

Exploring Parental Attitude and Practices towards Story Book Reading

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Abstract

This study sought to examine current trends towards shared stories in urban Pakistan. It explored the experiences of the parent's attitude towards reading and children's interest in reading. It also looked at the association between parents' qualifications on child reading and shared reading experiences at home. A cross-sectional survey study design was employed for this study with universal sampling employed to seek data from the parents during August and September 2021. This study found that children benefits greatly when parents share stories with their children. It also found that generally parents who buy and read books themselves supported children to become readers. The findings of this study provide insights into building awareness programs for the parents to provide them with hand on skills to initiate, sustain and promote story reading at home.

Keywords: early childhood; parenting; reading; story reading

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Introduction

Listening to narratives and sharing stories is a form of art as old as time itself. It can capture the listener's as they relate to personal and shared experiences through stories. As an ancient art form listening and engaging in stories has enthralled children as it unleashes their imagination, stimulates interest and concentration span and is a valuable resource for language and vocabulary development.

The Importance of Sharing Stories with Children

The sharing of stories by adults with children has been shown to lead to positive outcomes. An important factor for successful academic attainment and school readiness is parents reading stories to children. Reading with children can assist in the developments each of the four aspects of language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening to stories is one of the most efficient ways of acquiring language skills. Neuroscientists believe that the human brain is most receptive to stories that describe the world around them (Nguyen, et al., 2014). In listening to stories, children begin to understand the structure of language and simultaneously develop core beliefs, values, and perceptions. This is especially relevant for assisting development in acquiring one's mother tongue and improves vocabulary essential for communication (Lucarevski, 2016; Wright, 1995).

Parents and teachers can use story book reading as an opportunity to build relationships with children (Killick & Boffey, 2012). It can help. Killick and Bofey (2012) opine that stories develop emotional literacy, develop communication and forge strong relationships with adults. Emotional literacy can contribute to developing children's personalities and support a successful life. Listening to stories and reading also develops empathy and understanding (Manney, 2008; Yilmaz, Temiz, & Karaarslan Semiz, 2020), leading to a more observant, tolerant, and accepting mindset. This can help people accept each other's differences and support the engagement of meaningful discourse to resolve problems. Classroom teaching strategies include stories to develop the linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional domains of young children (Kabadayi, 2005).

Reading stories in the mother tongue can help develop cultural identity and build a relationship with the community (Barton & Barton, 2017). Friday (2014) states in his article that the sharing of stories was the first model or original form of teaching and learning. Friday (2014) writes,

"Stories define us, shape us, control us, and make us. Not every human culture in the world is literate, but every single culture tells stories" (n.p).

In sustaining the cultural practices of a community, stories shared in the mother tongue preserves the context and ethos of people (Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019). Listening to stories in the one's own language can be helpful to understand the world around the child, their relationships, and their responses to stimuli. Furthermore, folk tales in the mother tongue offer a rich cultural and historical perspective, which rouses the senses and creates ethnicity, affinity, and identity. Research corroborates the impact of storytelling in the mother tongue and many nations have mandated using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary schooling years (Begi, 2014; Iqbal, 2019). The importance of learning in the mother tongue is gaining attention in academia and among policymakers. A popular opinion is that teaching and learning in the mother tongue can be a successful start to academic attainment (Tomblin, 2049). Another research suggests that math achievement can be positively impacted by instruction in the native language (Perez & Alieto, 2018). This could be due to the brain's predisposition to think in the native language. Research suggests that thinking in a second language can reduce mental imagery and hinder the understanding of notions and norms, limiting comprehension and the brain's capacity to process information (Hayakawa & Keysar, 2018). The mother tongue is the language of the heart and the mind and reading stories in the native language can contribute to the mental and emotional wellbeing of children.

There is a dearth of storybooks in the mother tongue for the major ethnic languages spoken in Pakistan (Chemonics, 2015). There is, however, a large collection of folklore, prose and poetry written for children, youth, and adults in Urdu, which is the national language of Pakistan, though not widely spoken in ethnic family households. Naviwala states that the practice of telling stories to children is rare across the ethnic diaspora of Pakistan as most of the population is uneducated and uninformed on effective parenting practices (Naviwala, 2019). Moreover, the Pakistani education system is plagued by public and private divide, outdated curriculum and teaching practices, inefficient monitoring in government and private schools and lack of trained and qualified teachers and educators. The entire system cripples the notion of inspiring children to ideas, ideals, and ideologies through storytelling. Storytelling in the mother tongue is another implausible expectation altogether. Moreover, the rate of enrollment in primary schools is low and concerning in Pakistan. This indicates several issues, (a) the lack of preference for education, (b) barriers to education, and the likelihood of (c) lack of storytelling and story reading opportunities in the mother tongue. The teacher in the classroom and the parent at home has not realized the importance of storytelling in the mother tongue or telling stories at all. The general approach in a classroom is to complete the syllabi and deliver lessons in the preconceived notion of teaching like that of 'filling the vessel,'

(Perveen, 2015). Furthermore, the impact of storytelling in the mother tongue has yet to be explored in the Pakistani context. Studies must be conducted, and trends mapped to identify readiness, opportunities, and gaps.

Research Objectives

To explore.

- the trends of reading storybooks at home in the urban population of Pakistan.
- the attitude of parent's in Pakistan towards reading.
- children's interest in listening to books.
- the association between mother and father qualification on children's interest and practice of reading at home.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey study design was employed for this study. A universal sampling method was employed to seek the responses from the caregivers. Universal sampling was considered most appropriate for the reason that it was an open invitation to participate to all the attending participant of the workshop. All the caregivers who agreed to partake in the study provided consent. The questionnaire was made on a Google link and was shared in a Facebook group for caregiver's. The data was collected from August – September 2021.

We used the questionnaire developed by Dr Sunila John. It has 44 items and consists of the five subscales. The intention of the questionnaire is to explore parental attitudes and practices towards the reading of storybooks. The questionnaire also had demographic and personal information of the caregivers like name, number, email, profession, etc. which was not used. We developed our own demographic indicators.

The data was analyzed using SPSS, using simple descriptive analysis to explore the general trends and inferential analysis to explore the association of facets of the questionnaire.

Informed consent was sought from the caregivers to participate in this study. They were informed that personal data will only be used for coordination and communication purposes and only the principal investigator will have access to it. It was also shared with them that their information will remain anonymous in the data reporting and that their confidentiality will be maintained throughout. Consent was voluntary, and participants were able to withdraw at any time.

Findings

Demographics of participants

Most of the participants had either 1 or 2 children at home (see table 1). A large majority of both mothers and fathers had graduation or post-graduation level qualifications. Mother's profession included 46.02% working as homemakers, 50.44% have professional jobs and 3.5% run their own business. In contrast, only 2.6% of fathers are homemakers, 70.8% have professional jobs and 26.5% own their own business. Most parents claimed that they were good or very proficient in speaking both Urdu and English.

Table 1

Demographic Analysis

Variables		<i>f</i>	%
No. of Children	1 Child	45	39.82%
	2 Children	45	39.82%
	3 Children	14	12.39%
	4 Children	3	2.65%
	5 Children	0	0.00%
	5 and above children	6	5.31%
Mother Qualification	Matriculation	3	2.65%
	Intermediate	10	8.85%
	Graduation	48	42.48%
	Post-Graduation	52	46.02%
Father Qualification	Matriculation	9	7.96%
	Intermediate	15	13.27%
	Graduation	35	30.97%
	Post-Graduation	54	47.79%
Mother Profession	Home Maker	52	46.02%
	Professional Job	57	50.44%
	Businesswoman	4	3.54%
Father Profession	Home Maker	3	2.65%
	Professional Job	80	70.80%
	Businessman	30	26.55%
English Proficiency	Below Average	4	3.54%
	Average	14	12.39%
	Good	67	59.29%
	V Good	28	24.78%
Urdu Proficiency	Below Average	0	0.00%
	Average	13	11.50%
	Good	56	49.56%
	V Good	44	38.94%

Parent's reading to their children

It can be seen in Table 2 that just under three quarters of the parents surveyed (74.34%) stated that they read books with their children every day. More than a third of parents indicated that they spent 30 mins or more, with more than half spending less than 30 mins. Only a small portion of participants claimed to spend no time on nonacademic reading each day with their children.

Table 2
Reported Reading Time

Item	Responses	<i>f</i>	%
Reading Story Book Daily	No	29	25.66%
	Yes	84	74.34%
	None	5	4.42%
Amount of time spent every day on non-academic reading	Less than 30 mins	63	55.75%
	30 mins to 2 hours	45	39.82%

Reading practices of parents

This section explores the parents' reading practices with their child. The most preferred practice (46.90%) are for parents to ask questions to their children about the story, followed by naming and talking about the pictures in a story (45.13%) with 41.59% asking their children the words/letters to the picture. Whereas 35.40% of parents put the effort into making the story more relatable and change voices to suit the characters, 38.05% checks on the understanding of the story and opt for making their own stories.

Table 3
Parents' practices

Story Book Reading Practice Items	Never		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. How often you name pictures in books and talk about the picture	4	3.54%	35	30.97%	23	20.35%	51	45.13%
2. How often you try to make the story more real to your child by relating the story to his/her life	6	5.31%	33	29.20%	34	30.09%	40	35.40%
3. How often do you change your voice to suit the characters when you read to your child?	6	5.31%	33	29.20%	34	30.09%	40	35.40%
4. How often do you point your child's fingers to words/letters/related pictures when you both read?	4	3.54%	31	27.43%	31	27.43%	47	41.59%
5. How often do you ask questions to your child during story reading?	2	1.77%	40	35.40%	18	15.93%	53	46.90%
6. How often do you ask your child to repeat back the story according to what the child has understood?	11	9.73%	43	38.05%	26	23.01%	33	29.20%
7. How often you make your own story and tell your child?	8	7.08%	43	38.05%	36	31.86%	26	23.01%
8. How often you encourage your child to make his/her own story?	15	13.27%	37	32.74%	23	20.35%	38	33.63%

Children's interest in reading books

It can see (table 4) that parents felt that 36.28% of children always ask their parents to read for them and the same number often ask to be read to. A third of children (33.63%) ask questions in between story sessions for clarity. The frequent practices reported are 44.25% children show understanding, 43.36% express interest during reading story, 40.71% children pick books on their own and repeat new vocab introduced to them through stories. Further, 39.82% of children can guess the story progression.

Table 4
Children's interest in reading books

Child Interest in Reading	Never		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. How often does your child look at books on his / her own?	3	2.65%	24	21.24%	46	40.71%	40	35.40%
2. How often does your child ask you to read to him/her?	5	4.42%	26	23.01%	41	36.28%	41	36.28%
3. How often your child maintains interest during reading stories?	3	2.65%	24	21.24%	49	43.36%	37	32.74%
4. How often does your child ask questions if the story is not clear?	10	8.85%	30	26.55%	35	30.97%	38	33.63%
5. How often does your child repeat back the new words heard while reading?	9	7.96%	35	30.97%	46	40.71%	23	20.35%
6. How often does your child attempt to read along with you while reading it to them?	11	9.73%	37	32.74%	42	37.17%	23	20.35%
7. How often does your child make comments while story is being read to them?	11	9.73%	25	22.12%	40	35.40%	37	32.74%
8. How often do you think your child is able to understand the story read to him/her?	5	4.42%	24	21.24%	50	44.25%	34	30.09%
9. How often your child is able to guess what will happen next in the story based on pictures.	11	9.73%	33	29.20%	45	39.82%	24	21.24%

Parent's Attitudes and Beliefs about Story Book Reading

It can be seen in Table 5 that 66.37% of parents strongly believe that reading enhances vocabulary, critical skills, understanding and moral values, 52.21% believe in developing reading interest among children, 49.56% parents agree that they enjoy reading books with their child and read stories for them whenever they ask for it. Moreover, 46.90% agreed that story reading at home helps children in reading words in school as well.

Table 5
Parental Attitude and Beliefs about Story Book Reading

Parental Attitude and Beliefs about Story Book Reading	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. I have good memories of being read to when I was a child.	9	7.96%	27	23.89%	54	47.79%	23	20.35%
2. I enjoy reading storybooks with my child.	4	3.54%	6	5.31%	56	49.56%	47	41.59%
3. I read storybooks to my child whenever he or she wants.	6	5.31%	7	6.19%	56	49.56%	44	38.94%
4. Schools are responsible for teaching children story book reading and not parents.	50	44.25%	48	42.48%	11	9.73%	4	3.54%
5. I find it boring or difficult to read storybooks to my child.	61	53.98%	31	27.43%	15	13.27%	6	5.31%
6. I have to scold or discipline my child when we try to read storybooks.	43	38.05%	40	35.40%	24	21.24%	6	5.31%
7. I don't read storybooks to my child because he or she won't sit still.	60	53.10%	34	30.09%	16	14.16%	3	2.65%
8. My child is too young to learn about reading.	64	56.64%	29	25.66%	15	13.27%	5	4.42%
9. Even if I would like to, I'm just too busy or too tired to read storybooks to my child.	42	37.17%	39	34.51%	26	23.01%	6	5.31%
10. I don't read storybooks to my child because there is no quiet place in the house.	69	61.06%	29	25.66%	11	9.73%	4	3.54%
11. I don't read storybooks to my child because I have other, more important things to do as a parent	60	53.10%	42	37.17%	8	7.08%	3	2.65%
12. Children inherit their language ability from their parents, it's in their genes.	21	18.58%	37	32.74%	38	33.63%	17	15.04%
13. Most children do well at reading words in school because their parent read story books at home	4	3.54%	10	8.85%	53	46.90%	46	40.71%
14. I think that it is important to develop a broad interest in reading in my child	4	3.54%	6	5.31%	44	38.94%	59	52.21%
15. I think reading books will help my child develop new vocabulary, thinking, understanding and moral values.	4	3.54%	4	3.54%	30	26.55%	75	66.37%

Correlation between reading time and child interest in reading

It can be seen in Table 6 that there is a significant positive correlation ($r=0.34$, $p<0.01$), in non-academic reading time with child interest in reading.

Table 6

Correlation between Reading time and Child interest in reading

		Amount of Time ReadED	Total of Child Interest in Reading
Amount of Time ReadED	Pearson Correlation	1	.341**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	113	113
Total of Child Interest in Reading	Pearson Correlation	.341**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	113	113

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation between parents' profession/qualification and children's reading practice

There is no significant correlation between storybook reading practice and mother qualification ($r=0.137$, $p=0.147$). While a correlation between father qualification and storybook reading practice at home ($r=0.160$, $p=0.090$) was observed. Similarly, there is also a significant correlation between storybook reading practice and mother profession ($r=0.088$, $p=0.355$). However, a difference in father profession and storybook reading practice at home ($r=0.053$, $p=0.578$) was observed.

Table 7

Correlation between parents' profession/qualification and storybook reading practice.

Variables	Profession/qualification and storybook reading practice r	Total sig(2-tailed)
Mother's Qualifications	0.137	0.147
Father's Qualifications	0.160	0.090
Mother's profession	0.088	0.355
Father's profession	0.053	0.578

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

This study sought to examine current trends towards shared stories in urban Pakistan. It explored the experiences of the parent's attitude towards reading and children's interest in reading. It also looked at the association between parents' qualifications on child reading and shared reading experiences at home.

Parents play an important role as children's 'first teachers' (Ball, 2014). Promoting parent-child book reading is an essential role, encouraged in early childhood education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2015). There are lifelong benefits when parents share stories with children. Shared reading experiences enrich children's language and listening skills, cognitive development, social skills, early reading, and problem-solving skills (Merga, 2017).

Usually, parents who buy and read books themselves encourage children to become readers. Children are much more inclined to become a reader if they see their parents read and parents' who model reading, are strongly associated with positive literacy outcomes for their children (Mancini et.al., 2017). Most of the parents from urban Pakistan surveyed (nearly 89% of the mothers and 79% of fathers) have graduation or post-graduation level qualifications. Parents have also reported having good to very good proficiency in both the Urdu and English languages. Unsurprisingly considering this high level of qualification and command of language, parents predominantly demonstrated a positive attitude towards reading and most had recently purchased books and engaged in regular reading. More than half of the parents surveyed had purchased more than 3 books in the last three months and more than three-quarters of the parents identified having ten or more academic books at home. Furthermore, nearly all parents (96%) identified as spending some time each day reading themselves.

Friday (2014) reminds us it is important that children share as many stories as possible with adults. Nearly three-quarters of the parents recognised the importance of stories and the impact they had on children's development and attitudes. When asked if they believed that it was important for children to develop a broad interest in reading, 90% of parents wanted this for their children. Many of the participating parents stated that they believed in the benefits of reading to children and acknowledged that shared reading enhances vocabulary, critical skills, understanding and moral values, and just over half, support reading to develop interest among children.

This study also found that the urban Pakistan parents survey appreciated that most parents surveyed, understood they have a key role in children's learning and create many opportunities to read with their children. Paradoxically, only half the parents indicated that they enjoy reading books with their child and read stories for them whenever the child asked for it. Despite this lack of enjoyment in reading together, most parents did engage in reading with their children each night with only a very small number of parents indicating that they did not read with their children at all.

Although half the parents stated that they did not read to their child whenever the child requested it, only a very small number (8%) stated that they did not enjoy reading with their children at all and despite not always enjoying it, most parents did read with their children every day. However, this was challenging, and a variety of reasons impeded parents from reading with their children. These included parental busyness or tiredness, a lack of quiet space, the need to discipline children and a belief that children were too young to be read to. A small number of parents stated that their child would not sit still. The ability to keep still can be referred to as task attentiveness and refers to children's ability to maintain attention and to complete tasks without being distracted (Taylor et. al., 2016) and is a common issue for young children.

Further, nearly one-fifth of parents in this study believed that their child was too young to learn about reading. Merga (2017) too found in her study that some parents felt that their child was too young to be read to and that young children sometimes felt socially excluded by this. Research suggests that exposure to reading in the early years will play a role in readers' self-identification as avid lifelong readers (Mancini et.al., 2017; Merga, 2017, 2017a). Merga (2017) found that young people who are avid readers list their parent's influence and attitude towards reading as instrumental in developing their own positive attitude toward reading.

Children's first language is optimal for the learning of literacy (UNESCO, 2008a). Parents in this study indicated that their children regularly engaged with the story by asking questions for clarity and some children selected their own books. Children who use their own language to share stories can actively create opportunities for learning through their recognition of their children's abilities, positive interactions and by being a positive role model of literacy (Newman et.al, 2016).

The need to support parents who can, in turn, encourage children to read is acknowledged. Parents need to be recognised that they are often teaching their children literacy in the best way they know how (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). A holistic approach is suggested with great consideration

needed for family and parental circumstances, wellbeing, culture, and their economic, education and employment status (Taylor et.al., 2016).

Conclusion

This study provides some insights into current trends towards parents reading stories with their children in urban Pakistan. It explored the experiences the parent's attitude towards reading and children's interest in reading. It also looked at the association between parents' qualifications on child reading and shared reading experiences at home. It found that the parents in this study recognised and acknowledged the role they play in children's reading development. Although parents did not necessarily always enjoy reading with their children, they sought opportunities to read with their children despite the challenges.

Recommendations

- i. Parents need to read daily with their children, using recognised strategies to improve children's understandings.
- ii. The influence and attitude towards reading by parents needs to be recognised as instrumental in developing a child's positive attitude toward reading.
- iii. Recognition that children are much more inclined to become a reader if they see their parents read and parents' who model reading. This is strongly associated with positive literacy outcomes for children.
- iv. Consideration is needed for family and parental circumstances, wellbeing, culture, economic, education and employment status.

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