

Untangling the Factors Leading to Hong Kong Parents' Inhibition towards Parent-child Joint Book Reading at Home

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Abstract: Parent-child joint book reading is assumed a productive literacy activity conducted within a rich home literacy environment for the purpose of facilitating children's literacy and language development. In Hong Kong, where the education system is described as "highly competitive" and "examination-oriented", together with the impact of traditional Chinese culture which emphasizes academic excellence as a sign of personal achievement and success, and even family glory, parents are eager to conduct parent-child joint book reading as a kind of parental support contributing to their children's school success. However, unlike their western counterparts, a majority of Hong Kong parents are hesitant to perform joint book reading with their children at home due to a number of reasons. The current study attempts to identify the factors causing the inhibition among Hong Kong parents towards conducting parent-child joint book reading at home. Results from questionnaires and in-depth interviews proved that the parents' lack of efficacy towards their English language proficiency, their lack of proper joint book reading skills, the absence of formal parental training for conducting joint book reading, and a lack of time due to their busy work schedule are the major factors behind their inhibition towards parent-child joint book reading. Overall, this study concretely identified the problems uniquely yet commonly deterring many Hong Kong parents' from conducting parent-child joint reading at home, notwithstanding the numerous benefits it can bring to the children's literacy and language development.

Key words: parent-child joint book reading, home literacy activity, academic excellence, parental support, inhibition

1. Introduction

Hong Kong primary pupils are educated with the English Language curriculum in which a great deal of emphasis is placed on language skills and strategies of integrated language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as language forms (Chow, Chui, Lai & Kwok, 2015) which is considered holistically as "literacy" as it involves a whole range of skills covering reading, writing, speaking, listening, visualizing, or making graphical representation of something (Wolfson, 2008). Among all the skills, strong emphasis has been put on word recognition, print, and dictation exercise among most English Language teaching and learning activities ever since kindergarten when children are at a mere age of 4 (Chow, McBride-Chang & Cheung, 2010). There has therefore been a natural assumption that primary pupils, even those who are relatively new to primary

schools, precisely primary 1 and 2 pupils, should be able to possess a rich bank of vocabulary and master good vocabulary skills provided such extensive and rich exposure to print-related teaching and learning activities since kindergarten.

Under the paramount social expectations, parents of the primary pupils, especially those with the Chinese background who have traditionally and widely been characterized as strongly “achievement- and result-oriented” in their attitudes towards their children’s academic performance, would become even more concerned about their children’s literacy learning and education (Wu & Honig, 2010). In the perception of many Chinese parents, precisely Hong Kong parents in this study, their children being literate and academically outstanding would translate into more and better opportunities for future success and, in the long run, for employment in life, as education and literacy are the most effective tools leading to a person’s social status (Wu & Honig, 2010).

2. Motivational Belief for Parental Involvement

As suggested by Wu & Honig (2010), humans’ values and beliefs, including their education beliefs, family values and past social and cultural socialization experiences, guide their actions. Being nurtured with the Confucianism teachings which emphasize a life-long pursuit of knowledge (Wu & Honig, 2010); together with the high social expectations, parents in Hong Kong hold a sturdy presumption that they should be effectively involved in supporting their children’s education, very likely due to their cultural background (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). That provides an explanation for why Hong Kong parents are constantly regarded as those with high motivation for involvement and have a tendency of being more serious towards their children’s education (Wu & Honig, 2010).

While actions are guided by beliefs, Hong Kong parents’ enthusiastic involvement in their children’s education can therefore be seen as guided by their strong motivational beliefs. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), one of the key components constituting such strong motivational beliefs is the parental role construction, defined as the “*parents’ beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children’s education and the patterns of parental behavior that follow those beliefs*” (p. 107). Such a role construction encourages a high degree of parental involvement which guides the parents’ involvement practices, predict their home-based involvement activities, stimulate parents to take an active role in their children’s education and engage them in intellectually-stimulating activities with their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Aside from the parental role construction, the strongest predictor of parents’ academic involvement at home is their perception of requests by their children (Silinskas, Lerkkanen, Tolvanen, Niemi, Poikkeus & Nurmi, 2012). As reported by Silinskas et al. (2012), parents of children who experience difficulties in word decoding engage their children in shared reading and teaching of reading; and those of poorly performed children increase their involvement in school-related activities at home, as a result of the children’s “evocative impact” (p. 303) on their parents’ home-based involvement behavior influencing the frequency of both teaching reading shared reading at home as effort to support their children’s developmental and educational success (Hoovey-Dempsey et al., 2005).

3. Provision of Home Literacy Environment for Children’s Literacy and Language Development

While parental beliefs guide parental practices (Wu & Honig, 2010), many Hong Kong parents, having the strong motivational beliefs in mind, make attempts to enhance their children’s educational outcome with their

effort. Understanding the possibility that individual differences at an early stage can cause subsequent differences in reading and other areas of academic achievement, as advocated by Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan (2002), many Hong Kong parents develop some reading beliefs for their children's literacy and language development. Those who possess strong reading beliefs perceive themselves as playing the key role in supporting their children's literacy development and are more enthusiastic in creating a stimulating home environment for their children's active engagement in literacy-related activities. Such parental beliefs, as suggested by Yeo, Ong & Ng (2014), serve as strong indicator of the extent to which parents would expose their children to joint book reading and the quality of parent-child reading interactions in a favourable home environment.

According to Yeo, Ong & Ng (2014), it's the parents' beliefs about their roles in their children's literacy and language abilities which constitute an important component of a positive home literacy environment (HLE). The stronger the parents' beliefs about the significance of reading and their encouragements to their children towards reading, the more literacy opportunities they will strive to provide to their children which contribute to not just a positive, but also an active HLE which plays a prominent role in children's language development (Chow, Chui, Lai & Kwok, 2015). Home environment, as described by Serenchal & Cornell (1993), promotes acquisition and the elaboration of word meanings. Plenty of other previous researches have confirmed the educational value of an active HLE. Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan (2002) mentioned that when parents make efforts to provide opportunities for engaging their children directly in literacy activities, the influences to children's reading and language development can be long-standing, which aligns with a later study by Yeo, Ong & Ng (2014) reaching the same conclusion. One more research conducted by Sukhram & Hsu (2012) also emphasized the rich home literacy environment for children's early exposure to and participation in literacy activities with their parents as an influential element in their emergent as well as development and educational outcomes. Well-supported by the plentiful affirmative past research evidence, and with the strong parental motivational beliefs and reading beliefs for enhancing their children's literacy and language abilities, many Hong Kong parents therefore make effort to create an ideal HLE for further development of their competencies with direct parental support (Niklas & Schneider, 2013).

4. A Typical Activity in HLE-Parent-Child Shared Reading

Parent-child shared reading, also termed as joint book reading, which involves reading to and together with child (Niklas & Schneider, 2013), is a typical activity performed in an active HLE (Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan, 2002). This kind of parent-child storybook interactions have long been recognized by a number of researchers as having positive influences on children's reading development (Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein & Serpell, 2001) and outcome measures including language growth, emergent literacy and reading achievement (Simsek & Erdogan, 2015). Shared book reading, as conceptualized by Yeo, Ong & Ng (2014), is by nature a kind of *informal activity* taking place at an active HLE, which focuses on the meaning attached to print rather than print per se. They "build 'inside-out domain skills' which include alphabet knowledge, word decoding and phonological awareness" (p. 793).

A number of previous researches have proved the fact that shared reading, even at an early age, has been linked to later positive literacy outcomes including language growth and reading achievement (Ortiz, Stowe & Arnold, 2001). As suggested by Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein & Serpell (2001), shared reading experiences benefit children's literacy development mainly because of the "talk" that accompanies the reading of stories. Such

parent-child “talks” are believed to promote a variety of skills ranging from vocabulary, comprehension, to word recognition, which contribute directly to reading achievements. The usefulness of “talks” is later echoed in a study by Chow (2010) which emphasized that more parent-child verbal interactions during reading contribute to greater growth in children’s language ability mainly as a result of lower anxiety and discomfort in using English. Similarly, Chow & McBride-Chang (2003) suggested in their study that parent-child reading has a close tie with children’s language growth and literacy and it provides a “natural context” for parents to assist their children in “forming concepts about books, print and reading” while offering social and contextual support for development of language which suits the children’s learning needs (p. 234). Almost a decade later, Senechal (2012) put forward three categories of joint book reading relating to the acquisition of knowledge about both the world and language. Firstly, children can be exposed to more complex language including new syntactic and grammatical forms during joint book reading than their everyday conversations with their parents. Secondly, children are offered definitions, explanations and questions for facilitating their understanding and consolidation of new knowledge through unflagging attention from their parents during joint book reading which particularly enrich the children’s acquisition of expressive vocabulary. Finally, children can be repeatedly exposed to books on consecutive occasions which provide them with continuous opportunities for acquiring receptive vocabulary. Another study conducted by Sim & Berthelsen (2014) reached the same conclusion that vocabulary growth and later success in reading and other academic areas are results of frequent shared book reading. Captivated by the competence of shared reading is a helpful methodology for their children’s literacy development such as comprehension building (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2004), and that reading to their children especially while they are still young would increase their future literacy achievement, increase their vocabulary and print knowledge, facilitate their language acquisition and early reading performance, and in the long run school success (Brannon, Dauksas, Coleman, Isrealson & Williams, 2013), many concerned parents are therefore determined to practise shared book reading at home. These parents develop a belief that they should increase their degree of involvement for their children’s better learning outcome as proved by previous research that parental involvement in their children’s reading experiences and overall success are influential resource in children’s literacy development (Kotaman, 2008).

5. Roles of Parents in Parent-Child Shared Reading

With parent-child shared reading’s effectiveness in enhancing the children’s language and literacy skills, especially their vocabulary acquisition and development, as well as arousing and sustaining their reading interest, many parents, especially those in Hong Kong who are concerned ones, would be eager to carry out shared book reading as a home literacy activity. To ensure its success, parents need to perform their role of being active listeners (Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003; Chow, 2010) with proper techniques, attitudes and behaviours as contributions from parents is a component which is indispensable to children’s knowledge and skill acquisition (Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003). According to the PEER sequence proposed by Chow (2010) as a fundamental technique in shared book reading, parents should *prompt* their children to say something about the storybook; *evaluate* the children’s response; *expand* the children’s response by rephrasing and adding information; and *repeat* the prompt question, including completion, recall, open-ended, wh- and distancing (p. 292). Simsek & Erdogan (2015) further introduced the CROWD sequence used in parent-child shared book reading for ensuring effective parent-child interactions involving *Completion* prompt (fill-in-the-blank questions); *Recall* prompts (questions

that require the children to remember aspects of the book); *Open-ended* prompts (statements that encourage the child to respond to the book in their own words); *Wh-prompts* (what, where and why questions) and *Distancing* prompts (questions that require the child to relate the content of the book to aspects of life outside the book) (p. 755) which should all be conducted using the target language, English. Besides the PEER and CROWD sequence, Brannon & Dauksas (2014) emphasized shared book reading as an effective means for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and building by describing it as a golden opportunity for “direct vocabulary instruction” (p. 7). For parents who are eager to enrich their children’s vocabulary bank, they are expected to be able to utilize specific techniques including questioning, clarifying, repeating, pointing to words, supplying examples, using “child-friendly definitions” for teaching vocabulary. These techniques are said to bring impressive gains to English Language Learning (ELL) children, especially the young ones. Similarly, two types of talk, namely non-immediate talk which involve parent-child interactive conversations by going beyond the immediately context of the story targeting at encouraging children to make inferences and predictions drawn on their world knowledge which provides a platform for stimulating and enjoyable joint book reading experience which, in the long run, promotes motivation for further reading; and talk about the print, which aims at promoting knowledge of the mechanics of reading, are advocated by Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein & Serpell (2001) as techniques for parents to master for the benefit of their children’s literacy knowledge through dialogic reading. A type of meaning-related talk similar to non-immediate talk frequently takes place in dialogic reading is “talk about the illustration” (Baker et al., p. 432) which involves talking about the pictures during parent-child dialogic reading. This talk is found to be valuable in creating an enjoyable shared reading experience which is positively related to the affective quality of the parent-child interaction (Baker, et al., 2001) which may be effective in enhancing reading interest in children though is not sufficient to promote children’s reading ability.

6. Limitations of Hong Kong Chinese Parents in Conducting Joint Book Reading

Based on the listed techniques parents should be able to employ and types of talks they are expected to conduct for the success of dialogic reading, those who would like their children to be benefitted especially in terms of vocabulary enhancement, are under the expectation and pressure to be proficient users of English. Yeo, Ong & Ng (2014) discovered through their study that Chinese parents, whose native language is Cantonese but not English, generally lack the English oral language proficiency and confidence to discuss stories with their children during dialogic reading. Some parents in Hong Kong, while acknowledging that dialogic reading is rewarding and advantageous to their children’s literacy skills, are hesitant about performing such home literacy activity in their non-native language — English, mainly due to their foreign language anxiety (FLA), which is obviously negatively correlated with language task performance, is defined as a type of “situation-specific anxiety as a complex combination of emotional aspects covering self-perceptions, beliefs and feelings of tension and apprehension uniquely associated with foreign language” (Chow, Chui, Lai & Kwok, 2015, pp. 3–4). It is found that parents with high foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) are relatively reluctant to interact with their children using English which significantly deprive their children of the opportunities to be benefitted by dialogic reading due to its reduced frequency (Chow, Chui, Lai & Kwok, 2015). With reference to Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (Lynch, 2002), people’s belief in their abilities to “exercise and maintain some level of control over events” is a determining factor influencing their actions (p. 55). Parental efficacy, in particular, concerns their own belief in their abilities in helping their children to improve reading achievement (Lynch, 2002). It is believed that, with

their low self-efficacy, their incentive to perform dialogic reading (well) is little due to their self-doubt about whether they are able to bring desired outcomes because of their limited English proficiency (Lynch, 2002).

7. Overview of the Present Study

In summary, certain techniques required for the successful implementation of parent-child shared book reading, which exert a considerable amount pressure on parents who would like to conduct this meaningful literacy activity at home, leading to some degree of inhibition. One research question was examined in-depth: *What are the factors causing the potential inhibition among Chinese parents in Hong Kong towards conducting parent-child shared book reading at home?* A priori hypothesis is made: (a) Some Chinese parents whose native language is Cantonese are not as proficient as their western counterparts in using English while conducting shared book reading with English storybooks, (b) the lack of formal parent training on conducting shared book reading with English storybooks discourages Chinese parents in Hong Kong from reading with their children, and (c) most Chinese parents in Hong Kong, due to the hustle and bustle of their everyday lives, find it difficult to squeeze time to conduct parent-child shared reading at home.

8. Method

8.1 Participants

A total of 34 parents were invited to participate in this study but only 31 of them were finally included as samples. Three of them had children of more than 20 years old who were indeed adults so their questionnaires were considered invalid. The sample was recruited through face-to-face or online invitation. Parents were informed about the project and their written consent was obtained before they filled out the questionnaire (online or paper) (Appendix 1). The participating parents were told that the reasons behind their involvement (or lack of involvement) in the Home Literacy Environment would be investigated. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Since all of them speak Cantonese as their mother language, a bilingual version of the consent letter and questionnaire were given to them for their easy comprehension and to avoid potential difficulty of completing the questionnaires due to a lack of English reading proficiency.

Out of the 31 samples, 30 of them were mothers and only one is a father. In terms of their employment status, 41.9% of them had a full-time job, 22.6% worked on a part-time basis and the remaining 35.5% were full-time parents. Regarding the number of children they had, 45.2% of them had only one child, whereas 48.4% had two and 6.5% had three. Out of the total of 50 children these parents had, their average age was 74.42 months with the oldest one aged 120 months and the youngest 12 months, meaning they were either kindergarten or primary pupils. The median age of the sample's children were 72 months.

8.2 Measures and Procedures

Self-administered questionnaires were completed by parents. Measures used in the study were based on the hypotheses about why parents feel inhibited from conducting shared book reading with their children at home.

Parental Literacy Involvement measure. The parental literacy involvement component was assessed using the Home Literacy Inventory (Wu & Honig, 2010). The inventory is a 16-item measure that assessed the frequency of parental literacy-related practices. The 16 items can further be categorized into 5 categories namely "library and bookstore visit" (e.g. "You take your child to the library"), "Model writing" (e.g., "You write a shopping list in the

child's presence"), "Model reading" (e.g., "You read a book, textbook or report for yourself in the child's presence", "Teach reading" (e.g., "You teach your child how to read words" and "Parent-child joint reading". For this study, only the last category composed of four questions concerning parent-child shared reading were used. The four questions concerned how often shared reading of various materials is done between parents and their children (e.g., "You, together with the child, read the instructions or brand name on food packages".) and they were assessed on a four-point Likert scale (1 = never or rarely to 4 = very often).

Home Literacy Environment measure. To briefly assess the *home literacy environment* component, parents were asked two questions taken from the Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire (Lonigan & Farver, 2002). The original questionnaire contained thirteen items measuring aspects of parents' modeling of literacy activities (e.g. "About how often does your child see you or your spouse reading for enjoyment?"), parents' involvement in literacy-related activities (e.g., "About how many times per week do you read to your child at home?") and children's interest in literacy (e.g., "About how often does your child ask you what printed words say?". For this study, only the aspect of parental involvement in literacy-related activities were assessed with two questions concerning the frequency of reading to children at home and going to the library with their children on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = never to 7 = daily).

Parents' English Proficiency measure. Parental efficacy belief towards their English proficiency was assessed by a total of eleven items. Parent participants were first asked four questions for them to self-rate their English proficiency: (a) "How well do you speak English"? (b) "How well do you write English?" (c) "How well do you read English?" and (d) "How well do you understand English" on a 4-point Likert scale (Baker, 2014). Scores ranged from 4 to 16. The higher the score, the more proficient the parent's English is.

Parent participants' self-efficacy belief is further measured by their self-evaluation of seven statements (Lynch, 2002). Respondents were assessed by factors relating to their own belief for their efficacy for their children's reading achievement (e.g. "I think I can help my child become a better reader") on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree).

Training on Shared Book Reading measure. To find out whether parents have ever received any formal training regarding skills and techniques for conducting parent-child shared reading at home, two questions were asked. One concerned whether or not parents were given such training ("Have you ever received any training on how to conduct parent-child joint book reading (e.g. dialogic reading) at home with your children?) and another on the type of training made available to them when their answer to the first question is affirmative. Four options were made available to the parents – (a) "Live demonstration by reading experts / teachers" (Chow, 2010) (b) "Copies of guidelines for each storybook" (Chow, 2010) (c) Phone training on reading techniques and strategies" (Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003) and (d) "Video training" (Brannon et al., 2013).

Parenting Stress measure. To assess the parent participants' stress of parenting their children, three questions focusing on parents' personal distress associated with the parental role and perceived competence (e.g. "I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent") were taken from Parenting Stress Index (Dardas & Ahmad, 2014). Two additional questions tailor-made for Chinese parents in Hong Kong concerning their stress caused by their busy work were included (e.g., "I find it hard to squeeze time to read with my child on weekdays because of my other involvements"). The 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree) was used to assess this measure.

Family Demography measure. Parents answered four questions about who the primary caretaker is (father / mother / others), their employment status (full-time parent / part-time worker / full-time worker), the number of

children they have and their ages.

9. Results

Findings revealed that Chinese parents in Hong Kong generally (a) prefer formal literacy materials, (b) bring their children to the library more often than reading with them at home, (c) have high expectation for their children to develop themselves as good readers, though their efficacy belief is generally low and they lack a good understanding of an appropriate level of involvement

9.1 Family Demography

Out of the 31 samples ($n = 31$), nearly 100% of the primary caretakers were mothers and only one respondent was a father. 35.48% of them were full-time parents, while 41.94% of them were employed with a full-time job and the remaining 22.58% had a part-time job (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Employment Status of Samples

Considering the number of children the samples had, nearly half of them (48.39%) had 2 children and 45.16% had only 1 child at home. A small number of them (6.45%) said that they had 3 children. Concerning the 50 children the samples had, their mean age is 74.42 months ($SD = 26.45$ months).

9.2 Parental Literacy Involvement

Four questions were asked which revealed the frequency for Hong Kong Chinese parents to read different types of literacy materials with their children at home, ranging from some authentic or entertaining materials like glossy magazines and instructions or brand names of food packages to formal literacy materials like children's (picture books) at different times of the day — bedtime and daytime.

Out of the 31 samples ($n = 31$), none of the parents read glossy magazines with their children in a frequent manner, and this also applied to the reading of authentic materials (instructions or brand name on food packages) with only one parent indicated s/he did it very often. Contrarily, more parents would pick reading children's (picture) books with their children, with 41.9% mentioned reading them at bedtime 4-5 times or even every day, and 25.8% during day time with the same level of frequency (Figure 2). It proves the fact that parents prefer formal literacy materials instead of authentic or entertaining ones.

Wing, a mother of a kindergarten boy at the age of 5, explained how she made choices of books for his son:

At first I thought I needed to choose books with topics that interested my son. I actually like chapter books

which allowed my son to learn vocabulary and follow plots easily but they were too difficult for my son who's only 5. Most of my friends bought Oxford Reading Tree, and that's why I bought the same set of books because of its popularity among many parents and its low price. I understand that the content was quite boring but I think the whole series was like a "soup opera" with the same characters appearing in different levels of books which should be easy for my son to follow and remember. They were perfect for my son to learn phonics and pronunciation.

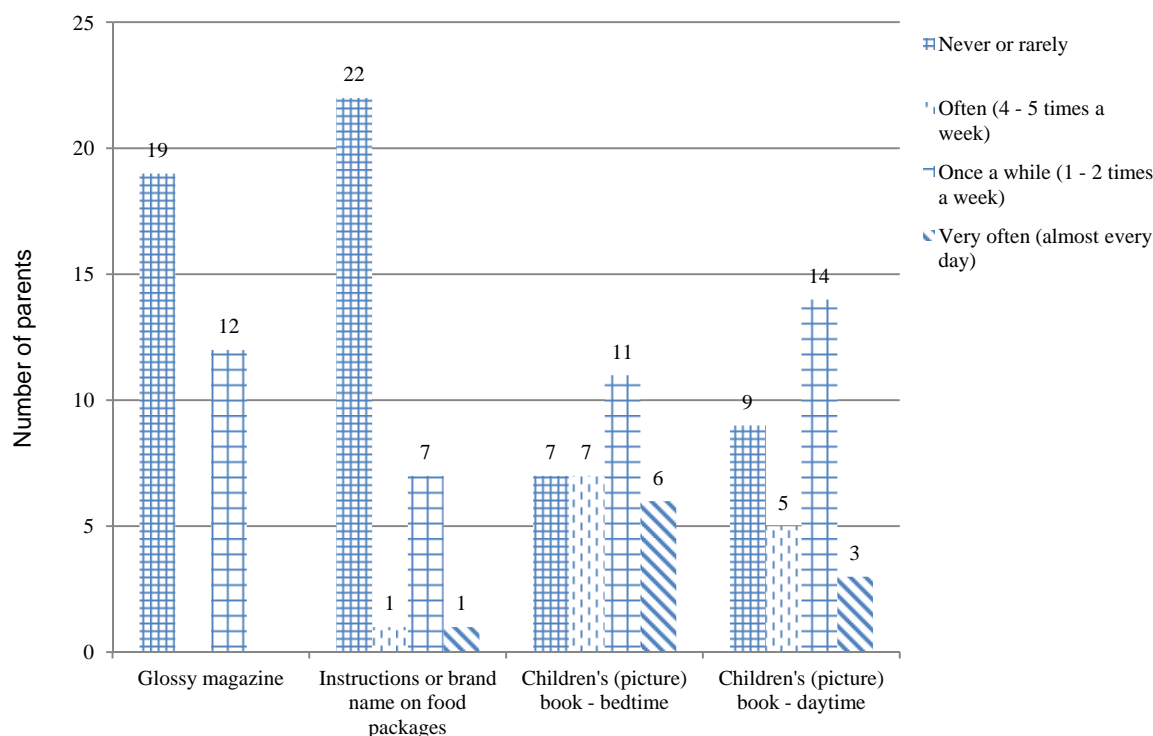


Figure 2 Frequency for Parents to Read Various Literacy Materials with Their Children at Home

9.3 Home Literacy Environment

Considering the frequency of conducting home literacy activities with their children, the largest number of parents (38.7%) read to their children at home 1-2 days per week. Although Chinese parents in Hong Kong did not seem to have the habit of reading to their children frequently, more than a double of them (80.6%), however, would take their children at least once a week to the public library (Figure 3).

Wing, mother of a 5-year-old boy, mentioned the reason for her to take his son to the library:

I take my son to the library to see which kinds of books he would choose and I observe the topics he would pick. That would save me lots of money in case I buy books from bookstores with topics which don't interest him at all.

9.4 Parental Efficacy Belief towards their English Proficiency

First, four questions were asked eliciting the parents' own reflection of their efficacy towards their speaking skills, writing skills, reading skills as well as their abilities to understand English well. Referring to Figure 4, an average number of parents (around 50% of the samples) believed that they didn't perform well ("not well") in all four skill areas. Among all, speaking English is the weakest skill reflected by 67.7% of samples who chose "not very well at all" and "not well". That could possibly explain why most Chinese parents in Hong Kong are hesitant

to perform dialogic reading during which they need to talk with their children in English.

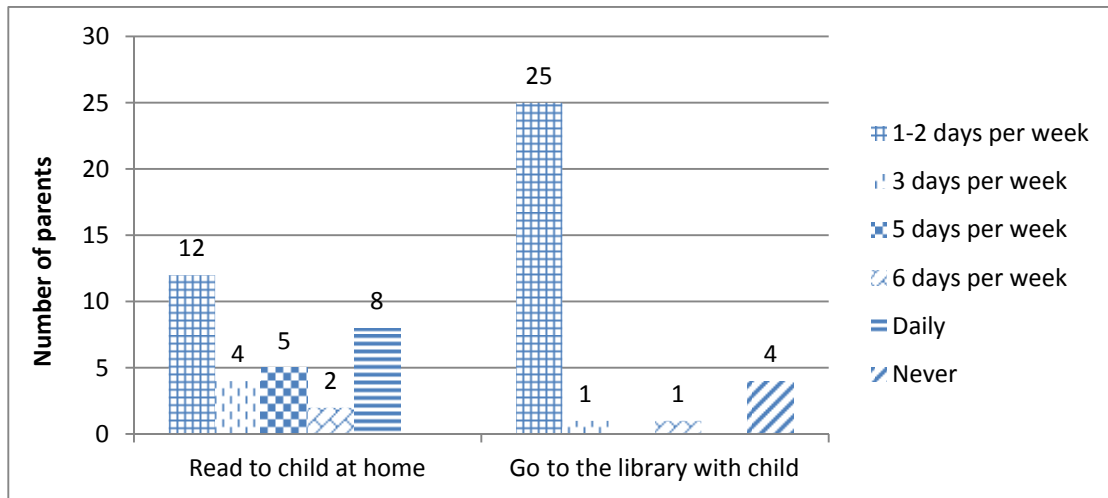


Figure 3 Frequency for Parents to Read Various Literacy Materials with Their Children at Home

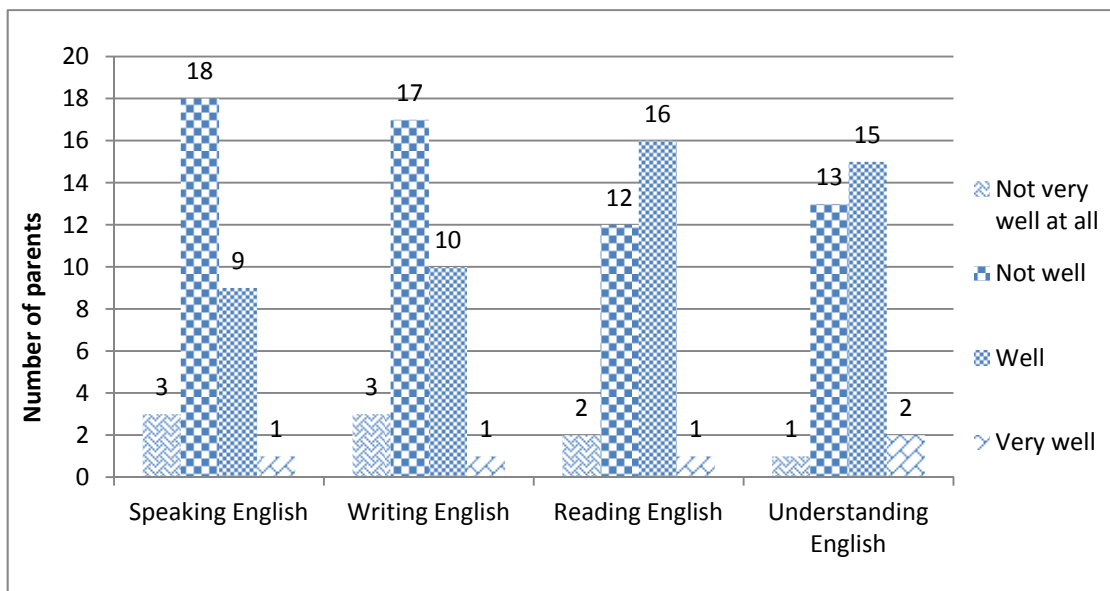


Figure 4 Parents' Self-Evaluation of Their Efficacy in Four Skills

Parents responded to these questions by choosing among four options and each option was assigned a score (“not very well at all” = 1 score points, “not well” = 2 score points, “well” = 3 score points, and “very well” = 4 score points). Total scores for each participating parent were shown in Figure 5. The highest number of parents scored eight points which was a relative low score compared to the highest score 16 (which was scored by only one parent).

Besides parents' self-evaluation of their efficacy in terms of the four skills, parental efficacy belief was further assessed with seven statements reflecting their efficacy and level of involvement in relation to their children's reading achievement (Figure 6).

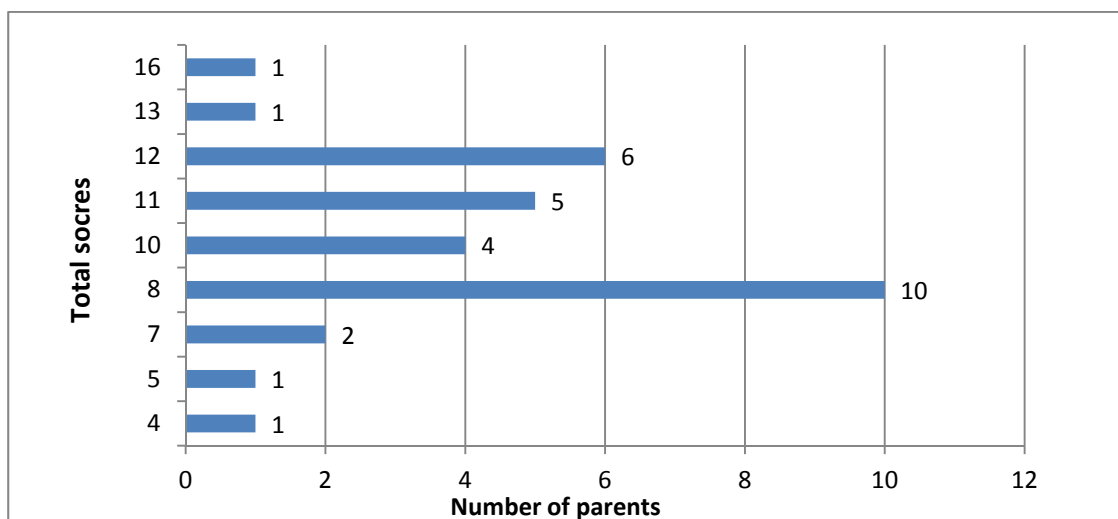


Figure 5 Total Scores of Parents' Self-Evaluation of Their Efficacy in Four Skills

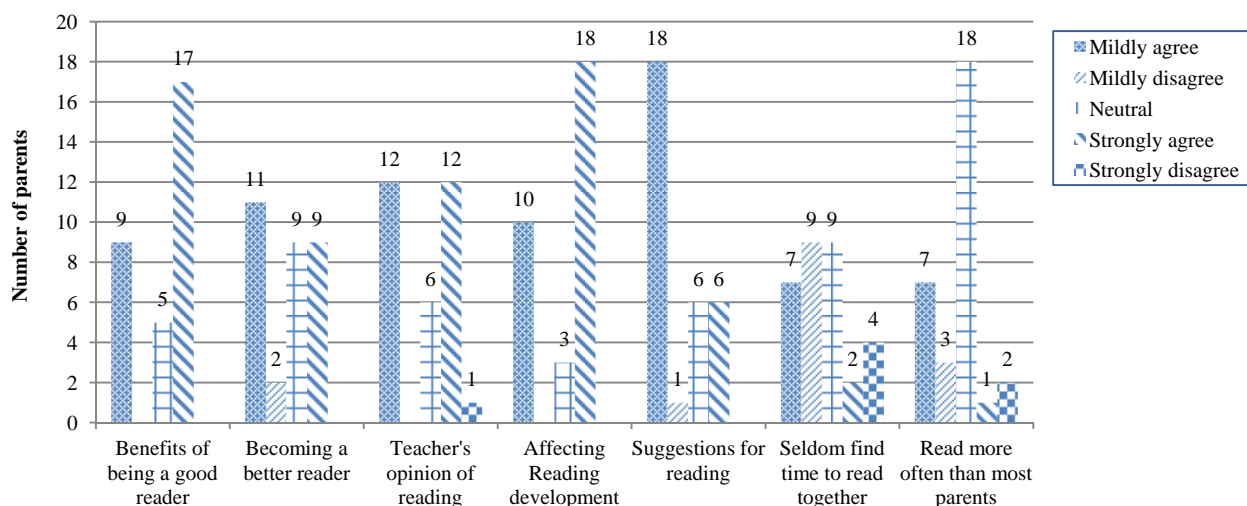


Figure 6 Parents' Self-Efficacy and Level of Involvement in Relation to Their Children's Reading Achievement

As hypothesized, most parents expected their children to become good readers (54.84%) and nearly all of them (90.32%) held a positive belief that they had significant influence on their children's development of reading abilities. However, when it came to their own belief towards their own efficacy, only 29.3% of them felt strongly that they could assist their children to improve their reading skills and a mere of 19.35% believed that their children listened to their suggestions for reading.

When asked about their involvement in parent-child shared reading at home, a surprisingly high percentage (29.03%) of the parents held a neutral attitude which means they were uncertain about whether they had enough or insufficient involvement in the interactive reading activity with their children. The same phenomenon occurred when parents were asked if they read to their children more often than the other parents, with the highest proportion of them (58.06%) picked "neutral" as their response, again showed their uncertainty about whether they had enough involvement or not.

Mrs Wu, mother of a 6-year-old son, explained why she was hesitant in reading with his son:

When I read English story books with my son, I am constantly worried about my pronunciation. I don't want

to mislead my son due to my wrong pronunciation. Indeed, I am always not sure whether my pronunciation is accurate or not.

9.5 Training on Shared Book Reading

As hypothesized, more than two-thirds (67.74%) of the sample never received any formal training regarding skills required for shared book reading with their children (Figure 7). For the one-thirds of them who received formal trainings, 40% of them were demonstrated by reading experts or teachers while one-thirds of them were given copies of guidelines for storybooks. Phone trainings, video trainings, and talks were less common types of trainings offered (Figure 8).

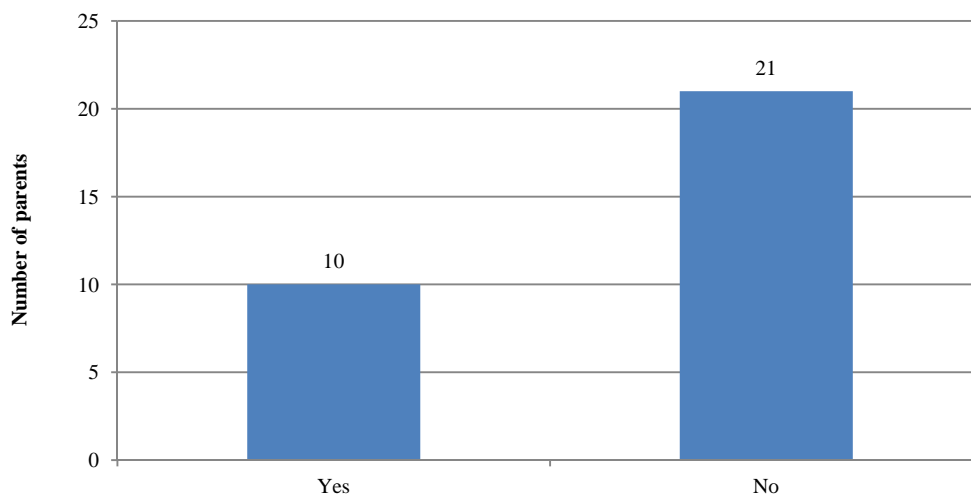


Figure 7 Whether Parents Have Received Formal Shared Book Reading Training

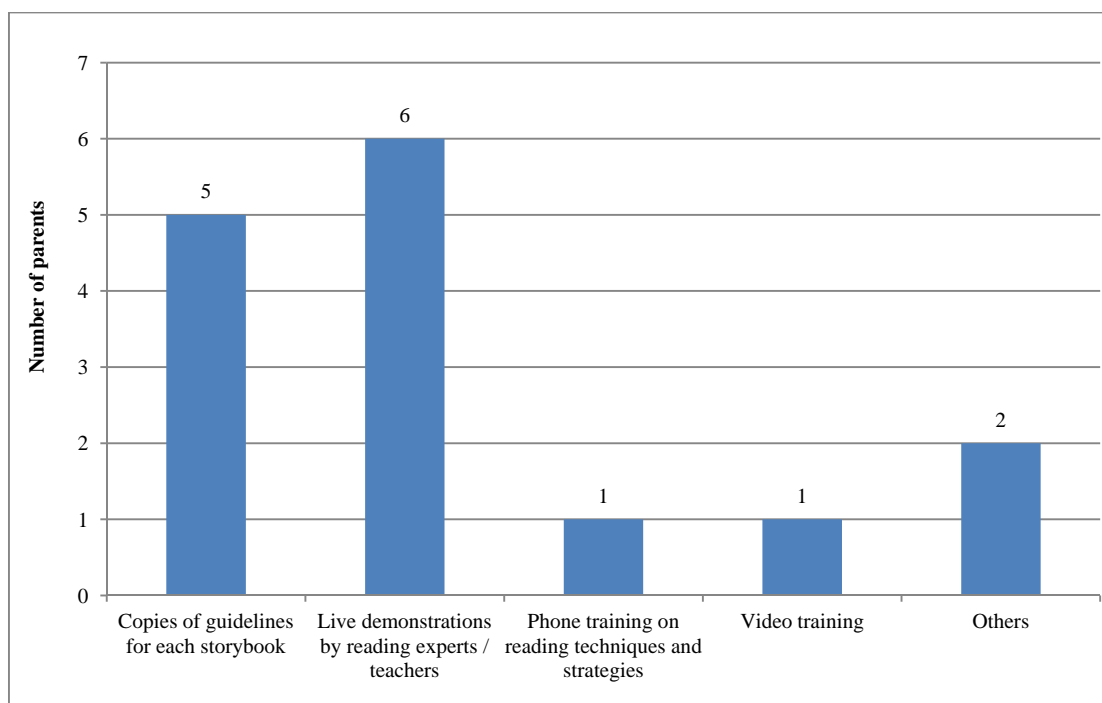


Figure 8 Types of Trainings Offered to Parents

9.6 Parenting Pressure

From the consistent responses elicited through the five questions asked, it can be proved that Chinese parents in Hong Kong were faced with tremendous pressure from their role as a “qualified” parent in raising their children. 41.94% of the sample had a general feeling of incompetence in handling things well. When asked if they had to give up their own life for meeting the needs of their children, an overwhelming 74.19% showed agreement with only 9.68% of the sample had an opposite perspective. A question focusing on whether parents felt trapped by their parenting responsibilities received only 9.68% disagreement and a high percentage of them “neutral” responses (38.71%), again reflecting their uncertainties in fulfilling their responsibilities well.

Notwithstanding the parents' eagerness to play a role in nurturing their children's reading abilities and cultivating in them a good habit of reading, many parents found it hard to allocate time on shared reading with their children, which contributed to their mounting pressure. Only 25.81% of the sample said they had no difficulties finding time to read with their children on weekdays, while even fewer of them (16.13%) mentioned they had sufficient time performing shared reading at weekends. On the contrary, a percentage as high as 54.8% agreed that their weekends were so packed with many other activities like bringing their kids to various interest classes so it was close to impossible to find time for shared reading.

Cindy, a mother of two kids — a boy at the age of 5 and a 3-year-old girl — gave up her full-time job as a university teacher and now teach on a part-time basis, explained the reasons for her to quit her full-time job:

It is really time-consuming to take care of two children, especially when I have a son who is really emotional and therefore need more attention from me. Working part-time gives me more flexibility to allocate time for my two kids. I spend most of my time now caring for my son's behavioral and emotional problems and his academic performance as well.

10. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to the potential inhibition among Chinese parents in Hong Kong towards conducting parent-child shared book reading at home. The findings presented here confirmed the fact that Chinese parents in Hong Kong were in fact very concerned about their children's academic performance and achievement, which is in line with many previous research about Chinese parents' attitudes towards their children's school success (Wu & Honig, 2010). This could be reflected initially through their choice of reading materials for shared reading at home — they had an obvious preference towards formal literacy materials like (picture) storybooks instead of more entertaining or authentic materials like magazines and food labels showing information about canned food, for instance. They had a general feeling that if their children had to learn, they had to learn from materials with quality and formal educational values which could help to enhance their English language proficiency. Such materials should be published by renowned publishers who are specialized in producing quality educational items. They generally did not trust any printed materials other than those published by well-established publishers.

Providing a conducive home literacy environment (HLE) is crucial to effectively facilitate children's learning. To the Chinese parents in Hong Kong, no matter how much they expect their children to develop into good readers for reaping the benefits of reading regularly, and how much influence they would like to exert over their children's academic development, they themselves were not actively involved in reading with their kids, partly due to their lack of time spent with their children due to their busy work and lifestyle. Many fathers and mothers

in Hong Kong are working parents who had to work throughout the day for a living and some of them even had to bring their work home or work overtime in their offices after official office hours. According to a survey conducted by Swiss Banking Group, UBS, employees in Hong Kong had the longest weekly average working hours of 50.1 among their international counterparts (UBS Prizes and Earnings, 2015). This lack of time is a cause for why reading is not a commonly practised activity in many Chinese homes (Wu & Honig, 2010).

Even at weekends, many of the parents were busy bringing their children to various interest classes. With reference to a survey conducted by the Chinese University Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, only 17.2% of parents of kindergarten and primary kids said they did not enrol their children to an average of two to three extra-curricular learning classes such as sports classes, music classes and tutorial classes. Among them, 8.2% of them even arranged their children to join five or even activities outside class for fear that their children may lag behind their peers if they did not start learning early (Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK, 2006). It is a common scene seeing parents rushing from one location to another escorting their children to various learning and educational venues. That explains why some parents may not be able to afford time to read with their children at weekends. Even if time is allowed, both the parents and their children may lack the stamina and energy for doing so.

For full-time parents who were supposed to have sufficient time for conducting shared reading at home, they may have low confidence in terms of their language abilities (Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014) leading to a hesitation towards reading with their children. They were worried that if they themselves were not proficient in English, they may not be able to provide accurate guidance especially regarding accurate pronunciation. Some of them were especially concerned about their abilities to converse with their children in English during dialogic shared reading during which they had to ask questions and provide comments frequently during the reading process. While previous researches suggest that parents with strong efficacy beliefs are enthusiastic in conducting educational activities conducive to learning at home (Lynch, 2002), Chinese parents' lack of self-efficacy may be a factor of infrequent shared book reading at home.

Shared book reading, to those whose native language is English, may not sound a difficult and stressful literacy activity done at HLE, but to Chinese parents, whose mother tongue is Cantonese while they had to read in English with their children, stress accumulated and they may require professional support to eliminate their anxiety and uncertainties. However, structured trainings which provide clear guidelines on how parents can foster their children's language development through shared book reading were not systemically arranged by either the school or educational organizations. Many parents therefore were not very sure and clear about how shared book reading can be done properly with techniques such as the PEER sequence (Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003). Without guidance and clear guidelines, some parents would give up conducting shared reading at home for fear that they did not do it properly which may lead to adverse effects.

Although many would deem the practice of Chinese parents in Hong Kong inappropriate which may exert too much pressure on their children due to their parents' high expectations, the fact is that parents themselves suffer from tremendous stress as well. To start with, some felt that they had to struggle between spending quality time nurturing their children and working hard for their career advancement. Some felt that they had to give up their full-time jobs for better care of their children. This gives a strong feeling of having to sacrificing themselves and being restrained due to their parenting role.

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