

Manuscript Title

Muslim Parent Preferences for Children's Storybook Illustrations: Cultural Relevance in the Context of the United Arab Emirates

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Summary

The manuscript was received on August 25, 2017 and was peer reviewed by two reviewers and an editor.

The initial recommendation of Accept with Minor Revision was made on November 13, 2017.

The first revision was submitted on November 28, 2017 and was re-evaluated by the editor.

The manuscript was accepted for publication on December 05, 2017.

Peer Review Comments

Peer Reviewer 1

Summative statement:

I recommend the article for publication, with two or 3 additional sentences.

Criteria:

General

The article suits the topics expected by the reader when seeing the title of the journal.

The author guidelines are followed.

The topic is worth investigating, both for the local situation described in the article and for researchers in other countries.

Presentation

The title reflects the content of the article.

The structure is logical.

The article is readable and interesting and raises attention for the problems the author(s) have turned to. The criterion "easy to be understood", I feel, should not be used by Rivera, because this is an ambiguous criterion. An article for an international journal does not need to be understood easily, because it is supposed to present new knowledge and open horizons and some effort while reading should be considered normal. An article like this cannot be handed out to Master of Education students, for example, with the expectation that they understand 100% of the underlying theory, discussion, data analysis procedures unaided.

Abstract

The abstract summarizes and reflects the full article.

The introduction is relevant and gives the experienced reader a picture of the how and why of the research work. A reader who has not heard of certain theoretical turns or the local cultural situation, needs to acquaint him/herself, but that is normal behaviour for a reader who continues after page 1.

The underlying theories are presented, the cultural capital approach is explained (one might want to look up some background, but there is no space in an article which needs to condense anyway). The relevance of joint creation of meaning and literacy development via storybook reading is explained, the cultural differences between Western and UAE approaches to private reading with children are explained. The language is correct, with the necessary amount of special language.

Methods:

The methods and data analysis section shows that the article is written by (an) experienced researcher(s).

Results:

The results are presented clearly, reasons for the specific way of data collection are given.

Discussion:

The discussion is detailed and proves that the author(s) has/have considered many contextual factors.

There is no acknowledgement. Therefore, I assume that no funding was necessary for this study. If the research assistants are, for example, writing a Master thesis about aspects of the topic, their names might be stated.

References:

The amount and range of references is interdisciplinary and can raise the interest of other readers to learn more about the topic.

Further comment:

The article might have been written by one author, or by a team. It seems that at least one author is not from UAE, because there is some implicit oscillation between an understanding of "cultural capital" in the sense of accepting and drawing on the attitude of the local parents, and the cultural capital placed onto joint reading beautifully illustrated children's books with artistic images of human beings or imaginary beings. It seems that the author/s has/have a background in educational psychology rather than theory of literature.

It will be interesting to see how the market develops, how the non-image and oral, learning by social tolerance, memorizing and imitating adults approach will be changed by the influx of Western, English textbooks and children's book. And how the differences in children's book culture across the Arabic world will have an impact in the UAE.

The fact that the parents who answered the questions preferred a simple realistic style, when turned into a recommendation, would limit future children's access to the broad range of imaginative children's books available across the world.

In a way, the study provides a baseline. How to discuss it with the university students, or with teachers?

Perhaps the author/authors might add one or two sentences about their own cultural background, and whether, in a study, like this, the researcher is really able to, or should "depersonalize" himself/herself, or not rather confront himself/herself with his/her intermediary position.

Peer Reviewer 2

The paper gives insights into criteria that influence Muslim parents' choice of storybooks for their children. A questionnaire study conducted with participants from the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

reveals in how far cultural values and gender schemes which are reflected in the storybook illustrations affect parents' storybook preferences. The findings of the study point to a major effect of culturally relevant illustrations: The parents prefer illustrations

- that are congruent with the participants' culture
- that do not contradict their religious beliefs
- that convey a moral message
- that are displayed in a realistic style with bright colors

Additionally, the study reveals that parents stick to their child's gender when choosing a storybook. This seems to be related to gender socialization in the UAE.

The importance of these results is due to three facts: First, the shared reading of storybooks in early childhood promotes language acquisition, early literacy and even future reading skills as well as academic achievement. Second, reading to children is not a common practice in the UAE because of a strong emphasis on oral tradition. Third, classroom practices in the UAE are high in Western cultural values causing cultural discrepancies between the children's home and their schools. Therefore, the creation and promotion of storybooks in the UAE with illustrations corresponding to Muslim parents' preferences could help to increase and to improve shared reading practices in families and, thereby, enhance children's early literacy learning. Thus, the paper does not only provide new findings in the research of parents' selection of storybooks but also has an important relevance to the practice of promoting early literacy in the UAE. In addition, the results may be helpful for – in most cases Western – teachers in the UAE to integrate the children's familiar fund of knowledge in the curriculum what might enhance opportunities to learn as well.

Furthermore, the paper is free from formal errors. In fact, it is well structured, readable and easy to understand. Despite the fact that the paper discusses an ethically sensitive subject it is written in an unbiased descriptive manner.

With regard to methodological aspects there are only a few suggestions for minor revisions:

- In the discussion of the study it is argued that the group of participants is very homogeneous (due to the snowball sampling) and thus represents only a small range of the target population in terms of socioeconomic status and education. This could be mentioned earlier in the description of the method. (Or at least, a reference to the later discussion might be helpful there.)
- It could be mentioned if the participants were informed about the aim of the study before answering the questions of the questionnaire.
- Exact dates for the age of the children (not only information about the grade) might be helpful for readers from countries with other educational systems.
- Before describing the procedure of the study it is hypothesized "that the extent to which illustrations mirror parents' cultural experiences would impact their choices of storybooks for their children" (p. 6). The form of a hypothesis does not suit the qualitative approach very well and, as such, it may create wrong expectations on the reader's part. The open-ended research question on p. 7 is more appropriate to the design of the study and the open coding in the analysis in terms of diction.
- The questions asked to the participants require some kind of metacognitive awareness about their criteria of choosing storybooks. Could it be that there are also implicit strategies and or subjective estimations in terms of aesthetic qualities that influence their choice but that cannot be detected by a questionnaire study? This aspect could be addressed in the discussion.

- On pages 10 and 11 the procedure of coding is explained referring to appendix A. However, not all examples given in the appendix and in the text are clear. Further and more detailed explanations would be helpful for a better understanding of the coding. For example, the question rises if the code *familiarity* sticks to the parents' appreciation or sticks to what the parents think about their children's knowledge or to both.
- The paragraph about visual literacy does not really seem necessary for the general arguments in the paper.
- There seems to be a mismatch between the title of the paragraph *Parents Consider their Child's Preferences Secondary to their Own, Placing Differing Values on this Based on Gender* and the arguments given in the further text of the paragraph. This incongruity could be graded either by revising the title or the arguments in the paragraph.
- The levels of grey in Figure 1 cannot be distinguished.

These minor comments do not question the overall quality of the paper. In fact, the paper provides new and important insights for the promotion of early literacy in Muslim families – a field that lacks studies like the present one.

Thus, it is highly recommended to accept and to publish the reviewed paper.