

Exploring Why Mothers Read: Motivational Goals for Shared Book Reading in Early Childhood

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Abstract

This paper discusses the motivational orientation of mothers during shared book reading (SBR) with their toddler and their relationship with the educational backgrounds. The study is concerned with (1) the prevailing maternal intentions of the participation in SBR, as well as (2) the connection between the maternal intentions and the level of maternal education. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on 32 mothers about the study aimed at evaluating the reason as to why they are interested in practicing SBR. In order to gather additional meaning and context to the quantitative results, six individuals were chosen to be interviewed on a follow-up basis through semi-structured interviews. The results of the descriptive analysis of the questionnaire revealed that, holistic motives of overall reinforcing emotional connections, enhancing speech formation, and activating cognition were dominant in all levels of education. Nonetheless, higher educated mothers had much lesser chances of expressing the teaching of skills motivation like teaching the alphabet or reading ability. These results show that the beliefs regarding SBR are predominantly holistic, but maternal education has an impact on the extent to which the instructional purposes are emphasized. Such understandings highlight the significance of providing the parents with complex insights into early literacy that will allow them to maximize both the language and emotional and cognitive development of children through effective interactions with literacy.

Keywords: *early literacy, maternal belief, shared-book reading*

INTRODUCTION

Although the government has tried to improve the quality of education with various changes in the curriculum, the reading level of the Indonesian students is a step lower than the level of other countries as per international standards. As shown in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 conducted by the OECD, the country of Indonesia is ranked among the bottom ten in the most recent PISA examination, with the result that more than 70 percent of 15-year-old school children are not at the minimum level of reading proficiency. This inertness indicates that issues related to the lack of literacy competences do not lie in the extent of formal education but have a chance to occur prior to it.

Before the age of school begins, mothers act as gatekeepers to literacy, culture, and learning frameworks, enabling access to learning materials [1]. Their supports early literacy through sophisticated interactions such as book handling, reading aloud, and introducing the print in their surroundings which cultivates language skills and represents reading as a meaningful and relational experience [2], [3]. In cases where formal early education less accessible such as in rural communities, maternal literacy involvement becomes the dominant resource for the acquisition of emergent literacy skills [4], [5].

The ways in which mothers practiced early literacy activities at home were shaped

by their beliefs. Studies also highlight the correlation between the parental literacy beliefs and the parents' involvement in literacy activities as well as literacy resource that parents provide to support their children literacy development [6], [7]. In particular, maternal reading habits and the presence of educational and reading materials in the home, defined as literacy resources, predict children's literacy outcomes [8], [9]. Mother's beliefs and perception about literacy shaped the amount and the quality of literacy activities at home and, subsequently, children's reading development [7], [10].

The beliefs that mothers have on the development of literacy in children can mostly be classified into two motivational versions, one being the holistic and the other being the skill based. Holistic orientations focus on the context of the emotions, cognitions, and social aspects of literacy acquisition and send the message that parents do not only think of reading as a means to teaching but also to deepening relationships and developing a sense of curiosity [11], [12]. The skill-based orientations, on the contrary, put more emphasis on the developing of certain specific literacy skills by teaching alphabet recognitions, phonetics, understanding strategies etc., in a systematic manner [13], [14]. Deitcher et al. indicated that these two orientations greatly affect the early literacy development of the children, and the holistic beliefs are linked to a more favorable home literacy environment [13], [14].

Nonetheless, past researches have pointed out that skill-based programs are very effective on short-term literacy acquisition, they still tend to overlook the emotional and relational aspects that the holistic approach can foster [15]. Moreover, studies have shown that holistic-minded parents can create an interactive reading experience that helps children to grow in language development and emotional intelligence as compared to their skill-focused parents [13], [14], [16]. Nonetheless, past studies by Alahmari proved that the increased level of education among parents is linked to a stronger holistic belief, yet the beliefs in the skills can still be more predominant in families of parents with lower levels of education, implying that direct educational assistance may be required [17]. This highlights the need of an intervention that goes beyond skills but one that also appeals to parents beliefs and values and will end up enriching the literacy environment where the children are growing [18].

Multiple factors come into play in building maternal beliefs in regard to early literacy development, each factor is correlated to the other and both maternal beliefs and practices on literacy are influenced by them. The mother educational background is one of the main determinants. Studies indicate that mothers who have a greater level of education tend to have stronger positive beliefs regarding literacy which is translated into amplified home literacy environment [10], [19]. The association between maternal literacy beliefs and education levels indicates that higher education levels refer to mothers with an enhanced sense of the significance of early literacy skills, hence an improved set of literacy-enhancing behaviours at home [19], [20].

The consequences of the level of maternal education are important. It is found that the higher the level of education of any mother, the more positive the beliefs related to literacy will be, and thus their children will have richer literacy experiences [4], [10]. These mothers practice literacy-rich activities including reading aloud to their children, as well as the usage of literacy-rich games, thus improving children pre literacy skills in many cases [10]. Moreover, the study of practices of the Latino mothers demonstrates that beliefs regarding maternal literacy represent the fusion of the socioeconomic status, maternal education, and child vocabulary development [21]. In such a way, the connection between the level of education of mothers and their belief in literacy proves

the point following that high education promotes good parenting practices in the domain of literacy [12]. As such, this paper examines the relationship that exists between maternal education and motivational orientation of shared reading practices which is either holistic or skill-bases amongst Indonesian mothers of young children.

Research Questions

1. Which motivational orientations (holistic vs. skill-based) of mothers seem to be predominant in involving themselves in shared book reading with their preschoolers?
2. What is the relationship between the maternal level of education and these motivational orientations in shared book reading?

METHOD

This research took a qualitative research design and backed it with descriptive data in examining motivation orientations of mothers in shared book reading (SBR) and their relation with the educational history. There were two stages of collecting data. To start with, a structured questionnaire was given to 32 mothers whose children aged between 1 and 5 years. The questionnaire was made of a number of items with single focused motives referring to any of engaging in SBR, both intentionally overall (e.g., bonding, language exposure) and skill-related (e.g., teaching letters or reading) (replicating the instruments of Anderson (1992) on beliefs). A summary of the patterns in responses regarding various educational groups was provided using descriptive statistics.

The purposive sample of six mothers willing to be interviewed was chosen among those who have answered the questionnaire and who have varied educational backgrounds to shed more detailed light on their beliefs. Interviews enabled non-directional communication and working out, resulting in the abundant qualitative information on how mothers describe and explain their motives to sober up and use SBR. Transcribed interviews were analyzed with the help of thematic analysis and identified the existence of repeating patterns in association with holistic and instructional reading orientations. Such a two-phasing structure provided the opportunity of investigating maternal literacy motivation (through questionnaire) and depth of maternal literacy motivation through interviews.

Table 1. *Different Kinds of Parents' motives and activities during SBR*

Literacy Beliefs		Parents' motives	Activities during SBR
More	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonding with children • Developing intelligence • Developing emotional skills • Developing ability to speech • Playing time • Broadening knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively engage children in creative ways such as using multiple media or adding songs. • Asking questions during shared book reading • Asking reasons or elaborating more for children's responses • Relating story content to children personal experience
Belief			

Skill-Oriented Belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching alphabets and numbers • Teaching reading skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pausing to children response • Introducing letters and numbers literally during shared-book reading • Naming and identifying objects in the book • Asking children to complete the words • Checking children understanding at the end

Face and content validity were confirmed for the items measuring parental motivation in shared book reading. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.830.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that holistic inspirations among the parents regardless of educational level were very high to participate in the process of shared book reading (SBR) with their children. Most parents do not regard SBR as another activity to help the children prepare at school, but they consider the activity a relationship building, growth, and an emotionally empowering experience. This orientation is also clear in the three most frequently used motivations being bonding with children, supporting cognitive development, and the facilitation of speech ability.

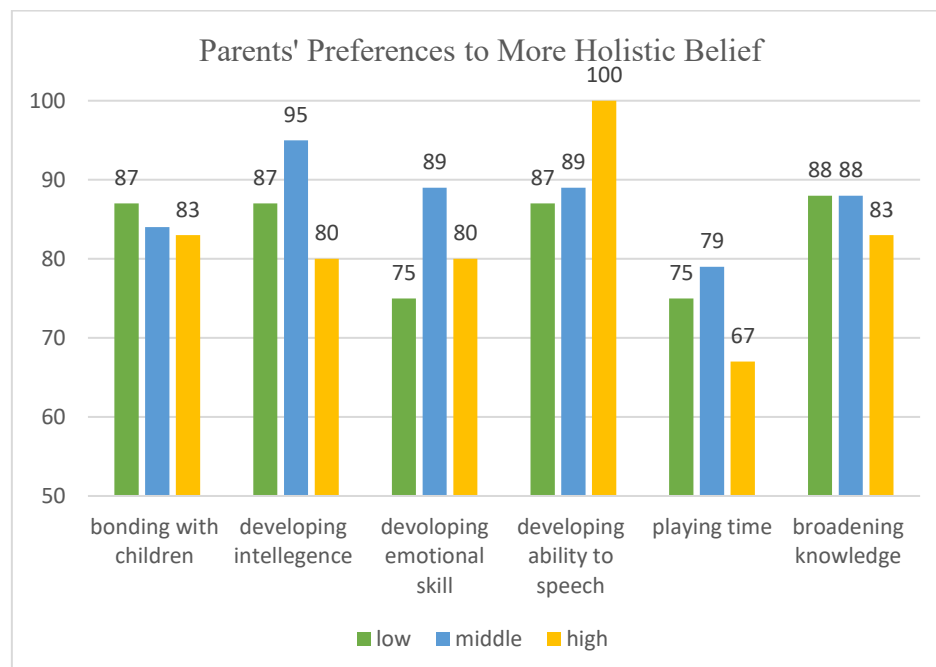


Figure 1. Parents' Preferences to More Holistic Belief

Motivation toward the cultivation of emotional bonds was confirmed by 87.5 percent of mothers with less education, 84.2 percent of middle-educated mothers, and 83 percent of mothers

with more education (as outlined in figure 1). This uniformity indicates that the urge to emotionally bond with their child with the narrative is basically an almost common belief. Several parents suggested that shared reading helped to create a soothing and reassuring routine, particularly in children below the age of five, a stage at which socio-emotional development is particularly acute. Mother with middle educational background provided her experience of toddler tantrums management through story books that helped her child with their names and emotion identification, which suggests that mothers, intuitively, use books to scaffold during the sensitive developmental stage of alternating emotional expression and regulation. It is established that reading-time with toddlers enables fruitful interactions between parents and their children, which foster deeper connections between them and boost emotional development in children to become healthier [13], [14].

The importance of SBR in cognitive enrichment also won a broad support of 95 percent of middle, 87.5 percent of low and 80 percent of high mothers having educated their reasons as the development of intelligence through reading. A single mother who had been highly educated explained that shared reading was a way of encouraging brain activity and the creation of neural connections, which would increase the academic readiness of her child. This concurs with the previous findings of a positive correlation between rich, interactive SBR practices being positively linked to greater levels of cognitive benefits including IQ, attention span, and executive functioning [15]. But the quality of cognitive stimulation will not be sufficient unless the interaction is effective, not just frequent, and includes extratextual dialogue, question making, and feedbacks [16].

SBR was regarded especially beneficial in regard to language development. This motive to develop speech was proven by all high-educated mothers, 89% of middle-educated and 87.5% of low-educated mothers. Most parents reported that the vocabulary of their toddlers improved after regular shared reading considerably. Nevertheless, there was also a slight disconnect evident in some interviews, whereas most parents were keen on speech outcomes, some considered speech development as a part of physical development instead of literacy. This means that there is an incomplete picture of early literacy where the component of language comprehension, expressiveness, oral narrative skills is underestimated as a component of literacy. The mentioned misconception can be explained by previous investigations indicating that parents tend to perceive literacy as a concept that comprises reading and writing only, neglecting oral and dialogic skills [18], [22].

Interestingly, motivations based on holistic reasons were common, whereas motivations based on skills varied much with education levels: teaching letters or reading skills. The data reveal that 87.5 percent of the low-educated mothers mentioned teaching of the alphabet and articulation skills as the significant motives, followed by 63 percent and 58 percent, respectively, of the middle-educated, and 33 percent of both categories of the high-educated mothers. Indeed, 67 percent of the highly educated mothers did not like the idea of SBR as a means of instilling letters or reading among their children. This negative relationship indicates that the more educated mothers are, the lesser they are bound to approve skill-interest motives. Since the concept of emergent literacy is introduced to these mothers in contemporary pedagogical concepts, these mothers might instead feel most comfortable with more child-cantered, more naturalistic, and more emotionally sensitive approaches to literacy [23], [24].

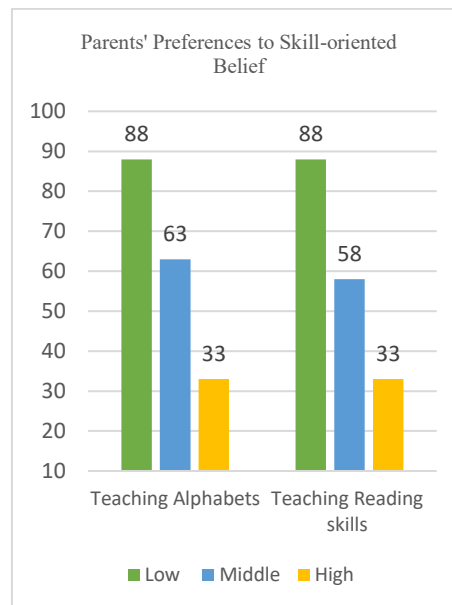


Figure 2. Parents' Preferences to Skill-Oriented Belief

Other justifications, such as extension of playtime, cognitive growth, and more knowledge were also explored. Findings indicate a different level of endorsement which ranged between 66 % and 89 % with high-educated mothers once more showing a selective trend. As an illustration, only 67 % of mothers with high education levels accepted the idea of letting SBR be played as a form of entertainment, which suggests that high-educated mothers are likely to distinguish between reading as an active activity and passive entertainment.

Surprisingly, the data show that maternal education is not very influential in supporting holistic beliefs like language stimulation, emotional development and bonding. Such results are consistent with [25] whereby he found no definite correlation between educational background and parental ideologies regarding literacy. The difference between the mothers with higher education and women whose education is less high is the fact that they are less likely to consider reading as a means of direct instruction. They do not have more cognitive or linguistic reasons to read, but they are generally less willing to devote reading time to a scheduled instructional experience. However, the findings of prior research have supported the idea that mothers who have high educational level are more likely to have holistic beliefs because they possess a wider range of knowledge regarding the emergence of early literacy [10] and have enhanced accessibility to promote rich early literacy experiences indoors [7].

The results provided in this paper can be used to enrich the current body of literature on the topic by showing that more advanced education level is associated with a decreased focus on skill-driven reading motives, but it does not always promote stronger holistic reading orientations, which are likely to be firmly established at all educational levels. These holistic tendencies are generally an extension of a universal desire of parents to connect and emotionally interact with children in narrative, which was rooted in human culture long prior to the advent of literacy [26].

These findings suggest that, in Indonesia, literacy programs and parenting education cannot presuppose that improvements in educational levels will necessarily lead to the enhancement of early-literacy promotion. Instead, programs ought to expose the range of early-literacy practice,

by emphasizing that it is not just about decoding, but also dialogic interaction, emotional exchange and language-rich storytelling. Even though parents in the full range of the educational continuum highly regard reading, filling the theoretical gap between language, literacy, and the developmental advantage is pivotal to increasing the effectiveness of shared-book-reading (SBR) interventions.

CONCLUSION

Although the maternal education level did not play a key role in influencing support for holistic motives, it was apparent that it played an essential role in decreasing the preference for skill-oriented motives. Higher-educated mothers were less likely to mention the teaching of letters or reading skills as their initial objectives but were more likely to note an overall or more textured understanding of literacy beyond rote teaching. Mothers with poorer schooling histories were, by contrast, more likely to be interested in SBR as a means of early literacy training, perhaps due to reduced exposure to contemporary views of pedagogy or less expertise on what constitutes literacy. The findings contribute to the literature by further confirming that it is not only important to note the frequency or prevalence of shared reading activities in the vertical direction, but also the deliberateness with which they are conducted. They also identify the importance of parent education programs that expand the prevailing view of early literacy as a multidimensional construct among parents, socio-emotional development, and conceptual development, as contrasted to the narrow focus on reading mechanics. Parents ought to be helped to realize the potential of SBR to the maximum to enhance a home-based, high-quality, and responsive literacy atmosphere regardless of the parental background.

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