

Perception of Teachers about the Role of Parents in Developing Reading Habit of Basic Level Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions about the role of parents in developing the reading habit of children to improve academic performance. In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, which enabled me in capturing qualitative experiences, opinions, beliefs, and perceptions of purposefully selected participants. The participants were three basic level English teachers from Rupandehi district, Lumbini Province, Nepal. Social constructivism of Vygotsky (1978) has been used as a theory in this study. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The study confirmed that parents' involvement is crucial in developing children's reading habits. The parents' continuous support in reading further enhances the academic performance of the children. The study helped me understand how children's reading habits enable them to learn English from childhood, which thrives for further educational enhancement. It particularly appeals to and makes parents aware of their influential role in helping children begin reading habits at home.

Key words: Reading habit, parents' role, reading materials, home environment

'If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.' Albert Einstein

Introduction

People believe that reading is the pillar of all-round educational development of a child. It is equally valid that children are the future pillars of any nation. Thus, a good reading habit is one of the fundamental language skills children should possess since childhood, especially in Nepal where English is learned as a foreign language. Children can develop vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation and exercise creative and critical thinking through reading. Children who read the text extensively help them learn language incidentally. That also helps develop their positive attitudes when reading books when immersed in a meaningful text (Elley, 1991). Moreover, reading habits help children develop overall language proficiency.

Reading is important for children for gaining experience in life, realizing the eternal truth, i.e. the truth of human life, death, nature, and the entire cosmos. Reading provides experience through which the individual may expand horizons of knowledge, identify, extend, and intensify

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interest, and gain deeper understanding of himself, other human beings, and the world (Akande&Oyedepo, 2018). If it is developed as a habit, it enhances individual self-confidence, and moral and intellectual development. Individuals with good reading habits have the chance to widen their mental horizons and to multiply their opportunities (Loan, 2009). Apart from textual materials, they need to be introduced with different non-textual materials that are of their interest and level.

Home is the first informal school for children. They learn lots of things at home before they go to school, and so is the case with reading habits. Parents play a crucial role in developing the reading culture at home as children grow up listening to many moral stories from their grandparents and parents in the context of Nepal. Children are naturally attracted and interested in listening to stories from their elders. In our culture, many children develop reading habit by listening to and reading *Swasthani BartaKatha* i.e. it is a Hindu tale recited everyday for a month, which mostly falls in January and February. Those stories create and strengthen emotional bonds between children and parents and are the way for interaction among them. The culture of storytelling at home makes children happy, content, imaginary, and critical thinkers. This interest and passion can be directed to the useful habit of book reading and studying. Apart from that, parents can also encourage their children in reading habit by bringing appropriate books; taking them to the library and helping them select appropriate books. Children are also influenced by the reading habits of their parents. The more they see their parents reading, more they get influenced by themselves.

The Research Context

After my SLC, I was enjoying my leisure time; one day, my father came to me with a book named “Merchant of Venice” by William Shakespeare and asked me to read it. I went through the book but hardly understood the content. However, it was the book that helped me arouse interest in reading. Now I realize, though I was encouraged to read something out of the course by my parents in my teenage years, it was never late.

As an ELT practitioner, I have many years of experience in teaching from basic level to university level. My experience speaks that students of basic level show less interest in reading even the textual materials in our context, especially in government-aided schools that results in poor reading performance in future. As a result, their overall academic achievement gets affected. Similarly, many parents assume that children start reading habits on their own after they start schools. Furthermore, in the present world many children are fond of digital devices for entertainment. They play games and watch videos most of the time in comparison to reading books at home. Due to technology, children spend most of their time playing games, watching television and surfing the internet. So they give little time for reading (Bano, Jabeen, & Qutoshi, 2018). My own two kids who are at basic level are the evident, though I encourage them in reading their textual materials and also give exposure of other non-textual

materials of their interest and level. In fact, the role of parents in encouraging children to read other non-textual reading materials of their level and interest occupies very little space in Nepalese context in comparison to the western world. Schools and teachers are the sole responsible factors for building better careers for students, is a common root belief among parents. Consequently, children learn better language and reading skills throughout childhood (Hoff, 2003, as cited in Eccles, 2005). Though there are many socio-economic challenges i.e. poor economic condition of the family hinders children from getting a warm, supportive, and consistent home environment for their education (Eccles, 2005). Despite the challenges, parents need to be made aware of their role in developing reading habits in their children by teachers, school administration, and government agencies. Moreover, parents and teachers need to establish a strong relationship through parent-teacher' meetings, close monitoring and facilitation so that they can develop reading habits at home and at school. This in turn, may further contribute towards high academic achievement. In collaboration with government, community schools and institutional schools can play important role in establishing public libraries so that younger children get opportunity to read more since childhood because good reading habits could serve as a panacea to socio-economic and political problems (Akande & Oyedapo, 2018).

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perception of teachers about the role of parents in developing the reading habits of children for enhancing better academic performance. To achieve this objective, I seek to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perception of the teachers on reading habits of children
2. What role do parents play in developing reading habits in their children?
3. How does reading habit enhance better academic performance in children?

Literature Review

Based on the reading of relevant literature, the habit of reading is important for young kids. It is essential for widening experiences and knowledge. With a good reading habit, students will inevitably attain success in their academic endeavors (Green, 2002).

In this study I use the theory of social constructivism which believes that language use depends upon the processes of social interchange. Hence, meaning is achieved through social interdependence. In this regard, Vygotsky (1978) argued that a child gets involved in a dialogue with the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) such as a peer or an adult, and gradually, through social interaction and sense-making. In other words, social constructivism believes that knowledge is actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment. I believe that home environment is very important for children to form any type of habit. Moreover, Vygotsky (1962) used the term scaffolding in his theory of social constructivism, in which he stated that children learn more effectively when they have others to support them. Based on this theory, reading habits can be developed as a culture and children

can be better readers if they are helped, guided, and supported by their parents or elders at home before going to school and then their teachers and peers at school.

A study on 'What Makes EFL Students Establish Good Reading Habits in English' showed that the EFL student's reading habit in English is established if they live in a good literacy environment with parents reading them aloud, have regular reading motivation and good reading habits in English (Iftanti, 2015). Thus, the home environment encourages children in reading. If parents help them read stories aloud regularly, they certainly get motivated and become better readers. Similarly, Bano et al. (2018) studied on 'Perception of Teachers about the Role of Parents in Developing Reading Habits of Children to improve their Academic Performance. The findings showed that if parents focus on reading improvement of their children in early ages, they can develop reading better as a routine activity.

Exploring the reading habits of basic level students is the area of my interest. Many studies have been conducted on reading skills and reading comprehension of the students as well as of teachers in Nepal. As a researcher, the reading habits of the basic level students need to be explored because reading habits can be best developed in childhood as it is the foundation period for any type of development. At the same time, parents are the first teachers of the children; their role in developing it is the main focus of the study. So this study will be different from other studies in its purpose, methodology, and findings.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the role of parents in developing the reading habits of their children. This study is a qualitative study, which aims to penetrate the essential meaning of human experience, to focus on the phenomenon or thing to generate understanding from within (Richards, 2003). I use interpretive paradigm in the study as understanding of the other in their context being one of the participants myself being a parent of two children and an English teacher as interpretive paradigm demands the researcher to understand the social phenomena "through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher" (Cohen et al., 2008). Furthermore, interpretive researcher relied upon the research work on qualitative data gathered from open ended interviews.

The participants of this study were three basic level English teachers from the three different government-aided schools in Rupandehi, in mid-western Nepal. All the participants had more than a half decade of experience in teaching. I collected data through semi-structured interviews which helped me to get qualitative experiences, opinions, information and perceptions of teachers about the role of parents in developing reading habits of the children. Furthermore, it also helped me collect data about practices and school-parent interactions. There were 15 questions altogether but I was flexible enough to ask other interconnected questions, as it was research about developing reading habits of the basic level students, which is a big area of discourse in academia. All the participants were made sure of confidentiality

before they were interviewed. The interview was recorded digitally taking the permission of the participants and then it was transcribed. Data were analyzed and transcribed thematically. Hence, in this study, I want teachers' voices heard on their perception about the role of parents in developing reading habits of their children at home as a culture.

Results and Discussion

The main aim of the study was to explore the perception of teachers about the role of parents in developing the reading habits of children for enhancing better academic performance. This idea of reading habits coincides with the theory of social constructivism of Vygotsky (1978) where he talks about More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and scaffolding. For this study, three basic level teachers of government-aided schools were interviewed and their responses were recorded digitally. The data were analyzed and transcribed thematically. Analysis of the data revealed three different categories: perception of teachers on reading habit; their perception about the role of parents in developing the reading habit of their children at home, and their views on the impact of reading habit for enhancing better academic performance.

Teachers' perception on reading habit

Developing reading habits in children at the basic level is the crucial part of this study. However, teachers' perception of the parental role in developing it is the prime concern. So as a researcher, before entering into the main issue of the study, I wanted first to get some ideas from the teachers regarding the reading habits of the children. It is because, if teachers have some basic concepts and understanding about the issue, then only they can further talk about the parental role in developing it. Therefore, in the interview, I began with the first question of the study to get their perception and understanding about the reading habit. In the response to the first question on the perception of the teacher on reading habits of the children, one of the participants views that reading skill is fundamental to develop other language skills. Therefore it needs to be developed as habit since childhood especially at home bringing colorful books to them. In this regard, she supports the view put forward by Ilogho (2015) who states that picture books are best to be introduced in the beginning.

In the same way another participant is found to be very close with the first participant that reading is a fundamental language skill. If it is developed as habit since childhood, children get rich exposure of other different people, places and their culture which supports Lazar (1996) who writes that reading literary materials represent not only the life in the real world, but also the culture of the society in the text.

Role of parents in developing the reading habit of the children

This study is focused on the parental role in developing reading habit of the children. The basic level teachers who deal with children and consider that parents and home environment

are crucial in academic performance of the students, were asked to give their perception about the role of parents on it. Regarding the question to the teachers about the role of parents in developing the reading habit of their children, one participant said that good parenting is more important than good schooling as the first teacher of a child is the parents and the first school is their home. Children can feel free to learn at home, therefore, parents need to guide their children in reading habit and then develop it as a culture. This view is close to the theory of scaffolding of Vygotsky (1962) which states that children learn effectively when they are helped and supported by others. In response to the same question, another participant said that those students are fluent in reading who are supported by their parents.

Their response i.e. good parenting is more important than good schooling and parents are the first teachers and home is the first school of a child is very much close to Vygotsky's theory (1978) of social constructivism which states that knowledge is actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment. Therefore, home environment of the child is crucial for children to begin reading and then for developing it as a habit/culture. Furthermore, healthy reading habit helps him/her to develop critical and analytic skills that make them ready to face and deal with problems in the later life. Unfortunately, in the context of Nepal, a developing country, many parents of government aided schools are not much aware, educated and economically sound to help their children bring reading materials and develop reading habit at home in comparison to developed countries (Hanifi, F., Karamali, A., Zohreei, M.A., & Amini, Z., 2017). One of my participants stated that *...the parents of my students are the wage workers and they have poor economic condition*. In this situation, teachers, school administrations, policy makers, local and central government need to work on making parents aware about the importance of reading habit in children and their roles in helping them develop it. Despite having some challenges i.e. education and economic condition, parents can be made aware on creating a reading environment at home (Vygotsky, 1978). Here I remember my late mother who was illiterate, used to make us read and write sitting next to us and did household things. Moreover, she used to hire a village teacher named Amar sir as our tutor to guide three of us at home, as my father who was educated, stayed away from us due to his job at a bank. Now I realize that my mother was good at creating a learning environment at home despite being uneducated herself.

In my view, in these conditions, the concerned authority first needs to bring awareness raising programs for parents. Schools can have parental meetings regularly and discuss on the importance of reading habit and their crucial role in helping children develop it at home. Similarly, the local government can conduct trainings for parents in negotiation with the training associations i.e. NELTA (Nepal English Language Teachers Association), TPDT (Teachers' Professional Development Training) etc.

Strategies for developing reading habit

From the above findings it is clear that parents' role is vital in developing the reading habit of the children. However, simply bringing the age appropriate books for children is not enough as developing reading habit is a process. Parents need to follow some strategies for helping children develop reading as a habit.

Creating family reading time for children: The research participants said that in today's fast world, everyone is busy, so is the case of parents. Despite this, they need to devote some time for reading for their children. They should read stories for their children in the beginning stage. This view of participants is linked with the idea of social constructivism of Vygotsky (1978) which asserts that children learn more when they interact with More knowledgeable other (MKO) or their parents. In this case, reading habit of the children gets formed and developed as habit if they listen stories from their parents and are helped to read them. When parents read stories for their children, they get opportunity to listen and practice pronunciation of words. But in case of two participants most of the children belong to poor socio-economic family background; their parents are the daily wage workers. So they neither have time nor have any skill to help children develop reading habit. In fact, they are not well educated to help their children in their reading. In this context, Baker and Walde (1999) points out that parents, who lack basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills, cannot be expected to help their children improve learning. In this case, there might be other family members at home i.e. his/her elder brother/sister, uncle/aunt or anyone educated in neighborhood, who could help the child in reading. This is again the responsibility of the parents to create reading environment of the child with other.

Similarly, another participant said that there are few educated parents, who visit school regularly and inquire about the performance of their children. Most of the parents are farmers and daily wage workers. So they even don't have time to come to school. From these responses, I learn that many parents of the government aided schools lack education, awareness, and skills in developing reading habit of their children. As a result, they are not able to help and guide their children in developing reading habit. There seems to be a great responsibility of teachers, school administrators, government agencies to raise awareness program especially to parents about the importance of reading habit and their role in developing it as a habit to their children at home under their guidance.

Bring colorful books/ Read aloud : The participants said that parents can buy colorful books for their children, as children love to read comic books or books having the images of cartoons i.e. Motu and Patlu in the outer cover. Moreover, the books need to be age appropriate and based on the interest of the children. This idea coincides with Ilogho (2015) who states that reading picture books stimulates and advances the imagination and thinking of the children. Imagination and thinking ability of the children help them get meanings of the text and beyond. Furthermore, their creativity gets sharpened. In the beginning days, parents need to

help children reading aloud for them. However, poor economic condition undermines parents' ability to provide a warm, supportive, and consistent home environment for their children. As a result it becomes difficult for children to fully engage in learning opportunities provided by the school (Eccles, 2005). Hence, poor economic family background of the students is one of the hindrances in developing reading habit of the children in this area.

Take children to library and book fair: Participants said that parents need to take their children to public/school library and book fair. This helps them realize that reading is important in one's life and slowly they develop it as a habit. Children who visit library are smarter. Similarly participants said that schools have enough reading materials in the library. Rural Education and Development (READ) Nepal, Karuna Girls, Early Grade Reading Program (EGRP) etc. are helping schools providing many books and other materials for students. Ilogho (2015) states that school libraries must have reading materials that will meet the reading needs of all categories of readers especially picture books and libraries need to be decorated with pictures all over the reading environment for children ages 1-5 years. Regarding book fair, one participant said, *READ Nepal organizes book fair every year in the schools. Parents are invited to observe this with their children. This is helping parents to be aware on the importance of reading for their children somehow.* However, there are neither public libraries nor book fair for children from the government side. Nevertheless, EGRP of the government has been playing influential role in promoting reading skill of the children in last few years.

Teach children through technology: This is the age of information and technology. Many parents use digital devices i.e. computers, laptops, smart phones. There are many age and level appropriate books on internet for children. Therefore, parents can encourage their children in E-learning if they have access of smart devices and internet. In this context, one participant stated, *these days, many parents have smart phones, so they can encourage their children to read online.* At the same time, a participant said, *parents can help children learn many things through mobile phones, but in our case, most of our parents neither have smart devices nor have internet access.* Digital reading is so closely related with reading habit of the students as new generation prefers reading through the internet (Verma & Malviya, 2010). From these responses, I learn that teachers think that parents can also take help of digital devices for helping their children develop reading habit but the problem in most of the parents having lower income is that they are not able to afford digital learning for their children in government schools.

Impact of reading habit in academic performance of children

In response of the third question, 'How does reading habit enhance better academic performance in children?' All the three participants had similar type of responses. They said that reading habit develops pronunciation, increases vocabularies, and develops other language skills i.e. writing, listening, and speaking. In this regard, one participant said, *Reading helps children learn better pronunciation.* Similarly, another participant said, *Reading improves*

vocabulary and other language skills. Moreover students get familiar with overall language structures; it sharpens creativity and makes children imaginative and analytical. In this regard, a participant said, *Reading is important skill for learning language.* Despite learning English language, creativity and critical thinking help children face the ups and downs of their lives and come with solutions of the problems in their practical lives.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the perception of teachers about the role of parents in developing the reading habits of children. The teachers were asked about parental role in developing reading habits in children and the impact of this habit on their further academic career. The study revealed that reading habits are a powerful weapon for learning English language for children in the context of Nepal. Similarly, it helps children in their academic and social development. Furthermore, parents play an important role in helping children read and further develop it as a habit and then as a culture if continually supported since childhood. However, parents' economic status, education background, and level of awareness affect it. Despite these challenges, teachers, school administrators and government agencies can raise awareness programs on the importance of reading habits and the role of parents in developing it as a habit since childhood. The study contributes to all the stakeholders, i.e. students, teachers, parents, school and government agencies, publishers etc. about the importance of reading habit for children and encourages them to work on it from their respective positions and places, i.e. text books designing, writing, publishing, distributing, making them available to parents and children in time. It especially appeals to the parents to play an important role in creating reading environment and supplying them with enough reading materials at home which is directly or indirectly related with better academic performance of the children in future.

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