

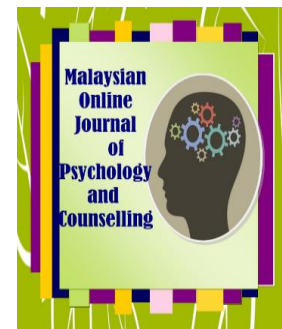
EXAMINING THE INTERPLAY OF PARENTAL LITERACY HABITS, READING ATTITUDE, AND ENGLISH PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AMONG PRIVATE PRESCHOOLERS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined 374 Malaysian parent-child dyads to explore the link between preschoolers' parent literacy habits, English phonological awareness, and reading attitude. Parents provided demographic information and completed a Parent Literacy Habits Questionnaire, while children underwent a Phonological Awareness Test and Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. Analyzing data with descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling revealed no significant relationship between parent literacy habits and reading attitude. Additionally, reading attitude did not mediate the connection between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness. The findings suggest that preschoolers' English phonological skills are directly influenced by parents' daily reading habits, independent of the child's reading attitude.

Keywords: *Parent Literacy Habits, Reading Attitude, Children's English Phonological Awareness*



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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between parents's reading habits, reading attitude, and English phonological awareness has been a subject of interest and investigation in the field of educational and developmental psychology. Parental literacy habits influence children from their interest in reading (Buvaneswari & Padakannaya, 2017). All parental indicators contribute to significant variance in children's reading outcomes; however, when moving to Grade 1, only parental reading-related ability was observed to continue to affect the child's reading outcomes (Inoue et al., 2018; Segal & Martin-Chang, 2018). Children tended to possess a more positive attitude toward reading when the parents enjoyed reading and read books to them more often (Baker & Scher, 2002, as cited in Patterson, 2017; Majid, 2018). Parental beliefs, literacy habits, and access to home literacy resources were the most significant and dominant predictors of young children's early literacy skills (Opiyo, 2017). Reading attitude, reading interest, and reading motivation is proven to be related to each other which have similar nature and contribute to children's development (Wiescholek et al. 2017; Carroll et al. 2019).

According to the International Literacy Association (2020), phonological awareness is a multilayered oral language skill that is often characterized by the phonological structure of uttered words in addition to the meaning carried by each word. Syllabic (words, syllabus) and sub syllabic units are phonological (linguistic) units (onsets and rimes, phonemes). Typically, children who can manipulate sound units in primary language are expected to be able to do it in the second language acquisition if the children can detect second language sounds correctly (Goodrich et al. 2019). Reading attitude and phonological awareness abilities strongly associate with preschool children's reading competencies, while phonological awareness abilities correlate with children's reading attitude toward academics (Wood and Gabas 2017; Buvaneswari and Padakannaya 2017).

International Literacy Association (2020) assured that with a sufficient level of phoneme-level awareness, children could understand how print develops and then implement phonics lessons provided by the teachers. There were subsequently few studies on phonological awareness conducted in Malaysia (Sinnadurai 2018; Alhumsi and Shabdin 2018; Anthony and Said 2019; Sapi'ee and Tan 2020; Winskel 2020) but the studies were not focused on English phonological awareness among preschoolers who enrolled in private preschools in a bigger scale. Hence, to obtain the current English phonological awareness level of young children in Malaysia, the researcher started the research from a state in Malaysia as a general view of the English phonological awareness level of the children after exposure to basic phonological skills as guided in the NSPC, specifically English language under the communication strand.

Ng et al. (2020) claimed that parents are aware that to promote their children's reading development on top of the efforts made at school, they need to begin strengthening their children's reading skills at home. Poor parental engagement in literacy activities has been linked to poor or outstanding reading performance in primary school (Hemmerechts et al., 2016). Swain and Cara (2017) claimed that many parents were starting to realize that the children's reading development opportunities were not limited to the school. Children can learn proper English in school through well-trained teachers; nonetheless, parents can only partially rely on the school to be responsible for their language acquisition. Young children spend much time with their primary caregivers at home, and they tend to feel more secure when they are at home. Good reading habit promotes better academic performance (Florence et al., 2017). Children's enthusiasm and motivation in reading-related activities are linked to their emergent literacy skills (Buvaneswari & Padakannaya, 2017). Parents'

MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELING

responsibility in developing children's reading habit and interest are very much related parent literacy habit, such as modelling reading (Kamunge, 2018). Niklas et al. (2020) suggested future research to study parental reading styles, especially dialogic reading.

Recent research conducted by various experts stated that reading attitude could lead to the acquisition or rejection of positive reading habits where children's reading has a significant indirect effect on their word reading (Wang and Liu 2021). Research has consistently shown that children's attitudes towards reading are closely linked to their reading achievement and motivation (Tisa, et al. 2021). Children's interest and motivation in engaging in literacy-related activities are closely associated with their emergent literacy skills (Buvaneswari & Padakannaya 2017). Positive reading attitudes have been found to contribute to higher reading achievement, as children who enjoy reading are more likely to engage in reading activities, which in turn enhances their reading skills (McGeown et al. 2015). It is commonly perceived that individuals with consistent reading habits can be more motivated on their love of reading activities. Dewi and Prawita (2019) stated that it is apparent that children wish to become more engrossed in reading activities which will boost their reading interest. Hence, in order to be able to read better, children should have a strong reading interest and motivation. Children who enjoyed reading had higher reading proficiency and were more likely to have positive attitudes towards reading. In addition, parents played an important role in encouraging children to read, with parental involvement positively impacting children's reading habits (Sun et al., 2020).

Understanding the relationship between parents' literacy habits, preschooler's reading attitudes and phonological awareness is crucial for educators and parents who seek to promote reading success in children. By cultivating positive reading attitudes and providing opportunities for phonological awareness development, children are more likely to become confident and proficient readers, laying a foundation for future academic success. However, research often focus on other home literacy dimensions and the interactions between each variable on the impact of children's literacy development. In addition, how the parents's reading attitude might influence their reading habits in the context of Malaysian children remains unclear. Therefore, this research aims to study the following:

1. The level of private preschoolers' English phonological awareness.
2. The influence of private preschoolers' parent literacy habits on their English phonological awareness.
3. The mediating effect of private preschoolers' reading attitude on the relationship between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The current study is a quantitative research that uses a survey design with a non-experimental correlational design. The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the home literacy environment and preschoolers' phonological awareness level, which is mediated by the preschoolers' reading attitude. The study will be conducted in the state of Johor and will use a cross-sectional, self-administered questionnaire to gather data from parents and preschoolers.

Instruments

Demographic Information

Parental demographic characteristics of the home were assessed by a total of 3 items of basic information, which are: the relationship of the respondent to the child, age of the respondent, and usual language spoken at home. The parents must answer all four items to gain basic information about the respondents.

Parent Literacy Habits Questionnaire

The Parent Literacy Habits Questionnaire was adapted and modified from Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire developed by Buvanewari and Padakannaya (2017) in the research Development of a home literacy environment Questionnaire for Tamil-speaking Kindergarten Children. Parent Literacy Habits is the sub-section in the Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire. This sub-section pertains to parents' reading or writing activities at home. The sub-items include various reading activities that parents may engage in with their children, such as "*Our family buys and reads daily newspapers.*" There are a total of 7 items in this part. Respondents are required to indicate the frequency with which they participated in these activities. To measure the frequency, a 5-points Likert scale is used, where respondents select a number from 1 to 5, representing "Never" to "Very Often". Higher scores in this section indicate that respondents engage in literacy activities more frequently.

This set of items aims to capture how often parents actively participate in reading-related activities at home, which contributes to the overall home literacy environment. Understanding the extent of parents' involvement in such activities can shed light on the influence of parental literacy habits on their preschoolers' phonological awareness and reading attitudes.

Phonological Awareness Test

The Phonological Awareness Test used in this survey is adapted and adopted from PAT by Robertson and Salter (1997), The Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processes (CTOPP) by Wagner, Torgesen and Rashotte (1999), and the Pre-Literacy Skills Screening (PLSS) by Crumrine and Lonigan (1999). The test consists of 7 parts, with a total number of 50 items. The researcher will read out the instruction to the children. The children will answer each sub-item, and every correct answer will be given one score. The answers are then analyzed according to scores obtained from each part and as total scores obtained for each sub-items. The total marks of this instrument are 50. The higher the score, the stronger the phonological awareness of the child.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)

The ERAS developed by McKenna and Kear in the year 1990 provides a rapid indicator of student attitudes toward reading. The ERAS score is based on a Likert scale with a 4-point pictorial response system. Each item is assigned 1 to 4 points with a '1' indicating the Very Upset Garfield, '2' the Mildly Upset Garfield, '3' the 'Slightly Smiling Garfield, and '4' the Happiest Garfield. Three scores will be gained for each student; (1) the total for the first ten items related to recreational reading attitude, the total for the second 10 items related to academic reading attitude, and the composite total, which indicate the overall reading attitude. The researcher only focuses on the academic reading subscale as the researcher only interested in the children's academic reading which is item 11 to 20 in the original instrument.

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The ERAS will be administered individually after the children answer the Phonological Awareness Test. The administration of the Phonological Awareness Test and Elementary Reading Attitude Survey will conduct together with the individual child in the preschool classroom. Every child who participated in the survey will be rewarded with a storybook.

Participants

Population means the entire group of individuals, events, or items of interest that the researcher desires to explore (Chua 2012). In order to obtain information on the phonological awareness level of the preschoolers, the study targeted all private preschoolers in Johor, Malaysia. The samples chosen from each preschool are based on the number of preschoolers registered in the preschools. The respondents are the preschoolers and their respective parents, either father or mother. Hence, there are a total number of 374 parent-child dyads for data analysis.

Analysis of Data

The data will be quantitatively analysed using SPSS version 21 software and Smart PLS 2. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between parents' literacy habits (independent variable), reading attitude (mediating variable), and English phonological awareness (dependent variable). Data was first demonstrated in descriptive statistics to show the basic information on the levels of the variables. Next, inferential statistics in Bivariate Correlation Analysis (Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient) will be employed to show the relationship between variables. Structural equation modelling (SEM) procedures with SmartPLS will be employed to examine the mediating effect of the variables.

RESULTS

As illustrated in Table 1, the total number of mother respondents (84.8%, n=317) is much higher than the number of father respondents (15.2%, n=57). The majority of the respondents are in the age range of 31-40 years old, which is 228 respondents (61.0%). Besides, 88.2% of the respondents speaks Mandarin at home.

According to Table 2, the average score for Parent Literacy Habits is 2.64, with a standard deviation of 0.79, indicating that the children in this group have medium-level parental literacy habits, with a relatively small spread in their scores. In terms of English Phonological Awareness, the mean score is 28.51 with a larger standard deviation of 13.42, suggesting a medium level of phonological awareness, but with a wider range of individual performance among the children.

Table 3 shows the frequency table according to each range of score of reading attitude indicators. The majority (63.64%) of the participants, consisting of 238 individuals, are extremely happy to be engaged, while 106 participants (28.34%) are slightly happy to be engaged. A smaller proportion, 27 participants (7.22%), are slightly unhappy to be engaged, and only 3 individuals (0.8%) are extremely unhappy to be engaged. Overall, the majority of the group demonstrates a positive attitude towards engagement, with over 90% of participants expressing some degree of happiness.

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Table 1. Profiles of Respondents According to Demographic Characteristics (N=374)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<u>Relationship</u>		
Mother	317	84.8
Father	57	15.2
<u>Parent's Age</u>		
Below 18	3	0.8
19-30 years old	57	15.2
31-40 years old	228	61.0
41-50 years old	79	21.1
51-60 years old	7	1.9
<u>Usual language</u>		
Mandarin	230	88.2
Malay language	25	6.7
English	15	4.0
Other	4	1.1

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and the Level of Child's Own Literacy Habits and English Phonological Awareness (N=374)

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Parent Literacy Habits	2.64	.79	Medium
English phonological awareness	28.51	13.42	Medium

Table 3. Frequency Table According to Each Range of Score of Reading Attitude Indicators (N=374)

Range of Score	Interpretation	n	%
21-24	Extremely happy to be engaged	238	63.64%
16-20	Slightly happy to be engaged	106	28.34%
11-15	Slightly unhappy to be engaged	27	7.22%
6-10	Extremely unhappy to be engaged	3	0.8%
Total		374	100

Note: M=20.78, S.D. =3.21

The data presented in Table 4 shows Pearson correlation coefficients and significance values (two-tailed) for the relationships between three variables: PA (Phonological Awareness), PLH (Parent Literacy Habits), and RA (Reading Attitude). There is a significant positive correlation between PA and PLH ($r = .186, p < .001, N = 374$), indicating that as Phonological Awareness increases, Parent Literacy Habits also tend to improve. Similarly, there is a significant positive correlation between PA and RA ($r = .167, p = .001, N = 374$), suggesting that higher Phonological Awareness is associated with better Reading Achievement. Lastly, there is no significant relationship observed between PLH and RA ($r = .002, p > .05, N = 374$), implying that parent literacy habits do not affect children's reading attitude.

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Table 4. Pearson Correlation among Child's Own Literacy Habits, English Phonological Awareness and Reading Attitude

		PA	PLH	RA
PA	Pearson Correlation	1	.186**	.167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001
	N	374	374	374
RA	Pearson Correlation	.167**	.002	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.968	
	N	374	374	374

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Key: PA=English Phonological Awareness, PLH=Parent Literacy Habits, RA=reading attitude

Table 5 shows the Bootstrapping result of SEM analysis with Smart PLS on the relationship between parent literacy habits, reading attitude, and English phonological awareness. Individual path parent literacy habits towards reading attitude ($\beta=-.007$, $t=.104$, $p>0.05$) is smaller than 1.96, which means the paths are not statistically significant. T-statistics value for individual path reading attitude towards English phonological awareness ($\beta=.193$, $t=4.668$, $p=.000$) and parent literacy habits towards English phonological awareness ($\beta=.211$, $t=4.682$, $p=.000$) are greater than 1.96, which means is statistically significant. R^2 for English phonological awareness is 0.081, the effect size is small (<0.1) (Cohen, 1988), meaning that 8.1% of private preschoolers' English phonological awareness is due to reading attitude and parent literacy habits. No significant mediating effect is observed in the relationship between parent literacy habits, reading attitude, and English phonological awareness ($\beta=-.001$, $t=0.098$, $p>0.05$).

Table 5. Mediating Effect Analysis of Reading Attitude on the Relationship between Child's Own Literacy Habits and English Phonological Awareness

	Beta	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	R^2	Result
PLH -> RA a	-0.007	0.067	0.104	0.917	0.000	Not Significant
RA -> PA b	0.193	0.041	4.668	0.000	0.081	Significant
PLH -> PA c'	0.211	0.045	4.682	0.000	0.081	Significant
PLH -> RA -> PA a x b	-0.001	0.014	0.098	0.922		Not Significant

Key: PLH = Parent Literacy Habits; RA = Reading Attitude; PA = English Phonological Awareness

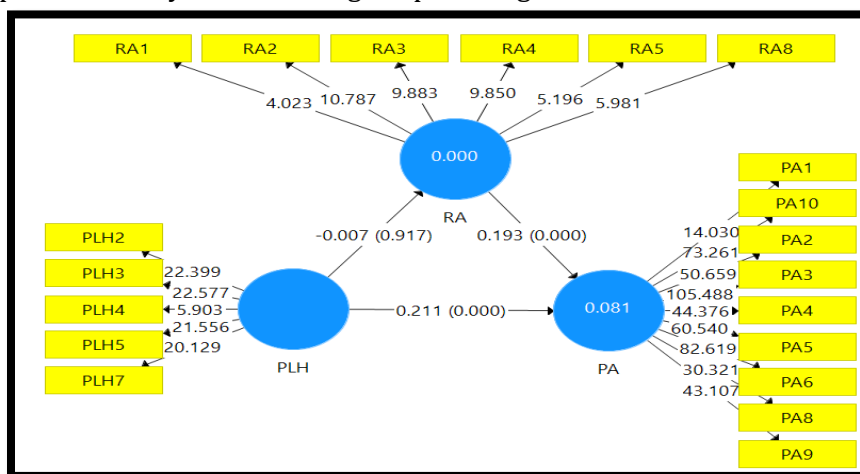
Based on Figure 1, reading attitude to English phonological awareness ($t=4.668$, $p<0.05$), and parent literacy habits to English phonological awareness ($t=4.682$, $p<0.05$) shows the statistically significant result. Parent literacy habits to reading attitude ($t=0.104$, $p>0.05$) shows statistically insignificant result. The indirect relationship of reading attitude towards the relationship between parent literacy

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habits and English phonological awareness ($t=0.098, p<0.05$) also shows a statistically insignificant result. Hence, no mediating effect occurs in this relationship.

The result showed no mediating effect of reading attitude on the relationship between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness. The result of the analysis indicates that children's reading attitude is not influenced by the parents' literacy habits and subsequently affect their performance in English phonological awareness.

Figure 1: SEM of the mediating effect of preschoolers' reading attitude on the relationship between parent literacy habit and English phonological awareness



DISCUSSION

Pearson's bivariate correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between parent literacy habits and private preschoolers' reading attitude. Parents' habits in reading and literacy activities do not influence children's attitudes toward reading activities. Parent literacy habits do not have an impact on children's reading attitude means that the way parents engage with reading, such as how often they read, does not necessarily determine or influence their child's attitude towards reading. A child's attitude towards reading is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including their early experiences with reading, and the interactions between parent and children, not just the reading habits of their parents. It is important to note that parent reading habits may still play an important role in supporting their child's reading development by providing access to books, reading to them, and encouraging their interest in reading, which is the combined effort with other home literacy environment dimensions. However, it does not necessarily determine the child's attitude towards reading. It is also worth noting that just because parent reading habits have weak impact on children's reading attitude, it doesn't mean that they are not important. Parental involvement in a child's education, including reading to them and providing access to age-appropriate books, can have a positive impact on a child's overall reading development. This can help to foster a love of reading and a positive attitude towards it, which can have long-term benefits for their literacy skills and academic performance. Furthermore, parents' literacy habits can also serve as a model for children and can help to promote the value of reading and learning in the household. Even if children may not

MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELING

immediately adopt the same reading habits as their parents, they may still be influenced by their parents' attitudes and behaviours towards reading.

With reference from the Pearson bivariate correlation analysis illustrated in the previous section of this chapter, no significance was found in the relationship between parent literacy habits and reading attitude, and a significant relationship was found between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness. The mediation analysis using Smart PLS showed no significant mediating effect of reading attitude on the relationship between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness. This means preschoolers' reading attitude does not influence the relationship between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness and preschoolers' English phonological awareness skill is solely and directly influenced by their parents' daily reading habits. Regardless of a child's reading attitude, the level of English phonological awareness will still be related to the literacy habits of their parents.

As there are various studies which showed a direct relationship between parent literacy habits and English phonological awareness (Opiyo, 2017; Inoue et al., 2018; Segal & Martin-Chang, 2018; Yeomans-Maldonado & Mesa, 2021), parents who exhibit daily reading habits have a solid motivation to influence children's English phonological awareness, which does not need children to build reading attitude from parent's literacy habits in order to encourage them in their English phonological awareness development. In addition, as discussed in the previous section, preschoolers' reading attitude showed significant relationship with their English phonological awareness performance, and it is not the mechanism through which parent literacy habits impact children's English phonological awareness performance. However, the study's result showed the opposite from the study conducted by Clavel & Mediavilla (2020), in which the conclusion drawn from the study was that the reading competence of a child whose parents enjoy reading would be boosted if the child enjoys reading as well.

Therefore, it can be concluded that parent literacy habits would not influence English phonological awareness no matter directly or indirectly, via preschoolers' reading attitude. Bivariate correlation analysis indicated that children's reading attitude were not influenced by their parents' reading habits, while their English phonological awareness did show a significant relationship with their parents' reading habits; therefore, it can further result in no mediating effect on reading attitude or the relationship between parent literacy habits and preschoolers' English phonological awareness. Parent literacy habits have a direct impact on the development of phonological awareness in preschoolers but reading attitude is not necessarily as a mediator. It is important to note that children's reading attitude can still play a significant role in their overall reading performance. Children who have a positive attitude towards reading may be more likely to engage in independent reading and seek out reading materials, which can help improve their reading skills.

In conclusion, the result from the study concluded that parents' literacy habits do not significantly affect children's reading attitude. However, parents' literacy habits influence children's development in other areas; as such, parents should not neglect the importance of practicing their own literacy habits. Children tend to follow whatever they observe from adults; hence, parents' literacy habits can further motivate children in daily reading habits.

Implications

The research findings contribute to the body of knowledge on literacy development by emphasizing the interplay between parental reading habits, reading attitude, and phonological awareness.

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Through the result from the study, parents' literacy habits do not significantly affect children's reading attitude, however, this factor does directly influence children's English phonological awareness. Therefore, parents can understand their role played in enhancing their children's English language development. There is significantly less the school can do to change the home environment in which the parents are the party who play an active role. Therefore, after identifying the challenges that children might face in the home environment, the school can provide extra assistance for the children in the school context to fill in the gap that the children are facing to achieve better reading outcomes. Furthermore, this study is a reference for the policymakers to plan to create awareness for the caretakers of the importance of their roles in their children's development. Policymakers, such as local authorities and town councils, can design campaigns and organize events and expert talks for the parents to participate in with their children.

There are a handful of limitations when conducting this research. The pandemic restricted the data collection method throughout the data collection period, from physical to virtual. Hence, it is suggested that further in-depth investigation be done fully face-to-face with the children and the parents in order to obtain more genuine responses. Apart from that, due to logistical constraints, this study is focusing on the northernmost state of Malaysia, Johor. Therefore, the results of the study only represent the population of Johor and would not be able to be generalised as a whole. As a result of this, future studies can extend the research coverage to different parts of the country, as the lifestyles and cultures of different states might vary.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research results offer valuable insights into the complex relationship between parent literacy habits, reading attitude, and phonological awareness. Children's reading attitude does not necessarily connect to their parents' reading habits, however, parents' reading habits somehow influence their language development. The findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to literacy development that considers multiple factors, including the cultivation of positive reading habits and attitudes. By understanding these relationships and their implications, educators, parents, and policymakers can develop effective strategies and interventions to support children's literacy development and promote lifelong learning.

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