

Role of Parents in Fostering Reading Skills in Early Years

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Abstract---Developmentally, individuals are continuously maturing in the process of learning to read, and reading goes beyond acquiring basic linguistic skills in elementary years and moves into adolescence and adulthood. Age appropriate reading and comprehension are the most fundamental skills required for a child to flourish in any education system. Children's literacy learning starts well before formal schooling and the home literacy environment (HLE) is the context in which children first acquire language and literacy skills that help them to make sense of, understand and participate in the world around them. This survey was done to inquire what kind of HLE the children in Old City, Hyderabad were receiving. The HLE incorporates diverse literacy related activities such as parental reading behavior, library visits, teaching of letters and sounds, and owning content rich story books at home. A structured questionnaire was collected from parents of 255 children and the results revealed that mostly mothers are involved with learning at home, but their support is not consistent. Moreover, parents don't utilize the content rich and age appropriate books provided in the school library. This results in a decline in reading age as the child grows older and the gap widens with every class.

Keywords---Pre-primary Children, Reading Habits, Early Years, Role of Parents, Language Development, Home Learning Environment, Early Literacy, Linguistic Skills.

I. Introduction

For Indian children, English is a second and foreign language. Children speak and learn their mother tongue during early years. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) and reiterated by Dhingra (2022) that children are raised in a complex social and cultural ecological system where some elements such as extended family, school, community and society are remote and have less influence and impact on children, whereas other adjacent elements like the immediate family have the most impact and influence on a child's development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further adds that family characteristics such as socioeconomic status, migration, education are less influential than proximal characteristics like parent-child bonding and quality interactions (Niklas, 2015, Singla 2022).

English is the foundation upon which knowledge of other subjects and analytical skills are built. Well-built reading habits have a significant impact on academic performance and there is a direct relationship between reading habits and academic performance of the children. (Ahmad, Zaheer, 2020). Parents who hardly ever practice reading skills have children who are not as successful in later school life as their counterparts. (Hastings, K., 2016). On the other hand, parents who give time to their children, and build a home learning environment see better results and consequently more confidence in reading and spoken English and success in school life (Bast and Rietsma, 1998). Consequently, children who do better in school, grow up to be adults with higher literacy competencies. These adults often earn better remunerations, get better job opportunities, have a lower risk of mental illnesses and mostly end up having a healthier lifestyle. (Fawcett, 2003) This in turn affects the community and the economy of the nation as a whole. (Coulombe, Serge & Tremblay, Jean-François, 2006)

The ability to acquire a language is at its peak during the Early Years between 2-6 years of age (Marzuqi, 2017). Language explosion occurs between 2-4 years which is mostly before a child comes to school. Even if children attend playgroup or pre-nursery, they hardly stay in school for more than three hours. The rest of the time is spent at home with family members. Moreover, children go to school for roughly 165 days out of 365. Children spend precious time at home especially during vacations and long weekends. This means that during early years, the role of parents is more important than the role of a teacher. Parents must create a home learning environment by reading content rich story books, visiting the library regularly and engaging in pre-literacy activities. (Niklas, 2015).

During the pandemic we have seen a substantial increase in screen time in children (Singh, Swarndeep; Balhara, Yatan Pal Singh, 2021). This is the digital era of "Engaged Learning" where reading is not confined to print text but is also acquired through audio-visual media. (Alexander and Jetton, 2003). Studies have shown that

digital books support the development of children’s print and phonological awareness, vocabulary development, spelling development, and reading comprehension (Ihmeideh, F, 2015). E-books are also an advantage for children in deprived social conditions or those who are at the risk of having learning gaps and difficulties. (López-Escribano C, Valverde-Montesino S, García-Ortega V., 2021). However, E-books should be used with caution and they must be carefully selected by the adult so that they have appropriate content and adequate strategies. Most books have irrelevant games and pop-ups that distract the learner. (López-Escribano C, Valverde-Montesino S, García-Ortega V., 2021). There recommends screen time given by WHO for E-books is also not more than one hour for children between 2-5 years. (Singh, Swarndeep; Balhara, Yatan Pal Singh, 2021).

Technology work to share, discuss, and process information, the relative comfort and audio-visual engagement afforded by technology usually means that it is preferred over print media. The internet not only changes the student’s preference for how they want to consume information, it also does the work of making information easier to digest. However, it is also known that having early and unlimited access to different forms of digital media during early childhood greatly impacts brain development (Brain Power, 2021). Daily screen time that exceeds the recommended one-hour of screen time impacts all five developmental health domains: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development and communication skills (Kerai, S., Almas, A., Guhn, M., 2022)

Whether a parent decides to use printed books or online books, the skill of reading is developed over a long period of time (Jha, 2022). During early years, certain practices like listening to bedtime stories, listening to Read Aloud storybooks, exposure to text in various fonts, repeating and isolating phonetic sounds and associating sounds with their respective alphabet symbols form a strong base for future emergent reading skills (López-Escribano C, Valverde-Montesino S, García-Ortega V., 2021) like blending of sounds or guessing familiar words in a paragraph, understanding the meaning of new words through context or recognising repeated sight words. This research aims to establish the role of parents in developing home literacy environments and emergent reading habits in their children aged 3-7 years in the locality of Old City in Hyderabad.

II. Materials and Methods

1. Selection of Candidates

This is a descriptive survey search, done through a questionnaire. The participants in this research were parents of 255 students studying in a private school in the old city of Hyderabad. They were selected randomly as the forms were sent to 500 parents but we received only 255 responses.

The children of these participants were also involved in the research in school. Teachers assessed them for their Reading Age which was then conveyed to the parents.

2. Ethical Consideration

The parents were informed that the survey is being done as a study for analyzing the role of parents in developing home literacy environments and emergent reading habits in Early Years. All of them gave their consent.

3. Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed according to criteria given for the home learning environment and questions were simplified for comprehension of parents. The collected information included demographic details, and whether the child attended school in the pandemic, the parents’ education levels, and activities done at home to support reading habits, use of digital media to support learning etc.

Let’s Read Diagnostic Test for Identifying Reading Age

The LET’S READ DIAGNOSTIC TEST is a self made tool that has been designed to compare the child’s CA (Chronological Age) with their RA (Reading Age). It is being used by teachers of Focus High School to document and track progress in reading across various age groups. For this study, 4 categories of Reading Age were discovered, that implied the following:

RA Below 4 years indicates Level 0- where child is learning phonic letter sounds and blending of CVC words.

RA 4.0-4.6 years indicates Level 1- reading and blending CVC words.

RA 4.7-5.0 indicates Level 1- recognising SIGHT WORDS a, the to read CVC phrases.

RA 5.0-5.6 years indicates Level 2- reading words with consonant blends (pl, fr, cr, sw, tw, lt, st etc.)

RA 5.6-6.0 years indicates Level 2- reading phrases with blends, double consonant word, digraphs (sh, ch, th, ng, nk, bd) and magic e words.

RA 6.0-6.6 years indicates Level 3- reading words with phonograms (oo, ai, ee, etc.) and complex vowel blends.

III. Demographic Details

The independent variables were the total number of students who participated, the child’s age, gender, the class in which/he is studying and qualification of parents.

Item		N=255	%
Age	3 or 3+	45	17.6 %
		93	36.5 % 31 %

	4 or 4+	79	14.9 %
	5 or 5+	38	
	6 or 6+		
Class	NurseryPP1 (LKG)PP2(UKG)	58	22.7%
	Class1	64	25.90%
	Class2	101	39.65%
		30	11.75%
		2	0.7%
Gender	Female	121	47.8% - Females
	Male	134	52.2% - Males
Mother's qualification	10 th 12 th DiplomaUG	24	9.4 % 20.04%
	PG	52	2.4 %
		6	47.8 % 20 %
		122	
		51	
Father's Qualification	10 th 12 th	36	14.1 %
		48	16.9 %
	UG	131	51.4 %
	PG	45	17.6 %

Of the data collected, the students in the survey ranged from preschool to the second grade, and 64% of the children were in the 5-6 year age group, while 27.7% were aged 4+ and 8.4% were aged 3+ years. The survey hypothesized that the reading habits of children in early years is affected by the kind of support that they received from their parents and the exposure to literature that they have had in their lives, academic or otherwise.

IV. Findings and Analysis

255 responses

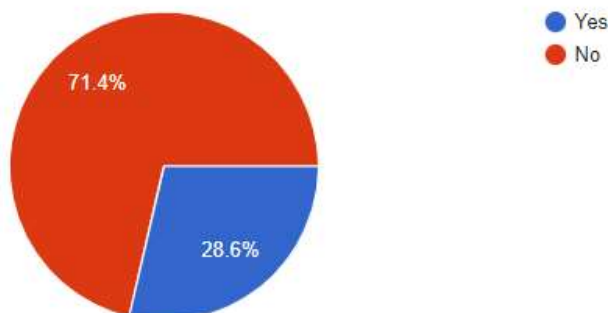


Fig. 1: Graph Showing the Percentage of Children that Attended School During the Pandemic

Fig.1: Out of 255 children, 71.4% of the children surveyed did not attend school during the pandemic. This indicates that during the pandemic, 244/255 children were not in any kind of formal educational environment.

255 responses

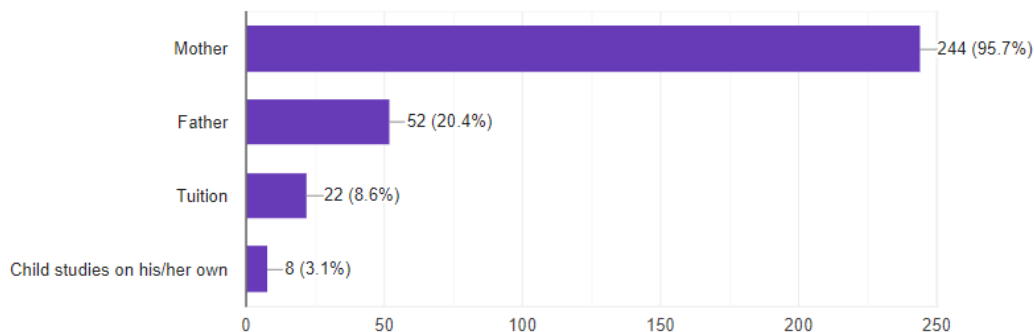


Fig.2:Graph Showingthe Supportthat the Students had at Home

Fig.2:Thesurveyshowsthatthechild’slearningathomewassupportedlargelybytheirmothers(97.5%).

255 responses

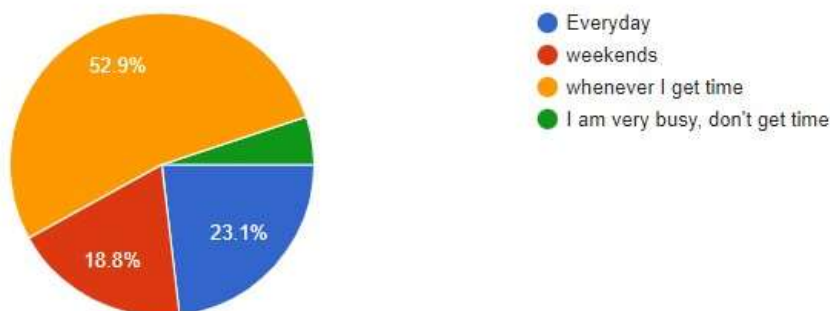


Fig.3:GraphShowsAvailabilityofMothertoProvidehomeLiteracyEnvironment

255 responses

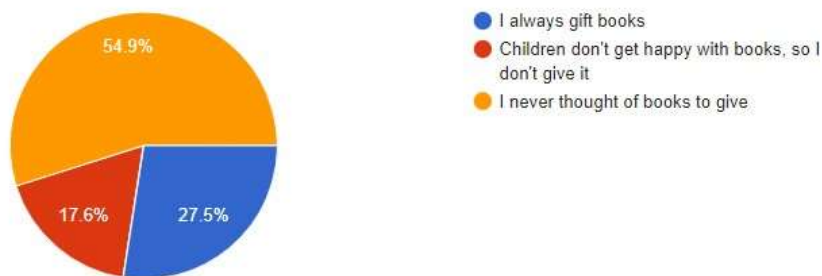


Fig.4: Attitude towards Importance of Books

Fig.3and4:Since,itisithemotherwhosupportslearningathometheliteracyenvironment is dependent onher availability and her attitude towards the importance of books and reading (**Fig.4**). Parents who are conscious about reading purchase books at every opportunity and build a culture of reading at home. They even give good books as gifts. Eventhough47%mothersaregraduatesandconsequentlyshouldbemoreconsciousoftheimportance of reading, the survey showed that only 23% of parents worked with their childrenconsistently, 52% do it only when they get time and 5% admitted that they have no time for theirchildren.Amongst those who said that they spend time, 64% mothers spend less than one hourdaily.(**Fig.3**).

255 responses

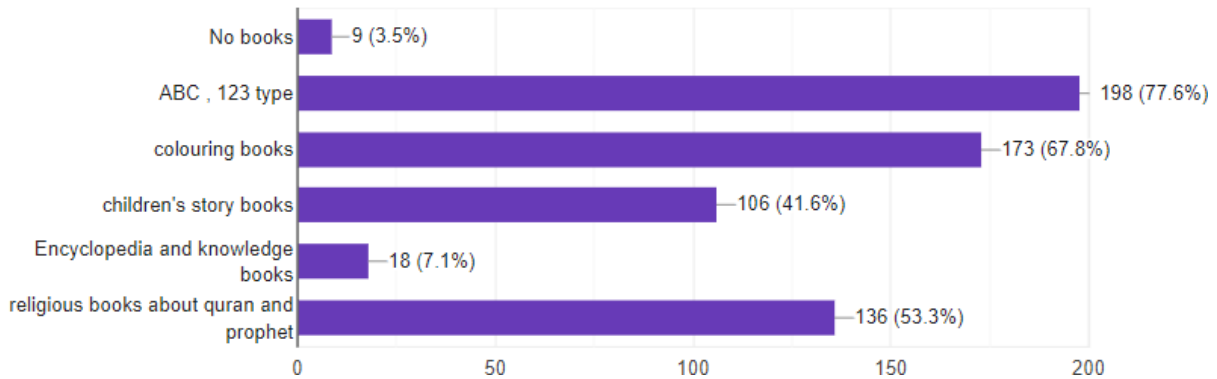


Fig.5: Graph Showing the Interactions of Children with Non-academic Books

255 responses

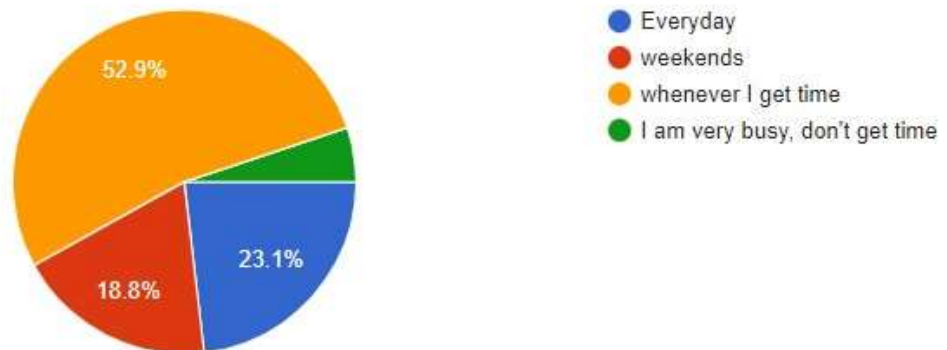


Fig.6: Time Spent by Parents for Reading

Fig.5 and 6: - Additional questions were asked to gauge the children's exposure to building of potential reading habits - exposure that strengthens the foundations for development of reading skills in Early Years. When asked if they actively supported reading at home, 83% of the parents responded that they hardly ever get time to read with their child. (Fig.6) Also, their responses to the next question about what kind of non academic textbooks the children read, it was discovered that 77% of the children read only ABC and 123 type books (Fig.5). These books contribute to only initial vocabulary building and not to reading at all.

255 responses

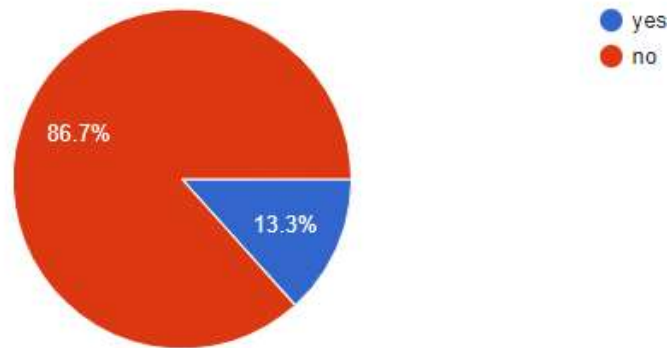


Fig.7: Whether there is a Children's Library Near their House

255 responses

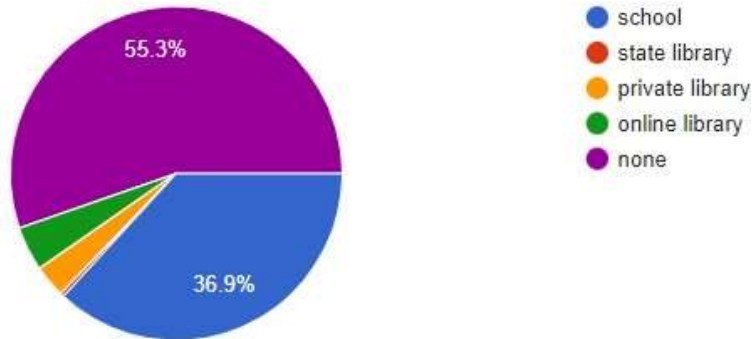


Fig. 8: Exposure to a Library

250 responses

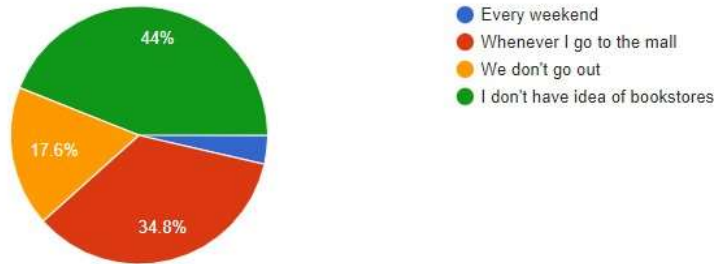


Fig.9: Visiting a Bookstore to Buy Storybooks in a Mall or any Shop

Fig. 7,8,9: 86.7% of parents claimed that they have no library or a space to purchase children's books near their homes. There is only one state library in the neighbourhood but it has no books for early childhood, and there are no private children's libraries in Old City. So the 8% who have claimed to use it have given false information. Out of the other available resources in Old City Hyderabad, 55.3% parents accepted that they don't use any of the facilities. 63% of parents who have access to the school library don't use that either. **Fig.9** shows that 44% of parents have no idea of any bookstore, and 48% of those who do, rarely visit it.

255 responses

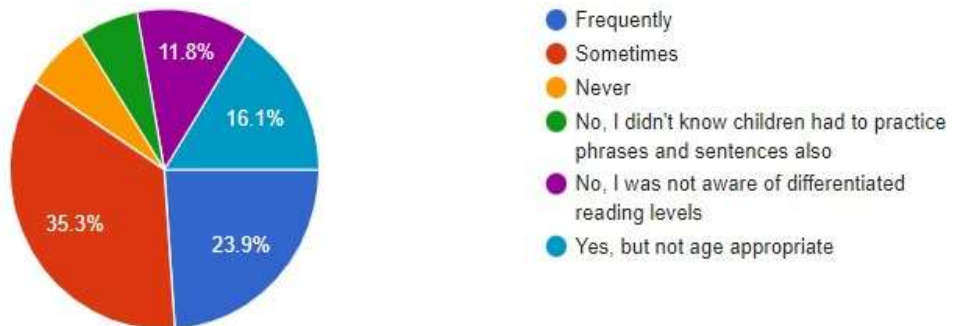


Fig.10: Practicing Age Appropriate Words for Reading

255 responses

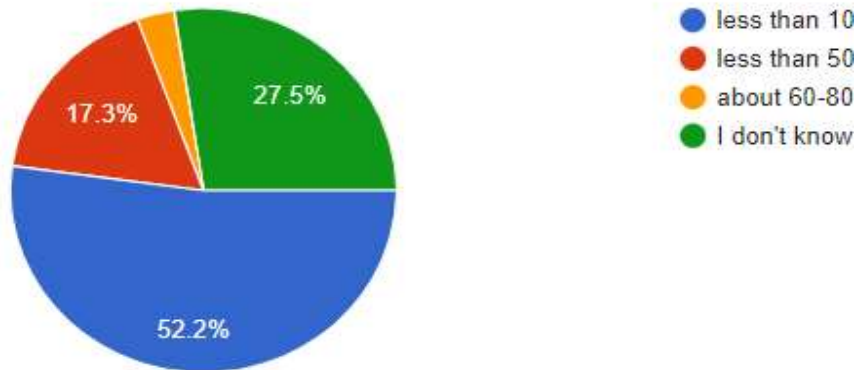


Fig. 11: Ability of Child to Read Non-phonetic Sight Words

247 responses

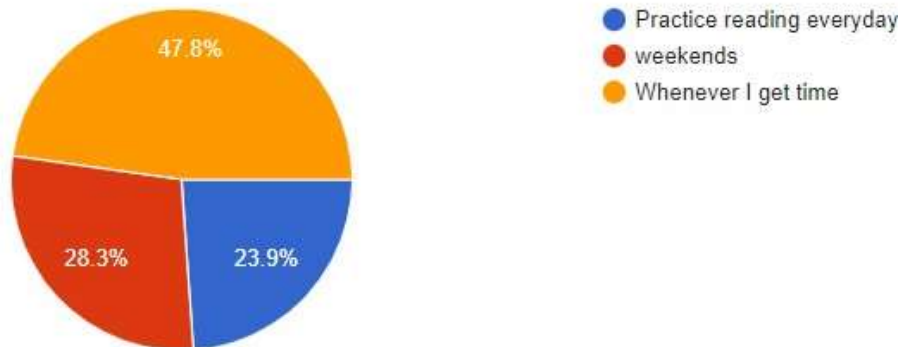


Fig.12: Reading Practice at Home

Fig10,11and12: It is important for parents to practice reading phonetic vocabulary and non-phonetic 'Sight Words' taught in school. The vocabulary words are given in textbooks or as homework. The survey confirmed that an overwhelming 76% of parents don't practice reading everyday, nor do they practice age appropriate reading of words and 16% even admitted that they did not know that reading of words should be practiced with children! Moreover, in **Fig. 11**-52% admitted that their child could read less than 10 Sight Words and 27% of parents had no idea what their child was capable of.

255 responses

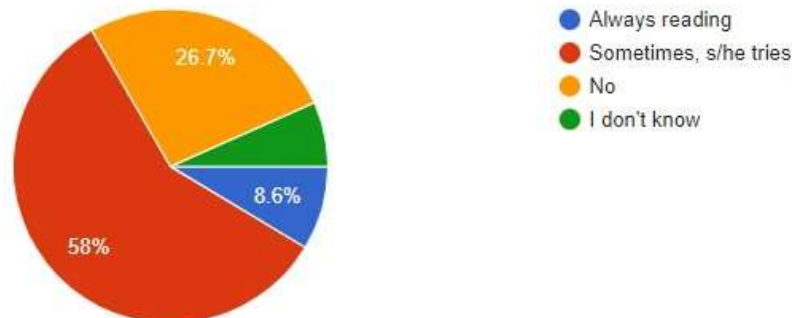


Fig.13: Child's Ability to Blend Unfamiliar Phonetic Sounds

255 responses

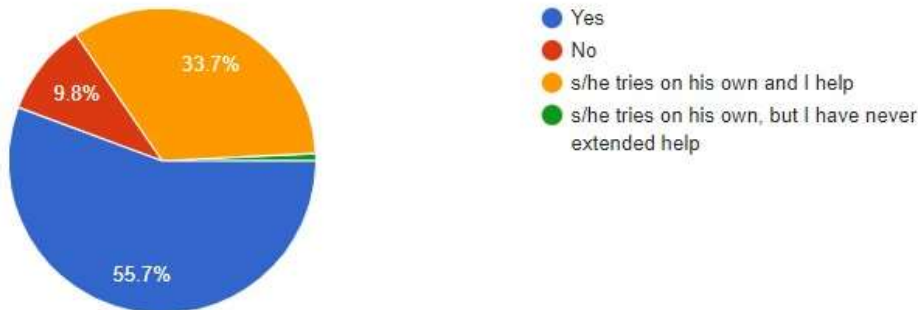


Fig.14: Support to Read Unfamiliar Text

Fig.13 and 14: Fig.14 indicates that 40% of children cannot blend unfamiliar age-appropriate phonetic words but in Fig.15, 55.7% parents claim that their children can read name boards, banners and posters.

255 responses

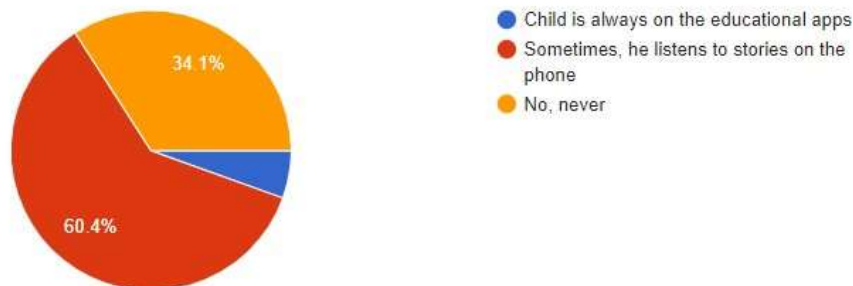


Fig.15: Using Mobile Apps for reading

Fig.15: The parents if their child used educational apps for reading. 98% of parents claimed that they don't use mobile apps to support reading. However, 34% of children listen to stories on various platforms and hardly 12% of children read e-books.

254 responses

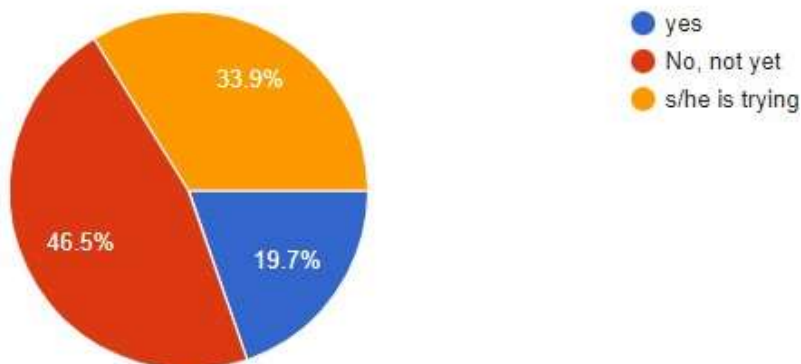


Fig.16: Whether the Parent Thinks that the Child is a Reader

Fig 16: In the survey, a question was asked to see if parents thought their child was an avid reader. 80% of parents admitted that their child was not a reader yet.

From the inferences of the above data, it is safe to conclude that the children have not received the required parental support and consequently have not developed age appropriate reading skills.

Table 1: Inference of comparison of Chronological Age and Reading Age Done in School

N=255 ChronologicalAge	Total	ReadingAge					
		Below4yr	4.0-4.6	4.7-5.0	5.0-5.6	5.7-6.0	Above6yr
3yrol	45	42	3	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
4yrol	92	44	38	10	Nil	Nil	Nil
5yrol	77	29	22	11	8	5	Nil
6yrol	41	8	10	4	5	3	11

From the above data of comparison between chronological age and Reading Age of children inschool, it is inferred that 45 of the 3 year old students are at the expected Reading Age of Below 4 years, i.e they are learning phonic sounds and the skill of blending sounds orally to form CVC words.

Out of 92 (4.0-4.11 year old) children, almost 50% (44 children) have a Reading Age of below 4 years and the other (48 children) 50% have a Reading Age between 4.0-5.0 years which is age appropriate.

Out of 77 (5.0-5.11 year old) children in the survey, 29 children (approx 38%) are below 4 years (i.e- they are still struggling to associate sounds with symbols), 22 children (approx 29%) are reading CVC words and 14% have started reading phrases with a and the Sight Words. ONLY 6% of the 5 year old children surveyed are able to read age appropriate words.

There were 41 children who were 6 year old and above. Out of these 8 were still below 4 years (struggling to recognise alphabets). 22 children (57%) were below age level and struggling to read blends and digraph words. In this group only 11 children (i.e 28%) are reading age appropriate words.

V. Conclusion

This survey confirms the claim that the parents in Old City Hyderabad (that have been surveyed) are not doing enough to inculcate reading habits or home literacy environment to their children. The survey showed that 76% of parents hardly ever practice reading for 20 minutes a day.

A possible reason for this is poor home learning environment and attitude towards the importance of reading, the lack of purchase by parents in required resources like age appropriate story books, poor frequency of using the school library, bookstores or limited skills in teaching techniques that support reading. It is possible that parents are unaware of brain development and the importance of reading in Early Years. It is also possible that parents have limited skills in teaching techniques that support reading.

There is definitely a distinct lack of neighborhood libraries and age appropriate resources in the community. This is something that has the potential to be explored further. There is no trend of storytelling workshops or out of school learning circles or interactive playgroup spaces that will help in establishing foundational literacy and an interest in reading books in early years. When the parent engagement is low, it directly affects the reading habits in growing children which consequently affects the performance in school and literacy rate of the state.

From the above comparison between RA and CA it can be inferred that when children start school at 3 years almost all children are at the same level. However, as children grow older, the percentage of children who read age appropriate vocabulary keeps decreasing. This conclusion is in agreement with national surveys done by ASER (Annual Survey of Education Report, 2021). It can also be concluded that since the results of the Diagnostic Tests were consistent with national surveys, this tool is valid and gives reliable data.

VI. Recommendations

This data enables us to gain some insight into the current roles of parents in Old City Hyderabad for cultivating a reading habit in children aged from three years to six years old. The survey clearly indicates that all parents are not giving enough support to their children. It further indicates that there is a lack of nurturing a reading culture amongst parents.

When asked if parents would like recommendation to nurture the habit of reading in Early Years, 90% of the parents agreed that they would.

Hence, it is recommended that:

- More opportunities to be provided in the school for pre-primary children to visit the school library and to borrow books from it.
- Awareness Workshops should be arranged for mothers (as survey indicated that they spend most time with children) to learn Reading Strategies and on brain development in Early Years.
- Parents should be invited as volunteers to support reading in class. This will help them to master techniques for teaching children how to read.
- Storytelling workshops are arranged for children using books and props.
- Preschool Playgroups and Mother-Toddler programs should be initiated in the community to support mothers.

- After school Reading Club for parents can be initiated where mothers read out a story they recommend and they get a chance to support each other and the reading habit as a community.
- Events like DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) and Reading Marathon can be organized to motivate and inculcate the spirit, joy and pleasure of reading from an early age.

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