

Assessing Emergent, Social, and Multiliteracy Practices in Urban Malaysian Homes

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to assess parents' understanding of literacy practices, including emergent, social and multiliteracy practices. In Malaysia, literacy skills are generally only taught in the classroom. However, research shows that the home and school are overlapping 'spheres of influence'. Children learn emergent and social literacy practices prior to school age and these are powerful factors towards future success in school. This paper stems from the findings from the Multimodal Community Literacy project, which was a day-long literacy event which used multiliteracies (arts and crafts, songs, videos, movies, and storytelling) to facilitate an understanding of and participation in social literacy practices among working class parents'. The participants comprised administrative staff with young children, aged 2 to 8, from the Institute of Teacher Education in (city), Malaysia. This case study used structured questionnaire triangulated with parent and caregiver interviews. The project assessed family's understanding, access, frequency and types of social literacy practices applied at home. The findings revealed that parents' belief in what constituted literacy practices differed from research defined social literacy practices. Finally, this article provides examples of parent teacher collaborations to increase social literacy practices towards student success in school.

KEYWORDS: Emergent Literacy, multiliteracies, social literacy practices, literacy event, 3D literacy

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Introduction

The learning and teaching style in most Asian countries (China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam) tend to be teacher-centred and mostly, text-based, focusing on form (Rao, 2002). Furthermore, in Asian education literacy is perceived only as the measurable product of reading and writing. However, as recent research in the EAL/ESL and EFL fields indicates, it is not sufficient to just expose children to literacy skills. More importantly, studies reveal how parents, community and schools engaging in literacy practices have a greater effect on later literacy learning (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000). Galindo and Sheldon (2012) contend that the two most important literacy learning contexts are home and school. Yet, in Malaysia, as in other Asian countries, some parents feel they are ill-prepared to facilitate their children's emergent L2 literacy practices. Findings from a study of rural Malaysian families by Abdul Majid, Muhammad & Puteh (2005) revealed that parents understood and were concerned about the future education of their children. These findings also showed that parents felt ill-equipped to aid their children's literacy learning. Furthermore, the study recommended that "more studies need to be done to assess the home and community environment that could provide favourable environment to the teaching of English to the rural children" (p.88). Thus, extending from this research and building on other literacy research, the present study applied a mixed-method case study aimed at investigating urban Malaysian parents' belief in what constituted literacy practices. In addition, the study investigated whether parents understood the concept of social and emergent literacy practices, the importance of parental participation in their child's literacy learning and if the families had access to multiliteracy practices at home.

In light of this, a literacy event was designed (Scribner & Cole, 1981) that would; a) assess Malaysian working parents understanding of social and multiliteracy practices at the emergent literacy stage and b) model how to increase social literacy practices at home. The project used multiliteracies including various forms of technology. Thus, the project was named the 'Multimodal Community Literacy Project'. The term *multimodal* refers to the use of more than one type of literacy mode (oral, audio, digital, visual, pictorial, and video) while *community* situated the project outside of the formal school context. Creating a multimodal community literacy project was based on the rationale that in Malaysia, literacy is usually only conducted in the formal classroom setting but should include parental participation as well (Abdul Majid, Muhammad, & Puteh, 2005). The project was based on three important literacy practices that occur prior to formal school-age. These are emergent literacy, social literacy, and multiliteracy practices. All three are interconnected and will be defined later.

It must be noted that this project was not based on a deficit model of what parents do not know but rather it is based on what parents do know in their L1 (Epstein, 2001). The project focused on the parents' strengths rather than their weaknesses. Thus, the researchers chose to approach literacy using a multiliteracy framework. More specifically, the study investigated whether families' had access to both 2D text-based literacy and 3D multiliteracy resources (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). 2D refers to the traditional paper or text-based literacy practices whereas 3D covers the digital images and information that children are exposed to through technology (Green & Beavis, 2012). Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) research indicates digital technology enables second language learners to extract meaning from visual images, audio, and video without the constraints of language. Furthermore, these are social and emergent practices which children are exposed to prior to school. These emergent skills include phonological awareness and vocabulary exposure which are crucial for later second

language and literacy acquisition (Kang, 2009). This is a gap in EFL research as most EFL literacy studies begin at school age. Ultimately, this pilot study aimed not only to assess the multiliteracy context in urban Malay households but to better understand how emergent social literacy practices could be applied by parents and community members through the use of a 3D-based approach. Next, following the definitions, the rationale and literature review will be discussed followed by the literacy event design, methodology, results and future implications.

Literature review

As previously stated, literacy is not just the measurable skills of reading and writing but a social practice ingrained in cultural context (Scribner & Cole, 1981). The social literacy practices that begin at birth consist of singing, oral stories, nursery rhymes, finger play, games and playing. These are called emergent literacy practices. Emergent literacy conceptualizes the acquisition of literacy as a developmental continuum occurring in pre-school age rather than when children start school (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). According to Evans, Shaw and Bell (2000), emergent literacy comprises several factors which include: language ability, phonological awareness, sounds, sounds of letters; extending discourse, using a variety of vocabulary; text awareness, print direction, promoting literacy environments; shared reading, variety of print and images; the understanding of narratives, stories and conversations. In addition, emergent literacy practices are the oral, conceptual, and meaning making of the foundation for later literacy skills which encompass both social literacy and multiliteracy practices. Thus, as national and international (ELL and EFL) research indicates, literacy is a form of social practice that includes oral language, family involvement, community socio-cultural interaction, and is enhanced by effective pre-reading activities prior to formal classroom literacy learning (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). For example, just reading a story is not as effective as 'how' the story is read such as utilizing gestures, voices, finger point, questions, and extending vocabulary (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000). Many children who struggle with literacy in school have shown signs of poor emergent literacy skills prior to school entry, lending support to the idea of a 'critical period' for developing emergent literacy skills (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). At the emergent stage, oral literacy and storytelling is vital for later text-based literacy practices regardless of language (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Moreover, findings from an empirical study of 113 grade four EFL learners indicated that their English phonological awareness, prior to school age, was a significant predictor of their word reading skills (Kang, 2009). Therefore, parents play an integral part in children's L1 and L2/L3 literacy and language learning. However, Plowman, McPake and Stephen (2008) found that parents tend to underestimate their participation in literacy practices through their own socio-cultural transmission. Consequently, parents who are not proficient in a L2/L3 feel that they lack the ability to facilitate home literacy practices with their children prior to school-age. However, Brooks, Pahl, Pollard, and Rees (2008) reviewed family literacy programs to assess inclusion and effectiveness. They used meta-data taken from quantitative and qualitative studies in Britain, Canada, Germany, Nepal, New Zealand, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, the USA, Malta Belgium, England, Italy, Lithuania and Romania. The evidence showed that "very few, if any, families could be said to totally lack literacy, or concern for children's development and education, yet some programmes appeared to be premised on such beliefs" (Brooks, Pahl, Pollard, & Rees, 2008, p.17). In order for strong L2 language and literacy acquisition to occur, emergent and social literacy practices must occur prior to formal school-age. In the next section, social literacy practices will be defined.

During, the last twenty years, researchers have expanded the traditional definition of literacy from just reading and writing to include other forms of socio-cultural practices (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Literacy is not just a practice, but a series of socially organised practices which include “not simply knowing how to but applying the knowledge for a specific context (Scribner & Cole, 1981 p. 236). Social literacy practices include; skills, technology, access and knowledge and encompass songs, jokes, riddles, storytelling, art, crafts, customs, cultural practices, and drama (Pahl, 2005). These are literacy practices that stem from socio-cultural process in which with meaning is contextualized for children rather than learnt. For example, learning the phonological sound of a letter is an emergent literacy practice. However, singing the alphabet song is defined as a social literacy practice. The main purpose of the song is socio-cultural communication. Although, social practices are connected to family, community and cultural practices, emergent literacy skills can still be learnt from these practices. Therefore, these social literacy practices start at emergent literacy stage and continue throughout the literacy learning process. Furthermore, Mahiri and Godley (1998) found evidence of a strong connection between societal literacy practices and successful language learning. Thus, it is important to note that literacy is not the sole responsibility of the school or of the parents but a socio-cultural process that integrates social literacy practices, events and activities (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Thirty years of literacy research has demonstrated that emergent L2 social literacy begins prior to school-age and is connected to the family (Brooks, Pahl, Pollard, & Rees, 2008; Pahl, 2005; Roswell, McLean, & Hamilton, 2012). Thus, success in literacy requires overlapping spheres of influence, of both the home and school context, as they are powerful factors in students’ achievements across grades (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Epstein and Sheldon (2006) defined the two spheres that influence literacy learning as home context which includes the community and the formal school context. Thus, social literacy includes three types of practices; traditional text-based practices, cultural interaction literacy practices, and multiliteracy practices or exposure to both 2D and 3D literacy. Therefore, an overview of multiliteracy practices based on research is required to better understand the rationale behind the design of the multimodal community literacy event.

The New London Group’s (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) research findings suggest that literacy comes from multiple domains such as audio, visual, spatial, text-based, and oral. With the increase use of digital technologies at a younger age, there are new literacies that embed more than one form of literacy practice. Literacies that incorporate various forms are called multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Multiliteracies include various forms such as: paper, electronic, live performance, multimedia, auditory music, sound effects, silence, gestures and facial expressions, paralinguistic grammar, punctuation, alphabets, spatial framing of objects in a domain, visual, moving images, page or screen, layout, and colour choice. Consequently, as with emergent and social literacy practices, multiliteracy practices can be components of both social and emergent literacy learning. However, multiliteracy is not just technology for learning but using digital technology to expose children to 3D literacy practices. Often, language acquisition and literacy practices in EFL contexts overlook the use of technology in favour of paper-based or traditional 2D approach. However, Zhao (2003) conducted meta-analysis of the studies that included enough data for such an analysis from studies between 1997 to 2001. The findings from the meta-analysis found there is evidence suggesting that technology-based language instruction can be as effective as teacher-delivered instruction (Zhao, 2003, p. 20). Research in multiliteracies emphasise that “the field needs to shift from an emphasis on teaching reading, writing, spelling and grammar to one that offers more flexibility in the kinds of meaning-making that students do” (McLean &

Rowse, 2013, p. 1). Consequently, to better illustrate for parents' multiliteracy practices, both social and digital practices were embedded into the multimodal community literacy project. Based on the understanding of emergent, social and multiliteracy practices the rationale for the project will be discussed.

The rationale

This was the pilot phase of a three-phase community literacy project. The initial case study was designed to assess urban working class parents, their access to technology, and their attitudes and understanding of social and multiliteracy practices. Within the context of this study, working class parents are defined as parents who must both work in order to pay their bills, who work in manual or administrative jobs, and who only have high school (Gilbert, 2002). Based on preliminary interviews with the participants, an issue of time constraint arose for the working class parents. Thus, a framework was designed, to assess family literacy practices access and develops a model for families on how to integrate social, emergent and multiliteracy literacy practices into their daily life. The researchers designed literacy events to highlight areas of investigation. The methodology and data collection process will be described in detail. Then, an overview of the rationale for the literacy activity event design will be given. Following this, an outline of the literacy day event and overview of learning outcomes will be discussed. After that the results from the quantitative questionnaire will be reported followed by the qualitative interview results. Finally, a summary of the issues that arose and future implications will be discussed.

The literacy activity event provided an opportunity to employ a mixed-methods approach which enabled the following research questions to be answered. The participants were interviewed after the literacy event to further discuss their understanding of social, emergent and multiliteracy practices. The quantitative questionnaire, which was administered prior to the literacy event investigated the following areas: what constitutes literacy practices, their desire to provide learning opportunities, and families' access to technology and text-based resources. Following this, the researchers presented five literacy activity events with the children participating while parents watched. After each literacy event, qualitative post-interviews were conducted to investigate parents' beliefs in social and emergent literacy practices, importance of digital technology, community practices, and parents' ability to participate in social literacy practices (see Appendix 3). Thus the following research questions were investigated.

- 1) What types of access (literacy, digital) to resources do Malaysian urban working families have?
- 2) What are parents' attitudes and understanding of literacy practices?
- 3) Are parents aware of what constitutes social, emergent and multiliteracy practices?

Methods

Population

The participants of this project were administrative staff, with children or relatives in pre-school through to middle primary, from the Institute of Teacher Education, (city), Malaysia. The project included, uncles, fathers, aunts, and grandparents based on the rationale that the whole family should be involved, and not just mothers (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). There were ten administrative staff participants. Their education level was generally until secondary school level. They were urban, working class parents (Gilbert, 2002). Most were ethnic Malay with one Indian Malaysian. The ages of the participants ranged from early twenties to late fifties. Their English proficiency levels were also varied. Next, the data collection design and approach will be discussed.

Data collection and design

As the participants were working in the same institute as the researchers, this allowed a more amicable relationship to exist. This co-participatory relationship enabled a deeper understanding of the participants' true attitudes and beliefs rather than a face-saving answer. Moreover, the nature of the research required participatory observation based on a relaxed trusting relationship (Yin, 2003). Based on the methodological needs of the questions, the pilot study became a case study assessing access to resources, participation, attitudes and understanding of social, emergent and multiliteracy practices. This study used a *derived etic* approach, where "the researcher adapts ways of questioning, observing, and interpreting to fit the perspective of the participants" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 30). Therefore, during the literacy activity day, the researchers also brought their children and nieces to build a more co-participatory relationship. The participants viewed the team not just as researchers but as parents, single-parents and relatives concerned with the same issues as they were.

However, while one might criticize the case study for using ethnographically-informed qualitative interview approach, it must be pointed out that the questionnaire and interview questions were designed by an objective member of the team. The researcher was an educational consultant new to the country and therefore was objective when designing, assessing and analysing the data. Furthermore, if the study only was concerned with assessing types of practice and access, then a purely quantitative approach based on the questionnaire would be sufficient. However, since this study intended to establish to what extent participants understood social literacy practices, and their desire and motivation for participating in their child's literacy learning, a mixed method of quantitative questionnaires, semi-structured interview questions triangulated with qualitative interviews assessing attitudes was necessary. Thus, the study triangulated the qualitative approach with quantitative questionnaire data in order to answer all three questions.

The participants were pre-interviewed regarding family size, age of children and daily routines. This occurred prior to the literacy event. This data was used for background understanding rather than for comparative purposes. Permission was obtained prior to the event to interview both the parents and the children during the event. Then the participants were given a piloted questionnaire in their L1 at the beginning of the literacy event. This questionnaire was divided into three sections investigating participants' access to digital and

literacy resources and frequency of participation in literacy practices (see Appendix 2, Tables A1, A2 and A3). The quantitative questionnaire was employed prior to the literacy event when participants first arrived. The questionnaire was in English with researchers orally translating into Malay for the participants. The interviews were conducted in English and Bahasa Melayu. During the literacy events the researchers interviewed and observed the parents and children's interaction. The questions were asked orally in their L1 while the other lecturers took notes translating into English. Answers were immediately discussed amongst the researchers. If needed, further confirmation and clarification questions were asked (Yin, 2003).

The literacy activities events were designed for a dual purpose. The first purpose of the literacy activity was to highlight and model various types of social, emergent and multiliteracy activities. They were embedded with critical literacy pedagogical approach which encompassed both 2D and 3D practices. The second purpose of the literacy activity was to allow the researchers to interview the participants after each activity and investigate attitudes and beliefs of multiliteracy practices. The first literacy event, which included a game, allowed researchers to interview the parents regarding attitudes and understanding of games as a literacy resource. The next literacy activity used songs and videos; after this activity, parents were questioned regarding their attitudes and understanding of social and multiliteracy practices such as using videos and songs. The next activity incorporated puppet making to integrate social literacy and emergent literacy topics as they pertain to community participation. Following this, the next literacy activity used a book, cartoon and craft. This was used to raise the discussion of two concepts: multiliteracy and home practices. The final literacy activity was an oral co-constructed story which highlighted oral and multigenerational aspects to social literacy practices.

Literacy activity day

This one-day literacy event facilitated interviewing children and their parents regarding types of home literacy practices, understanding what literacy practices constituted, access to and use of types of technology. In addition, the literacy event created an opportunity for the researchers to expose parents to emergent, social and multiliteracy practices. It also allowed researchers to assess their understanding and frequency of using social, emergent and multiliteracy practices. A schedule was designed which included a lunch break. The activity day ran from 8 am until 4:30 pm (see Appendix 1). This allowed various opportunities to interview the participants and the children. The following are descriptions of the learning outcomes and activities for each event. There were five researchers. Each headed an activity while the other researchers interacted with the parents and children.

The literacy event began with an interactive story reading session. This started as a traditional storybook reading session. However, the researcher included emergent literacy practices such as; gestures, interactive participation by the children, group story collaboration, and a game of scavenger hunt. The scavenger hunt provided meaningful practice of newly learnt vocabulary. The staff throughout the institution kindly volunteered to participate in the game. This was designed to illustrate two areas of emergent and social literacy practices. First, they can occur in a variety of settings. Second, they can include the community, and not be limited to teachers and parents. Next session was active singing with videos of the songs. This activity was designed to increase parents' knowledge of digital resources that exist. Then the event following this was the showing of the movie of the book *The Gruffalo*. The book was

presented but not read. Then a short movie was watched. Finally, the children created masks of the characters in the movies. A lunch break followed this session. After lunch, a sock puppet-making session was carried out which encouraged families to use resources from their home. The final event was a magic box story creation. Out of a brightly decorated box, the lecturer asked a child to pull out an object which was incorporated into the group story creation. Each activity will be discussed in terms of emergent, social and multiliteracy learning outcomes.

Activity one - storytelling and scavenger hunt

This activity incorporated interactive techniques. The storytelling was modelled so that parents could later effectively engage in storytelling with their children. The researcher read the story *The Enormous Turnip*. The story was selected to highlight that books which have repetitive sentence structures are highly effective in vocabulary acquisition, as they allow for interaction and language practice at the emergent literacy stage. Children were provided the opportunity to act out the character, repeat the vocabulary in the story in a choral fashion, and use Total Physical Response (TPR) to connect actions with the meaning of the vocabulary. The parents watched the researcher providing space in which learned participation could occur. Words were repeated in a choral fashion. Children were encouraged to act out using a TPR approach. In addition, the story used gestures and voices to highlight the meaning of new vocabulary. Children were encouraged to come up in pairs. This was to alleviate any fear a child may have to go up alone. They came and helped portray the characters in the story while the teacher read the story. The children came up after each page and helped pull the turnip as a character (dog, cat, mouse, boy, girl, grandma, and grandpa). The teacher encouraged the other children to participate by loudly repeating the words “*they pulled and pulled but it wouldn’t come up*”. By the end of the story most of the children were in line pulling up the turnip. After the story was read, a scavenger hunt began.

Two sets of cards were produced with the picture of the animal/person and the word underneath. This enabled repeated exposure of the printed word in conjunction with a visual representation. The children were divided into two teams. Each team was assigned one of the researcher’s a pre-adolescent/adolescent son to guide them around the college during the game. The older youths were given a sheet with the words. Five areas in the teacher education college were chosen for the children to find the pictures. The areas were the library, canteen, student affairs, administrative office, and the office of the Director of the Institute. The administrative staff from each department volunteered to give the children cards. They were instructed to give the children a card once they posed the question “Do you have a...?” If the child asked for the correct vocabulary word then the staff gave them the card. Each team started from a different place. It was a race to get back. The children were then given prizes. However, all children received a prize so that it became about personal completion rather than winning. In addition, each card had the picture and word so it facilitated exposure to the word. While it had an element of ‘rote’ learning it was an engaging activity so the children enjoyed repeating the same questions over and over. This activity allowed for repeated exposure to set sentence structures as well as set vocabulary. Moreover, this illustrated how vocabulary from a book could be participatory, oral in nature, and can include games, encompassing all components of emergent literacy practices. This activity with various forms of social and emergent literacy practices modelled for parents the variety of social literacy activities which could occur outside the classroom. This literacy event

sparked the qualitative discussion as to what constitutes literacy practices. Figure 1 shows the story pictures for the *Enormous Turnip* (designed by Boivin, 2013).

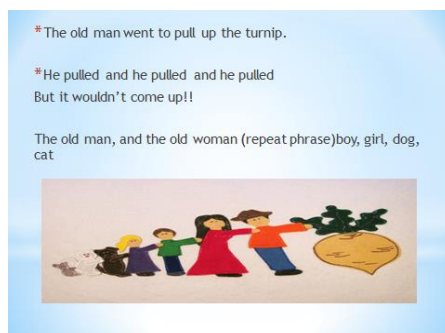


Figure 1. *The Enormous Turnip* story and scavenger hunt

Activity two – action songs

Several action songs were selected that allowed for TPR, changes in voice, speed, tempo, rhythm and contained engaging actions. The songs chosen were *Head and Shoulders*, *Hokey Pokey*, *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, and *the Itsy Bitsy Spider*. These songs extended vocabulary, integrated meaning with action, and were repetitive while being engaging. The songs covered age appropriate vocabulary of body parts, counting, animals, and finger play essential at the emergent literacy stage. First, the video was shown and it contained cute animation, written vocabulary, music and actions. All of these are forms of social literacy practices and connect to emergent literacy components as exposure to print environment, phonological awareness, paralinguistic cues, and extending vocabulary. Also, using video allowed the children to understand the meaning of a word through actions, visuals, sounds and video all components of multiliteracy, social and emergent literacy practices. It also allowed for parents to understand that literacy practices come not only from written text but pictorial, oral, visual, audio and digital modes. Moreover, participants were instructed how to access these resources at home. Figures 2a and 2b, show children engaging in songs using action and multiliteracy technology.



Figure 2a. Engaging through multiliteracy

Figure 2b. Gestures and songs

Next, the researchers modelled how to actively sing the song using gestures, movement and facial expressions. Again, these are emergent literacy practices as gestures connect non-verbal meaning to linguistic discourse. Then, the children were instructed to join in. The children had heard the song once from the video and once from the modelling. Therefore, the

songs became familiar. The use of songs and videos highlighted to parents their ability to participate in social, emergent, and multiliteracy practices. Figures 2c and 2d show how connecting song meaning through non-verbal communication such as; gestures, facial expressions, and movement.



Figure 2c. Non-verbal meaning



Figure 2d. Movement and facial expressions

Activity three - Gruffalo movie and mask-making

In activity 3, the *Gruffalo* movie was shown. This activity took the storybook and connected it to multiliteracy of a short video. Meaning of the vocabulary was provided through visual cues and the 3D action in the movie. Next, the students created masks depicting the characters in the movie. The masks allowed the children to create applied versions of the vocabulary. Then, using colour pencils and crayons the teachers reviewed colour and animal vocabulary. The children were encouraged to ask for crayon colours in English asking “Excuse me, do you have a red... Do you have scissors?” Parents were directed to free online resources. Figures 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d are the *Gruffalo* character masks used after the movie.



Figure 3a. Owl mask from the *Gruffalo*



Figure 3b. Mouse mask from the *Gruffalo* movie**Figure 3c. Fox mask from the *Gruffalo* movie****Figure 3d. Snake mask from the *Gruffalo* Movie**

This activity was enjoyable as the boys really liked the animals such as the snake and monster. An alternative would be to switch the Western animals with ones from the local area such as orang-utan. This activity transitioned from a book, to movie, to arts and crafts. It emphasised the idea of using digital technology at home and not just in school.

Activity four - making sock puppets

The lecturer used old socks to make the puppet. Buttons were bought for the eyes however an alternative is to draw the eye with marker pen, colour paper, caps (washed) from pop/soda bottles. She placed the sock on her hand and pointed to her eyes. This was an emergent literacy practice parents could easily participate with their children. It connected the meaning of the vocabulary within an applied learning context. Then she asked the children if they can name it. This continued by pointing to the mouth, nose and hair using similar asking questions “*what is this?*” If the kids yelled out the answer in their L1 this was acknowledged then the English word was stated and children were encouraged to repeat the new vocabulary. Next, she pointed at the sock on her hand and asked the child several questions. It is important to allow the children to have fun making the puppets. After creating the puppets the children used them to practice language in a safe way. Lecturers discussed with the parents other ways to play with the puppet such as, put on a play in front of the family using the puppets. Even if the words are not correct, using puppets provides opportunities to practically apply language in an engaging way, which is a rich learning experience. Figure 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e show the process and questions asked during the puppet making session.



Figure 4a. "Where do the eyes go?"

Figure 4b. "Where does the nose go?"



Figure 4c. "Do you want the puppet to have hair?" Figure 4d. "How many eyes does it have?"



Figure 4e. Look big brothers, cousins, grandparents can help not just the mom!!!!

Parents were advised to remember that often the learning does not occur instantaneously but rather over time. Continually providing these types of creative learning moments will allow the child to develop their language skills overtime (Roswell, McLean, & Hamilton, 2012).

Activity five - magic storytelling box

This activity promoted group story collaboration and vocabulary practice. First, the lecturer found unusual and common items. She placed them in a cardboard box. Then, she decorated the box in old birthday or holiday wrapping paper. A cover was placed on top of the box so that the children could not see what is inside. In addition, items from previous stories read the researchers encouraged parents to include prior vocabulary for review. Figure 5 shows the Magic Storytelling collaborating with the puppets.



Figure 5. Magic storytelling

One at a time the teacher offered the box to the child. They put their hand in and pulled out one item. The teacher elicited the name of the item. She let them say it in their L1 then state “Yes Kitab is book”. Another strategy used was that she offered the first letter of the word if she suspected a student might know the word. For example, “Bbb...boo...” until they say “book”! If the student did not know the word she told them and got them to repeat it. She started the story by saying “Once upon a time there was a... (She let the children choose – boy, girl, king etc.) and the ____ (word chosen by students) needed a_____. The story continued until all objects were removed from the box. During and after each activity parents were interviewed. At the end of the literacy event parents were given questionnaires and interviewed.

Results

Quantitative

The first section of the questionnaire investigated literacy access and resources. As the tables show, one of the issues was access to free books (library books) for parents to use in their homes. The majority of participants (92%) do not have easy access to free children’s literature provided in most libraries. Many of the participants, over half, go to bookstores and magazine shops exposing their children to magazines, comics, manga and activity books. As it is shown in Table 1, the children are exposed to literacy through religious schools. However, the reading level, variety of language and types of materials are geared for one purpose. Thus, for emergent literacy, children need exposure to a wider variety of reading materials not presently accessible to these families. Next, assessment of families’ access to digital literacy resources will be explored. Table 1 shows access to literacy resources.

Table 1. Access to literacy

Types of access to literacy	Yes	No	Sometimes (weekly)	Rarely (monthly or less)
Do they have access to a library?		89%	1%	10%
Do they go to bookstores?	32%	8%	45%	15%
Do they go to magazine store?	55%	2%	40%	3%
Do they own a library card?		89%	1%	10%
Do they attend religious school?	99%			2%
Do they have a kindle?	1%	99%		

Table 2 reveals all participant families had access to internet except for one family and she accessed the internet from work. It is interesting to note that the majority of homes did not have traditional landlines. Only 15% had landlines whereas the rest of the participants used mobile or smart phones. This was due to the participants' limited budget. Rather than pay for a landline, cell and internet, the use of a smartphone bundled the costs to make it cheaper for them. Table 2 shows access to technology.

Table 2. Availability of technology

Types of multimodal available in the home	Yes	No	Type
Is there access to the internet?	99%	1%	
What type of broadband speed exists in the home?	95%	5%	Hi-Speed Mid-range
Do they own a computer?	11%	89%	
Do they own a laptop?	89%	11%	
Do they own a tablet?	10%	90%	
Do they own a landline phone?	15%	85%	
Do they own a mobile phone?	100%		
If yes, is the mobile a smartphone?	95%	5%	

Moreover, the majority of participants, around 89%, had either cheap laptop or cheap tablet in the homes. The issue of cost was raised early on and the majority stated in interviews that they had some cheap unlimited texting plan. Now that the accessibility has been analysed, assessing the frequency and types of literacy practices by family members will be explored. First, traditional literacy practices such as reading to their child was explored. As seen in Table 3, 95% of the participants answered that they read to their children or told oral stories. However, when questioned regarding the frequency of this, 95% stated they sometimes do this. The term sometimes was defined as one to two times during a week period. When asked if they have books at home 55% stated yes. Following the answers to this question the type of text material was investigated. There were few children's books in the home. The majority of reading materials were newspapers at 80% whereas, 67% had magazines at home. Only 5% had English newspapers in the home. However, 75% had access to English movies with subtitles. In addition, 87% read blogs and online reading materials. Table 3 shows home social literacy practices.

Table 3. Home literacy practices

Literacy practices done in the home	Yes	No	Sometimes (weekly)	Rarely (monthly or less)
Do they read to their children at bedtime?	95%	5%	95%	5%
At home, do they have books?	55%	45%		
At home, do they have magazines?	67%	33%		
At home, do they have newspapers?	80%	20%		
At home, do they have English newspapers?	5%	95%		
At home, do they have English videos with subtitles?	75%	25%		
At home, do they read websites/blogs?	87%	13%		Malaysian

Therefore, even though only half had traditional reading materials and the majority of these were not for children, there were still other types of digital and non-traditional text-based materials. Next, the participants' attitudes to literacy practices will be presented.

Qualitative results

After each literacy event the participants were interviewed. The qualitative interview questions were designed to investigate the attitudes and understanding of participants' literacy practices. These interviews were in Malay as well as English. After the first literacy activity event, the scavenger hunt, participants were asked the following questions: What is literacy? What are social literacies? When and where is literacy conducted? Researchers asked the participants *"what constitutes literacy? Is it just reading and writing?"* Not surprisingly, 98% of the participants defined literacy as only reading or writing. In addition, as it connects to the results from the questionnaire, participants believe they do not have enough time for traditional text-based practices. When asked *"do they like reading but have no time?"* the majority of participants (87%) stated they would like to "read more but don't have enough time". Most admitted they prefer gossip or entertainment magazines (82%) while the majority enjoy television and movies over reading (95%). As one participant stated *"Reading is not really in our culture we tell stories"*. However, when asked if *"do they dislike reading?"* the majority stated while *"I don't read a lot. I don't hate reading!"* So the majority reported negatively to this question (96%). Further, investigation into why revealed a connection with traditional text-based literacy practices being perceived as homework from school. As one participant stated *"Reading is like being in school"*. However, reading books, even though not a popular literacy practice was highly valued by the participants. When asked *"do they think reading is important?"* most at 98%, stated literacy was an important skill for their children. Further inquiry discovered participants' attitudes to reading as connecting a moral practice. The majority approximately 95% felt that it would *"help children in school"*. A few stated that *"reading made you a better person"*. The researchers next attempted to uncover what participants believed literacy practices to encompass. One of the mothers told us *"I get home and I am so tired. I have clean and make dinner for my family. By the time I am finished it is time to put the children to bed. So I do not have time to sit and read with them"* (this was a translated conversation).

After the second literacy event, singing songs, participants were asked if they sing, do art, dance, or tell traditional, historical or ethnic stories with your children? Why or why not? Do they wish to facilitate language and literacy learning? The songs provided a discussion regarding songs as a form of literacy learning. The interviewer asked if while the mother was cooking she spoke, sang or engaged with her children. *"Yes sometimes"* When informed that this was considered a form of social literacy she was so surprised. *"I thought you have to do reading"*. Again this illustrates the lack of understanding of social and emergent literacy practices. Literacy was being viewed as a product rather than process. This led researchers to investigate whether participants believed social literacy (singing, games, jokes, oral storytelling, and drama) practices facilitated literacy success. The majority believed singing, jokes and oral stories were not part of literacy practices.

After the third literacy event, Gruffalo movie and mask making, participants were asked; what is the importance of multiliteracy? What was their attitude to using technology in literacy? How can technology connect to literacy learning? The participants were asked *"can increasing singing, storytelling, and games improve a child's later academic success?"* All participants did not think that any of the practices previously listed would facilitate later success in their children's' academic future. This lack of understanding as to what constituted social literacy practices needs further investigation. Moreover, participants were generally surprised that using technology such as movies, YouTube or videos could aid in literacy

learning. One grandmother said “I never think something you hear and see is part of literacy” (translated from L1).

After the fourth literacy event, puppet making, participants were asked: What is the parents’ role in literacy? What types of play activities do they do with their children? What is the connection to culture and literacy learning? The first question investigated oral and historical practices including oral historical narratives, oral storytelling, and traditional storytelling. When asked “*do you tell stories about when they were younger?*” the majority responded affirmatively. In discussions, which were done in English and Malay, approximately 50% of the mothers, grandmothers and aunties told their children oral historical biographies. These stories were mainly about how much harder life was or how much the city had changed. “*I tell my daughter that our grandmothers had to wash the clothes by hand. So they are very lucky to have machines.*” Furthermore, when researchers asked “*if storytelling was a literacy practice*”, 99% of participants believed storytelling was not part of literacy but “*more social*”.

After the fifth literacy event, magic story box, participants were asked: Do you participate in socio-cultural oral storytelling and historical narratives participation at home? What types of traditional, cultural and ethnic customs and practices did they engage within the community and at home? Did they participate in community and cultural multiliteracy learning practices? Participants were asked “*do they tell traditional stories, religious stories, and biographical stories?*” Most of the participants were Muslim thus their children attend Maktab classes. However, when asked if family members tell traditional or religious stories the majority of participants (89%) stated that they did not. Yet approximately 45% of the participants occasionally told stories about grandparents and older family members’ past exploits. An example of this is the story one of the participants told the interviewers. “*When we have the family gathered together during Ramadan or Eid we tell the children the types of foods our grandparents cooked for the celebrations. I am from Kelantan so the food is different than the food we eat here in KL!*” (This was translated from Malay). The majority of participants were surprised when told that all of these practices are considered important in the emergent literacy practices. When they were presented with research evidence stating early literacy increase the chances of better academic and employment success, they were surprised. Many of them asked “*how can we help with this?*”

Discussion

Results showed that the participants were very interested in helping with their children’s English social literacy learning which mirrors the rural Malaysian study (Majid, Muhammad, & Puteh, 2005). Parents also generally felt they lacked knowledge regarding how to integrate social and emergent literacy practices into their daily lives. Our literacy event better facilitated their understanding of what social literacy practices were but after interviews another issue was raised. It became more apparent from interaction with the participants during the literacy event that they were unaware of what social literacy practices were. The kids really enjoyed the songs and mimicked the actions. Later, it was reported by one of the mothers, whose child attended the session said that “*She (daughter) really enjoyed the songs she still sings them (songs)*”. The mother stated this two months after the activity day in a post-activity interview. This highlighted the power of social literacy practices in literacy and L2 learning.

However, the parents also felt they needed training in how to participate in social and emergent literacy practices in the home. In addition, they believed their English proficiency needed to improve. This issue was raised during semi-structured interviews. This is also concurrent with the findings from rural Malaysian parents and literacy. Therefore, while the size of participants was small it is meaningful that these urban parents felt similar helplessness towards aiding their children's future literacy learning. Family training in awareness and integration of emergent, social and multiliteracy practices needs further investigation. The lecturers who participated in the project would often engage in social conversation with the participants in their L1 (BM). In addition, 87 per cent of parents stated that if they knew that helping their children would increase the children's education and job status they would participate more. Not understanding or knowing how to utilize social and emergent literacy practices is a constraint. Consequently, the parents are missing opportunities to embed social literacy practices into their daily life. Another issue arising from the case study was a need to better understand how digital technologies could better facilitate L2 language and literacy learning.

With current educational trends children not only need access to traditional text-based materials but also digital materials. The majority of homes had medium speed internet. If an aim is to create a bridge between the home and school contexts then digital solutions needs proper scrutiny. Prior to tablets, Game boy, and smartphones, children more likely discussed historical narratives and shared past experiences. For the oral transmission of social literacy practices researchers need to incorporate a way to connect parents' traditional storytelling and technology. Finally, community and extended family members who also could participate in the children's social literacy development were being under-utilised.

Limitations of the study

This can be considered as a relatively small-scale case study. The participants were known to the researchers, thus, possible bias could have occurred. However, the design, collection and assessment of the data were conducted using a non-biased team member. Moreover, while the case study is small it confirms prior research conducted in rural Malaysia. However, issues raised do need further investigation towards generalising results. The lack of understanding of emergent and social literacy practices is an area which is a gap in EFL research.

Future implications

From the initial research prior to the literacy event highlighted the biggest problem was not access to technology but time. After the literacy activity event, the interview findings revealed the participants' desire to improve their children's English literacy. Mothers, aunts and grandparents wanted to engage in literacy with their children but did not know how. The findings also revealed parents' lack of understanding in emergent and social literacy practices and the importance of parental participation. More importantly, parents need resources they can easily access to teach them how to participate in social literacy practices. This is in-line with other research findings. Future effort should be made to increase parents understanding of their role. Furthermore, using technology could facilitate this goal through videotaped sessions that could be accessed by community members at any time. Therefore, as educators, we must build professional learning communities which can be accessed by parents. With the advent of technology, educators can easily create on-line learning communities. Therefore, schools can connect to home and communities. Future research should investigate training

programs using multiliteracy approach to facilitate greater increase in home social literacy practices.

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Appendix 1

HOLIDAY LITERACY ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN OF SUPPORT STAFF	
Time	Literacy Event
9-11am	1) Storytelling leading to Scavenger Hunt
11-11:30	Juice break
11:30- 12:15	2) Singing
12:15 – 1:15	3) <i>Gruffalo</i> movie with post art activities
1:15- 2:15	Lunch
2:15– 3:15	4) Puppet making
3:15 – 4:00	5) Magic Prop Box Storytelling

Appendix 2

Table A1. Access to literacy

Types of access to literacy	Yes	No	Sometimes (weekly)	Rarely (monthly or less)
Do they have access to a library?		89%	1%	10%
Do they go to bookstores?	32%	8%	45%	15%
Do they go to magazine store?	55%	2%	40%	3%
Do they own a library card?		89%	1%	10%
Do they attend religious school?	99%			2%
Do they have a kindle?	1%	99%		

Table A2. Availability of technology

Types of multimodal available in the home	Yes	No	Type
Is there access to the internet?	99%	1%	
What type of broadband speed exists in the home?	95%	5%	Hi-Speed Mid-range
Do they own a computer?	11%	89%	
Do they own a laptop?	89%	11%	
Do they own a tablet?	10%	90%	
Do they own a landline phone?	15%	85%	
Do they own a mobile phone?	100%		
If yes, is the mobile a smartphone?	95%	5%	

Table A3. Home literacy practices

Literacy practices done in the home	Yes	No	Sometimes (weekly)	Rarely (monthly or less)
Do they read to their children at bedtime?	95%	5%	95%	5%
At home, do they have books?	55%	45%		
At home, do they have magazines?	67%	33%		
At home, do they have newspapers?	80%	20%		
At home, do they have English newspapers?	5%	95%		
At home, do they have English videos with subtitles?	75%	25%		
At home, do they read websites/blogs?	87%	13%		Malaysian

Appendix 3

Areas of Qualitative Interviews

What is literacy?

What are social literacies?

Do you sing, do art, dance, or tell traditional, historical or ethnic stories with your children?

Why or why not?

What is the importance of literacy?

What is the parents' role in literacy?

What types of play activities do they do with their children?

Extent of socio-cultural oral storytelling and historical narratives participation at home and in the community?

Connection to traditional, cultural and ethnic customs and practices participated in the community and at home?

Desire to facilitate language and literacy learning?

Literacy connecting to technology – when, how, attitudes?

How can technology connect to literacy learning?

What is the connection to culture and literacy learning?

When and where is literacy conducted?

Connection to community and cultural learning?