An Analysis of Attitudes, Perceptions, and Practices of Shared Reading among Preschool Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract

Shared reading is a common instructional activity in preschools. However, not all preschool teachers receive training in shared reading. This research investigated factors that influenced the attitudes, perceptions, and practices of shared reading among an urban sample of preschool teachers in Malaysia. The findings revealed that prior training experience in shared reading courses or seminars significantly influenced preschool teachers' attitudes toward shared reading. Those who reportedly had attended the training were found to have more positive attitudes toward shared reading than those who had not received any training. Further investigations also revealed differences in their perceptions and practices of shared reading. Specifically, there was reduced emphasis on the acquisition of print knowledge and the development of independent readers by the preschool teachers who had not received any training. Implications of the findings in relation to supporting early literacy development are discussed.

Keywords: shared reading, practice, perceptions, attitudes

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Introduction

Shared reading is also known as "shared book experience" (Holdaway, 1982, p. 294) or "shared book reading" (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012, p. 267). Shared reading can be considered as an early literacy activity. Participation in an early literacy activity provides the young children with the opportunities to acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to reading and writing (Saracho & Spodek, 2010). Such an opportunity also allows them to engage in social interaction, active learning, problem-solving, and meaning making (Saracho & Spodek, 2010). More specifically, Short, Kane, and Peeling (2000) described shared reading as an activity where the early childhood educators "model and support the use of cues and self-monitoring reading strategies, which may include the use of pictures to help construct meaning, making predictions, rereading, segmenting and blending, phonemes, and finding familiar word chunks to decode words" (p. 287). In short, shared reading can be defined as an early literacy activity where an adult shares text and creates an instructional conversation that guides the children to apply their knowledge and strategy to decode the information available in the text.

Shared reading is commonly practiced in early childhood education settings with the aim to develop oral language, print concepts, and listening comprehension in young children (Kindle, 2011). In shared reading, teachers will encourage children to voice their opinions, express their reactions, pose questions, share the enjoyment in reading, and be involved in authentic literacy experiences (Richards, 2010). Shared reading also includes interactive reading aloud, interactive writing, and shared writing (Honchell & Schulz, 2012). Concisely, shared reading is considered as part of a balanced early literacy framework, in which the teachers use attractive texts and reliable literacy experiences to help children to develop the set of skills necessary to become independent readers (Button & Johnson, 1997).

Specifically, many past studies have documented the relationships between effective shared reading practices and young children's language and literacy growth (Gonzalez et al., 2014). For example, a longitudinal project carried out by Burgess (1997) suggested that shared reading interaction in preschool can influence children's development of phonological awareness and early reading ability. During shared reading sessions, the

teacher and the children read the same text, ask and answer questions, or retell the story (Affizal, 2015). These interactive forms of communications in shared reading help the children to acquire early literacy skills. Besides, teachers' explanations on the meaning of unknown words in shared reading also assist the children to gain more vocabulary (Gonzalez et al., 2014).

Shared Reading and Social-Constructivism

Shared reading, which involves active adult-child interaction during reading, is supported by Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism (Milburn, Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2014). Vygotsky (1986) described learning as a process of gradual mastery and achieved through social interaction and practice mediated by adults and then followed by a second stage in which the concepts become internalized and consolidated (Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2012). The learning process involves both aspects of cognitive development and language development (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002). Furthermore, it can benefit all students since collaboration and social interaction are incorporated (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Shared reading is considered as a social-constructivist activity that can provide opportunities for children to learn language and to acquire emergent literacy skills (Girolametto et al., 2012). During shared reading, teachers do not only model the reading, but also mediate children's language learning by using prompts such as asking questions and providing feedback to students (Hastings, 2012). Kindergarten teachers can facilitate young children's early literacy learning by introducing print concepts, drawing their attention to the print features, and modeling correct letter-sound associations (Piasta et al., 2010). At the same time, students are encouraged to be actively engaged in exploring the reading texts and sharing their ideas about the content of the reading materials with the support of an adult (Affizal, 2015). Close interaction occurs between the teacher and the students during the process of shared reading.

Vygotsky's social development theory suggests that adults, such as teachers, play an important role in providing quality adult-child interactions to facilitate children's language and literacy development. One important concept in Vygotsky's social development theory

is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes a zone in-between the level of performance that the child can achieve independently and that which he or she can achieve with assistance (Hastings, 2012). In short, ZPD helps to bridge the gap between what a child knows and what a child potentially can know. The ZPD also gives rise to the idea that learning should be matched to the ability of a child at his/her level of development.

Scaffolding is a facilitating method of learning that supports ZPD (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Through quality interaction via shared reading, teachers can scaffold the children's learning process by demonstrating how to read and write, providing a reading or writing model, asking questions that lead to certain important realizations, correcting on-task errors, and motivating students (Lefrancois, 2000). This strategy can facilitate the child's engagement in the conversation related to the content in shared reading at a low level of demand that is likely to provoke a correct response, thus providing an opportunity for the teacher to give positive feedback (Milburn et al., 2014).

Teachers' Roles in Shared Reading

To date, despite the growing literature on shared reading, only a few studies have addressed teachers' practices, perceptions, and attitudes toward shared reading in schools (e.g. Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012; Sandvik, van Daal, & Adèr, 2014), particularly in the Asian region (e.g. Fern & Jiar, 2014). Teachers' beliefs about shared reading are inextricably linked to their practice (Sandvik et al., 2014). The differences in the teachers' shared reading practices can be attributed to their educational philosophy and perceived purposes of shared reading (Kindle, 2011). The way a teacher conducts shared reading is closely related to the outcome of the shared reading and the input to the children (Gonzalez et al., 2014). For example, the teacher-directed type of shared reading session can cause the participating children to have a fairly passive role in the reading process whereas the student-directed type of shared reading session, such as one in which teachers frequently ask open-ended questions, responds to children's comments and use extra-textual talk (Gonzalez et al., 2014) could possibly elicit more feedback from children (Kindle, 2011). Hence, whether a particular shared reading activity is a potent teaching and learning experience or an enjoyable pastime mostly relies on the teacher's knowledge and skill in

conducting shared reading.

Aside from the types of materials and the strategies used in shared reading, consideration of the children's current levels of knowledge and skills can also impact the learning outcomes of shared reading (Schickedanz & McGee, 2010). All these factors are related to teachers' practices, perceptions, and attitudes toward shared reading because teachers' beliefs may influence their practices; and subsequently, their practices will influence the child's outcomes (Sandvik et al., 2014). In regards to this, it is also important to recognize that preschool teachers have different levels of instructional expertise and knowledge pertaining to shared reading practices (Milburn et al., 2014; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012) which are independent of their teaching experience and educational background (Lipsky & Adelman, 2016). In particular, professional training in shared reading practice has been shown to improve the efficacy of teachers to implement evidence-based instructional strategies during shared reading activities in early childhood education settings (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012).

The importance of professional training in shared reading is consistent with the view that teachers require pedagogical content knowledge to deliver the best teaching and learning outcomes (Shulman, 1986, 1987). The notion of pedagogical content knowledge introduced by Shulman (1986) emphasizes the importance of teachers being able to utilize their pedagogical knowledge to deliver their content knowledge during teaching. An essential part of pedagogical content knowledge is the understanding and ability of teachers to make the learning of certain topics easy for the students (Evens, Elen, & Depaepe, 2016). With regards to shared reading, teachers' pedagogical content knowledge would refer to the teachers' understanding and ability to achieve the expected outcomes of teaching early literacy skills via the activity of shared reading. This would include competencies to perform evidence-based instructional strategies during shared reading such as completion (pause to cue children to complete the phrase/sentence), recalling (ask children to remember important aspects of study), asking open-ended questions, asking wh- questions, distancing (ask children to bring in their own background knowledge), asking questions about print and comments about print, and tracking fingers along print (Dennis & Horn, 2014).

Teachers' acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge to perform shared reading is

especially crucial in contexts where home literacy culture is not strong. For example, Malaysia, a developing country in South East Asia, is a nation where home literacy culture is not strong in the local community. In a study which involved parents with children from preschool to middle primary schools, Boivin, Albakri, Yunus, Mohammed, and Muniandy (2014) found that only 11% of the parents reported having visited the local libraries and only 55% of them reported having books at home. As many as 95% of the parents reported that they only read to their children on a weekly basis, which was defined as one to two times per week (Boivin et al., 2014). Hence, in Malaysia, young children are more likely to be involved in early literacy activities only in school (Boivin et al., 2014). However, a study conducted by Fern and Jiar (2014) found that many early childhood educators in Malaysia face challenges associated with the lack of training in effective literacy instruction. Consequently, many teachers were found to merely rely on the conventional methods of reading instruction such as instructing students to spell verbally, reading after the teacher, reading aloud, and memorizing syllables via drilling practice (Fern & Jiar, 2014).

In line with this, this study aims to investigate early childhood educators' attitudes, perceptions, and practices of shared reading in Malaysia. Subsequently, the study intends to figure out the impacts of prior training on the perceptions, attitudes, and practices of early childhood educators towards shared book reading. In the context of this study, attitudes refer to the patterns of feelings and beliefs about thoughts, objects, or other people according to a person's past experiences (Ajzen, 2011). Thus, teachers' attitudes toward shared reading refer to their feelings and beliefs about the activity of shared reading in the classroom. On the other hand, perception refers to the teachers' understanding of shared reading, which includes their perceived rationales and challenges related to shared reading. In educational psychology, practice refers to one's own experiences with the teaching-learning process which can contribute to the development of a model of teaching (Tan, Parsons, Hinson, & Sardo-Brown, 2011). Here, the term "practice" is used specifically to refer to teachers' practical knowledge in shared reading. The three research questions addressed in this study are:

1) What factor(s) influence early childhood educators' attitudes toward shared reading? (RQ1)
2) How do the factor(s) impact on early childhood educators' perceptions of shared reading? (RQ2)
3) How do the factor(s) impact on early childhood educators' practices of shared reading? (RQ3)

Method

A survey was conducted with kindergarten teachers in Kubang Kerian, a new economic hub in the north east of Peninsular Malaysia. From records obtained from the State Educational Department, there were 15 registered kindergartens with a total of 50 teachers in that area. The researchers approached all the registered kindergartens and invited the teachers to participate in this survey. Among them, 41 teachers consented to participate in this survey (82.0% response rate). The data was then analyzed using descriptive and analytical statistics.

Table 1. *Demographic Profiles*

		Frequency	Percent
Race	Malay	41	100%
	Female	41	100%
Age	21 to 30 years old	28	68.3%
	31 to 40 years old	10	24.4%
	41 years old or more	3	7.3%
Education Level	Upper secondary	7	17.1%
	Pre-university	6	14.6%
	Diploma	14	34.1%
	Bachelor degree	11	26.8%
	Master's degree	3	7.3%
Teaching Experience	Less than 1 year	7	17.1%
	1 – 2 years	14	34.1%
	2 – 3 years	5	12.2%
	3 – 4 years	3	7.3%
	4 – 5 years	4	9.8%
	More than 5 years	8	19.5%
Prior Training In Shared Reading	Pre-service training	0	0
	Courses / seminars	10	24.4%
	Workshops	3	7.3%
	Self-learning	4	9.8%
	Observe other teachers	14	34.1%
	No training	10	24.4%

Participants

All the participants were female Malay teachers (n = 41) (see Table 1). The majority of them were below 40 years of age (92.7%), who had attained at least a pre-university level of education (82.8%). More than half of the teachers were novice teachers, who had less than three years of teaching experience (63.4%). In comparison, only 19.5% of them had more than five years of teaching experience. For training in shared reading, 31.7% of them reported having received formal training in shared reading (24.4% from courses/seminars, 7.3% from workshops). A further 43.9% of them reported having had informal training in shared reading (9.8% by self-learning, 34.1% from observing other teachers) while 24.4% of them did not have any form of training related to shared reading.

Instrument

A self-developed questionnaire was used in the current investigation. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part A was about teachers' demographics. Part B was about teachers' perceptions and practices of shared reading. Part B was loosely adapted from a teacher survey on guided reading originally developed by Reeves (2011). Questions included in the Reeves (2011)'s survey were used as a guideline to develop the multiple choice questions in Part B which were presented in Yes/No binary format. The questions were related to teachers' implementation of shared reading practices and the teachers' perceived rationales and challenges in conducting shared reading.

Part C was about teachers' attitudes toward shared reading. Part C consisted of seven questions adapted from the Kindergarten Literacy Survey originally developed by Molzahn (2005). Molzahn (2005) measured teachers' attitudes toward early literacy in her survey; she used the terms "shared reading" and "guided reading" interchangeably in her original questionnaire. In the current investigation, the term "shared reading" was consistently used throughout the questionnaire. All the questions were presented in a 5-point Likert scale format (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha analysis revealed that the alpha value for the seven items in Part C was .639 (n = 41). The alpha value increased to .733 when item C6 was deleted. Hence,

only six items in Part C were ultimately used to measure the teachers' attitudes toward shared reading.

Data Analysis

First, mean scores were computed to represent attitudes toward shared reading obtained from the 5-point Likert scale items in Part C. To address the first research question (RQ1: What factor(s) influence early childhood educators' attitudes toward shared reading?), chi-square analyses were conducted to deduce factor(s) that differentiated the teachers' attitudes toward shared reading. Subsequently, the factor(s) identified from the above analyses were used as the variable(s) to compare the differences in perceptions (RQ2) and practices (RQ3) of shared reading reported by the teachers in Part B of the questionnaire. Similarly, chi-square analyses were performed on the binary data obtained.

Results

Factor(s) Influencing Attitudes toward Shared Reading

The teachers' attitudes toward shared reading were computed and the mean scores were obtained (overall mean score = 4.41, range = 3.83 - 4.68). Chi-square analyses were conducted to deduce factor(s) that differentiated the teachers' attitudes toward shared reading. As reported in Table 2, age, education level, teaching experience, and having had training in shared reading did not differentiate between the participants' attitudes toward shared reading. However, a more in-depth investigation revealed that the types of training did have an effect on the teachers' attitudes toward shared reading. Specifically, prior training by attending courses or seminars related to shared reading was found to significantly differentiate between the participants' attitudes toward shared reading (p < .05). In subsequent analyses, teachers who had attended courses or seminars related to shared reading were referred to as the 'CS teachers' while teachers who never had such training were referred to as the 'non-CS teachers'.

Table 2. *Factors that Differentiate Attitudes toward Shared Reading*

Factors	Chi-square values	*df*	*p*
Age	15.914	14	.319
Education level	27.580	28	.487
Teaching experience	42.420	35	.182
Training in shared reading (Yes/No)	10.807	7	.147
• Formal training (courses/seminars)	16.760	7	.019*
• Formal training (workshops)	10.104	7	.183
• Informal training (self-learning)	11.591	7	.115
• Informal training (observing other teachers)	6.360	7	.498

*p < .05

As summarized in Figure 1, both CS and non-CS teachers were differentiated in their responses across all six attitudinal items analyzed. As a whole, the CS teachers reported more positive attitudes toward shared reading compared to the non-CS teachers. The difference in their attitudinal responses was highly significant for items C2, C4, C5, and C7 (*p* < .01) and significant for items C1 and C3 (*p* < .05). In particular, the non-CS teachers indicated the lowest level of agreement to Item C4 with a mean of 3.61.
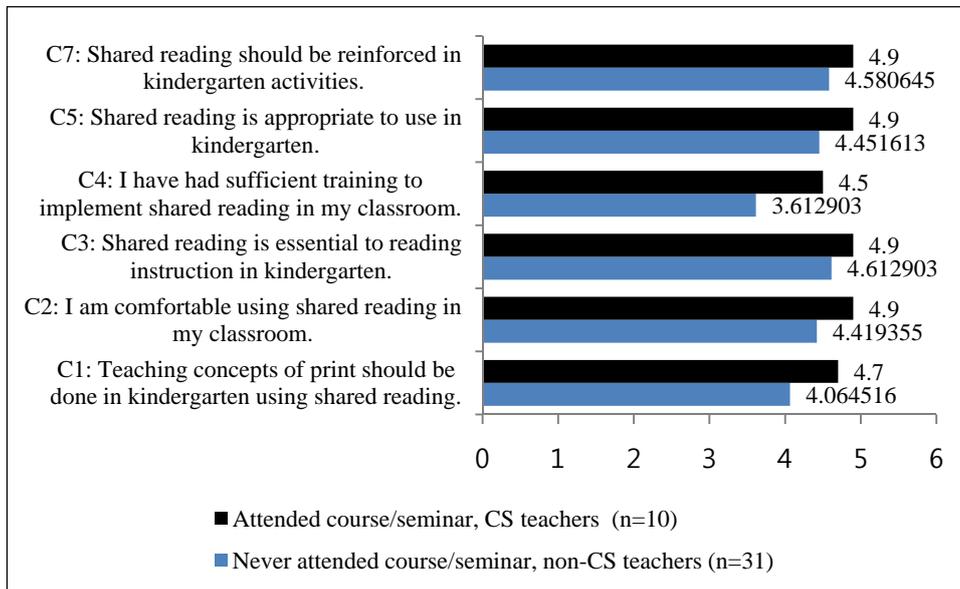

Figure 1. Comparison of Attitudes toward Shared Reading between CS and Non-CS Teachers

Differences in Perceived Rationales and Challenges

The CS and non-CS teachers' perceived rationales and challenges of shared reading were compared. The findings revealed that more teachers in the CS group (range = 50.0 - 90.0%) could relate to the listed rationales of conducting shared reading as compared to the non-CS group (range = 35.5 - 87.1%). In particular, significantly more CS teachers (80.0%) could relate to the rationale of providing repeated practice of new concepts and sentences via shared reading than the non-CS teachers (35.5%) ($p < .05$). In comparison, there was more variation when the teachers' perceived challenges in conducting shared reading were compared. More CS teachers could relate to six of the eight challenges presented (see Table 3),

Table 3. *Comparison of Perceptions of Shared Reading between CS and Non-CS Teachers*

	Teacher groups		Chi-square values	df	p
	CS	Non-CS			
Rationales					
• To help the students to recognize letters and to match letters with sounds.	90.0%	87.1%	0.060	1	0.807
• To teach vocabulary.	90.0%	58.1%	3.429	1	0.064
• To teach students about the letters and words in the books.	80.0%	67.7%	0.549	1	0.459
• To give joy to the students.	80.0%	61.3%	1.177	1	0.273
• To provide repeated practice of new concepts and sentences.	80.0%	35.5%	6.026	1	0.014*
• To provide fun experiences to the students.	70.0%	58.1%	0.453	1	0.501
• To teach the students to become independent readers and writers.	60.0%	41.9%	0.992	1	0.319
• To introduce the concept of prints.	60.0%	38.7%	1.392	1	0.238
• To enable the students to become independent readers.	50.0%	41.9%	0.200	1	0.655
Challenges					
• Variation in the students' reading competencies.	90.0%	83.9%	0.227	1	0.633
• Big group size.	70.0%	51.6%	1.038	1	0.308
• Lack of time.	50.0%	48.4%	0.008	1	0.929
• Reduced attention span.	50.0%	29.0%	1.478	1	0.224
• Extensive instruction required.	50.0%	12.9%	6.073	1	0.014*
• Lack of students' participation.	20.0%	29.0%	0.314	1	0.575
• Lack of suitable materials.	10.0%	22.6%	0.762	1	0.383
• Lack of interaction among the students.	30.0%	12.9%	1.561	1	0.212

particularly the challenge related to using extensive instruction during shared reading (CS teachers = 80.0%, non-CS teachers = 35.5%) ($p < .05$). On the other hand, more non-CS teachers could relate to the remaining two challenges – lack of student participation and suitable materials. Together, the findings portray positive training effects on teachers' awareness of literacy instruction via shared reading and on their understanding of getting students' participation and using suitable materials during shared reading.

Table 4. *Comparison of Shared Reading Practices between CS and Non-CS Teachers*

	Teacher groups		Chi-square values	df	p
	CS	non-CS			
Before shared reading					
• Ensures that students are sitting comfortably in a good seating arrangement.	100.0%	80.6%	2.267	1	.132
• Introduces the book title.	80.0%	64.5%	.837	1	.360
• Introduces the learning objectives.	70.0%	54.8%	.716	1	.397
• Provides information about the theme or background of the book.	50.0%	35.5%	.670	1	.413
• Prompts students to predict the content from the book cover.	30.0%	22.6%	.226	1	.635
• Introduces the author.	20.0%	9.7%	.752	1	.386
During shared reading					
• Ask open-ended questions to prompt students to participate actively.	80.0%	71.0%	.314	1	.575
• Allows the students to share their own experiences and connect it with the story.	70.0%	64.5%	.101	1	.750
• Allows the students to ask spontaneous questions.	60.0%	61.3%	.005	1	.942
• Points to the prints word-by-word to prompt reading aloud.	80.0%	51.6%	2.51	1	.113
• Answers the students' questions.	70.0%	51.6%	1.038	1	.308
• Uses own words to tell the story, rather than reading the texts.	70.0%	48.4%	1.42	1	.233
• Pauses to allow students to predict what is happening next.	60.0%	35.5%	1.872	1	.171
• Instructs the students to find the word meanings when encountering new words.	60.0%	19.4%	6.034	1	.014*
• Prompts students to notice the punctuation.	50.0%	25.8%	2.044	1	.153
• Provides information about grammar.	50.0%	9.7%	7.828	1	.005**
After shared reading					
• Teacher and students discuss the story.	70.0%	58.1%	.453	1	.501
• Teacher and students discuss the concepts.	70.0%	38.7%	2.977	1	.084
• Teacher and students act out the story.	70.0%	25.8%	6.365	1	.012*
• Students read the story aloud without the teacher's assistance.	60.0%	22.6%	4.889	1	.027*

Differences in Shared Reading Practices

For shared reading practices, more CS teachers (range = 20.0 - 100.0%) utilized the instructional strategies outlined in Table 4 compared to the non-CS teachers (range = 9.7-80.6%). Specifically, more CS teachers instructed their students to find the word meanings when encountering new words (60.0% compared to 19.4% in non-CS teachers) ($p < .05$) and provided information about grammar (50.0% compared to 9.7% in non-CS teachers) ($p < .01$) during shared reading. After shared reading, significantly more CS teachers also reported acting out the story with their students (70.0% compared to 25.8% in non-CS teachers) ($p < .05$) and encouraged their students to read the story aloud without the teacher's assistance (60.0% compared to 22.6% in non-CS teachers) ($p < .05$). As a whole, the findings indicated that the CS and non-CS teachers were differentiable in instructions related to more advanced literacy teaching (such as finding meanings for words and providing information about grammar) and in expansion of the teaching to cultivate story appreciation and independent reading (such as acting out the story and reading aloud independently).

Discussion

The findings obtained in this study shed light on the attitudes toward perceptions and practices of shared reading among preschool teachers in Malaysia. The majority of the preschool teachers in the current study were young, educated, and had at least one to two years of experience in teaching young children in kindergartens. For research question one (RQ1: What factor(s) influence early childhood educators' attitudes toward shared reading?), only a single factor was identified – formal training via courses or seminars. This finding indicates the relevance of professional development in shaping positive attitudes toward shared reading among the preschool teachers. The teachers who had previously attended courses or seminars related to shared reading were found to be more likely to perceive shared reading as appropriate for use in preschools and as an instructional method that should be reinforced in preschool activities. Besides, more of them also felt that they

have had sufficient training to perform shared reading and they were comfortable in implementing this activity. This finding offers novel evidence to demonstrate the link between professional development and attitudes toward shared reading.

Subsequently, the impact of formal training via attending courses and seminars was also assessed in relation to the teachers' perceptions and practices of shared reading. As a whole, the results showed a positive impact on teachers who had attended courses and seminars in shared reading. For research question two (RQ2: How do the courses/seminars training impact on the teachers' perceptions of shared reading?), it was found that teachers who had attended such training (CS teachers) were more able to relate to the instructional rationales of performing shared reading, particularly in the aspects of enhancing conceptual and sentential development. The findings suggest increased ability among the trained teachers to recognize the instructional functions of shared reading in teaching more advanced language and literacy skills such as concepts and sentences. On the contrary, teachers who were not trained in shared reading (non-CS teachers) were only able to relate to the basic functions of shared reading such as providing joy and teaching vocabulary.

Consistent with the above findings, it was found that CS teachers were more alert to the challenges of using extensive instruction during shared reading. The findings revealed the link between perceived rationales and challenges. Teachers who could relate to the advanced instructional functions of shared reading would naturally be aware that they should have utilized various instructional strategies during shared reading to achieve the expected outcomes. On the other hand, these findings also suggest that although the CS teachers have attended training related to shared reading, possibly the training that they had received was not sufficient enough for them to gain full competency in performing shared reading. Consequently, 50.0% of them perceived using extensive instruction during shared reading as a challenge.

Despite this challenge, the CS teachers showed more confidence than the non-CS teachers in their ability to encourage students to participate in shared reading and to choose suitable materials for shared reading. The findings on the teachers' perceptions of shared reading provide preliminary insights into the differences in their shared reading practices. To address research question three (RQ3: How did the courses/seminars training impact on the teachers' practices of shared reading?), the teachers were asked to identify their

practices before, during, and after the shared reading activity. In regards to this, the CS teachers were found to consistently use more instructional strategies as outlined compared to non-CS teachers. Specifically, the analysis of practices revealed that the CS and non-CS teachers were differentiable in the use of advanced literacy teaching strategies during shared reading and in the expansion of teaching to cultivate story appreciation and independent reading after the shared reading.

As a whole, the findings from this study have contributed evidence to support the importance of professional development in shared reading to enable preschool teachers to acquire positive attitudes, perceptions, and improved skills in delivering shared reading. The findings are consistent with the notion of pedagogical content knowledge proposed by Shulman (1986, 1987) which posits that teachers require knowledge related to how to help learners to access learning content with ease. As documented by Kunter et al. (2013), pedagogical content knowledge, rather than teachers' general academic ability, significantly affects instructional quality and students' outcomes. Today, most studies on pedagogical content knowledge have focused on mathematics and science education (Evens et al., 2016). The findings from the current study extend the application of pedagogical content knowledge to early childhood education where shared reading is concerned. In fact, there are research findings pointing to the relevance of pedagogical content knowledge in helping early childhood educators to perform quality teaching. For example, Cash, Cabell, Hamre, DeCoster, and Pianta (2015) found that teachers' knowledge of language positively predicted children's gains in expressive vocabulary while teachers' knowledge of literacy positively predicted children's gains in print knowledge. Schachter, Spear, Piasta, Justice, and Logan (2016) additionally found that pedagogical content knowledge and qualification, but not teaching experience, are positively related to amount of instruction.

The findings from this study offer directions for professional development in shared reading. First, it was apparent that relatively few preschool teachers (including CS and non-CS teachers) in this study mentioned about the instructional functions of shared reading to promote independent reading (41.9 - 50.0%) and to promote conceptual learning (28.7 - 60.0%). The findings suggest that most teachers in the current sample were merely using shared reading to teach the basic language skills with reduced emphasis on promoting self-initiative in reading and in developing higher order thinking skills. This finding is

worrisome since if the teachers are unsure about these instructional functions of shared reading, they may not understand how to help students to develop these skills in shared reading (Hall, 2005). As posited by Wasik (2010), teachers who can better relate to the functions of shared reading in enhancing language development are more likely to incorporate features such as open-ended questions and provide encouragement to expand language and linguistic feedback in reading lessons than those who cannot. The findings point to aspects of pedagogical content knowledge which need to be emphasized during professional development in shared reading.

Second, two discrepancies were noticed in the results. Firstly, the majority of the teachers reported positive attitudes toward the use of shared reading to teach print concepts (Mean = 4.06 - 4.70), but notably not many of them reported the rationale of teaching print concepts during shared reading (38.7 - 60.0%) and even fewer of them reported practices such as providing information about punctuation and grammar during shared reading (50.0% and less). Secondly, the teachers reported considerably positive attitudes toward the sufficiency of training (Mean = 3.61 - 4.50), but, in fact, the majority of them (68.3%) did not attend any formal training on shared reading. Such a discrepancy might have occurred due to the reason that preschool teachers tend to rely heavily on professional or personal experience to defend their practices (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000). Besides, it is also possible that preschool teachers are inclined to give socially desirable responses in attitudinal questionnaires (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000). In other words, the preschool teachers may have realized, through their pre-school teaching experience, that shared reading is an effective reading instructional method that benefits young children in language and literacy development. However, many of them may be unfamiliar with effective methods of conducting productive shared reading sessions due to lack of training. Subsequently, this produces a discrepancy between their beliefs and practices.

As a whole, the aforementioned findings highlight the importance of providing professional development on shared reading to preschool teachers. Specifically, the professional development needs to emphasize pedagogical content knowledge related to teaching "print knowledge" in shared reading. With regards to this, past research has proven that shared reading is an effective method to teach print knowledge to young children (Burgess, 1997; Ezell & Justice, 2000; Gettinger & Stoiber, 2014; Justice & Ezell,

2001; Kindle, 2011). Ezell and Justice (2000) have noted that teachers who merely focus on story and related comprehension skills tend to overlook the development of print knowledge. Even though some teachers might avoid focusing on print concepts during shared reading due to a concern that it would distract students from the flow of the storyline (Flowers, Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2007), research has provided evidence that print referencing, during shared reading, is beneficial for literacy development (Justice & Ezell, 2001).

Correspondingly, professional development on shared reading should highlight to early childhood educators that the teaching of print knowledge is as important as vocabulary teaching during shared reading. Today, word and print awareness, along with phonological awareness, are recognized as the key building blocks of literacy (Justice & Ezell, 2001). Preschool teachers can target the teaching and learning of print concepts during shared reading by having a clear objective and plan that enable them to use various evidence-based strategies to introduce print concepts during shared reading. For instance, teachers may plan shared reading routines which prompt young children to focus on print conventions including the introduction of the author and illustrator, the identification of the front cover and title page, or a demonstration on book handling as well as discussion of the prints forms in the materials used (Beauchat, Blamey, & Walpole, 2009). Such pedagogical content knowledge should be emphasized in professional development on shared reading to preschool teachers. Effective professional development can help preschool teachers to have a clearer understanding of shared reading and to improve the way they plan and execute shared reading activities. Past research has indicated that professional development can assist teachers to translate their practices in shared reading into positive child outcomes in preschool, especially in building the foundation for literacy (Kindle, 2011; Milburn et al., 2014).

In addition, an expert coaching approach can be used to guide and enhance preschool teachers' skills in shared reading. The expert coaching approach can be used to (a) guide preschool teachers to select appropriate materials based on specific book features, (b) help preschool teachers to consider how to incorporate attention to each component of shared reading such as vocabulary, text structures, print concepts, and phonological awareness, and (c) model a shared reading session (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009). Furthermore, the coach could also play a consultative role by assisting preschool teachers to plan and

implement classroom-based strategies for enhancing language and literacy outcomes. This is an important step in interventions that seek to improve the literacy experiences of preschoolers, including those at risk (Girolametto et al., 2012).

There are several limitations that should be considered when reflecting on the outcomes of this study and in looking ahead to future research. One of the limitations acknowledged in the current study is the limited availability of prior research studies on the topic of preschool teachers' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes on shared reading in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. Besides, the current study was conducted with a small number of preschool teachers and was limited to the area of Kubang Kerian, Kelantan. Therefore, the results of the current study are not representative of the overall population of preschool teachers' perceptions, practices, and attitudes toward shared reading in Malaysia. A larger sample size that involves different districts may reflect a more holistic view on the practices of preschool teachers in shared reading. Owing to the limited time frame, the Malay version of the questionnaire was only validated for face and content validity. Future researchers should consider testing the reliability of Malay translation of the questionnaire so that the items in the questionnaire can be validated to gain more reliable responses from participants.

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the potential benefit of formal training for improving preschool teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and practices of shared reading. Thus, professional development in shared reading should be made compulsory for preschool teachers to ensure that they have enough pedagogical content knowledge of shared reading in order to optimally support young children's early language and literacy development via shared reading activities.

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