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Nadia Akindele

Covenant University, npa.nadia@yahoo.com

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Reading Culture, Parental Involvement and Children's Development in Formative Years: The Covenant University Experience

Nadia Akindele
Covenant University
Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: npa.nadia@yahoo.com

Abstract

Reading culture and parental involvement in the development of children in their formative years are the most crucial factors which form the foundation for the child's education. This study examines these two key factors, while the respondents for the study were confined to the Covenant University. The research concentrates on reading culture at the formative years of the children (from birth to age 7) and the degree of parental involvement in the child's development.

In order to make an assessment of the current reading culture of the children in the academic community, a survey of 211 parents, comprising 115 fathers (54.4%) and 96 mothers (45.49%) was conducted. This study showed that the practice of early childhood reading among parents in Covenant University is high (95.2%) and the respondents have a good perception on the need and importance of early childhood reading. However, there is evidence to show that there is poor habit of borrowing books from libraries. This trend has a direct negative impact on inculcating reading culture in their children.

Most of the respondents (87.7%) are of the opinion that learning activities provided by nursery school are not sufficient for children's development without parental involvement.

On the average, parents spend at least one hour reading to their children, but mainly during the weekends. The availability of time is a major obstacle faced by parents in cultivating reading culture for their children in (83.4%) of cases, while lack of parental involvement account for (23.3%). Only (3.3%) of the respondents thought reading to children is a waste of time. Based on the results of the study appropriate recommendations were made.

Introduction

Reading plays an integral part in the education of individual, especially young children. It is so important that it cannot be eliminated from the education process. Reading is defined as a basic life skill, it is a cornerstone for a child's success in school, and indeed throughout life. Without the ability to read properly, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will inevitably be lost. Reading creates a

good foundation and inspiration for a child's development and education. It awakens children's interest in books, which help cultivate a reading culture in them for a push to future academic excellence. Reading provides an opportunity to develop children's minds and this helps them form enduring habits and character. It is significant that children at their formative age should acquire love for books and reading culture, which will contribute to their subsequent reading success. According to the UNICEF (2005), young children are in their most important development stage of life, what they learn now and what happens to them now will influence them for the rest of their life and the early years of the child are the most determinant of the child's psychosocial and cognitive development.

The most formative years of a child are prior to the entry of the child into the primary school (Pioneer House, 2011). This period can be regarded as a period of a remarkable brain development which lays an amazing platform for subsequent learning.

Santrock (2005) affirms that while the brain continues to grow in early childhood, it does not grow as rapidly as in infancy. By the time children have reached three years of age, the brain is three-quarters of its adult size. By age five, the brain has reached about nine-tenths of its adult size.

Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed by age four and early childhood interventions can have a lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality, and social behavior (Young, 1996).

Reading culture and love of reading are developed in the home of the child. Cultivating reading culture in youngest readers should start right from the birth of a child and the book can be considered as the third parent of a child.

As stated by (Needleman cited in Wells, 2007), infants can see and hear at birth, and seem genetically programmed to prefer to look at faces and listen to human voices. Infants perceive the world through all these senses, and transfer information from one sense to another. Children learn predominantly by association. If books are part of loving parent-child interactions from an early age, children will associate the presence of books with all of the positive feelings of being held and loved. Undoubtedly, these associations are encoded in a profound way in the child's developing brain.

Gayle (2010) is of the opinion that parents who introduce their preschool aged children to books and read to them on a daily basis leads to greater reading knowledge and links them to school readiness in later years. The earlier parents become involved in their children's reading practices, the more profound the results and the longer lasting the effects. Parents are the first educators the children come in contact with. Impacting knowledge to the children through reading at the early stage adds a lot of meaning to their lives. Children are easily taught and mentored through parental action, so when their parents take time to read to them, the children become more interested in reading. Reading makes them eager to explore things written in books as they grow older, thereby cultivating reading culture and learning about things, places, events and experiences.

A child who reads stands out to be different amidst others and outshines the ones who do not read. About 20 to 30 percent of school age children have difficulties learning to read. At this young age it can be embarrassing for them, and can result in low motivation and self-esteem. Children who are at risk of reading difficulties are those who were not read to at home (Pioneer House, 2011). According to Mustard (2006), children who develop poor verbal skills during the first three years of development will tend to do poorly in language and literacy in the school system, and children who develop poor verbal skills in the first two years are at risk of antisocial behavior as teenagers. The earlier children start to enjoy stories and start to develop reading skills the better for them. Reading helps children enjoy and find pleasure in reading books which forms into long life recreational reading in later years. The need to inculcate this reading culture early in the life of our children is of great importance.

Time investment by parent in reading to their children is a crucial factor in cultivating reading culture in the formative age of their children. Parents must dedicate time and energy if they tend to achieve the best for their children. According to Santrock (2005), competent fathers of preschool children set aside regular time to be with their child, listen to the child and respond to questions, become more involved in the child's preschool and kindergarten activities.

Gauthier, Smeeding, and Furstenberg (2004) are of the view, that the time pressures to which today's parents are subjected to, would suggest that parents are devoting less time to their children as compared to 30 or 40 years ago. But in fact, time use data from Canada, the United States and several other industrialized countries suggest exactly the opposite. The authors rely on time use surveys collected between 1961 and 2000. From the survey it indicates that today's parents are spending substantially more time with their children. The increase in parental time has been especially strong for fathers. In the 1970's full-time employed married father's time allocation to childcare represented only 36% of mother's time. By the 1990's it had increased to 53% (for all countries). The authors went on further to say that parents have been able to preserve the time they spend with their children by sacrificing other activities including sleep. One possible explanation for the increase in parental time is that changes in societal norms may have called for increased reading time and for fathers to be more involved in their children's lives.

Reading Culture in Nigeria

A lot has been heard over the past couple of years about declining reading culture in Nigeria. Looking critically at Nigeria as a whole, lack of reading culture has been described as one of the major causes of the problems militating against the development of our society (Nigerian Tribune, 2010). The situation is even getting worse, because our leaders of tomorrow –our children- are growing up with even less attraction to books and serious reading. They appear to be more interested in television, especially the highly-addictive cartoon channels (Vanguard, 2009). Children should be discouraged from watching television all the time.

Wells (2009) is of the opinion, that a young child's growing mind needs active play and live conversation. Television puts a child into what neurologists call the 'Passive Alpha State'. A child cannot learn from screen because programs are meant to sell products not to teach. She further emphasized that television and video are now our national babysitters. Our popular television culture degrades the imagination, but children who read succeed and books boost the imagination.

The Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Irina Bokova (2010), on a review of the role of books in our constantly evolving world, appealed to policy-decision makers, publishers, educators and civil society to consider once again the most effective ways of promoting that irreplaceable tool of knowledge: The book.

More importantly, the fact that the reading culture in Nigeria is declining drastically and the observation is that Nigerians have poor reading culture, should be a great concern to everyone in our society. Nigerian children of today are in a disadvantaged position compared with their counterparts in other parts of the world. In more advanced countries, children from their first days of life are privileged to have access to the wonderful collections of children's books, well-stocked children libraries and many other recreational facilities which stimulate them and move forward to a brighter future. It is necessary to recognize and pay attention to our children of today to safeguard their future.

The current National Policy on Education (2004) highlights that government shall establish and monitor a minimum standard for early childcare centers in the country. It is expected that existence of library facilities in these pre-primary settings is part and parcel of the minimum standard set by the government.

A great number of these early learning settings are far away from realization of this standard. In the Nigerian community, many nursery schools can hardly be found to have library facilities, and this is detrimental to the children in their formative years. As Prosalkova (1991) stated, that the whole organism

of the children's library is aimed at awakening in the child the desire to understand the world and himself, to broaden his knowledge by turning to the book, to reading. Libraries in these schools can be used as a platform for storytelling sessions with group of children. Storytelling according to (Hume, 1988) is a natural and simple way of communication and enjoyment with roots in our universal past.

The National Policy on Education (2004) also stated that state and local governments shall establish public libraries and actively promote readership. This is a policy which is deserving of commendation. However, is this really happening? After nearly seven years of existence of the current National Policy on Education, it is sad to notice that within a radius of about 50 kilometers or even more of the town center of the surveyed community there is no single public or children library for use of the population.

For this to happen, government especially at the local level should re-emphasize the level of importance to the establishing of public and children libraries. Libraries have a contribution to make to child's development as well as building reading culture in the youngest generation. According to Prosalkova (1991), the public children library can through its collection become the bridge, which connects new generations with the culture of preceding generations, on the condition that it ensures the child's access to the finest examples of literature to the book he desires and needs not only in large cities, but in small settlements too.

We live in globalized world, we have to capture and put into effect the good things that parents, wealthy individuals, corporate organizations, governments do for their children in advanced countries. According to the United States Department of Education (2011), the President of the United States of America, Barrack Obama, is committed to providing the support that the youngest children need to prepare to succeed later in school. He supports a seamless and comprehensive set of services and support for children, from birth through age 5 because the President is committed to helping all children succeed-regardless of where they spend their day, he urges states to impose high standards across all publicly funded early learning settings, develop new programs to improve opportunities and outcomes, engage parents in their child's early learning and development, and improve the early education workforce.

Here in Nigeria, on the 20th of December, 2010 the nationwide campaign on promoting reading culture tagged "Bring Back the Book" was launched by the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan (Vanguard, 2010). This was a good push forward of the new ways of promoting reading culture in the country. The decision of the President to embark on this across the nation campaign showed interest in revamping the book industry and rebuilding the reading culture.

Out of concern over the dwindling reading culture in the country, children's book author and chairman of Leadership Editorial Board, Fatima Akilu, in June 2011, launched a campaign called the 100-Book Challenge. This challenge strives towards getting children to read 100 books a year - an average of two books a week. It notes that young readers can sign up for the program at their school or local library. In her words "children will get encouragement at every stage." The program will help interested schools to keep a log of how many books the whole school is reading. Parents will also help evaluate children's reading progress, and authors and celebrities will visit schools for interactive reading sessions. Individuals and schools with the highest readership will be publicly recognized for their effort (Sunday Punch, 2011). With effective implementation, such programs like these, without any doubt, will go a long way in improving the reading standard of our children and they should be encouraged.

It is important to invest in our children's education, particularly in their formative years, to provide a solid footing for them in time to come. According to Mustard (2002), the economic benefits of investing in early child development for society and individuals are very great. Bokova (2010), rightly stated that children were the most precious resource. With them our future lies, they are tomorrow's citizens, leaders and policy makers. By investing in the early years of the child, we shall all be enriched. In the words of Rosemary Wells (2011) reading to your little one is just like putting coins in the bank. It will pay you back tenfold. Your daughter will learn and imagine, and become strong in herself. Your son will thrive, and give your love back forever.

To build a strong platform of reading culture for the children, which is the foundation for their future, should we be concerned about the poor reading culture of our children? Yes, we should! This is a worrying situation. One can say that majority of Nigerian children particularly in their formative years, which are very crucial years in the child's life, are deprived of that opportunity of family bonding that is one of the central factors of cultivating the reading culture.

Creating strong family bonding is the primary responsibility of all parents across the world to make children feel that they are loved and needed. As parent we should not be too busy to have time for the development of our children. Parents must read as well. You cannot give to your child what you do not have. In Nigeria, mothers devote more time for child care and same applies to mothers in all other countries. Nigerian fathers should be more involved and be active in their child's development.

Great and positive changes will come to the nation if all parents are involved in the act of inculcating reading culture in their children early enough. It is expected that well educated parents will produce children with good reading culture. Is this truly so? Does Nigerian academia place a high value for reading culture of their children?

This study answers these questions as it focuses on the academic setting of the Covenant University.

Objectives of the Study

- Highlight the perception and practice of early childhood reading culture among the parents in the Covenant University by showing how much time parents spend reading to their children
- Highlight the benefits observed by parents as a result of the practice of early childhood reading.
- Reveal what the hindrances are, if any, to the early childhood reading culture among parents in the university community.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey, designed to look into the benefits in cultivating reading culture of children at the formative age (from birth to age of 7) and the degree of parental involvement in the reading culture of their children.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample study comprised two 211 parents (96 mothers and 115 fathers) in the university community. The research was based on the responses of the respondents to the questionnaire. Responses to the 211 questionnaires out of 253 purposively administered (representing 84.4 % retrieval rate) were collected.

Research Instrument

A specifically designed 20-item questionnaire with open and closed ended questions was used as a main instrument for data collection. The target population of the respondents for this study were academic and non-academic staff of the university.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Stata IC 11.2 statistical software, the percentage of respondents responses to the questionnaire was calculated.

Results

The results of the study indicated that there were in total 211 respondents out of the 253 sample size obtained from the population of parents in the Covenant University. The sample size comprised 115 men (54.5%) and 96 female (45.49%). The population is essentially a young population, as 49% of the respondents fall between the ages of 30 and 39, 27.6% between 40 and 49, while the smallest age group is above 60 (0.48%).

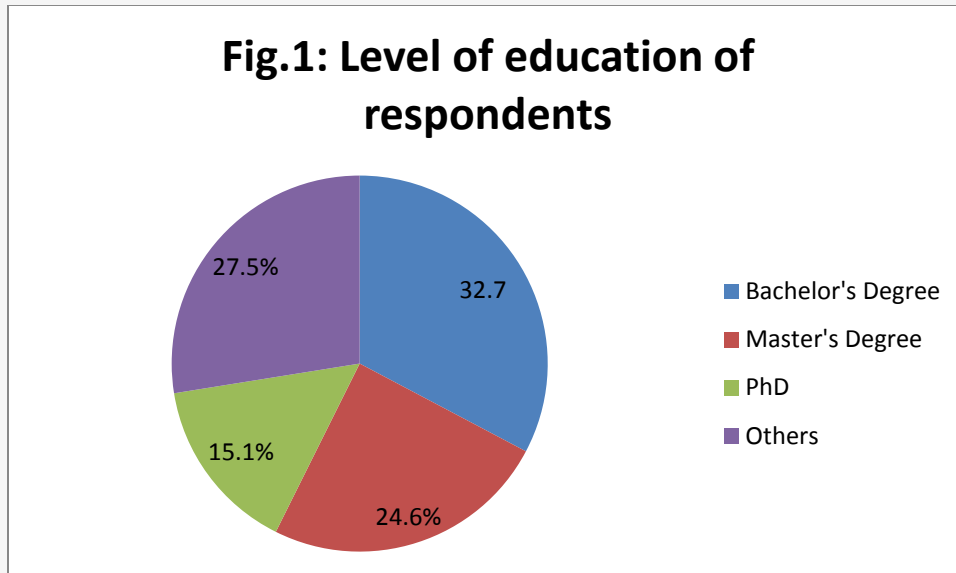


Figure1: Distribution of the level of education of the respondents.

Figure 1 displays that over a quarter of the respondents are Bachelor degree holders 32.7%, 24.6% were Master’s degree holders, 15.1% held PhD degree, while the rest were holders of professional Diplomas.

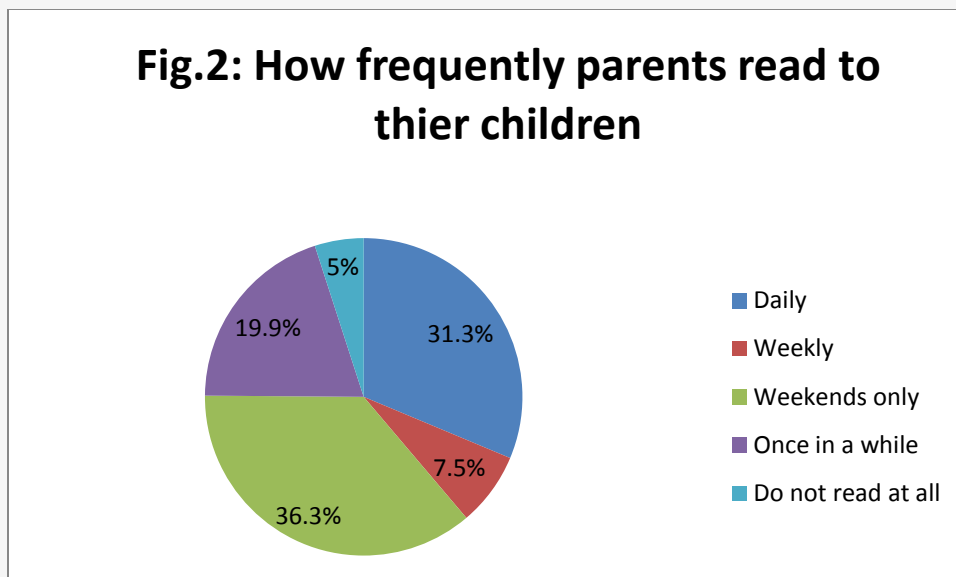


Figure 2: Pie chart showing how often parents read to their children.

The data illustrates that 95% of the respondents do take time out to read to their children, only 5% do not. This is encouraging, as it shows that most parents in the sample have a considerable reading habit, but there is still 5% left who will need to be reached out to. There were 9 non-respondents. Figure 2 displays, among the 95% respondents who read to their children 36.3% of them do so only during the weekends, 31.3% on a daily basis, 7.5% read to their children weekly, approximately 20% of them read to their children only once in a while. The 5% in the graph above represent the group of people who do not read to their children at all.

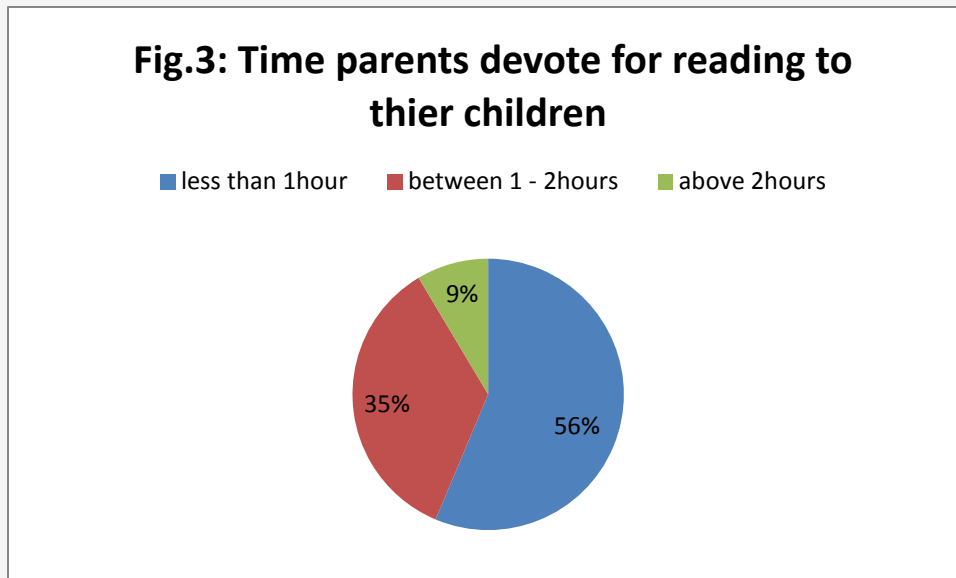


Figure 3: Amount of time respondents spend reading to their children in a day.

Figure 3 shows that majority (56%) of the respondents spend less than one hour a day reading to their children, 35% of the respondents devote between 1-2 hours for reading, only 9% of them spend more than 2hours.

Fig.4 : Type of books parents read to their children

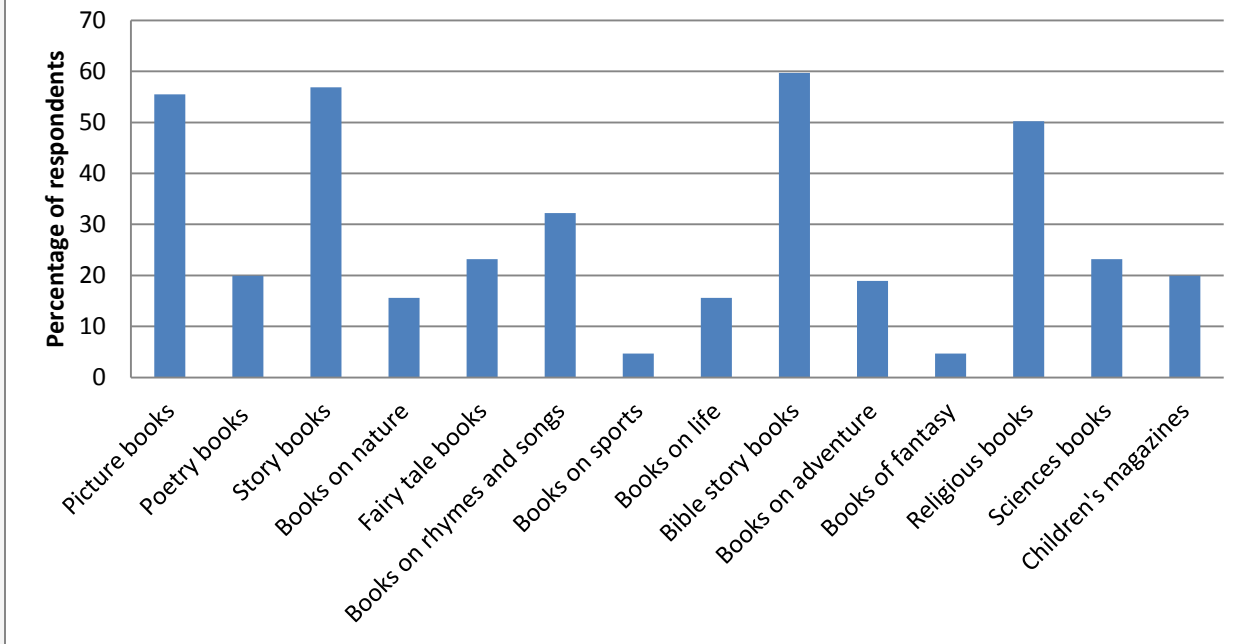


Figure 4: Type of books parents read to their children.

Figure 4 shows that parents read mainly picture books, bible story books and religious books to their children (55.5%, 59.7%, 50.2% respectively) while a few of them read books on poetry 19.9%, books on nature 15.6%, books on sports 4.7%, books on life 15.6% and children's magazines 19.9%. Others are books on science 23.22%, adventure books 18.9%, books on songs and rhymes 32.2%

Fig.5: Proportion of readers who purchase or borrow books from libraries

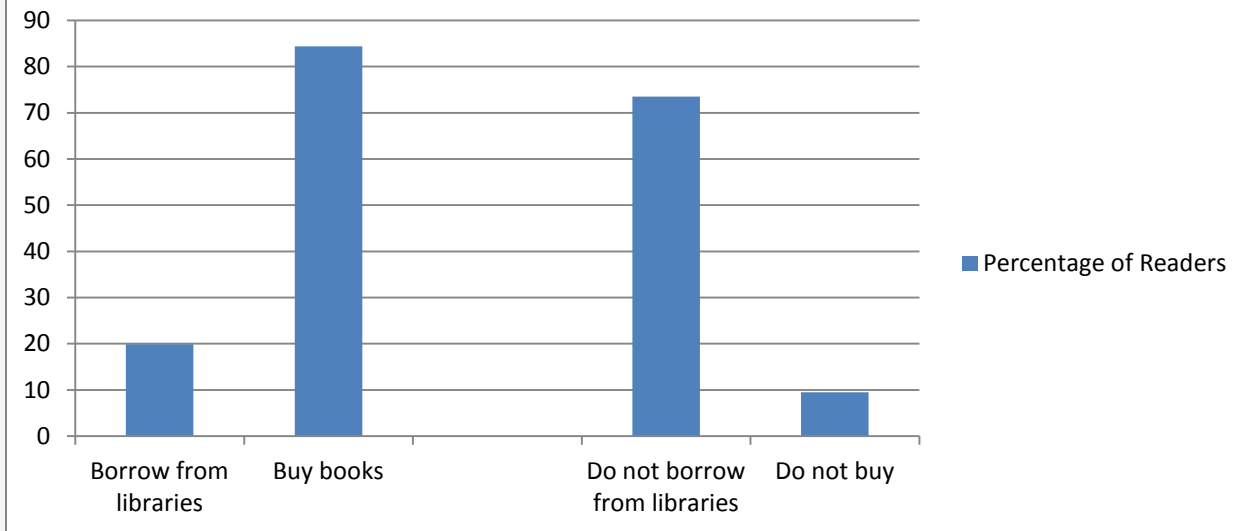


Figure 5: Proportion of readers who purchase or borrow books from libraries.

Figure 5 reveals that most of the respondents do not borrow books from libraries or from friends (78.7%, 73.4% respectively) for their children. Of those who read to their children, 22.7% of them borrow books from libraries or friends. However, a larger proportion of these readers (70.8%) neither borrow books from a library nor from a friend. For this group of people however, the data showed that they are the same proportion of people who purchase books more Figure 5.

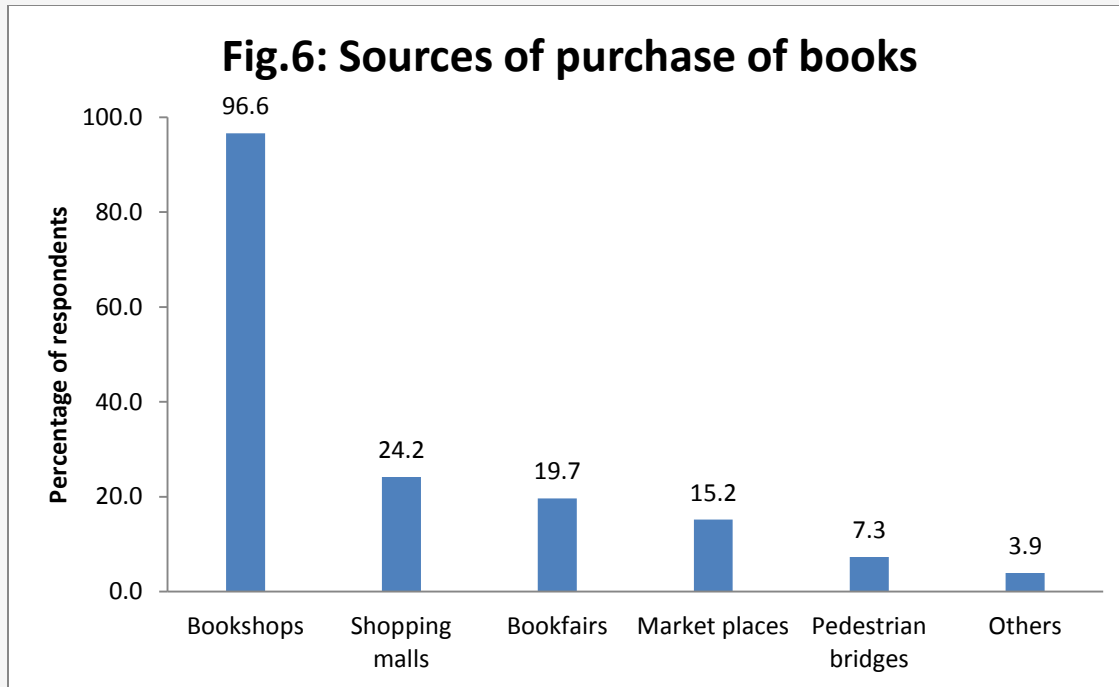


Figure 6 : The sources of purchase of books the respondents read to their children.

Looking at Figure 6, it is evident that majority of respondents buy books mainly from the bookshops (96.6%), shopping malls (24.2%), not many people buy books from book fairs, pedestrian bridges or market place (19.7%,15.2%,7.3% respectively) compared to the indoor stores. Other interesting sources of purchase (3.9%) are online, directly from the publishers, through a vendor and when the parents travel abroad .

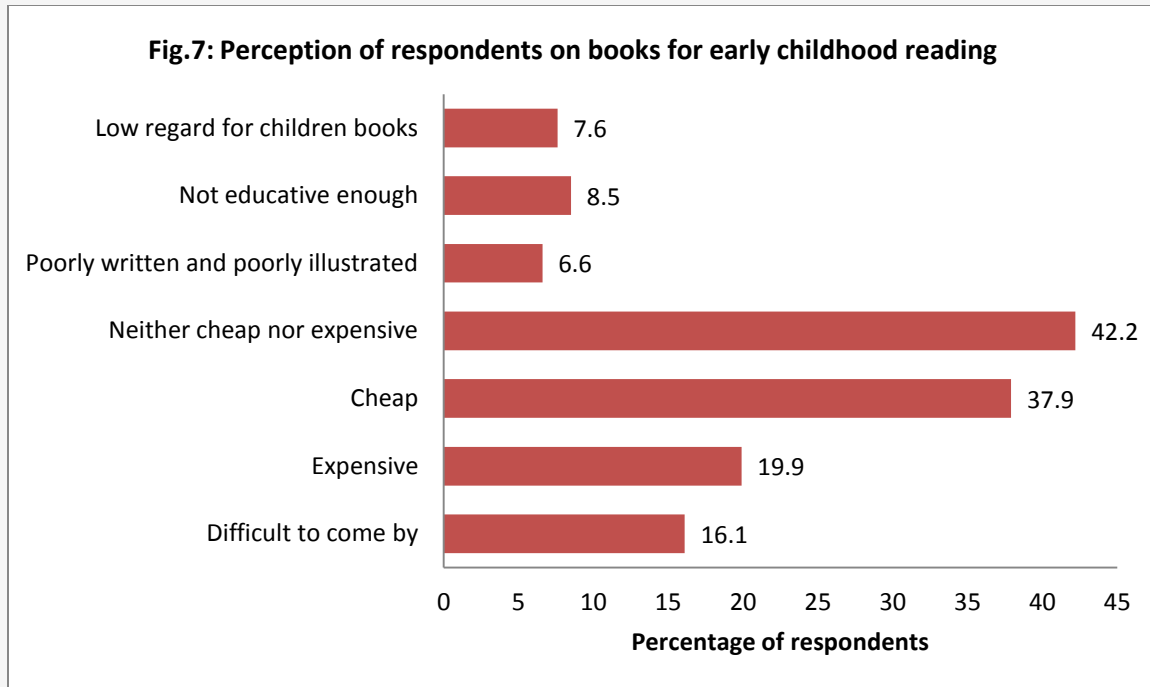


Figure 7: The perception of respondents on the cost and quality of the books.

Figure 7 reveals that most of the respondents perceived that the books for early childhood reading are not expensive. 42.2% were of the opinion that the books were neither cheap nor expensive, 37.9% considered the books cheap, only about 20% of respondents considered the books expensive. 16.1% of respondents were of the opinion that there is limited access to books for early childhood reading. Less than 10% of the respondents considered that the books available for children are poorly written or have low regard for children’s books, while 8.5% considered books not educative enough.

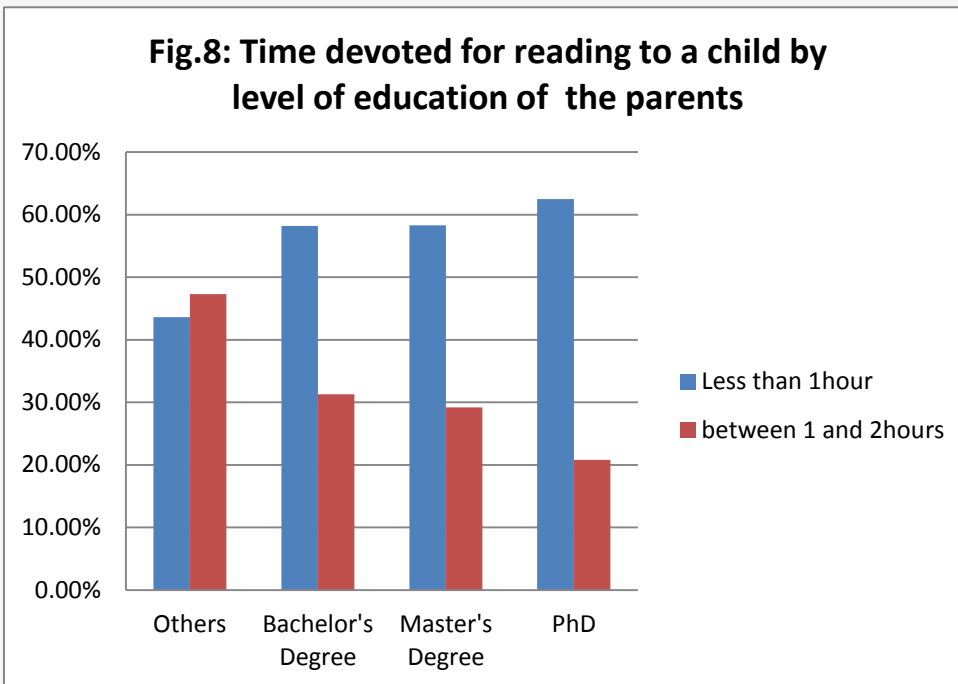


Figure 8: Time parents spend reading to their children by the highest level of education.

Figure 8 shows the relationship between the time spent by parents reading to their children and the highest level of education of the parents, 58.2% of parents who hold Bachelor degree devote less than 1 hour for reading to their child, while 31.3% of them devote between 1-2 hours. 65.5% of PhD holders spend less than 1 hour for reading to their child, while only 20.8% of them devote between 1 and 2 hours. 43.6% of professional Diploma holders “Others” spend less than 1 hour for reading, while the larger proportion of them (47.3%) set aside between 1 and 2 hours. The trend observed in Masters degree holders for time spent reading is very similar to that observed among the Bachelor degree holders.

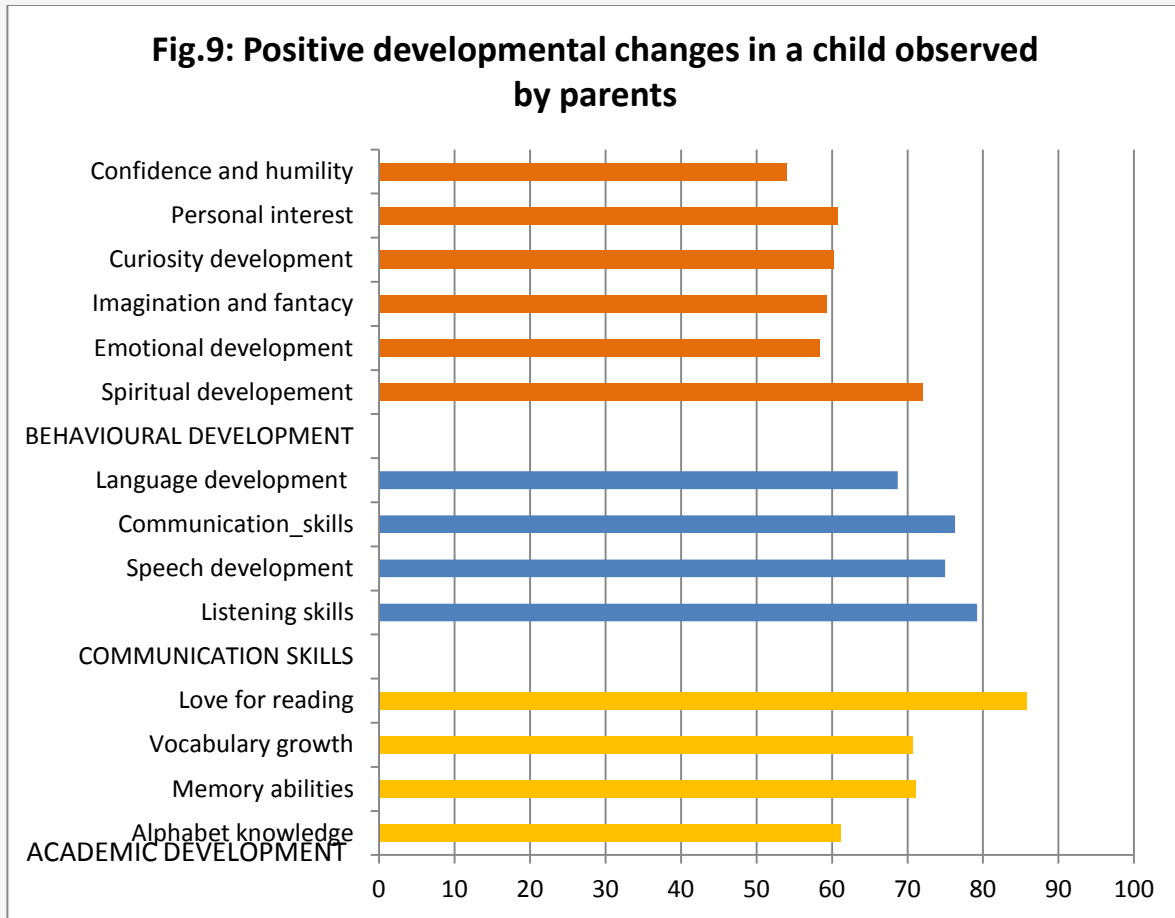


Figure 9: Positive observable development resulting from early childhood reading by parents to their children.

Observed child development was grouped into 3 categories: behavioral development, academic development and development of communication skills. Behavioral development includes spiritual and emotional development, improvement in imagination and fantasy, curiosity, development of personal interest, confidence and humility. Communication skills development includes speech and language development, listening skill development. While academic development includes vocabulary growth, development of in memory abilities, alphabet knowledge and love for reading.

Majority of respondents observed these types of early childhood development in their children (82.5% behavioral development, 88.8% academic development, 86.9% communication skills development). Of the proportion of respondents who admit to spending less than 1 hour reading to their children, majority of them observe a high degree level of academic development (97.2%), behavioural development (93.4%) and communication skills development (97.2%) in their children, this trend is similar to that among respondents who spend more than 1 hour reading to their children Figure 8.

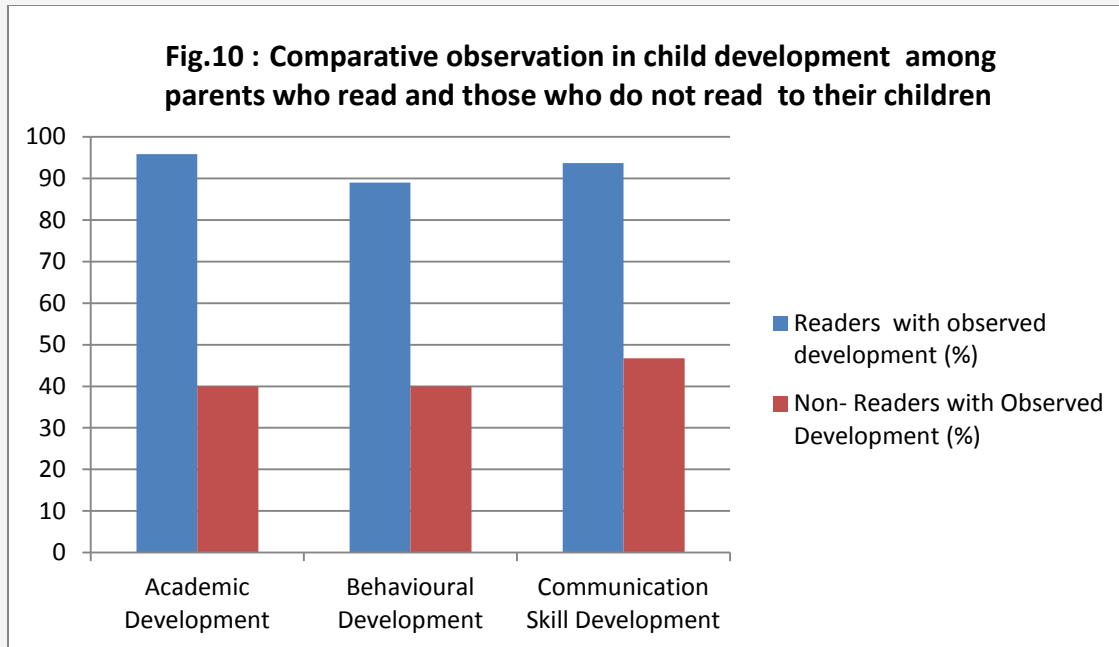


Figure 10: A comparative observation in child development among parents who read and those who do not read to their children.

Figure 10 reveals that academic development was more observed among parents (95.8%) who read to their children, communication skill development was more observed among parents (93.7%) who also read to their children, while behavioral development was (89%) for readers and non-readers (40%) only.

Fig.11 : Common problems encountered by parents in association with early childhood reading culture

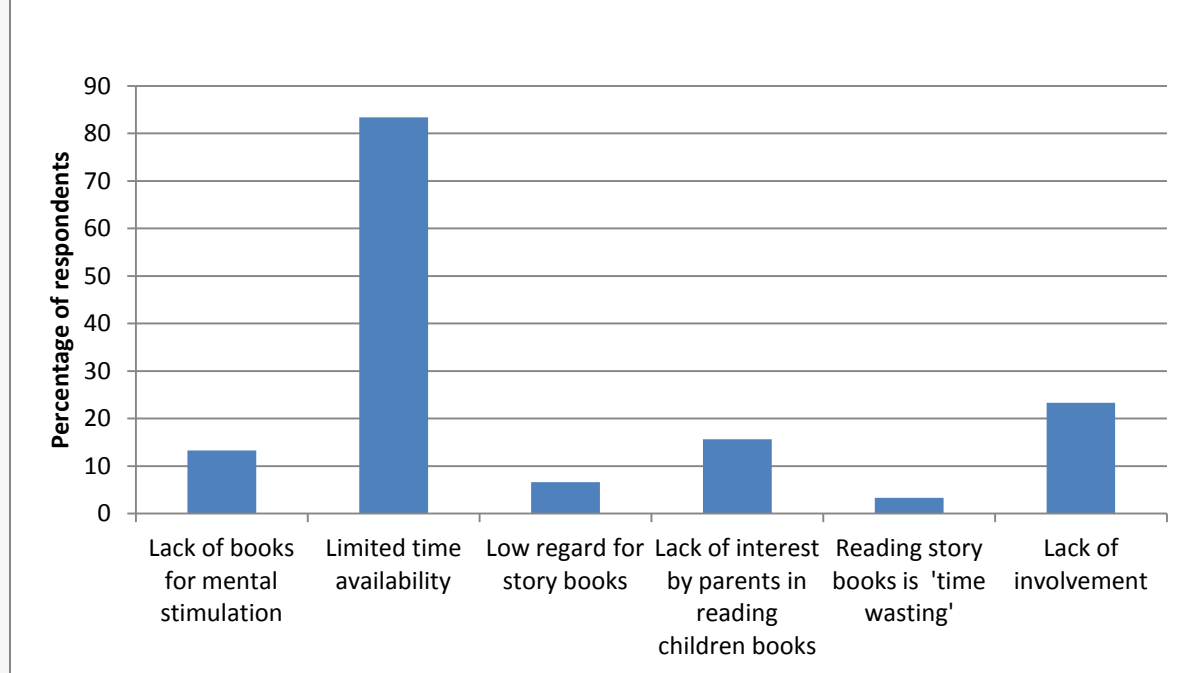


Figure 11: Problems parents encounter in association with early childhood reading activities.

Figure 11 shows the various constraints experienced by parents in the practice of early childhood reading culture. The biggest problem encountered is time availability (83.4%), 13.27% of them say there are not enough children’s books for mental stimulation, in 15.6% of cases there is lack of interest by parents in reading children’s books and lack of parental involvement accounts for 23.3% of cases. Only 3.3% of respondents though, reading to children is a waste of time. Others perceived problems identified by the respondents were: “gaining child’s concentration is a challenge in most cases”, “had to make extra effort to maintain consistency in reading to the child”, “child cannot concentrate for a long time”, “initial response of a child could be discouraging”, “poor reading habit”.

This study revealed, that 87.7% of the respondents disagree that pre-school learning activities provided by nursery school is sufficient without parental involvement in ensuring proper growth and development of the child. 95.2% of them admit reading to their children, while only 4.8% admitted not. Findings from the study showed, that 79% of the respondents acknowledged having home collection of children’s books, out of which 77.2% of them have a collection of less than 50 books, while 12.8% have more than 50 books in their collection.

Discussion

Despite an impressive early childhood reading culture illustrated by the results in this study, by the large proportion of respondents (95.2%) who read to their children, they read to their children mainly on the weekends. This shows that most of the parents do not have time during the week and have to wait till the weekend to devote time to the children for reading. This is not surprising as it is common occurrence in

our environment where parents go to work, staying late and returning home tired with little time for themselves let alone to read to their children.

The study also reveals that among those parents who read to their children, buy books more than they use libraries, so in as much as there is a good reading culture among the respondents, there is a poor habit of borrowing books from libraries. The reason is that there are no public or children libraries for the community to utilize. In this case parents would be compelled to buy the books. The few libraries that are available in the surveyed area are those that belong to the few schools and universities, and these libraries contain mainly text books.

A large proportion of the respondents buy books from the bookshops (96.6%), it is suspected that majority of the books bought in the book stores would be text books for the child's nursery school studies and not books for leisure reading. It is common to find bookshops in Nigeria selling more of texts books than books for leisure reading, this might account for the higher proportion of respondents buying from the bookshops. Not many book fairs are held in our environment and when there are, these book fairs are focused on a target audience like secondary schools and universities. Even when they are incorporated in a commercial fair like the Lagos International Trade Fair, the parents are more interested in goods for commercial purposes other than books for childhood reading. On the whole, parents seldom buy children's books outside the ones recommended in schools that are made compulsory. They do not consider it as important as school textbooks.

From Figure 6, it is evident that the proportion of respondents who buy books from shopping malls, market places and pedestrian bridges appear very low compared to that of those who buy from bookshops. Putting aside the large proportion of respondents who buy books from the bookshops (96.6%) and comparing the proportion of people who buy books from shopping malls and book fairs (24.2%, 19.7% respectively), to those who buy from market places and pedestrian bridges (15.2%, 7.3% respectively) not much difference can be seen. It can be said that, the latter two sources play the role of impulse purchasing of books which plays a participatory role to the development of reading culture. Sales of books on pedestrian bridges, market places, and commercial buses are not the ideal for purchase of children's books due to issue of book piracy in our country, but is however, very common in our environment. Nevertheless, the pirated books are accessible and affordable for people especially of low-income status. The low proportion of respondents in this study who buy books from the market places and pedestrian bridges may be explained by the considerable high level of education of the respondents and the high level of their awareness about the issue of book piracy in Nigeria.

The issue of childhood reading culture is not a question of cost or availability of books as seen in this study Figure 7. Majority of the respondents considered that the books are not so expensive. This goes to show that cost is not a deterrent to childhood reading culture in this population of people. A smaller proportion of them were of the opinion that the books were cheap (37.9%). The respondents perceived books for childhood reading to be of good quality and well written. This shows that they have a good perception of the quality, availability, accessibility and cost of the books for early childhood reading. These are common factors that tend to deter people from reading books to their children in our society. This however, does not seem to affect the respondents in our study, which explains the reason for the good childhood reading culture observed in them. This study also highlighted the fact that parents place great emphasis on imparting religious values in their children by reading books on religion to them, like bible stories and other religious books. This is not surprising as the study population was drawn from Christian Mission University.

Results showed in general that majority of parents (56%) devote less than 1 hour to read to their child in a day Figure 3. When comparing the amount of time respondents spend on reading to their children and their level of education, it was found that respondents with a higher level of education spend more often less than one hour, while those with a lower level of education Figure 8 "Others" which represent professional Diploma holders, tend to spend more time between 1 to 2 hours. It is normal to assume that people with a higher level of education will spend more time reading to their children as they are well informed about the numerous benefits associated with early childhood reading culture. However, this study revealed an inverse relationship. The trend highlighted in Figure 8 may be explained by the fact that

people with higher level of education have more time constraints, they tend to be preoccupied with work, studies or research and might not be able to afford much time for reading to their children. Duration of time devoted to reading to children is one of the numerous factors that affect child development, other factors like quality of tuition, learning environment, psychological status of the child and, etc., have not been taken into account in this study. If these factors were considered, the proportions observed may have been different. The same applies to behavioural and communication skills developments. Factors such as parents income, socio-economic status of the parents have to be considered to determine the actual role early childhood reading plays in the development of a child. Parents who read or do not read to their children will observe development in their children because there are numerous other factors that contribute to a child's development some of which are innate abilities of the child, social environment, well-being of the parents and, etc. This is clearly shown in Figure 10 as the proportion of children whose parents read to them with positive observed development is higher than those whose parents do not. However, the proportion of respondents who read to their children and observe growth in the various aspects of development mentioned earlier, clearly out way the proportion of those who do not read and either observe development or not. Generally behavioral development was the least observed among respondents (89%) for readers and (40%) for non-readers, this might be because of the complexity and subjectivity in assessing a child's personal interest, spiritual and emotional development at their tender age. Other observations perceived by the parents were: " improves relationship at home with kids ", "love for parents and improve intimacy", "children are more inquisitive, asking questions all the time".

Figure 11 shows that it is not uncommon to find that the major constraints parents encounter in the practice of early childhood reading is that of time availability, especially among working class parents and those who are very much career oriented. Most parents are interested in their child's development, but do not have time to spend reading to their children, these children spend most of their time with nannies who at most have only basic education or none at all in which case the child is left to discover the world on his own.

Some respondents felt there were not enough books for mental stimulation, which is highly debatable seeing that there are a lot of books on fantasy that will help stimulate the child mentally. The problem here in Nigeria is that of availability of books.

The study also revealed that most of the respondents (87.7%) are of the opinion that learning activities provided by nursery schools are not sufficient for child development without parental involvement, this is important to note and it is highly commendable. It is becoming a norm now, that parents have begun to neglect their duties in the early development of their children, relying on the teachers in nursery schools since they pay heavy tuitions in these schools for their children. Majority of parents, even academics do not value involvement with a child in early stage. At this period of development, children form over 70% of the habit they carry on with in life. The role of parents and the home in general in the development of a child in the formative years is crucial and must not be overlooked.

Conclusion

The practice of early childhood reading among parent in the university is high (95.2%) and the respondents have a good perception on the need and importance of early childhood reading. On the average parents in this study spend at least one hour reading to their children but mainly during the weekends due to time constraints during the week. Parents who devote time to read to their children observed more developmental changes than those who do not. However, limited time availability on the part of parents in devoting time for reading to their children is still a major obstacle in molding reading culture. Lack of parental involvement is another hindrance which affects negatively the development of reading culture of our children. Parent should create time for reading to their children out of their busy schedule, especially during children's formative age. Scarcity of children's books and the absence of children libraries in the country is highly detrimental for cultivating of reading culture. This research is timely and very important for further research development. It is a wake-up call to all parents to be fully involved in cultivating reading culture in their children in the formative age, because it is the right way to

set a brighter future for our children and for Nigeria as a whole. Reading culture without any doubt is crucial and should be integrated in our society.

Limitations

1. Parents with children below the age of 7 years had problems assessing their child's development as they might have been too young.
2. Parents with more than one child would have difficulty answering the questionnaire, as child development differs from child to child.
3. There is a high tendency for recall bias among respondents in terms of time spent in reading, and how often they read to the children.
4. This study is limited to the Covenant University community where the level of education of the respondents and access to books is much higher than the general population in Nigeria. For these reasons the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of the country.

Recommendations

Despite the fact that this study is confined to a particular university community, it may not be out of place to extend the research recommendations to embrace a broader population of the country. Further studies should be conducted on a larger population of people from various backgrounds and socioeconomic status, so that a clearer picture of the situation can be revealed.

Parents

- Early childhood reading culture can be improved when parents set aside time regularly for reading to their children. They should create quality time for the children and develop such closeness, love and passion in being in children's world to make reading time interesting with their children.
- Every parent should endeavor as much as possible within the constraint of their time to nurture a good desire and interest for qualitative reading with their children. Reading should be an everyday exercise to achieve worthy of praise results. However, parents should not put undue pressure on their children, while developing reading culture in them.
- Parents who do not have reading culture cannot develop that in their children. Parents must have a reading culture. Without this the battle is already lost.
- Parents should invest in purchasing of books for their children, appreciate children reading materials, they need to see book acquisition as an investment and not a waste. Parents should all the time budget for children's books.
- Home library can be created by parents for their children with children's books and it can be placed in a conspicuous area in the house to attract attention of the children and sense of treasure of the books should be developed in their children.
- The amount of time spent watching television, videos (for parent) work on the internet should be severely curtailed in order to create time for their beloved children.
- Parent should communicate with their children in English from early childhood, as this will boost the child's level of understanding and reasoning.

Government

- The Federal Government of Nigeria has to proclaim the promotion of reading culture as one of the top priorities in its educational policy. Reading culture should be promoted through partnership between public and private sectors. Government and individuals should be involved in the distribution of books written for children.
- State and local governments should establish libraries in every local government to promote and encourage reading by the populace.
- Federal Government should endeavor to equip all schools with standard libraries and these libraries should be well stocked with current literature.

- Government should establish play grounds and have in-built children libraries in every local government.
- Books for early childhood should be subsidized by the Nigerian Government. Import duty on books and educational materials for children should be removed by the government to make books accessible and affordable for children development. Government should support the Nigerian writers of children's books.

Libraries

- Establishment of community children libraries will greatly improve reading culture of the children.
- As a matter of policy, nursery schools should have well functioning libraries with well-stocked children story books and other interesting children's books which can be available for home loan, while the libraries should be manned by a librarian. Storytelling sessions in nursery schools libraries should be introduced and carried out on a regular basis as it is important way to secure love for reading in our children.
- Universities having residential quarters should establish children's libraries in their communities to give opportunity for improvement of their staff children.
- Creating children's reading clubs.

Public Awareness for Parents on Reading Culture

- To educate parents on the great importance of cultivating reading culture of their children during the formative age (from birth to age of 7).
- Educative programs should be designed for parents through television, radio, cinema, journals, newspapers on the need to embrace early childhood reading.
- Create awareness among parents on the necessity to be adequately involved in their children's education.
- There should be deliberate increased awareness of the general public in Nigeria on the requirements for increased reading culture among children with the involvement of parents.

Children's Books

- Children's books should be educative, entertaining, with colorful pictures to catch children's attention. Books should be written with familiar language and they should be easy to read.
- Most indigenous children's books are poorly worded and poorly illustrated. Picture books with Nigerian setting are uncommon. Indigenous authors should be encouraged to reflect our culture and moral values. Quality of indigenous books needs to be improved here in Nigeria, so that they will be books worth reading.
- Book publishers should ensure that they produce standard books for children, at affordable prices and in sufficient quantity.
- Children's books should be available and affordable in bookshops across the nation for accessibility to parents to purchase in order to discourage buying pirated books. The Nigerian society should be interested in children's books.
- Book fairs should be organized in schools, creating a platform for interaction between parents, publishers of children's books and other stakeholders as well as making books available at affordable prices for purchase.
- Individuals should consider giving children's books to the children during their birthday celebration and other occasions.

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