

## Exploring Muslims' Parents Experiences in Utilizing Literature

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### ABSTRACT

This study attempted to investigate the experiences of parents in utilizing children's literature to support teaching and learning. The purpose of this study was to explore parents' knowledge towards children's literature and employed qualitative methods as the mode of inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine Muslim parents from various countries with the aims to investigate the literature' preference for young children, the main source of literature and the methods used to teach literature. The three found themes translated to our research findings: fiction is the most preferred genre of literature among the parents, Al-Quran and the Prophets' stories as the main source of literature for Muslim parents, and theatre as a medium to introduce literature. Finally, future researchers are recommended to adapt this study to a larger scale of Muslim respondents to test its confirmability and credibility.

**Keywords:** *Multicultural Education, Children Literature, International Parents, Muslim Literature, Muslim Parents*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of children's literature arose in the first part of the twentieth century, and it is currently recognised as a vital instrument for boosting language development and creativity among preschool and primary school kids. Children's literature can be characterised as high-quality trade books ranging from prose and poetry to fiction and nonfiction, produced for children from infancy to adolescence, and created in accordance with the developmental features of children within each age group (Imşek & Yakar, 2014). The importance of children's reading for young children is both personal and academic. Personal values in children's books include giving children with joy, enhancing their imagination and creativity,

and allowing them to have vicarious experiences.

Multicultural literature promotes or develop an appreciation for diversity, honour students' voices, connect to students' rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and promote critical consciousness (Osorio, 2018). Apart from that, multicultural education may become an approach in altering values that are capable of honouring and educating humans (Vidya Mandarani, 2021).

This research investigates the experiences of parents in utilizing children's literature to support teaching and learning. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to identify the literature' preference for young children and the main resource of literature. This research also aims to determine the methods utilized by parents to teach literature.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Multicultural education through literature

The focus of multicultural literature is the cultures of people from non-mainstream cultural backgrounds. Lawrence et al. (2017) observed pre-service teachers in an urban primary school who used multicultural literature to increase children's literacy. Their findings demonstrated that students who participated in multicultural literature with an actual relationship to learning had better learning results. Bedard and Fuhrken (2019) observed that middle schoolers may participate in the travels of characters, genuinely develop a respect and regard for the book, and gain cultural richness. Teachers' primary focus is presenting culturally sensitive instruction, but many are ignorant of the benefits of multicultural texts that may affect their classroom since their lack of awareness, as well as preparation, may substantially influence students' learning. Inclusion of multicultural literature in a curriculum is the first step in attempting to identify differences (Slaughter, 2021) establish self-worth (Rapp, 2019), and achieve education fairness above all else. It tells the tale via the words of minorities in order to confront and communicate true cultural material about freedom, socio-cultural experiences, historical elements, and racial identity (Davis, 2016). Educators are of the opinion that the only books or works of literature that can be considered authentic are those that were written by a member of an ethnic group about the cultural traditions of that ethnic group and the people who belong to that ethnic group.

### 2.2 Fictitious literature and early children's cognitive development

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to investigate the importance of promoting child development. In these studies, the researchers agreed that child development needs to be focused on because it casts the anchor for children to be productive

independent individuals in the future (Heath, Smith, & Young, 2017)

The term "cognitive engagement" is used to describe the mental processes that a participant must engage in in order to comprehend the material being discussed and to take part in the conversation effectively. The findings of the study conducted by Al-Aufi in 2020 showed that the children's literature included in the curricula have a positive impact on the students' development as it helps the students achieve developmental milestones. On another hand, reading a literary fiction could enhance the Theory of Mind (ToM) of school-aged children (Ike Kuntoro, 2017).

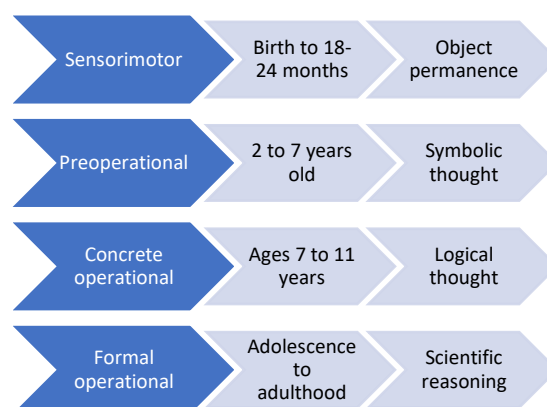


FIGURE 1

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

Every child will go through these phases in the same order, and the progression of a child's development is dictated by the interplay of the child's biological maturation with their surroundings. Each stage of a kid's development requires a different form of intelligence, and one of those types is literature. The way a child thinks at each stage of development is fundamentally distinct from the way they think at the other stages.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study focused on the parents' opinions and utilization of children's literature in supporting teaching and learning. Qualitative research design seemed to be the most suitable design to meet the purpose of this investigation. A case study is used to pursue in-depth information around the topic. A total of nine respondents were chosen to participate in an

in-depth interview and it was conducted online via Google Meet and Whatsapp video call. The participants of the study are parents with at least one child. Purposive sampling was chosen in selecting the respondents. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, 2015). The reason to employ this technique is to ensure a fairly equal representation of the variables for the study.

The researchers selected respondents based on the differences in terms of genders, nationalities, educational background and professions. All parents are Muslims and the most important criteria is the parental experience, which is more than 5 years. The interview questions were piloted to identify the weaknesses of the instruments (Malmqvist, 2019) thus increasing the likelihood of success. The interview questions, terms and interview protocol were adjusted to improve the quality of the interview. Piloting is important to strengthened the interview protocols (Montoya, 2016) and limitations within the interview design.

TABLE I  
Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

Resp onde nt	Nationality	Gender	Year of parental experienc e	Total numbe r of childre n
A	Indonesia	Female	6	1
B	Malaysia	Male	13	3
C	Malaysia	Male	16	4
D	Sierra Leone	Female	11	2
E	Indonesia	Female	28	1
F	Malaysia	Female	13	3
G	Indonesia	Female	22	4
H	South Africa	Male	25	4
I	Saudi Arabia	Female	22	5

### 3.1 Biography of the Respondents

The interview questions were piloted to assess their validity and suitability for the study's intended aim. Certain terminology and structures, as well as questions leading to

identical responses, were adjusted. Piloting is essential because it can help reveal problems or limitations in the interview design that necessitate alterations to the main study (Kvale, 2007). The interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to collect pertinent information regarding stereotypes and the respondents' experiences. The interview questions were separated into three categories: A, B, and C.

- A. Demographic information of the respondents.
- B. Focused on the literature' preference for young children
- C. Questions regarding the technique used to teach literature

The interview was recorded, transcribed, tagged, and reordered so order to collect mutual information within the same category. To establish credibility, the researchers employed the approach of member-checking to build consensus on the collected data. In qualitative research, this methodology is used to establish credibility. With this technique, respondents are provided with the facts, interpretations, and conclusions, allowing them to explain their intents, correct errors, and contribute additional information as needed (Kabir, 2016).

During the interviews, the researchers were as objective as possible in order to avoid being biased towards the subject matter. Observing the degree of neutrality in this research is essential for producing reliable results. During the interviews, the researchers also posed somewhat probing questions. This is done to preserve the objectivity of respondent's comments without being influenced by the researcher's possible bias to match the narrative.

## 4.0 RESULTS

Several themes were derived through rigorous coding and analyses. The arguments are examined in light of the framework utilized, the experiences of the respondents, and excerpts from the interviews, as well as support from the literature discussed earlier.

#### 4.1 Fiction Is the Most Preferred Genre Among Parents

Five out of nine parents stated that they utilized fiction books to encourage their children to read.

Respondent A:

"I use this book that contains pictures and colours because it is very interesting for children." (A:2)

"With this too, my child is able to make up his own story and is able to tell it to me." (A:16)

Respondent B:

"Selection of titles in the genre of literature is important and necessary to research to attract children to literature. For myself who is directly involved in children's theatre staging, title selection is as important as using the animal elements of the surrounding fund for the purpose of title selection in theatre staging". (B:3)

Respondent C:

"I would go for poetry because it is a pretty simple kind of material. So that they could learn faster. They can comprehend whatever the materials inside the books or the web faster." (C:26)

"But I can see that they love to read something related to fiction." (C:29)

Respondent E:

"I also bought her these nursery rhymes and you know all these stories about Jack and Jill. The fairy tales is fine to read you know like Snow White and Seven Dwarfs and um Red Riding Hood, you know so my daughter is familiar with that" (E:6)

Respondent F:

"Development with children's literature and referring to the classic literature that we have been introduced to like the Brothers Grimm. We have a sore fable. We have Dr. Seuss and so many other famous children's literature which is good and I think parents should never neglect that." (F:4)

The reading of fiction has had three distinct effects on target learners: fiction is used to teach lessons and morals, fiction is read for enjoyment, and fiction is used to aid story sequencing and comprehension (Cost, 2016). It has been demonstrated that fictional texts, such as graphic novels, inspire conversation and thinking abilities, leading in higher story comprehension (Jennings, Rule, & Zanden, 2014). As a result of adopting fiction texts as a teaching tool in the classroom, it has been demonstrated that student comprehension increases relative to non-fiction genres (Topping, 2015).

Through the research of Accelerated Reading (AR) software, Topping (2015) discovered that students who read tough fiction materials achieved a greater level of comprehension than their similarly-leveled non-fiction peers. Topping's (2015) study of over 150,000 students in 967 schools revealed that youngsters are capable of reading high-level fiction with greater comprehension and interest than any other genre. Signes et al. (2017) believed that values should be contextualized through stories for children rather than presenting them as abstract concepts" (p. 21).

#### 4.2 Al-Quran and Prophets' Stories as The Main Source of Literature

Two respondents mentioned the utilization of Al-Quran to teach literature which includes the history of Prophets, Quranic translations and prediction of the future.

Respondent E:

"I guess for most Islamic books as well you know so I gave her like stories of prophets and uh we talked a lot about the prophet Muhammad *salla Allah alaih wasallam*. So, I think she started off very early with her Qur'anic classes so I don't see much influence from the literature from the English literature that she reads. But definitely I think it's from the Islamic classes that she has you know so and because she's a girl I suppose that she is going to behave even from young you know so I don't have much problem with her *Alhamdulillah*." (E:13)

Respondent G:

“Mostly, in terms of Islamic teaching, like the history of the prophet.” (G:2)

“After we recite Al-quran I am the one who is the teacher to teach my children to recite Al-quran and then the famous story that I always use is the story of prophet Yusuf alaihissalam because the prophet Yusuf is the strong story. I think the popular story has a lot of memories because he had so many tests from ALLAH. He became a strong, powerful man in the future and including the strong man, and the powerful man in the future he also has the emotion of the nourishing in his smile even if he is angry at his brothers because most of his brothers try to kill him right?” (G:3)

“All of us leave it and we have a good Halaqoh in our family. So like I recite Al-Quran and tell him from the story of Al-Quran so when we recite Al-Quran.” (G:17)

“When I recite Al-Quran there are some words that touch my heart. I’ll stop and I’ll call him to me. And I tell him that ALLAH says like this and I translate to him and give him the lesson from the Al-Quran, the ayat Al-Quran also. I always do that.” (G:20)

The four artistic and storytelling aspects that are clearly mentioned by Muhammad Qutb (1961) are the variety and diversity of the presentation methods, diversification of unanticipated occurrences and climax method, the story presentation and Quranic narration’s frequent and exuberant use of illustrations (as cited by Osman, 2014). Early childhood education that focuses on the teaching of religion or instruction based on the Quran might help youngsters develop a greater appreciation for religious practise (Colina & Listiana, 2020). The purpose of the Al Quran is to cultivate human thought, as well as to regulate attitudes and emotions, both in terms of personal and public interests. The Al Quran contains values, such as the values of faith, sharia, and morals, which are fundamental values; in addition to this, the Al Quran contains values that are local to the region. This creates a distinction between one another and between one location and another, and such distinctions are allowed so long as they do

not go against the principles that are found in the Quran (Yusuf, 2013)

### 4.3 Theatre as A Medium to Introduce Literature

One of the significant findings found based on the interview is the usage of theatre to encourage students’ interest in learning literature.

Respondent B:

“Selection of titles in the genre of literature is important and necessary to research to attract children to literature. For myself who is directly involved in children’s theatre staging, title selection is as important as using the animal elements of the surrounding fund for the purpose of title selection in theatre staging. This is to attract the interest of children as actors or to watch and attract their interest to be close to the theatre itself. This method of theatre is seen as a good method because it can involve students in reality to the world of literature and we can convey something in the form of storytelling to the children themselves. literature gives very good values in its delivery. In the world of theatre, I see that good values have been clearly conveyed to children as well as in theatre staging has been taught with high discipline to children.” (B:2)

“So, I find this literature very good to the children themselves. The effect on children will be to be more focused, disciplined and be able to increase their knowledge of literature as well as other values. I think this literature is very good and needs to be intensified to instil the spirit of cooperation that will result from the theatrical staging that I bring to these children. I see literature through this theatrical staging. Very few of them are fighting for it. I see that they incur high costs to produce a good staging, but for myself, literature needs to be presented well to children and also, the current generation needs to play an important role in producing this success.” (B:14)

Past studies have shown the existence of positive relationships between the arts and academic achievement when the arts are integrated into language arts. A study conducted by Inoa in 2014 indicates that



students in arts integrated classrooms tend to outperform their counterparts in both math and language arts. Another study by Kamarudin (2014) by using Kolb's (1984) Model of Experiential Learning revealed that theatre has increased students' comprehension of the literary texts and also their motivation to learn literature.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained, five out of nine parents preferred to use fiction materials to introduce literature to their children at the early stage while the rest would opt for Al-Quran, Prophets' stories. To answer the second research question regarding the methods utilized by parents, we found that parents preferred to use storytelling and theatre to expose their children with literature.

It is suggested that future researchers to replicate similar research in various cultures especially in remote areas. In-depth investigations of children literature area such as the pedagogy and psychology are greatly needed currently especially for the 21st century children. It is also suggested to adapt this study to a larger group of respondents to examine its reliability and validity.

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