

From Belief to Practice: Parental Shared Book Reading and Equity in Inclusive Home Learning for Children with Autism in Malaysia

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Research Overview (50 words)

This study examines how parental beliefs about shared book reading (SBR) are enacted in inclusive home contexts for children with autism in Malaysia, with a focus on educational equity. Using a case study design, survey and interview data were triangulated to explore how internal and external factors shape SBR implementation.

Purpose of Study

Shared book reading (SBR) is widely recognised as an effective approach for supporting children's language and communication development within naturalistic home environments. However, children's opportunities to benefit from such practices may vary depending on differences in family resources, access to support, and contextual conditions. In inclusive education, ensuring equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities is critical, particularly for children with autism who may require structured interaction and guided support to maximise language development. Despite its importance, there is limited understanding of how parents of children with autism in Malaysia perceive and implement SBR in everyday home contexts, and whether their beliefs are translated into practice. Understanding how internal factors (e.g., parental beliefs, emotional engagement) interact with external contextual factors (e.g., resources, support, and environmental constraints) is essential for identifying potential inequities in home-based learning opportunities.

This study aims to:

1. Examine internal factors, including parental beliefs regarding their roles and responsibilities, as well as their emotional experiences in shared book reading;
2. Investigate external factors, such as resources, support, and environmental constraints;
3. Identify how the interaction between these factors shapes the implementation of shared book reading.

Research Methods

A qualitative case study design with embedded quantitative elements was employed. The study involved two Malay mothers of children with autism aged 6 (Case 1) and 7 (Case 2). Both children were attending school and demonstrated emerging language abilities. Both parents engaged in SBR for approximately 5–10 minutes per session using both Malay and English, reading an average of two to three books weekly. Differences in frequency and materials were observed. Case 1 practised SBR once a week using a variety of materials, including wordless

books, picture books, and early reader books. In contrast, Case 2 engaged more frequently (four to five times per week), primarily using picture word books and early reader books.

Data were collected through two methods. A structured survey assessed four constructs: (A) role and responsibilities, (B) emotional responses, (C) resources and support, and (D) challenges, using a 5-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews explored parents perceived roles and responsibilities, emotional experiences, factors influencing SBR implementation and support needs related to SBR. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Data triangulation was employed to enhance credibility by integrating quantitative and qualitative findings.

Results and Discussion

Findings indicated that both parents reported strongly positive beliefs regarding their roles and responsibilities. Case 1 and Case 2 demonstrated high agreement on roles and responsibilities (Case 1: $M = 5.00$, $SD = 0$; Case 2: $M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.43$), supported by interview data emphasising the importance of SBR in facilitating speech and language development. Both parents also reported positive emotional engagement, with Case 1 demonstrating higher emotional responses ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.52$), indicating strong enjoyment and motivation, while Case 2 reported moderately positive emotions ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.75$). Parents described SBR as a meaningful activity that supports parent–child bonding. However, internal challenges were also evident, including uncertainty in applying effective reading strategies and emotional fluctuations when children showed limited attention or progress.

From an external perspective, differences emerged in access to resources and support. Case 2 reported more consistent access to resources ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.41$), whereas Case 1 showed greater variability ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.38$), particularly in access to guidance and instructional support. Despite this, Case 2 experienced more implementation challenges, including time constraints and difficulties managing child attention, highlighting the influence of environmental and child-related factors.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that positive parental beliefs alone do not ensure equitable learning opportunities. The implementation of SBR was shaped by disparities in access to resources, guidance, and supportive conditions, as well as differences in child engagement and family contexts. These factors contribute to variations in how children with autism experience language-rich interactions at home, potentially leading to unequal developmental opportunities.

Overall, SBR practices are influenced by the dynamic interaction between internal and external factors, which in turn shape the extent to which equitable learning opportunities are realised. Targeted and accessible parent support initiatives are therefore needed to equip families with practical strategies, enhance parental confidence, and provide context-sensitive guidance to promote inclusive and equitable home-based learning.

Keywords (maximum five)

Shared book reading; autism; Malaysia; inclusion, factors