directly associated with the ability of a child to write and identify his or her own name including jumbled letters and accurate ones. Thus, this might indicate that parents can teach their children, at the onset, ways in which to write and identify their names accurately in order to hone and mold their recognition of letters and eventually words.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The current study intended to describe the various practices of mothers in teaching

letter and sound recognition to their four year old children. More specifically, the study looked into the specific strategies mothers employed inside and outside of their homes to assist their child's learning in letter and sound recognition.

The study used qualitative method; 50 mothers were interviewed who have children ages 4.0 to 5.0 years old and are currently enrolled in small preschools in Metro Manila. The mothers that were interviewed did not employ any tutors for their children's learning needs.

## III. FINDINGS

This discussion is organized as follows: (1) presentation of activities used by mothers in teaching letter and sound recognition at home, (2) strategies used by mothers to verify their children's learning of letter and sound recognition and (3) how these strategies helped their children in school.

The various activities used by the respondents in teaching letter recognition were kindergarten story books, songs and rhymes, toys, learning videos, coloring books, computer games and alphabet cut-outs. Fifty five percent of the mothers used story books and learning videos, while 21% of the mothers equally used computer games, songs, rhymes and toys. Additionally, 16% of mothers preferred alphabet cut-outs and only 8% used coloring books. Mothers also used learning videos, toys, reading books, and computer games in teaching sound recognition. 50% of the mothers used learning videos and reading books while, 33% used toys and computer games.

In the recognition of letter sounds, mothers used toys, storybooks, workbooks, pictographs, videos and one on one session with the child where both mother and child pronounced the sound of each letter. One



hundred percent of the mothers had one on one session with their children where they pronounced the letter sound, 70% of the mothers used videos while 65% used story books and work books. Additionally 55 % of the mothers used toys while 35% used pictographs and only 10% used games.

All the respondents used technology particularly, applications in the IPAD for letter and sound recognition. Respondents explained that applications which showed the letters helped the children in recognition.

All of the respondents used pen and paper tasks and oral tests to appraise the letter and sound recognition of their children. Sixty five percent of the respondents also used the pictographs to appraise the letter and sound recognition

#### IV. SYNTHESIS

In summary, there is a plethora of ways in which parents can explore in order to promulgate the facilitation of early literacy in their children. But caution must also be noted, because home experiences are mere preparatory strategies in which to ready their children to build their knowledge on letters and language. Of course, such mechanism cannot substitute the teachers' role and the school's responsibility to further enhance the knowledge and translate it into academic terms. Nonetheless, it is a substantial mechanism that requires active participation and coordination of the parents for the complete and thorough implementation of such strategy. The benefits of home readiness are enormous and must be taken into account for the exploration and development of early literacy among children.

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