

## Teachers' strategies for involving parents in the development of children's literacy skills in primary schools

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### Abstract

This study examined teachers' strategies for involving parents in the development of children's literacy skills in primary schools in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study. The study used survey design. The population was made up of 665 teachers with 45 public primary schools within the Local Education Authority. 10 schools were selected from the total number of schools. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 80 teachers from the schools. This was used to give fair representation to every school. A 18-item questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Strategies Teachers Use to Involve Parents for Literacy Development (STUIPLD)" was used to collect data. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one from the Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation) all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Formula. A reliability of 0.78 was obtained for the entire instrument. Data collected was analyzed using mean. Findings revealed that open and effective communications among others are the strategies teachers use to get parents involved in their children literacy development. Findings also revealed that poor parental educational background among others are the challenges of parental involvement in their children's literacy development. The researchers recommended among others that government through Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board should organize workshops for parents at least once annually on the strategies for getting them involved in the literacy skills development of their children.

**Keywords:** parents, parental involvement, literacy, literacy development, teachers

### 1. Introduction

The connection between school and home is very vital. This is because parents are the experts over their children and who without doubts know them better than anyone else. Parents' involvement in children's school play significant roles in supporting their children's literacy skill development, guiding their children successfully through school processes and advocating for their children for effectiveness teaching and learning in the schools. Parents' guide their children's upbringing, which includes the interaction processes between parent and child that contribute to the child's literacy development. For the purposes of this write up, the word parents stand for the adult primary caregiver(s) of a child's basic needs. Such basic needs as feeding, safety, clothing, security among others. The adult primary caregiver(s) includes biological parents; other biological relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings; and non-biological parents such as surrogate parents. These adult caregivers are involved in the education of children. Involvement on the other hand means participation or connection to something.

Currently, parental involvement in children's learning has already been an important issue of concern to educators. According to Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) <sup>[7]</sup>, parental involvement in the education of students begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school. These connections between the home and the school environment should be developed cooperatively on the beliefs of both parents and teachers. Parental involvement in schools means parents and school

staff working together to support and improve the learning, development and health of children and adolescents (Epstein, 2011) <sup>[8]</sup>. Parental involvement in schools is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage parents in meaningful ways, and parents are committed to actively supporting their children's and adolescents' learning and development (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Parental involvement could either be School-based parental involvement or Home based parental involvement. Home-based parental involvement includes activities that parents promote to support their child's school-based learning such as helping with homework, checking homework completion and the child's educational progress (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016 <sup>[4]</sup>; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007) <sup>[11]</sup>. School-based involvement generally includes activities typically undertaken by parents in the school setting for an individual child. Attending a parent teacher conference, observing the child in class, and fundraising are examples of school based involvement. School-based involvement also includes activities that focus on school issues such as volunteering at the school and participating in school organizations and other activities (Benner *et al*, 2016 <sup>[4]</sup>; Green *et al*, 2007) <sup>[11]</sup>. In this study, parental involvement in schools is therefore a cooperation between the schools and families on the issue of getting the parents actively supporting their children's literacy development. This involvement includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their children's literacy skill development and also take part in decision

making in schools as to how to help the child/learner develop the literacy skills.

The term literacy is the ability to read and write for knowledge, write coherently and think critically about the written word. According to Foley cited in Widosari, Suwandi, Slamet and Winarni (2017) <sup>[21]</sup>, literacy refers to the mastery of language, in both its spoken (augmented) and written forms, which enables an individual to use language fluently for a variety of purposes. It therefore means that literacy is not just ability to write, it also involves the skills of critical writing and reading to comprehend information. Literacy is concomitant with human development, influencing every aspect of life. It is one of the basic necessities of life as well as survival. It should therefore be given adequate attention beginning from early stage in life. If children are to approach literacy as a social activity, they need to be engaged in reading and writing tasks with adults who create a social context for them. Such social context engages children actively in early language and print activities and thus children become more focused and motivated for successful literacy development.

According to Epstein (2011) <sup>[8]</sup>, parents can contribute to building home school connections through volunteering in school activities and noted that sharing reading practices at home influences young children's academic and social achievement. In other words, positive interactions between families and schools increase children's success in school settings and support ongoing family involvement in the children's education (Handerson & Bella, 2014) <sup>[12]</sup>. Finding ways to connect literacy activities at home and at school are important part of each child's ongoing literacy development. This requires educating the professionals in early care and education to become familiar with each family's strengths and resources. Several research findings have shown that family involvement is the most accurate predictor of children's school achievements (Epstein, 2011) <sup>[8]</sup>. Children tend to do better when they know that their parents are involved in their learning, they tend to be more serious in their studies and make higher grades, they have higher attendance to school, display more positive attitude and behaviour. As early care and education professionals, it is critical to identify ways that make materials and experiences available to families. It is equally important to identify ways to help families understand how important their role is in the academic success of their children. By making connections between the home and the school, young children's literacy development and academic success could be supported. The teachers must ensure that they are respectfully approaching families in an effort to encourage their use of materials available in the community while helping them to understand their important role in the development of young children literacy.

The teachers' role is to connect what happens inside the classroom to what happens outside, so that literacy can become a meaningful tool for addressing the issues in the learners' lives. Allen and Darly (2012) <sup>[2]</sup>, also reported that when parents involved their children in strategies like dialogic reading, children's skills related to understanding and producing, language began to develop, which helped them decode print. The authors' finding revealed that parents who were taught dialogic reading techniques made a significant difference in the growth of their children's literacy skills. This shows that parents have the potential to

make a positive difference in the literacy skills of their children if properly guided about how to implement literacy activities at home.

Many times families want to do whatever they can to support their children but do not understand what types of experiences they should provide, or they may assume that their children are not ready for certain types of learning experiences (Wade & More, 2011) <sup>[20]</sup>. For example, families with young children may not be aware of the importance of such activities as reading books, telling stories, or singing songs with their children. For these families, the information provided by early care and education professionals can make a difference in their children's literacy skills development. To support literacy at home what can early care and education professionals do to increase the involvement of parent to supporting their children's literacy development? To increase parent engagement in the child literacy skill development in schools, the schools must make a positive connection with parents. Schools also need to provide a variety of activities and frequent opportunities to fully engage parents and sustain their engagement by addressing the common challenges to getting and keeping them engaged. Another strategy teacher uses to get parents involved in their children learning is to encourage parents to set aside a time each day to talk with their children about school activities and to get involved in dialogic reading with them (Allen & Darly, 2012) <sup>[2]</sup>. By engaging in dialogic reading involving an engaging conversation about a text being read, teachers and families can maximize the educational benefits of reading to children (Folsom, 2017) <sup>[9]</sup>. Parents could be empowered by receiving high quality literature aligned home based interactive activities for intensifying their children language and literacy acquisition. Though some parents may not know how to carry out such activities, the teachers have to provide sufficient written direction that explains different options for parents to implement. Such things like teaching the parents how to engage their children in conversation during reading with them. Massaro cited in Frey (2015) <sup>[10]</sup>, states that although parents can build their children's vocabularies by talking to them, reading to them is more effective. Massaro further states that reading aloud is the best way to help children develop word mastery and grammatical understanding, which form the basis for learning how to read. Also, Merga (2019) <sup>[16]</sup>, states that when parents read books aloud to their children from an early age, this offers notable advantages for children's vocabulary development. Merga further states that it gives them a broader range of possible word choices. In order to develop effective partnerships with families, teachers have an obligation to develop open and ongoing communication with families and to demonstrate a willingness to accept family input as it relates to their roles in each child's education and development. Effective communication requires a two-way flow of information (McGraw-Hill, 2007). Schools should establish clear communication channels between parents and school staff (Aduaka, 2004) <sup>[1]</sup>. This can include opportunities for school staff to communicate with parents about school academic activities and provide them opportunities to participate in school health activities and other community-based programs that focus on child development. Most schools develop efficient structures for getting information out-such as newsletters,

and web site development, and other similar structures to ensure that feedback from parents are actively solicited. For some schools, improving communication involves technology such as e-mail messages and interactive phone systems (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2005) [18]. Through such means the parents get actively involved in the children literacy development. Providing encouragement for reading is another way to support families in getting involved to promote the literacy development of their children. Families living in lower socioeconomic conditions seem less likely to read with their preschooler than are families with more resources. Thus, it is important that all families understand the importance of sharing books and literacy experiences with their children. As opined by Aduaka (2004) [1], sharing picture books and reading stories with children to be read at homes is always an excellent activity to support literacy development, however, families should never be made to feel obligated to read to their children if they have time constraints or other limitations. Reading with children should be enjoyable rather than forced. For some families, it may be more appropriate to emphasize the importance of having print materials such as newspapers, magazines, and catalogs available in the home. Families might also read food labels to children while cooking, recite nursery rhymes during routine activities such as bathing, and provide alphabet. A note from school shouldn't be a source of dread for parents, it could be regularly feedback, good news as well as any worries or concerns. Parents-teachers' workshops where they discuss homework, tests, and study skills is yet another strategy teacher use to get parents involved in the school. They teach parents topics like 'Parenting'. They make such events fun and unique and parents see it as an opportunity to respectively make a difference in their children's progress (CDC, 2011) [5]. Though teachers use the above strategies to get parents involved in their children learning because of several benefits that come out of such relationships, but there are some challenges teachers experience in getting the parents involved in the school. Such challenges as Hornby and Rayleen (2011) [13], categorized: as parents-family-societal factors, parent-teacher factors and child factor. Some parents believe according to the authors that their only responsibility is to get their children to school, any other responsibility they see them as disturbances. This is because such parents lack awareness about their potentials to contribute to their children academic development. Perry (2013) [17], sees parent level of education, socioeconomic status, lack of common understanding of parental involvement and limited participations in schools' activities as additional factors that hinder effective parental involvement in literacy skills development of their children. The above author further identified parents work commitment as another constraint to parental involvement. Parents due to their workloads run away from getting involved in school activities. Such views generate conflicts that ultimately hinder meaningful parental involvement in the literacy development of their children. To get the parents properly

Guided on strategies to use to get involved in their children education, this study was carried out.

### Statement of the Problem

It is widely known that when parents get involved in their children literacy development, there is always a great difference academically and otherwise. Despite the benefits of involving parents in the literacy development of their children, most parents are at a loss when it comes to supporting their children's literacy development. Reason may be because they do not have time to get involved due to their tight schedule or that they do not know how and the areas to get involved in. This is the worry of the researchers who carried out this research to find out the strategies teachers can use to get parents involved in their children's literacy skills development.

### Research Questions

The study was guided by two research questions.

1. What strategies can teachers use to get parents involved in their children's literacy development in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State?
2. What are the challenges to parental involvement in children literacy development in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State?

### Method

This study examined teachers' strategies for involving parents in the development of children's literacy skills in primary schools within Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra state. Two research questions guided the study. The study used survey design. The population was made up of 665 teachers within the Local Education Authority. The study area has 45 public primary schools. 10 schools were selected from the total number of schools. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 80 teachers from the schools. This was used to give fair representation to every school. A 18-item questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Strategies Teachers Use to Involve Parents for Literacy Development (STUIPLD)" was used to collect data. The questionnaire was validated by three experts two from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one from the Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation) all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Formula. A reliability of 0.78 was obtained for the entire instrument. The data collected was analyzed using mean.

A four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 was used to answer the research question. Mean was used to analyze the research question. Mean response of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed while those below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed.

### Results

**Research Question 1:** What strategies can teachers use to get parents involved in their children's literacy development in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State?

**Table 1:** Mean ratings on the strategies teachers can use to involve parents in their children’s literacy development in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State.

S/N strategies teachers can use includes	X	Decision
1. Open and effective communications	3.56	Agree
2. Recommendation of good books for children to parents	3.83	Agree
3. Paying home visit	3.22	Agree
4. Parents teachers' meetings	3.18	Agree
5. Sending progress report about the child	2.81	Agree
6. Sending home literature materials	3.07	Agree
7. Giving children home work that will involve parents	3.41	Agree
8. Occasional invitation of parents to school to monitor the teachers teaching	3.00	Agree
9. Organizing workshops for parents on parenting practices	3.21	Agree
Grand Mean	3.25	Agree

Table 1 above shows the mean ratings on the strategies teachers use to get parents involved in their children’s literacy skills development. All the items so listed were agreed as the strategies teachers can use to get parents involved in their children’s literacy development. This can

be attested to the grand mean of 3.25.

**Research Question 2:** What are the challenges to parental involvement in children literacy development in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State?

**Table 2:** Teachers’ Mean ratings on the challenges to parental involvement in children literacy development in Awka South Local Education Authority of Anambra State.

S/N Challenges to parental involvement in children literacy development	X	Decision
10. Uncooperative attitude of teachers	3.12	Agree
11. Traits and behaviour of the child	2.53	Agree
12. Lack of commitment in school activities by parents	3.23	Agree
13. Poor parental educational background	3.15	Agree
14. Lack of awareness on the part of parents	2.64	Agree
15. Parents feel uneasy dealing with teachers	2.77	Agree
16. Diverse culture	3.00	Agree
17. Parents work load	3.01	Agree
18. Parents socio-economic level	3.45	Agree
Grand Mean	2.98	Agree

Table 2 above shows respondents mean ratings on the challenges to parental involvement to children’s literacy development. The respondents agreed to all the items listed above as the challenges to parental involvement to children literacy development. This can also be attested to the grand mean score of 2.98.

**Discussions**

Findings in table 1 above shows that teachers agreed to open and effective communications, recommendation of good books for children to parents, paying home visit, parents teachers meetings, sending progress report about their children, giving children home work that will involve parents, occasional invitation of parents to school to monitor the teachers teaching and organizing workshops for parents on parenting practices are different strategies teachers use to get parents involved in their children literacy development. The finding is in tandem with the findings of Epstein (2011) [8], who posits that in order to develop effective partnerships with families, professionals have an obligation to develop open and ongoing communication with families and to demonstrate a willingness to accept family input as it relates to their roles in each child’s education and development and that such communications must be done respectfully. Again the findings of this study is in line with that of Allen and Darly (2012) [2], who posits that another strategy teacher’s use to get parents involved in their children learning is to encourage parents to set aside a time each day to talk with their children about school activities and to get involved in

dialogic reading with them.

Findings in table 2 revealed that the respondents agreed to all the items so listed as the challenges of parental involvement in their children’s literacy development. The items include; uncooperative Traits, behaviour of the child, attitude of teachers, poor parental educational background, lack of awareness on the part of parents, parents feel uneasy dealing with teachers, diverse culture and parent’s work load among others. The findings are in consonance with that of Bæck (2010) [3], as well as Lee and Bowen (2006) [14], who posits that cultural norms, insufficient financial resources, and lack of educational attainment are barriers to parental involvement in school. The findings are also in agreement with that of Williams and Sanchez (2011) [22], who posits that the four areas that are barriers to involvement are; time poverty, lack of access, lack of financial resources and lack of awareness. Similarly, Perry (2013) [17], posits that parents level of education, socioeconomic status, lack of common understanding of parental involvement and limited participations in schools’ activities as factors that hinder effective parental involvement in literacy skills development of their children. The author further identified parents work commitment as another constraint to parental involvement. Parents due to their workloads run away from getting involved in schools.

**Conclusion**

This study having examined different areas of parental involvement in the literacy skills development of their

children and the benefits, concluded that for effective parents' involvement in their children education, childhood professionals should have the knowledge of these strategies discussed in this study. This will be useful in increasing such parental involvement without many problems and help in laying strong foundation for children future success and quality academic achievement.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government through Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board should organize workshops for Parents at least once annually on the strategies for getting them involved in the literacy skills development of their children.
2. Head teachers and teachers should help in educating the parents on the need to get involve in the education of their children in order to develop their literacy skills. This can be done during Parents Teachers Association meetings.

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