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ASSESSMENT IN LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE OBIO-AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study sought to find out the roles parents play in assessment in literacy of their children in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area in Nigeria. The design that was used for the study was the descriptive survey. Using the simple random sampling procedure, 12 public pre-schools in the Universal Basic Education in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area were selected for study. Data gathered from parents and teachers with using questionnaire, analysed using the descriptive statistics namely frequencies and percentages. The major findings were that, having reading sessions with children at home; engaging in shared reading with children and providing varieties of reading materials to children were some of the roles parents played in assessment in literacy of their children. Again, development of vocabulary and print awareness; and development of reading comprehension and decoding abilities were the major impact of parental involvement in assessment in literacy in early childhood. The study recommended that, parents should engage in reading activities such as reading aloud to children at home and share reading with their children at home to enhance their literacy development. Again, parents and teachers should develop positive and mutual communication and support to help assess the literacy development of children both in school and at home.

Keywords

Assessment, Literacy, Early Childhood, Parents, Parental Involvement

1. Introduction

The importance and usefulness of acquiring literacy early in life cannot be overlooked because it gives an individual the confidence to live comfortably in the society. All the nations, leaders, education stakeholders, and researchers are trying to ensure that children are given special opportunities to develop strong literacy skills [NRCIM] 2000). Developing literacy skills is an important developmental milestone for young ones. In this regard, Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) emphasize that, the benefits of the preschool period for becoming a skilled reader is highlighted by a well-known evidence that preschool children's development in the areas of oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge is a result of how well they will learn to read once they start formal reading instruction in elementary school. Thanaset & Suksan (2018) emphasize that, reading is an indispensable language skill which children need to acquire not for academic goals only, it will also help them in other areas of life even professional development.

Assessment in early childhood is very important as it helps to identify the weakness and strengths of pupils. Thereby, devising varied and appropriate ways help pupils who face challenges in acquiring certain skills. According to Clay (1993) and Elley (1992), literacy assessment happens in the school years because, in some part of the western countries, teaching and learning literacy is seen as the responsibility of the school, but teaching of literacy differs from school to school internationally roughly between ages five through eight and the methods and curriculum varies but are similarly.

Early identification and quick response to challenges children encounter is one common purpose of literacy assessment. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] (1991), the primary purposes of Literacy assessment are; to optimize student learning, to engage parents (and students and other community members) in a productive conversation about learning. This function is, of course, an extension of function one, which requires students to be engaged in such a conversation about their own learning, and to develop instructional programs and institutional supports for instruction.

In young children's literacy learning and assessment, it is believed that the teachers are the main assessment agent for some reasons (Johnston, 1992; IRA/NCTE, 1994). Clay (1993) supports this notion with the reasons that, the link between assessment and instruction is most

direct and also individual teacher observation is very important with young children and in cases of difficult learning. Similarly, Johnston, Woodside-Jiron, and Day(1998) postulates that, early years children are easily distracted in learning than the older children therefore they need close observation and interaction for easy access of their literate understandings. Also, records are most meaningfully collected in the course of teachers' daily interactions with children, and most meaningfully analysed within an on-going history. In this regard the teacher needs to have professional skills to enable him give the appropriate kind of support children need, and a sense of how to analyze the interactions. Lastly, Johnston (1992) stressed that, the most important reason that teachers are the main people that have the capacity of assessing children is that their assessments have an impact on their children's learning, on their instructional relationship, and on children's assessments of themselves as literate individuals.

It is very obvious from the foregoing that teachers really play a key role in assessment in literacy in the early childhood setting. But the question remains that, are teachers the only agents in early literacy assessment? What about other educational stakeholders such as parents. Do they really have a role to play when it comes to assessment in literacy in early childhood? This is what actually triggered this study. The following research questions accompanied the study; "What are the roles parents play in assessment in literacy of their children?" As well as "What impact does parental involvement in assessment have on a child's performance in literacy?" This study will help parents to come to light of what assessment in literacy in the early childhood really is as well as the roles they are supposed to play to make it effective. The rest of the paragraphs will focus on the literatures review, methodology, results and discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

1.1 Problem identification

The aim of this study is to find out the roles parents play in assessment in literacy of their children in early years.

Some parents of children in early childhood classes do not know their roles and the importance of their participation in assessment of literacy; they often assume that teachers are the main agent in assessment.

1.2 Scope of study

This study is delimited to assessment in literacy in Early childhood: the role of parents and the impact of parental involvement in assessment of literacy in early childhood. The study

will be restricted to selected pre-school teachers and parents in Obio-Akpor local government area of Nigeria.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Assess the views of teachers regarding roles of parents in assessment of literacy in Early childhood.
- Find out how parental involvement in assessment can impact performance of children in literacy
- Explore the roles parents play in assessment of literacy in Early childhood.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Assessment

Assessment is an essential part of instruction, because it ascertain whether or not the objectives of education has been achieved. Assessment influences decisions about grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, curriculum, and, even affects funding. [GER] (2014), the word assessment includes the instruments or methods that teachers use in evaluating, measuring, and documenting the readiness, learning progress, and all the educational needs of pupils. In other words, assessment is the process of gathering information or data about certain traits, analysing them and using them for decision making. Orillosa & Magno (2013) suggested that Early literacy skills assessment (ELSA) should be used in evaluating children literacy skills because it checks their comprehension, phonological awareness, and alphabetic principle of children.

2.2 Literacy

Literacy is commonly accepted as the ability to read and write. According to Sweet and Snow (2002), the mutual understanding of literacy is that it is a set of definite skills especially the cognitive skills of reading and writing that depends on the setting in which they are obtained and the background of the person who obtained them. Reutzel & Cooter (2002) stress on, ‘Emergent Literacy’, a word that state that literacy starts from birth and is endless and developmental process. The Department of Education and Skills noted that, literacy involves the ability to read, capable of observing and judging and acknowledge different ways of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.

2.3 Early Childhood

Early childhood starts from birth to eight years (0-8 years). It is the formation stage in a child's life. According to the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (2001), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is not just preparing a child for transition to primary school, but its objective is to help children in developing all the domain social, emotional, cognitive and physical domains in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. ECCE has the ability to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens. A high-quality Early childhood education plan is supposed to provide the following component : ability to provide a well-designed curriculum that will touch every area of a child's development, ability of looking into the health and nutrition requirements of the child, and the ability of identifying and promoting effective learning by meeting each child's academic needs, the should employ early childhood professionals with small class size for efficiency and adequate motivation for teachers.(ECED,2012). Good relationship between the teacher and the children is very essential at early year. According to, Moe Moe Win,(2018), the one the greatest way to motivate children is for teachers to maintain good relationship with their pupils.

2.4 Roles Parents Play in Literacy Assessment in Early Childhood

Assessment is very important in development of the young ones. Parental involvement is very crucial in early literacy success and future academic achievement. Notwithstanding the importance of parental involvement in assessment of literacy in early years, parents still see the task as a difficult task. Assessment is continuous, and will serve as the basis for future decisions about their child. Is very necessary that parents acquire knowledge in understanding the process and giving suitable information to the person who is coordinating/completing the assessment (Loftin, 2003). For sure this applies that parents really have a role to play in terms of assessment in literacy in early childhood education.

Actions in intervention programs for young children have advised that parents should be part of the assessment process. Their involvement enables them to contribute toward reliable analysis and solutions for the developmental growth of the child. They point out such activities as, reading to younger children and providing a variety of reading materials in the home, providing a quiet place for children to do homework and encouraging them to study at home.

Huag & Doleis (2007) craves that ,home activities carried out by parents or guardians have serious and positive effect on children , activities like reading loud, sharing readings, labelling items in the house.

However, if parents or other adults don't know or have skills for providing literacy-rich experiences it will still affect their literacy development

Moreover, each child's uniqueness in language and early literacy skills at the beginning of school have been attributed to the quality and quantity of language interactions with their parents and also home environment. Children who have attention drawn to the print around them will gain the important message that print conveys meaning (Williams & Rask, 2003). Parents can ask their children about how their school day was and what they learned.

According to Williams and Rask(2003), schools should offer parents the platform to get involved, which can include organising open-day, giving feedbacks to parents on their child's progress, giving parents the opportunity to be part of curriculum development, planning and designing of some of the school programs.

Schooling is merely a part of education and therefore parents are intimately involved in 85% of education which occurs outside the school (Munn, 1993). In addition, parents can ensure to make reading materials available for their children particularly in early literacy stage. Shared reading activities with children can effectively enhance their early reading capacity. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that there is a significant positive relationship between availability of reading materials at home and the child achievement in reading (Becher, 1985).

According to the General Teaching Council for England (2006), helping children develop skills that they gradually learn to take care of their basic needs and encouraging them to study is part of responsive and supportive parenting skills. The interaction between parenting skills and children's learning in school and the conversation that parents have with their children is valuable for the child's academic achievement, thus, literacy acquisition. It appears that information distribution and sharing is a vital constituent of a flourishing home school relationship.

Musti-Rao and Carledge (2004) also affirmed that there has to be clarity, consistency and positivity in communication, parents also would need to believe and understand the importance of their role in learning. Parents should give children opportunities to learn and acquire skills at home that increase their academic performance,.

2.5 Impacts of Parents' Involvement on their Children's Performance in Literacy Assessment

Learning to read and write is a multifaceted task that comprises a variety of skills and capabilities. Parental involvement in assessment in literacy is very important as it enable children to utilize pre-existing skills and experiences to their tasks, they also need to add reading skills, thus developing reading comprehension and interpreting abilities. The importance of literacy

cannot be over emphasised as it is the pivot which their academic skills revolve around, due to its ability to influence the acquisition of skills in other academic areas (Stanovich, 1986).

In the light of this, there is a dire need for parental participation at the early age in children's literacy development, as it will boost the success rate. Children whose parents have higher levels of participation in literacy oriented activities and workshops at home show greater growth in literacy than those whose parents are not involved (Leslie & Allen, 1999).

These variables in the home that add to the children's early literacy success may even overshadow those in the school environment. Paratore (as cited in Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004) efforts have been made to explain how low performance can be traced to the role of parents in children's learning. In the same vein, Resetar, Noell, & Pellegrin, (2006) "Children whose parents contribute less time devoted to reading are more likely to have reading problems at school" (p.242).

Educators are aware of the fact that parental involvement in students education can further increase the chances of the student's successful academic results. Darch, Miao, & Shippen (2004) stress that, family participation have advantages of higher test scores and results, better attendance, increased levels of completed homework, and enthusiasm, and a more optimistic attitude towards academics. Thus, when parents show keen interest in their child's education, that child will certainly excel in academics.

In addition, the parent's ability to assist the child in areas that are conversant with, like phonics, context clues, picture clues, and word recognition techniques. As families provide prospects for their young ones to engage with language and print through interacting and modelling with their child, early literacy skills, such as, oral language, vocabulary and print awareness and letter knowledge increases (Carter, et. al, 2009). This indicates that children are more successful in school when their parents are involved. When parents understand how to use effective reading strategies, pupils increase in their literacy skills.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The design used for the study was the descriptive survey. Gay (1992) asserts that, the descriptive survey design allows a researcher to gather information on the present state of the topic being examined. The study adopted this design in order to have the opportunity to determine the roles parents play in assessment in literacy of their children; and assess the impact of parents' involvement on children's performance in literacy assessment in pre-schools in the

Obio-Akpor Local Government Area. But the design has its own pitfalls as it does not give room for the manipulation of variables as in experimental research (Yin, 2001).

3.2 Population

A population in a research refers to the larger group of people with common observable features to which one hopes to apply the research result (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The population for the study comprised all parents and teachers in the public pre-schools in the Universal Basic Education in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area. There are 53 public pre-schools with 53 nursery two teachers and 1855 parents in the Universal Basic Education in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area totalling 1908 respondents (Obio-Akpor Local Government, 2018). The parents were involved in the study because they are in a better position to give information concerning the roles they play in assessment in literacy of their children. Also, teachers were involved in the study because they can provide information regarding the impact of parents' involvement on children's performance in literacy assessment.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Varkevisser (2003) explains sampling a way of picking a number of study units from a defined population. Using the simple random sampling procedure, 12 out of the 53 public pre-schools were selected for the study. There are 12 nursery two teachers and 395 parents in the 12 public pre-schools schools in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size, all the 12 nursery two teachers and 196 parents were selected for the study totalling 208 respondents (Obio-Akpor Local Government, 2018). The simple random sampling procedure was used in selecting all 12 nursery two teachers and the 196 parents for the study. In this kind of sampling procedure, the probability that any of the respondents (both teachers and parents) can be selected is high. The lottery method was used in the selection procedure. With the help of the teacher, the parents of the pupils were traced so that the questionnaires could be administered to them.

3.4 Research Instrument

Two sets of questionnaires (for teachers and parents) were used as data collection instruments. In that, the questionnaire was used to gather data from the parents on the roles they play in assessment in literacy in early childhood. Also, the questionnaire was used to gather information from the nursery two (2) teachers who were used in the study to find out the impact of parents' involvement on the performance of their children in literacy. The questionnaires provided a high level of anonymity to the respondents. The questionnaire items were put into two

parts (sections A and B). Section A catered for the background information of the respondents, and the section B covered the questions related to either research question 1 or 2 for either the teachers or the parents.

3.5 Data Analysis

This study sought to determine the roles of parents in the assessment in literacy in early childhood. The study adopted the descriptive statistics such as the use of frequencies and percentages, in analyzing the information gathered using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions.

4. Results and Discussions

Data was analyzed and presented systematically beginning with the background information of the respondents, followed with the research questions that guided the study. Table 1 show the characteristics of parents who served as respondents for the study.

Table 1: *Background Characteristics of Parents (n=196)*

Variables	Subscale	No.	%
Gender	Male	99	50.5
	Female	97	49.5
	Certificate	71	36.2
Level of Education	Degree	91	46.4
	Masters	17	8.7
	PhD	17	8.7

Source: Field Data, 2018

From Table 1, it will suffice to concede that, the majority of the parents who participated in the study were males. This is because out of the 196 parents, 99 representing 50.5% were males whereas 97 representing 49.5% were females. However, the difference was not that much. In that the number of male parents exceeded the females by 2. Also, it is obvious from Table 1 that, the majority of the parents who took part in the study were degree holders. This is because, out of the 196 parents, 91 of them representing 46.4% were degree holders, 71 representing 36.2% were certificate holders, and those parents who had attained Masters and PhD both recorded 17 each representing 8.7%.

Table 2: Background Characteristics of Teachers (n=12)

Variables	Subscale	No.	%
Gender	Male	4	33.3
	Female	8	66.7
Years of Teaching Experience	One to five years	4	33.3
	Six to ten years	6	50.0
	Eleven to fifteen years	2	16.7
Academic Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	8	66.7
	Diploma	3	25.0
	WASSCE	1	8.3

Source: Field Data, 2018

From Table 2, it is obvious that majority of the teachers were females. This is because, out of the total number 12 teachers, 4 were males representing 33.3% whereas 8 representing 66.7% were females. This is not surprising because, early childhood education is usually seen as a preserve for women. Table 2 also indicates that, the majority of the teachers had taught between 6-10 years. With this, 33.3% had taught between 1-5 years, 50.0% between 6-10 years, and 16.7% between 11-15 years. The finding of the study is significant because, with the majority of the teachers having between 6-10 years of teaching experience, it can be concluded that, the teachers had quite a good number of years of teaching experience and can give the necessary information as a result of their experience concerning the impact of parents' involvement on children's performance in literacy assessment. Concerning academic qualification, 66.7% had Bachelor's Degree, 25.0% had Diploma, and 8.3% had WASSCE as their highest academic qualification.

This section presents the results and discussions of data collected to answer the two research questions formulated to guide the study. It comprised data from the questionnaire.

Research Question1: What are the roles parents play in assessment in literacy in early childhood?

This section intended to find out from parents the roles they play in literacy assessment in early childhood. The findings are represented on Table 3 below.

Table 3: The Roles Parents in Assessment in Literacy in Early Childhood (N=196)

“Engaging in shared reading with children and providing varieties of reading materials to children” both recorded means of 2.81, 2.91 and standard deviations of .63, .51 respectively indicating that, the majority of the respondents agreed that, they are roles of parents in assessment in literacy in early childhood. Thus, these items fall on scale 3 (agree) under Table 3. In relation to these statements, Munn (1993), claim that, schooling is merely a part of education and therefore parents are intimately involved in 85% of education which occurs outside the school. In addition, Munn states that, parents can ensure to make reading materials available for their children particularly in early literacy stage. Similarly, Becher (1985) postulates that, shared reading activities with children can effectively enhance their early reading capacity. Thus, research has repeatedly demonstrated that there is a significant positive relationship between availability of reading materials at home and the child achievement in reading. With regards to the statement “Asking children about school day and what they learned”, a mean of 2.79 and standard deviation of .62 were obtained signifying that majority of the respondent agreed to it as a role of parents in assessment in literacy in early childhood. The final statement; “Providing a quiet place for children to do homework and encouraging them to study at home”, had a mean of 2.51 and a standard deviation of .88, indicating that most of the respondents agreed to it. This item also falls on the scale 3 (agree) under Table 3.

It can therefore be concluded that, having regular and positive interaction with children; visiting school regularly to get feedback on child’s performance and to offer information to class teachers about child’s home life; having reading sections with children at home; as well as engaging in shared reading with children and providing varieties of reading materials to children were some of the roles of parents in assessment in literacy in early childhood. Again, asking children about school day and what they learned; and providing a quiet place for children to do homework and encouraging them to study at home are all key roles parents play in assessment in literacy in early childhood. However, the most prominent of them all were, having reading sessions with children at home; visiting school regularly to get feedback on child’s performance and to offer information to class teachers about child’s home life, and engaging in shared reading with children and providing varieties of reading materials to children.

Research Question 2: What are the impacts of parents’ involvement on child’s performance in literacy assessment? This part sought to find out from teachers the outcome of parents’ involvement on children’s performance in literacy. Data gathered are illustrated on Table 4 below.

Table 4: *Impact of Parents’ Involvement on Children’s Performance in Literacy (n=12)*

are successful in school . succinctly parents understanding and use of effective reading strategies, will increase pupils ability. When parents understand how to use effective reading strategies, students increase in their reading ability. The last statement; “Develop reading comprehension and decoding abilities”, most of the teachers agreed that it is indeed an impact parental involvement in assessment in literacy. In that, this statement obtained a mean of 2.90 and a standard deviation of .38 signifying that a greater response. This statement also falls on scale 3 as shown under Table 4 above. In relation to this statement, Stanovich (1986) postulates that, parental involvement in assessment in literacy is very important as it enables children to utilize pre-existing skills and experiences to their reading tasks, they also need to add reading skills. Thus, developing reading comprehension and decoding abilities. Literacy is one of the most important academic skill areas because it influences skill acquisition in other academic areas.

It can be concluded from the afore-mentioned that; development of vocabulary and print awareness; and development of reading comprehension and decoding abilities are the major impact of parental involvement in assessment in literacy in early childhood. These items recorded the highest means of 2.8 and 2.9 respectively. Thus, fall on scale 3 under Table 4.

5. Limitations of the Study

The study explored the role of parents in assessment of literacy in early years. The sample consisted of twelve public pre-schools; the sampled pre-schools were randomly selected from the fifty-three pre-school pre-schools in Obio-Akpor local government area. The sample size is small and can't really be generalized. The selection of parents, teachers and schools, in addition to the time duration were part of the limitation.

6. Scope of Future Research

Considering the fact that a small sample geographical area indicated for this study constrain wide generalization, a replication of the research in other local government area in Nigeria is highly recommended to provide a bigger insight into the problem.

Parental participation in literacy assessment in early childhood is very important and the inadequate participation of parents will definitely affect the performance of children in school, therefore, the need to look at the major consequences of inadequate parental participation in literacy assessment of their children in early years and also the factors limiting parental participation is recommended for further investigation.

7. Conclusions

The following conclusions can be made from the data analysed.

The most prominent roles of parents in the assessment of literacy in early childhood were, having reading sections with children at home; visiting school regularly to get feedback on child's performance and to offer information to class teachers about child's home life; as well as engaging in shared reading with children and providing varieties of reading materials to children. Parental participation in their children literacy assessment is very important because they understand the development needs of their children at that early years.

Again, development of vocabulary and print awareness; and development of reading comprehension and decoding abilities were the major impact of parental involvement in assessment in literacy in early childhood.

The following recommendations were made from the conclusion.

- Parents should engage in reading activities such as reading aloud to children at home and share reading with their children at home to enhance their literacy development.
- Both parents and teachers should endeavour to provide print-rich literacy environment to support children's literacy development. Again, parents and teachers should develop positive and mutual communication and support to help assess the literacy development of children both in school and at home.

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