| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Parental Involvement in Interactive Reading and Its Impact on Vocabulary Development in Preschoolers in Saudi Arabia

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| **ABSTRACT**

This research examines parental involvement in interactive reading and its influence on preschoolers' vocabulary development in Saudi Arabia. This research recognizes the vital role of the parents in initial language acquisition and focuses on how specific interactive reading strategies, like shared storytelling, dialogic inquiry, and child-led book selection, aid in vocabulary growth. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five mothers from Aletqan Private School using a qualitative approach to learn their reading routines, perceived outcomes, and challenges. Four key areas were revealed through the thematic analysis: the effect of constant reading habits, increased vocabulary, a visible increase in language use, and coping with engagement. Results show that daily interactive reading with parental enthusiasm and tailored reading techniques further growth in vocabulary and develop a long-term love for reading. The study adds culturally salient insights to the early childhood education literature in Saudi Arabia and contributes meaningfully to the practice of language development among young learners, parents, educators, and policymakers to improve this important outcome.

1. Introduction

For preschoolers, vocabulary acquisition a crucial aspect learning any language. Whenever children encounter new words, they try to improve their communication while learning more about them. One of the most effective ways to help facilitate vocabulary development is reading. Research shows that children learn new words when reading or being read to because they can find the words in context and understand them better (Chuang and Jamiat, 2023). In Saudi Arabia, reading, even with young children, can significantly help vocabulary learning (Alghamdi and Malekan, 2020). Thus, an important aspect of vocabulary acquisition for young learners must be pushed forward to emphasize reading as a primary source.

Parents play a vital role in helping young learners, and interactive reading is a good way to support them. Thus, parents participate in reading activities with children. Parents may participate in activities such as reading instructions, asking questions about new words or stories, and having discussions about the stories. A simple example is when parents read a picture book with their children and can point and ask what they see to support vocabulary learning (Alghamdi and Malekan, 2020). In addition, reading bedtime stories helps to make learning English enjoyable and routine. Parents can do a lot toward their children's vocabulary development and language skills through participating in interactive reading.

It has been shown in earlier research that parental involvement in children's education is important. As noted by Muhinyi and Rowland (2021), active parental involvement facilitates learning, reduces truancy, and improves behavior in class. Along with this, Olaru et al. (2022) noted that caregiver's talk outside the text during reading sessions accounts for many vocabulary skills. All these studies point in one direction, that parental involvement is beneficial but has intricate and nuanced cultural contexts , for

instance, things are different in Saudi Arabia. This is especially true for Saudi Arabia, whose family systems, language use, and pre-school education are unlike those of Western countries.

Preschool children have shown skillful usage when supporting vocabulary acquisition through an interactive style during shared reading (Alghamdi & Malekan, 2020; Muhinyi & Rowland, 2021). Chuang and Jamiat (2023) conducted an empirical study, finding that the use of questions and follow-up interaction in this reading approach was more predictive of vocabulary enhancement than the level of abstraction. This shows that children need to be active participants in conversations about reading during reading sessions in order to improve their language development.

For several reasons, it is important to understand the impact of parental involvement in interactive reading on vocabulary development. First, it provides ideas for educational strategies to help support language development in early childhood (Lennox, 2013). Structured parental involvement has been found to have better language outcome effects for children (Muller and Kerbow, 2018). Second, cultural practices are explored, and insights are offered regarding how they can be adapted to improve educational outputs. The use of reading as a means of communication with the child varies based on the cultural context of the parent since language acquisition (Alghamdi and Malekan, 2020). Finally, this research contributes to the broader field of educational psychology by studying parental involvement in early language acquisition in a particular culture (Muller and Kerbow, 2018). In doing so, the present study aims to provide a better understanding of the needs of diverse learners and can tailor approaches more effectively.

Previous studies have emphasized the significance of parental involvement in the development of children's language, particularly in reading. For example, Olaru et al., (2022) showed that interactive reading significantly increases young learners' vocabulary skills. Other studies, like (Muller and Kerbow, 2018), also focused on the role parental engagement plays in shaping the outcomes with respect to language. These past studies offer good lessons, but they significantly fall short of revealing the cultural background of Saudi Arabia. Most research has been carried out in the West, and this research may not correspond to the unique dynamics of parental involvement in Arabic-speaking families. This gap forms the basis for the current research, which investigates how interactive reading practices among Saudi parents influence vocabulary development in preschool-aged children. This focus would assist in understanding how culture affects language acquisition and the design of more effective education strategies for this context. This research aims to understand the interplay between cultural norms and educational practice, uncovering insights that educators, policymakers, and parents can use to make changes.

1.2 Research aim
This study aims to examine the impact of parental involvement in interactive reading on vocabulary development in Saudi preschool-aged children and to identify the most effective interactive reading strategies for promoting vocabulary growth in this age group.

1. 3 Research questions
- What is the relation between parental involvement in interactive reading and vocabulary development among Saudi preschool-aged children?
- Which interactive reading strategies are most effective in promoting vocabulary growth in Saudi preschoolers?

1.4 Significance of the Study
The study findings are expected to provide valuable insights into early childhood education practices and offer practical strategies for enhancing vocabulary development among preschoolers in Saudi Arabia. They may also serve as a foundation for future research aimed at improving language acquisition in similar cultural contexts.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study
The study focused on parental involvement in interactive reading and its impact on vocabulary development in preschoolers in Saudi Arabia, specifically targeting preschoolers. It examined only interactive reading practices, excluding other literacy activities or forms of parental engagement. The research was conducted within the unique cultural context of Saudi Arabia, acknowledging that cultural norms influenced parental roles and engagement levels. While the study aimed to provide actionable insights for educators and parents, it had limitations, including potential biases in self-reported data, a limited sample size, and a focus on short-term vocabulary outcomes, which may have affected generalizability to other settings or age groups. By defining these boundaries, the study sought to contribute valuable knowledge to early childhood education in Saudi Arabia.

2.Review of Literature
2.1 Parental Involvement in Interactive Reading
In recent years, understanding how parents get involved with their children's education has become increasingly important, especially in specific cultural contexts. For example, Abed and Shackelford (2023) explored how Saudi parents perceive their

involvement with schools, particularly for children with learning disabilities. Their findings shed light on the unique challenges these families face and how they navigate the educational system.

Similarly, Muhinyi and Rowlnd (2021) examined the role of parent-child interactions in developing vocabulary among preschoolers. They highlighted how different styles of communication, like abstract conversations and interactive talk, can significantly enhance vocabulary growth. This suggests that the way parents engage with their children during reading or playtime can have lasting effects on language development.

However, while these studies provided valuable insights, there's still a gap when it comes to understanding these dynamics in the context of Saudi Arabia. The present study focuses on this area, aiming to uncover how specific practices of interactive reading among parents in this cultural setting impact preschoolers' vocabulary development. This could help educators and policymakers create more effective strategies tailored to the needs of these families.

Research in this area (e.g. Bruin, 2017; Muller & Kerbow, 2018) has highlighted that the quality of parents' involvement in engaging reading has a significant effect on how well their child learns language and literacy. By using tools like observation checklists, researchers can group parents into different levels of involvement during reading time.

Parents who actively engage with their kids during reading—such as asking questions and discussing their children's thoughts—have a greater impact on their preschoolers' language development. These interactions not only help kids learn language but also strengthen the bond between parent and child, creating lasting memories around reading time. Research has found that parents who participate in their children's educational activities tangentially enhance their learning in later grades.

In the current digital age, children seem to have set aside reading as a traditional pastime in favor of watching videos or playing games on electronic devices. This shift from simple reading to interactive reading, makes encouragement to participate at this stage ever more vital. Children indeed need their parents to engage actively while reading to them because there are so many competing distractions.

Caregivers are encouraged to actively participate in their children's education through family literacy initiatives by stressing interactive reading sessions. These workshops show caregivers how to actively engage with children during reading sessions by providing them with appropriate resources and effective reading strategies. Active parental engagement has the potential to create fluent readers with advanced vocabularies who are bound to succeed academically and learn to love it (Bruin, 2017; Muller & Kerbow, 2018).

2.2 Review of Related Studies

Numerous studies have highlighted the critical role of parental involvement in interactive reading in promoting vocabulary development among preschool-aged children. For instance, Muhinyi and Rowland (2021) found that toddlers whose parents engaged in reading activities—such as reading aloud, asking questions, and explaining unfamiliar words—showed significantly greater improvements in vocabulary skills than those with less engaged parents. The study emphasized that highly interactive, back-and-forth conversations during reading were especially effective in supporting early language development.

Similarly, Olaru et al. (2022) demonstrated that family participation in home-based interactive reading significantly enhanced vocabulary acquisition and broader language skills in early childhood. Their use of local structural equation modeling helped uncover how multiple factors, including parental involvement, interact over time to influence language development from kindergarten into the elementary years. This study underscores the importance of sustained parental engagement during the preschool years and offers a framework for understanding how such involvement contributes to long-term vocabulary growth.

Despite these findings, little research has been conducted in the Saudi Arabian context, especially concerning how specific interactive reading strategies employed by parents influence vocabulary growth in preschool-aged children. This presents a key gap that the current study seeks to address.

In addition to traditional reading practices, technology-mediated approaches are gaining attention. Chuang and Jamiat (2023) conducted a systematic review examining the effectiveness of interactive reading apps in supporting early literacy development. Their findings suggest that technology-based collaborative reading can complement traditional parent-child reading sessions, offering a new avenue for parental involvement. While their study was not Saudi-specific, it highlights the potential for digital tools to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and enrich parent-child reading experiences. Investigating how such tools are received and used by Saudi parents remains an area in need of exploration.

Insights from Chuang and Jamiat's work can inform discussions on best practices, challenges, and cultural considerations related to incorporating engaging reading apps into family literacy routines in Saudi Arabia. Their findings reinforce the notion that combining interactive print and digital reading strategies may yield better outcomes in vocabulary development.

Further supporting this perspective, Lennox (2013) emphasized the importance of interactive read-aloud sessions, showing that parental scaffolding—through asking questions and encouraging children to express themselves—enhances vocabulary, critical thinking, and reading comprehension. This aligns well with the present study's focus on identifying effective interactive strategies that Saudi parents can adopt during shared reading sessions.

While these international studies offer valuable insights, research specific to Saudi families remains sparse. Abed and Shackelford (2023) investigated parental involvement in the education of Saudi elementary students with learning challenges. Although their focus was on older children and learning difficulties, their findings shed light on broader issues that affect family-school partnerships, including barriers to parental involvement such as social norms, communication gaps, and policy limitations. These insights underscore the importance of developing culturally sensitive and inclusive strategies to enhance family engagement in early literacy activities.

Taken together, the reviewed studies suggest that parental involvement in interactive reading plays a crucial role in vocabulary development, and that both traditional and digital strategies have the potential to enhance these outcomes. However, the lack of research within the Saudi preschool context—particularly regarding which interactive strategies are most effective—highlights the need for localized studies. The present research addresses this gap by exploring the relationship between parental involvement and vocabulary growth in Saudi preschoolers, and by identifying the most impactful interactive reading strategies suited to this cultural and educational setting.

3. Method
3.1 Design of the Study
This exploratory study used a qualitative research design, where qualitative data were collected from interviews with the participants. The interviews aimed to answer questions on how parents in Saudi Arabia help their preschoolers learn new words through interactive reading. For this current research topic, a qualitative research design is appropriate to get more in-depth data about parental attitudes towards reading and its impact on vocabulary development and challenges they face in engaging with their children in reading activities.

3.2 Participants
Five parents from Aletqan private school took part in this study interview. They are parents with children in nursery school. The parents were mothers only as it is more convenient to reach them. Their ages ranged between 29 and 35 years old. The study involved five Saudi mothers, each with distinct backgrounds in terms of age, education, occupation, and family size. Parent 1 was 28 years old and held a bachelor's degree. She is a housewife and cares for two children, including a five-year-old daughter who was the focus of the study.

Parent 2, aged 27, also holds a bachelor's degree and works as a teacher. She has one daughter, aged five and a half. Her dual role as a mother and educator provided valuable insight into how professional knowledge influenced parental involvement in early learning.

Parent 3 was 35 years old and had completed high school. She is a housewife and the mother of four children. Her five-year-old son participated in the study. Her experiences highlighted the challenges of supporting early literacy within a larger family setting.

Parent 4, aged 30, also hold a bachelor's degree and is a housewife. She has five children, with her five-year-old son serving as the participant. Her background offered perspectives on managing multiple caregiving responsibilities while engaging in her child's vocabulary development.

Parent 5 was 33 years old and held a bachelor's degree. She works as a hairdresser and is the mother of three children. Her five-year-old daughter took part in the study. Balancing work and parenting responsibilities shaped her approach to interactive reading and language support at home.

Overall, the participants varied in terms of education, employment, and family size, yet all demonstrated a meaningful level of involvement in their children's early language development. Their contributions provided rich, experience-based insights into interactive reading practices and vocabulary growth within the home environment.

3.3 Data collection instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online via Zoom, ensuring accessibility and convenience for participants. Each interview lasted between 35 and 50 minutes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the mothers' views, practices, and experiences related to interactive reading and vocabulary development. To promote comfort and encourage open communication, the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' native language. This helped ensure that participants could express their thoughts clearly and naturally.

The interview protocol was designed to investigate the role of parental involvement in interactive reading and its impact on vocabulary development among preschool-aged children in Saudi Arabia. It consisted of open-ended questions aimed at capturing the participants' perspectives, daily reading practices, and the strategies they use to support their children's language growth (see Appendix A for the full list of interview questions).

With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription and analysis. The recorded data offered rich qualitative insights into the types of interactive reading strategies employed by parents and the perceived impact of these practices on early language development in the Saudi context.

The interviews were conducted during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. Prior to data collection, the interview questions were reviewed and validated to ensure relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives. Participants were given the option to attend the interviews either in person or virtually. All five participants chose the virtual format, which further enhanced convenience and participation. Overall, the semi-structured interviews served as a key instrument for understanding the nature and effectiveness of parental involvement in interactive reading and provided essential data for the thematic analysis that followed.

3.4 Data analysis
3.4.1 Thematic Analysis:

Data collected from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to parental involvement in interactive reading and its impact on vocabulary development among preschool-aged children in Saudi Arabia. The analysis focused on drawing patterns from the participants' experiences, highlighting the strategies they used and their perceptions of how these practices supported language growth. Coding procedures were applied to systematically categorize and interpret the interview responses, allowing for the extraction of key insights and commonalities across participants. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the nature and effectiveness of interactive reading practices within the Saudi context.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Parental Involvement in Interactive Reading and Its Influence on Vocabulary Development (RQ1)

The qualitative analysis of interview data revealed four key themes addressing the first research question concerning the role of parental involvement in interactive reading and its impact on children's vocabulary development.

4.1.1 Reading Routines and Frequency

Parents reported different frequencies of interactive reading with their children, but most said that reading with their kids is a daily routine, while others reported that they manage to read with their kids on the weekends. For instance, Mother 1 explained, "We read a book [1-2 pages from a book or a short story] every night before bed. It is part of our routine now," while Mother 2 admitted, "I only manage to read with her on weekends." These answers prove differences in parental involvement, a key aspect emphasized by Abed and Shackelford (2023), who noted that workload, cultural expectations, and awareness levels influence Saudi parents' participation in educational activities.

Consistent reading practices, especially reading daily with young children, are crucial for vocabulary development. Olaru et al. (2022) highlight that frequent, sustained exposure to rich language input through shared reading significantly predicts vocabulary acquisition across early childhood.

4.1.2 Perceived Impact of Interactive Reading on Vocabulary Growth

All parents agreed that interactive reading is invaluable for vocabulary growth. Parent 3 shared, "He repeats words from the book the next day," while Mother 4 said, "He uses new adjectives he hears in stories." This aligns with findings from Muhinyi and Rowland (2021), who assert that interactive reading promotes deeper vocabulary learning, especially involving extratextual talk and active engagement. Moreover, Lennox (2013) underscores how shared reading allows children to hear new words in meaningful contexts, enhancing understanding and retention.

4.1.3 Observed Changes in Children's Language Skills

Most parents noticed significant improvements in their children's vocabulary and language use. Parent 5 stated, "Now she tells me stories with full sentences," and Parent 2 noted, "Her teacher said she uses more descriptive words in class."

These outcomes reflect the development of young children's language improvements because of enriched home learning environments, where language is developed with intensive and regular interactions and support of parents at home (Chuang and Jamiat, 2023). Interactive reading is especially effective in supporting vocabulary when parents ask questions, explain new terms, and give examples.

4.1.4 Challenges in Engaging Children in Interactive Reading

Some mothers expressed challenges in maintaining their children's attention during reading sessions. A few mentioned that their children became easily distracted, lost interest quickly, or were not always in the mood to listen to stories. These issues made it difficult for parents to establish consistent reading habits or maintain meaningful engagement during reading time. To address these challenges, parents used strategies such as reading shorter stories, using expressive voices, and allowing children to pick books. Bruin (2017) points out that when parents adapt their methods to suit their child's needs, they can overcome common engagement issues and transform reading into a shared, meaningful experience.

4.2 Effective Interactive Reading Strategies for Vocabulary Growth (RQ2)

The response to the interview highlighted different interactive reading practices that parents use to facilitate their children's vocabulary enhancement. These techniques, explored across five key areas, show how parents — from choosing the books to discussing them after reading—guide their children's learning and encourage them to approach reading more deeply.

4.2.1 Book Selection Practices

Few parents let their children select a book to read, while most reported that they tend to consult other parents or search the internet to find an appropriate book. However, lots of studies proved that child-led book selection not only boosts motivation but also fosters engagement, as noted by Lennox (2013), who emphasizes the role of appealing, age-appropriate materials in literacy development. Cultural factors also play a role in book choice, as described by Alghamdi and Malekan (2020), who found that Saudi families often choose materials that align with cultural norms and values.

4.2.2 Storytelling and Discussion Techniques

Most parents reported that dialogic reading techniques encourage children to participate in meaning-making. For instance, mother 2 said, "I often relate the stories to my childhood experiences, which makes it more relatable for my child. This not only fosters discussion but also deepens our emotional connection." According to Muhinyi and Rowland (2021), these verbal exchanges during reading sessions lead to richer vocabulary learning and language use.

4.2.3 Effective Strategies Reported by Individual Parents

Most parents use similar strategies to enhance the learning process, such as repetition and connecting the words to different items. Meanwhile, parent 3 finds: "I love to use sound effects and different voices for characters. It makes the story come alive! After reading, we discuss what they would do in similar situations, which encourages critical thinking."

These findings align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, where learning occurs through guided interaction with more knowledgeable others. Muller and Kerbow (2018) assured that parental modeling and participation in educational activities are central to cognitive and language growth.

4.2.4 Parental Methods for Tracking Vocabulary Progress

Parents use different methods to assess their children's vocabulary progress, such as asking questions or noticing their use of new words during playing or conversation. While not formal, these observational strategies are valuable, as parents often serve as the first assessors of their child's language development. Olaru et al. (2022) argued that vocabulary growth can be effectively monitored through behavior in natural contexts, especially when formal.

Overall, the findings highlight the essential role of parents in supporting vocabulary development and promoting a reading culture at home. Through consistent routines, interactive techniques, and emotional engagement, parents help children build language skills and a love for reading. Strategies like using expressive voices, relating stories to real-life experiences, and encouraging book choice align with effective practices in the literature. Parents also informally track progress by observing new word use in daily contexts. As Parent 5 shared, "Parental involvement is crucial. When we make reading a shared experience, it shows them that it is important and enjoyable." This supports research by Chuang and Jamiat (2023) and Abed and Shackelford (2023), which shows that early, positive reading interactions shape long-term motivation and educational engagement. These insights suggest the need for culturally relevant support that empowers Saudi parents as key partners in early literacy development.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of parental involvement in interactive reading on vocabulary development among Saudi preschoolers and identified effective strategies that support early language growth. The findings show that consistent, engaging reading practices—such as dialogic techniques, expressive storytelling, and child-led book selection—enhance children's vocabulary and foster a lifelong interest in reading. Despite some challenges, parents play a critical role in shaping early literacy experiences. These insights highlight the importance of supporting and equipping parents with culturally appropriate strategies to strengthen language development at home and promote positive educational outcomes from an early age. However, the study was limited by its small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. Future research could expand to include diverse family backgrounds and incorporate observational or longitudinal methods to gain a deeper understanding of long-term impacts.

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