



| READING HABITS

OF CHILDREN IN CAMBODIA

November 2022



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Asia Foundation would like to thank the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) for their support and cooperation in this research, in particular the officials who generously gave their time for interviews. We are also deeply grateful to all the parents and caregivers who responded to the survey and parents and teachers who participated in the interviews and focus groups.

In addition, we would like to thank Indochina Research Ltd., which conducted the fieldwork for this study. Their hard work and flexibility throughout the process was much appreciated.

SUMMARY

The Asia Foundation commissioned a survey of 400 adults in Phnom Penh with children aged 4 to 9 years old in their households. These parents and caregivers were asked about their children's reading habits. Below is a summary of the key findings and recommendations detailed in this report.

READING BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

A considerable majority (85%) of parents¹ reported that someone in the household reads physical books at least once per week with the child (including 46% of households on a daily basis and 39% one or two times per week).

However, one in ten children are missing out on this experience. 2% of households said this “almost never” happened and 8% said it “never happened.” An additional 5% of children are read to only once or twice per month.

Children were reported to read or play with books on their own more commonly than with parents, with 67% reported as reading on their own every day and 28% reading on their own once or twice per week.

Children aged 8 or 9 were less likely to have parents read with them than children aged 4 to 7, possibly reflecting a view that older children will not benefit from being read to.

Girls were read to (both physical and digital books) by household members more often than boys.

Most children were reported to be interested in reading, with only 3% reported as not interested, and 18% as neutral.

Worryingly, children with disabilities appear less likely to have family members engage in educational activities with them. For example, 20% of parents of children with a disability said that they “almost never” or “never” read books with their child, compared with 9% of parents of children without a disability.

Reading physical books is very common, with 90% of respondents reporting that they read physical books with their children at least once per month. Nearly half – 46% - reported reading physical books with their children every day, while 39% reported doing so 1-2 times per week. 5% reported reading physical books 1-2 times per month.

¹ Of the 400 respondents, 83% were parents or step-parents. Others were grandparents, uncles, aunts, or older siblings. The term “parents” is used here for brevity but refers to all members of this group unless otherwise specified.

Reading digital books is less common than reading physical books but still happens with some frequency, with 41% of families reporting reading digital books with their child at least once per month. Fourteen percent reported reading digital books with their child daily, with a further 19% saying one to two times per week, and 8% once or twice per month.

However, a significant minority (15%) believed that some children in the 4 to 9 age group were too young to be read to. Forty percent said that children's teachers read to them at school so it is not necessary for parents to do it at home, and 22% said that once a child can read to themselves, they do not need their parents to read with them.

Parents use a range of strategies to engage children during shared reading time, but these could be more interactive. Many parents reported that they would appreciate being provided with questions and activities connected with the story.

Lack of time appeared to be a common barrier to shared reading at home (84% reported this regarding their own time and 15% said that the child did not have enough time).

Other barriers to reading at home included the child's lack of interest, not having age-appropriate books, and the parent not knowing how to read books well.

In principle, parents recognized the importance of reading with children for their development and how it fosters interest in reading. One hundred percent of parents said they believed that reading books to their child is important.

Many parents placed value on the educational benefits of reading. This was more common than those viewing reading together as an opportunity for fun or bonding.

Most parents said that they felt comfortable reading with their child, but 22% said that they did not. This was due to their lack of confidence in their own reading ability or feeling unsure how to read with young children. Comfort of parents when reading with children might affect reading frequency.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Encourage parents to read frequently with all children (regardless of age, gender, and disability).



Ensure that materials are accessible for children with disabilities and that they are promoted to parents of this group.



Provide specific examples of how shared and independent reading might look for different age groups (including tips, techniques, duration, types of books, etc., as well as the benefits for each age).



Highlight the range of books on various topics (including nonfiction topics) that have been found to be of interest to children and parents.



Share the message that short reading sessions can also be useful when time is limited.



Encourage parents to see themselves as role models for reading, as children who see their parents reading are more interested in reading themselves.



Support parents to have more interactive shared reading sessions, focusing on fun and engagement. Adding questions could help, along with tips on how to read with children and keep them interested. Adding songs and activities connected to the books might also be useful.



Highlight features of reading-related apps and websites that can be useful for parents who lack confidence in their own reading abilities or who have impairments that impact reading.



Ensure that promotional materials and campaigns target boys and male caregivers as well as girls and women. etc., as well as the benefits for each age).



Expand awareness of children's books available on websites and apps.

ACCESS TO PHYSICAL BOOKS

A While the households in this survey appear to own more children's books than found in studies conducted in more rural areas, the number of physical books available to children and families is still limited.

Only 10% of households had over 20 printed children's books, and 36% had five or fewer.

When buying books, parents most commonly prioritize attractive pictures, age-appropriateness and educational value, and good moral lessons.

Recommendations from the MoEYS, teachers and friends about books for children were valued by parents.

The biggest barrier to buying books cited by parents was not having a bookstore near their home (mentioned by 53% of respondents).

The cost of books was the second most common barrier (mentioned by 31% of parents).

Parents who could visit a local bookstore still faced challenges related to the kinds of books available to them. Thirteen percent of respondents reported that their local bookstore lacked books that their child was interested in, while 12% said that it lacked age-appropriate books. Another 16% reported being unsure about what books to purchase for their children.

Children's access to books at libraries, community centers, and bookstores is extremely limited. Few children visit these places and those who visit do not do so frequently.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Investment in libraries with physical books would be valuable to ensure that children have access to a wide range of books.



If investment in libraries is unlikely or unfeasible, promote free digital libraries as a realistic alternative to ensure children have access to a wide range of books (when parents have access to internet and devices).



When seeking to attract the interest of potential users of digital libraries, highlight factors that appeal most to parents (attractive illustrations and educational value)



Help parents to choose books that are the appropriate level for their children by clearly labelling books and providing advice through promotional campaigns.



Highlight to parents those books which have been created in partnership with the MoEYS and are part of the official MoEYS early grade learning program.



Seek ways to engage the MoEYS and teachers in promoting the use of digital libraries and specific books.



Continue to support the development of the publishing industry through training and mentoring of authors, illustrators, and publishers.



Expand partnerships with NGOs and donor-funded projects that have budgets to print and supply books to schools.



Work with publishers to increase the number of titles that is printed and sold.

DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

All families except one had a smart phone. The majority of households (94%) had at least two smart devices at home, with 61% having three or more.

Fewer had internet connections at home (44%), suggesting that most parents gain access to the internet via mobile phone packages that are typically limited and/or through public Wi-Fi spots.

Among parents who are willing to use educational apps, most are interested in ones that support reading.

Most parents felt that children aged 7 and under should not spend more than 20 minutes per day on a device. However, 51% of parents of children in this age group reported spending more than 20 minutes per day on devices with their children, including 12% who spent over an hour per day on devices together.

The majority (65%) of parents reported using educational or reading-related apps, though many applied this term somewhat loosely. YouTube was the most reported “educational” app followed by Facebook.

Some parents do not want their child to use any apps, whereas some parents who do not use apps report not knowing which apps would be useful.

Parents were also influenced by recommendations from teachers and others they know.

Most parents were willing to click on posts about unfamiliar apps, websites, and services when they were interested in the content (however 43% said they never clicked on unfamiliar content). Most would also tap on push notifications, but 39% said they never would.

Parents who could visit a local bookstore still faced challenges related to the kinds of books available to them. Thirteen percent of respondents reported that their local bookstore lacked books that their child was interested in, while 12% said that it lacked age-appropriate books. Another 16% reported being unsure about what books to purchase for their children.

The MoEYS and government websites are the most highly trusted sources of information about online content, followed by news sites and social media.

Some parents are concerned about content that their children can access online.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Promote awareness of existing digital literacy resources. As noted above, the fact that 41% of parents already read digital books with their children at least monthly, combined with extensive smart phone ownership in Cambodia, and the substantial amount of time that families are already spending together on devices suggests significant potential for the use of digital libraries in Cambodia.



Capitalize on parents' use of YouTube for educational resources. Use videos that already exist and/or create more video content. These examples also include Cambodian Sign Language videos and audio resources, which are useful for audiences who are deaf, have visual impairments, or struggle with reading. The focus group discussions suggested that many children are interested in video content, so books with audio in a video format might be more appealing to capture interest initially, and direct greater numbers of parents to free digital libraries.



Use Facebook to promote the use of free digital libraries, as well as to showcase content from specific books.



Consider including full books on Facebook as slide shows, or as videos of the app as a reader clicks through books with audio.



Include messaging about the potential benefits of appropriate use of devices with young children.



Support education around safe internet practices for kids, particularly as it relates to content designed specifically for kids.



Use quotes from real people, teachers, and the MoEYS on social media campaigns. However, keep in mind that digital access is unequal. Explore possibilities with mobile network companies to provide parents with free data when using digital libraries and/or to have digital library apps preloaded on SIM cards.

INTRODUCTION

Kids need books in the languages they speak to develop strong reading habits and achieve educational outcomes that will lead to thriving societies. This idea is at the core of Let's Read's efforts to create reading opportunities for children and families in Cambodia and across Asia and the Pacific.

Since 2016, Let's Read has continued to build upon The Asia Foundation's decades of experience in Cambodia to help expand access to reading-related resources and positive reading experiences. Through partnerships with local creatives, educational nonprofits, and governmental organizations, Let's Read's approach combines dynamic access to relatable stories with fun, impactful reading programs to help children develop the confidence and skills they need to read and thrive.

As participants in the early literacy space in Cambodia, understanding how parents and caregivers think about and practice reading with their children, the resources they can access, and the barriers that stand in their way will help Let's

Read and others working in the sector to more effectively allocate resources and bridge reading-related gaps in early education.

To date, there has been limited research into reading behaviors of parents/caregivers and their children in Cambodia. However, the research that does exist suggests that children have limited access to age-appropriate reading materials, and many families are not reading together regularly outside of school (Howell et al., 2016; World Vision, 2016; World Education, 2021).

Furthermore, research has shown that most children are not achieving the literacy levels expected in each grade (DeStefano et al., 2018), highlighting the need to reevaluate how programs support reading opportunities for children outside the classroom and how to communicate the importance and urgency of reading more effectively.

This study aims to contribute to the available body of information about the reading habits of parents/caregivers and their children in Cambodia and to better inform the Let's Read program, as well as to share information with others working in the early literacy space in Cambodia.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to explore the following questions:



How do parents and caregivers engage their children with reading activities?



What attitudes about reading are found among our priority audience (parents/caregivers and children)?



What access do families currently have to children's books?



Where do members of our priority audience look for trusted information, particularly about education and within digital spaces?

SCOPE

The current study is limited to a representative sample of respondents in the greater Phnom Penh area.

Respondents were mostly parents, along with some other caregivers (including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings). However, for brevity, the respondents are referred to as parents throughout the report.

Because so little information is available specific to the reading habits of children in Cambodia, particularly outside of the classroom environment, The Asia Foundation undertook a literature review to summarize key international research findings and findings contained in published and unpublished reports by other organizations related to projects in Cambodia. This literature review can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

METHODOLOGY

This study included a survey of 400 parents/caregivers, two focus group discussions with parents, and eight interviews with MoEYS officials and teachers.

SURVEY

The survey tool was created, translated, entered into tablet form, and piloted with 10 respondents before it was finalized. The use of tablets allowed for automated skip logic to reduce human error, as well as GPS and Voice recording for quality control.

The survey was conducted between August 26 and September 6, 2022. Eligible respondents were selected to meet a quota based on their district as shown in Figure 1. The quotas were based on the relative size of the district, rounding to the nearest 10.

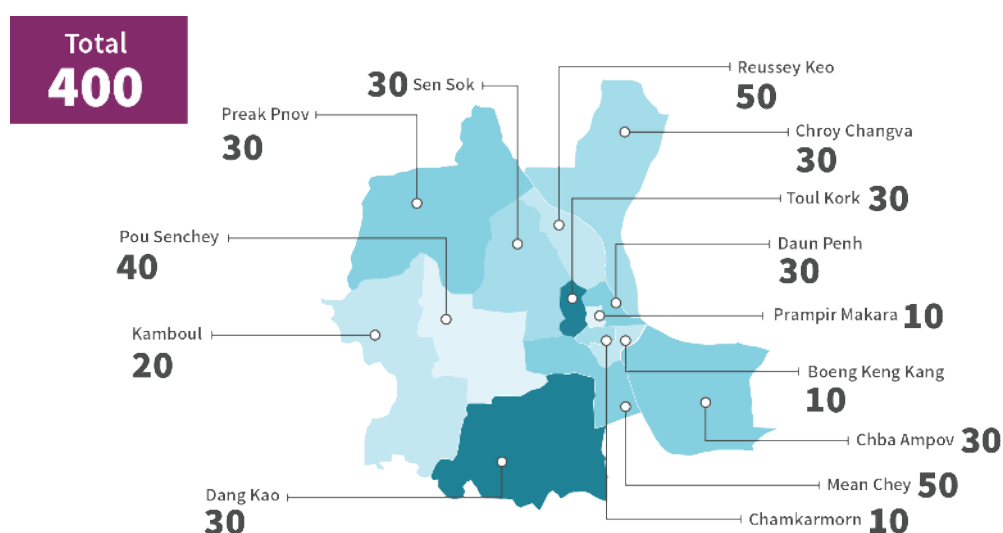


Figure 1. Sample Quota by district in Phnom Penh

Respondents were considered eligible if they were over 18 and the household had at least one child aged between 4 and 9 years old. The research team-leader identified a starting point such as pagoda, school, hospital or post office in each district, and the survey team attempted to interview a parent/caregiver from the first household on the right-hand side, and then from every third household.

The survey team attempted contact at 2,245 households to reach the quota of 400 respondents across all districts. In all, 482 households refused, and over 1,000 were not at home, or not eligible. Four respondents dropped out mid-interview and were replaced. Three potential respondents did not speak Khmer so were not interviewed.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Two focus group discussions were conducted. These both included six parents. Six were reported to be users of the Let's Read App. Six said that they did not use the app. The group discussions lasted 75 mins each.

INTERVIEWS

Eight interviews were conducted with the following participants:

MoEYS

- Primary Education Department
- Provincial Office of Education

Officials

- Primary Education Department
- Early Child Education Department

Teachers

- Regular users of the Let's Read app
- Not using the Let's Read app

Daycare Workers

- Regular users of the Let's Read app
- Not using the Let's Read app

These interviews lasted 40 minutes each.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

All 400 respondents lived in Phnom Penh, split across 14 districts as per the quota.

There were 274 female respondents (68.5%) and 126 male (32.5%), aged between 18 and 75. The mean age of respondents was 33, with the majority (65.5%) ranging from 26 to 35 years of age.

Households were selected because they had at least one child aged between 4 and 9 year in the household.

They were asked how many children they had aged 0-9 in the household. Overall, 59% of respondents had only one child of this age in the household, while 33% had two, and 9% had at least 3 children in the household.

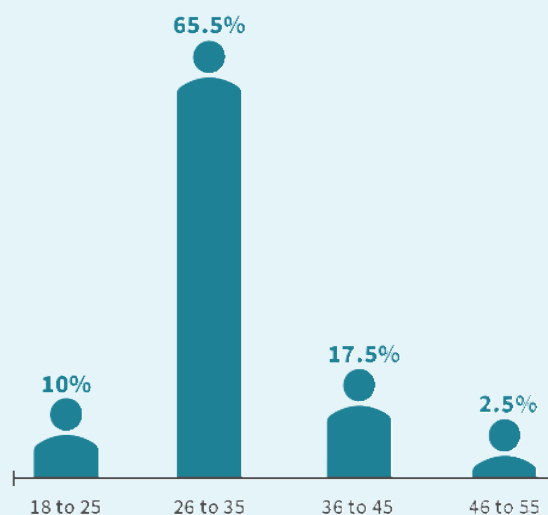


Figure 2. Age of respondents

In households with more than one child in the 4 to 9 age group, a single child was selected by the interviewer at random to be the focus of all subsequent questions. Figure 3 shows the ages of selected children.

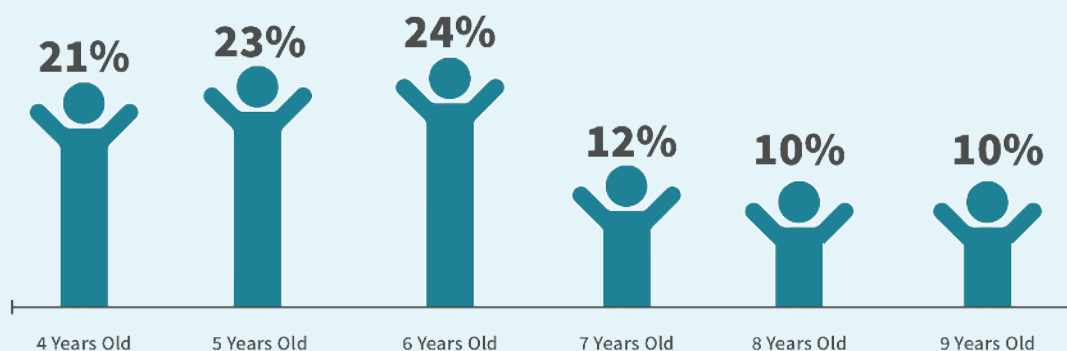


Figure 3. Age of the child selected as the focus of the survey

The mean age of the children selected was 6 years old. Five percent (20 children) were reported to have a developmental disability.

Of the 218 children who were attending Grade 1 or above, most (72%) had attended pre-school for up to one year. Seventeen percent had never attended preschool, with 11% attending for two or more years

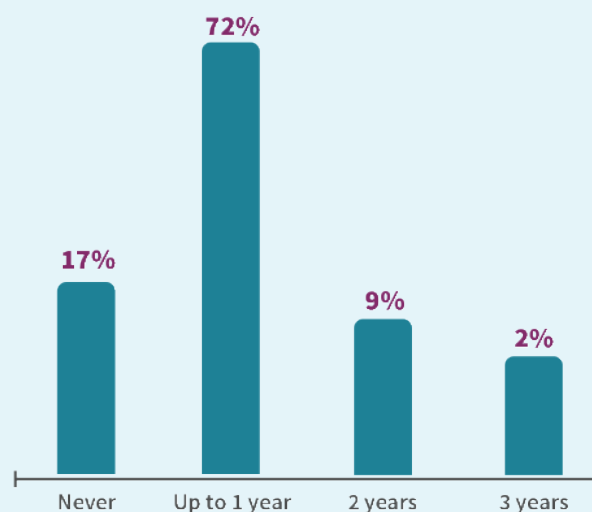


Figure 4. Attendance at preschool of children who were in Grade 1 or above

The majority of the respondents (56%) were the mother or stepmother of the selected child. Next most common were fathers or stepfathers (27%), followed by siblings (10%), grandmothers (6%) and grandfathers (1%), as shown in Figure 5.

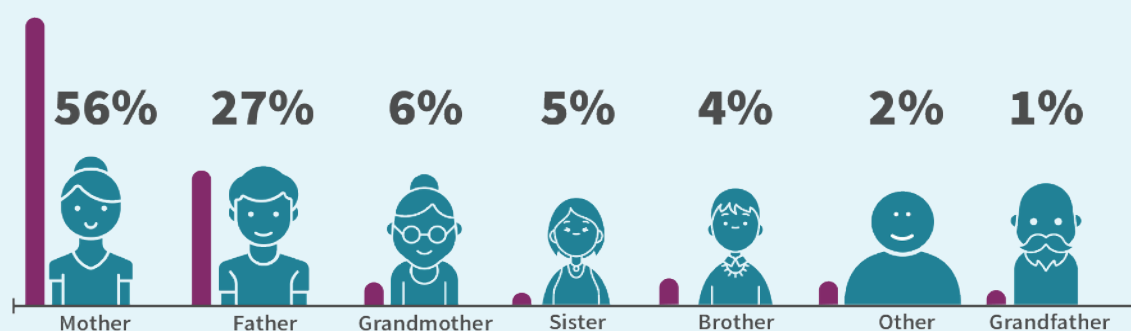


Figure 5. Respondents' relationship to the child

The majority of respondents were married (87%), 10% were single, 3% were widows/widowers, 1% were separated, and 1% were divorced.

Figure 6 shows the education levels of mothers/stepmothers and fathers/stepfathers. Men in this group had higher levels of education than women. However, the majority of the respondents (65% of men and 54% of women) had completed upper-secondary or higher. Twenty percent of women had either not completed primary school or reported primary school as their highest level of completed education, compared with 15% of men.

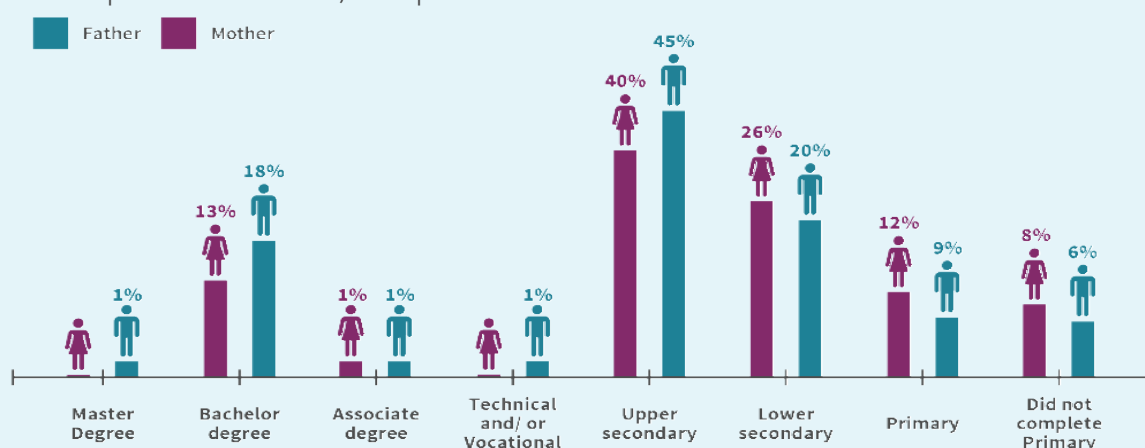


Figure 6. Education level of mothers and fathers

The education level of siblings and grandparents was generally lower than parents. This is as might be expected, as many siblings were still in school, and grandparents grew up in a time when access to education was more limited.

Figure 7 shows responses relating to monthly household income. Seventy percent selected the lowest bracket of under \$400 US per month. For context, the Cambodian Socio-economic Survey 2019-20 found the median monthly income in Phnom Penh was 2,871,000 (approx. \$718) (NIS, 2021, p. 113).

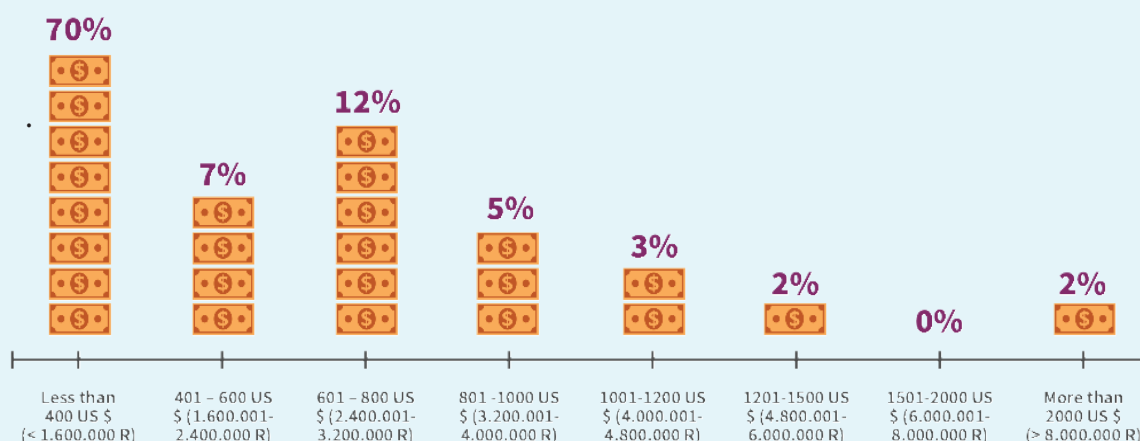


Figure 7. Monthly Household Income

Respondents were asked about the adequacy of their income. Just over half (51%) said it was adequate to afford basic needs, but not adequate to make savings. Twenty-five percent said it was not adequate to afford basic needs. See Figure 8 for full responses.

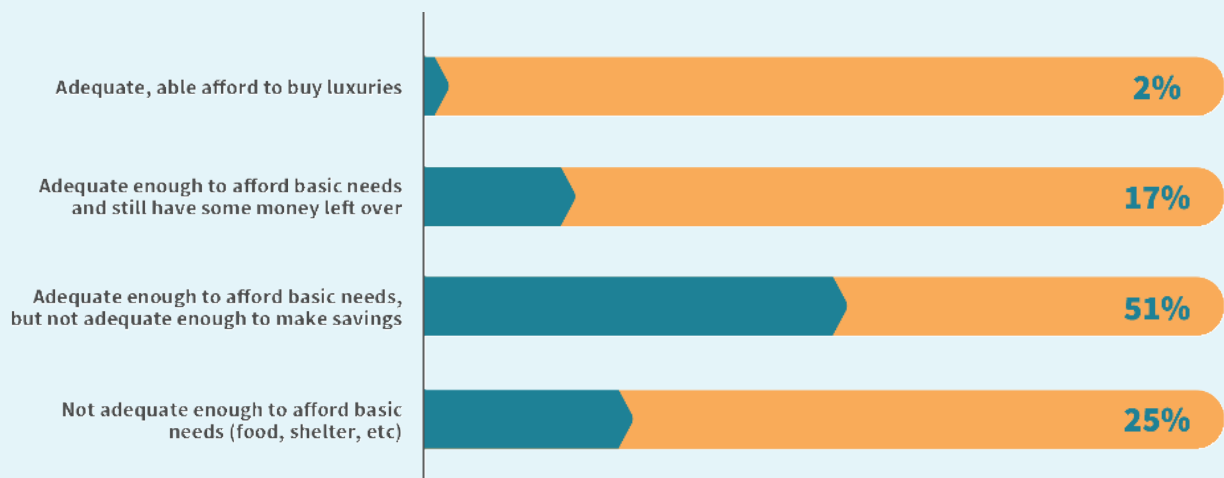


Figure 8. Adequacy of income

READING BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

FREQUENCY OF PARENTS ENGAGING CHILDREN IN READING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked how often do they, or any of the household's members (age 15 or over), engage in any of the following activities with the selected child:

	Telling stories		Naming objects and colors
	Singing songs		Reading physical books
	Taking a walk outside		Reading digital books
	Playing together		

Figure 9 shows the responses. Encouragingly, playing together was reported as frequently taking place in most households, with 88% saying that someone in the household played with the child daily, and a further 9% said one or two times per week. Although not as commonly reported to be a daily practice, 88% reported a household member naming objects and colors with the child at least once per week, including 59% who did this daily. These results suggest that parents value play and engaging the child in activities that can further their development.

Encouragingly, 85% reported that someone read physical books at least once per week with the child, including 46% of households doing this daily, and 39% one or two times per week. However, one in ten households said this “almost never” or “never happened” (2% and 8% respectively).

The majority of families also engaged in activities that can support children’s oral language development, including telling stories and singing songs at least once per week (79% and 54% respectively).

Reading digital books was less common than physical books, but 14% did report doing this daily with their child, with a further 19% saying one to two times per week, and 8% once or twice per month. This demonstrates that there is a significant number of households within Phnom Penh who could be a potential audience for digital libraries or other online reading resources; indeed, 41% are already using digital books with children at least once per month.

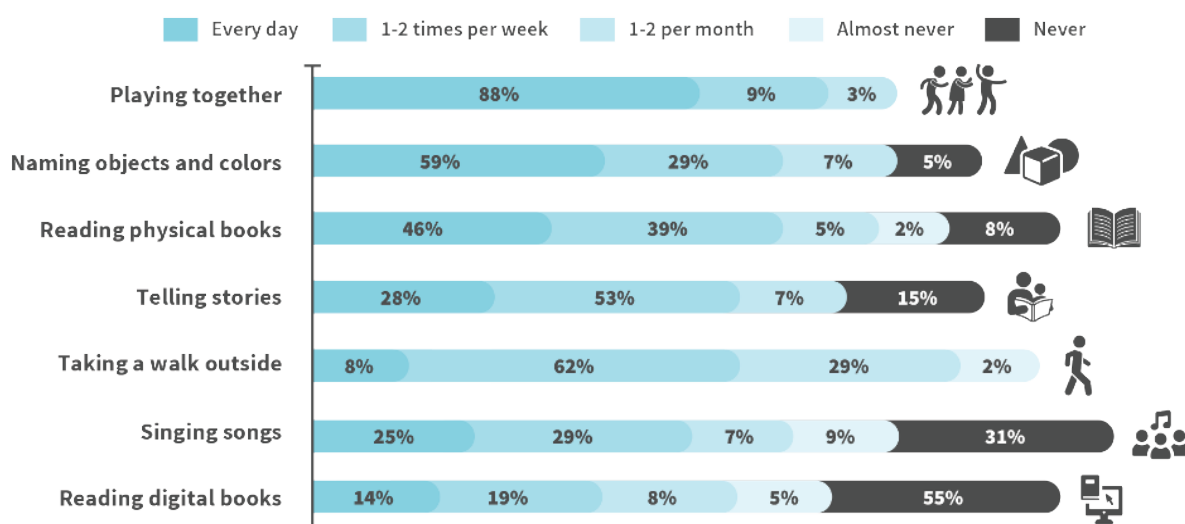


Figure 9. Frequency of household members engaging the child in different learning and leisure activities

DIFFERENCES ACCORDING TO GENDER, AGE, DISABILITY AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household members read physical books with girls more often than boys. The vast majority of girls (89%) had a caregiver read physical books with them at least once week per week, compared with 82% of boys. This pattern was also apparent with digital books: 36% of girls read digital books at least once per week with parents, compared with 29% of boys.

There also seems to be a possible trend of household members being less likely to read with children as they get older, as shown in Figure 10. This might reflect a perception that older children do not need parents to engage with them to read books together. This belief was expressed by parents in one of the later questions.

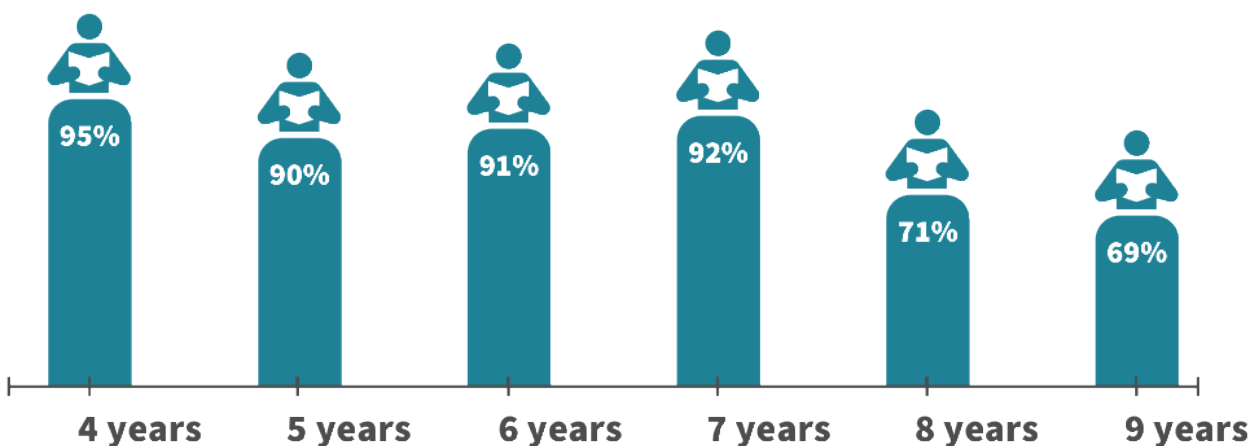


Figure 10. Percentage of children whose families read physical books with them at least once per week.

Worryingly, results suggest that children reported as having a developmental disability might be less likely to have family members engage in educational activities with them. Among parents of children with a disability in the survey, 20% said members of their household (aged over 15) “almost never” or “never” read books with their child, compared with 9% of parents of children without a reported disability. Seventy-five percent of the respondents who had a child with a disability said they never or almost never read digital books with them, compared with 58% of respondents whose child did not have a reported disability. A similar pattern was found with telling stories and singing songs. It must be noted, however, that the numbers here are small; a bigger sample size would likely be needed to conclude with more confidence that these apparent patterns are not caused by chance. Nonetheless, those working on reading promotion should work to address possible inequalities here, ensuring that books are promoted to families of children with disabilities, and ensuring that the materials are accessible.

When asked who typically engages in each activity with the child, respondents selected “mother and father together” most commonly from a series of options for every activity. Mother was the second most common response, then father, in all but one instance. The only exception was taking a walk outside, which was done equally by mothers (alone) and fathers (alone).

The parents’ own level of education appeared to influence how frequently they read with their children, with the results suggesting that households with higher levels of education might be slightly more likely to read with their children regularly. Ninety percent of parents who had upper-secondary education or higher reported someone in the household reads with the child at least once per week, compared with 80% of respondents with lower education levels. Fewer of this group also reported that children were never or almost never read with (5% compared with 15% of those with maximum of lower secondary education).

Proportions of respondents who reported reading physical books with children seemed fairly similar across income groups, with a slightly higher percentage of those earning over \$400 saying they read to them at least once per week, compared with those in the lowest income band (88% compared with 84%).

DURATION AND TIME OF READING TOGETHER

When parents were asked how long they typically read with the child in one sitting, most reported spending between 20 and 30 minutes (37% of respondents selected this answer). Thirty percent reported spending between 10 and 20 minutes; 25% said more than 30 minutes; and 9% reported spending up to 10 minutes per sitting.

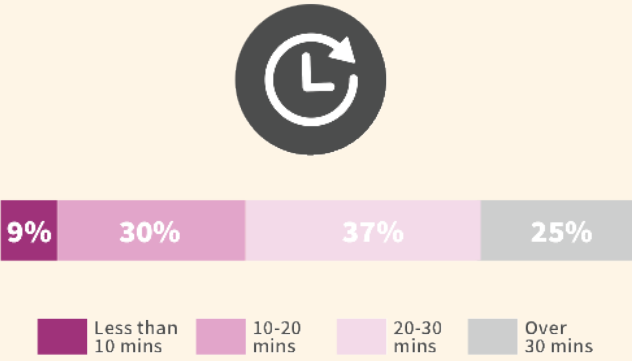


Figure 11. Duration of reading together

The majority of respondents (80%) reported that reading typically took place between 5pm and 9pm. Twenty percent reported reading with their child later, from 9pm to midnight, 15 percent reported reading in the afternoon before 5pm, and the remaining 7% read in the morning.

More reading took place on weekends with 78% of respondents reporting reading with their child on Saturday and 75% on Sunday. Weekdays were selected by between 56% and 63% of respondents depending on the day, with a slight preference for Mondays.

Respondents were also asked when they read with their child. The table below also shows responses.

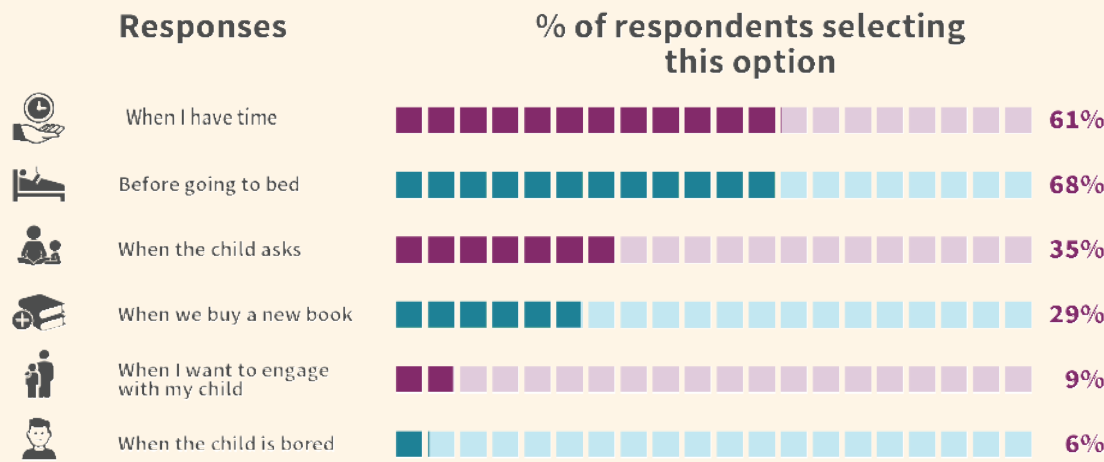


Figure 12. Impetus for reading a book together

FREQUENCY OF CHILDREN READING WITHOUT ADULTS

Respondents were asked how often their child reads books or plays with books without the participation of an adult. This occurred more often than reading together with parents. Sixty-seven percent said daily, and 28% reported one or two times per week, with only 3% saying once or twice a month, and 2% saying never.

PARENTS' SATISFACTION WITH THE FREQUENCY OF CHILD'S READING

Most parents (84%) were satisfied with the amount their child read, or was read to, whereas some (15%) said they would like their child to read more. One percent said they thought their child reads, or is read to, too often.

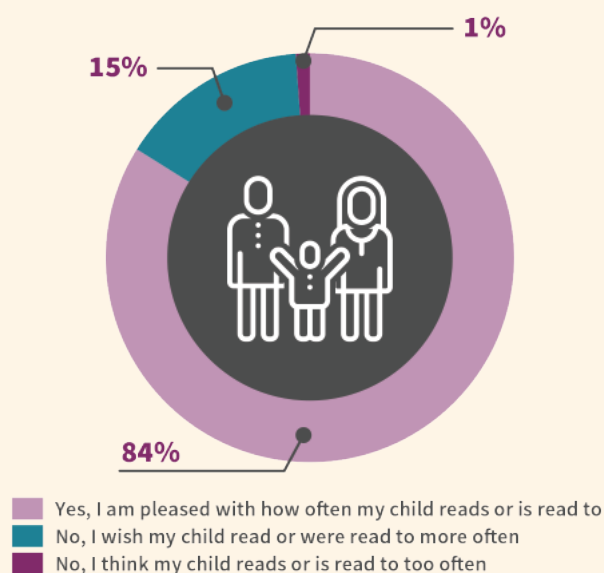


Figure 13. Parents' satisfaction with frequency of their child's reading

ACTIVITIES WHEN READING TOGETHER

Parents were asked about strategies they use to engage their child when they read together and given a list of possible responses from which they could choose multiple options. Twenty-two percent said they just read the story and do nothing else. The strategies parents employed are listed below, with those most frequently selected listed first.

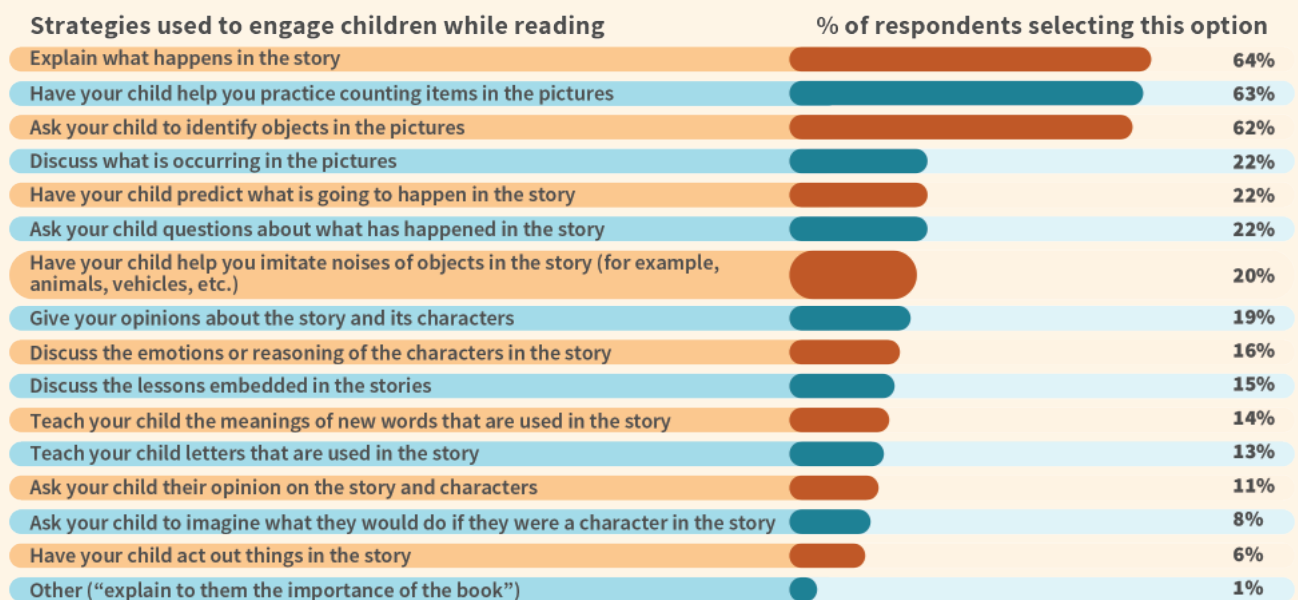


Figure 14. Strategies parents use to engage children while reading

Strategies that promote interaction and engagement between caregiver and child can stimulate interest amongst children, as well as further children's understanding of the story and develop language skills. Explaining the story was the most commonly used strategy, which although not interactive, might help comprehension. Practicing counting can be a useful strategy to engage young children, as can asking them to identify objects in the pictures; these were reported as used by 63 and 62% of parents respectively. The strategies of prediction, which can help to build interest and excitement as children listen to see if they were right, and that of asking questions, which can engage children of all ages, were selected less frequently (both used by 22% of parents). Parents gave their opinions about the story and characters more frequently than they asked children their opinions, perhaps suggesting that shared story reading could be more interactive, with more opportunities for children to express their ideas.

All respondents said that they felt these kinds of "additional activities connected to reading, such as the above, are useful for children to learn to read." Participants were asked to explain their answer in their own words. A quarter of parents said that it helped children to learn to read more quickly. Twenty percent said it helped them to remember the story and 17% said they get additional knowledge. Several respondents referred to the benefits for children's intellectual development, saying "it makes them clever" or similar answers. Three percent said it helps them to love reading. Two percent said that they use the strategies to avoid the child playing on a phone.

Respondents were then asked what kinds of additional resources or activities they would find useful to engage their child when reading together. Figure 15 shows responses selected. Parents were keen to have questions that they could ask children about the story (55% selected this option), a list of important words to explain (54%), and strategies for keeping children's attention when reading (44%). Thirty-six percent said they would find songs or rhymes, and games connected to the story useful. Thirty-six percent said they would find songs or rhymes, and games connected to the story useful. One percent said they would find other resources or activities useful.

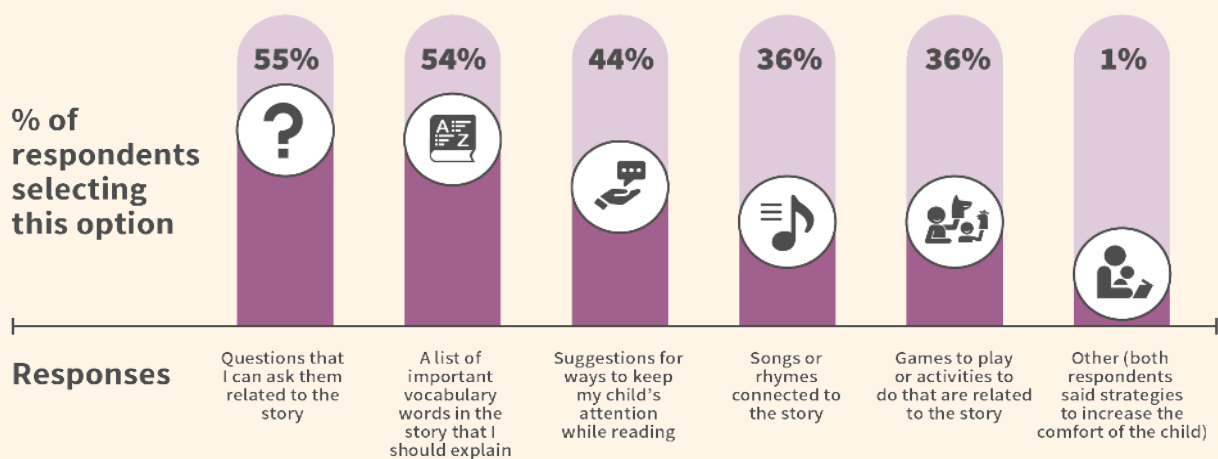


Figure 15. Resources and activities parents would find useful to support reading together

CHALLENGES AROUND READING

Parents were asked about the challenges they face when they want to read a book to their child. The majority (84%) said they did not have enough time. The next most common response was that the child lacked interest (23%), followed by the child not having enough time (15%). Thirteen percent of parents reported lack of age-appropriate books as a barrier (access is discussed in more detail in the next section).

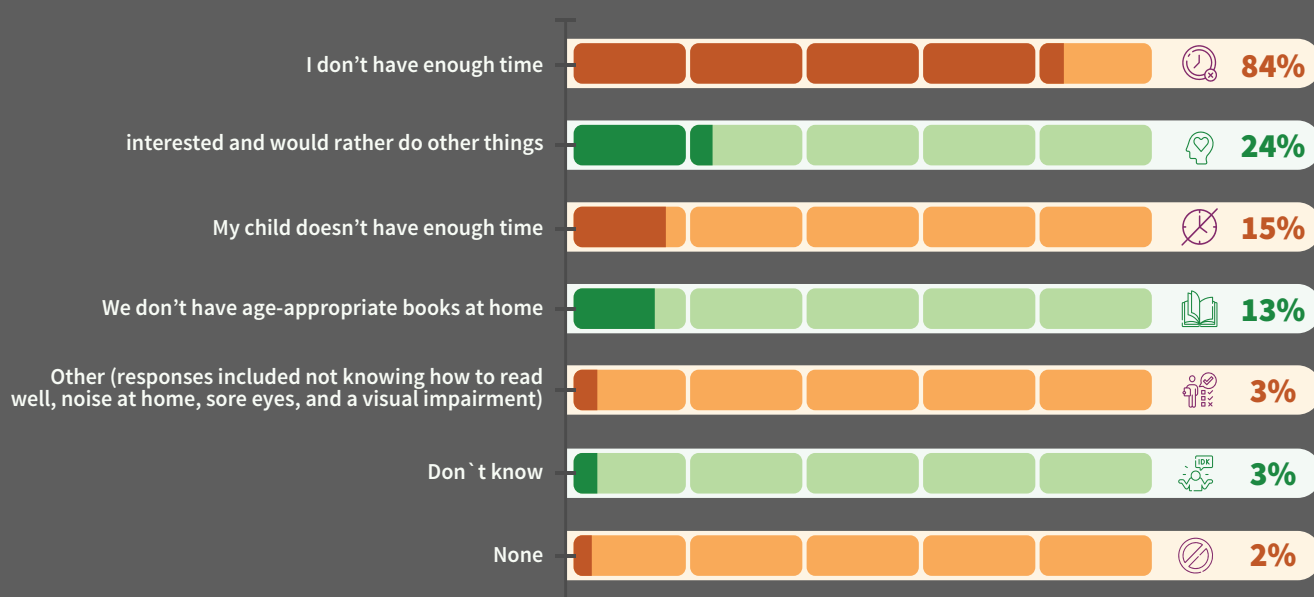


Figure 16. Challenges parents face when wanting to read a book to their child

One other challenge that 12 parents (3%) mentioned was related to their own confidence with reading. Two participants mentioned sore eyes and one a visual impairment. One mentioned noise around the home as a challenge.

Parents were also asked what other factors affect how often they read to their child. Participants could select multiple answers and give their own. The answers are shown in Figure 17.

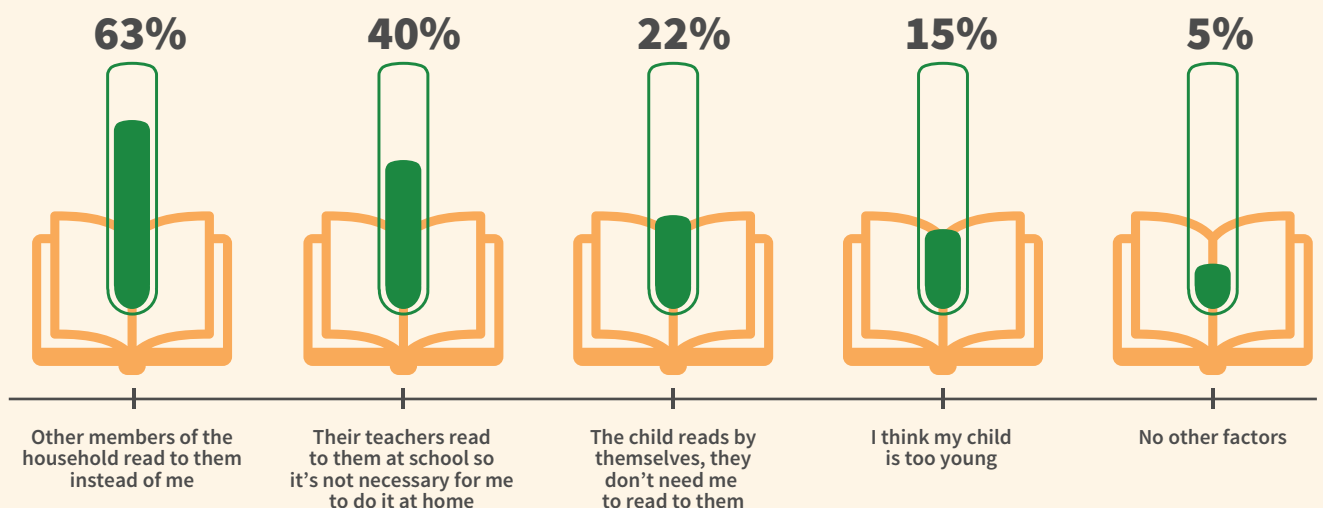


Figure 17. Other factors affecting the frequency of parents reading with children

Sixty-three percent said that other members of the household read to the child. Forty percent of parents said that since their teacher reads to the child at school it is not necessary for them to do it at home, signaling that many parents are not aware of how much they can support their child's education by reading together even after children have begun formal schooling.

Twenty-two percent said that as the child can read by themselves, they do not need someone to read to them. This also suggests that in many homes there is a missed opportunity for parents to support the literacy and language skills of children at slightly later stages of their development. Children who are able to read still benefit from being read to by an adult and being exposed to texts that are above their reading level. This might be an area where those involved with reading promotion can work to change attitudes.

Another misconception that would be important to try to address is that children are too young to be read to; 15% of parents expressed this belief. While this belief was mostly held by parents of 4- to 5-year-old children (24% of parents of children in this age group gave this reply), it was also expressed by 8% of parents of children aged 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Respondents were asked about their comfort levels reading with their children to determine whether this might be a barrier for some parents. The majority (78%) rated their comfort level as high or very high.

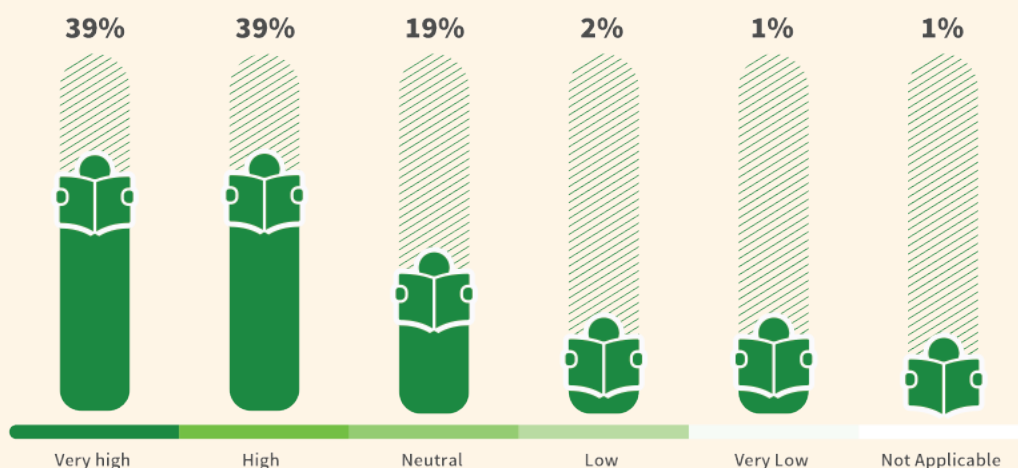


Figure 18. Caregiver's level of comfort reading to their child

If parents answered neutral, low, or very low to the previous question, they were then asked why they felt that way. Forty-six percent of this group said they were not confident with their own reading ability and 52% said that they were unsure of how to read with a small child.

Two respondents citing another reason specified that they did not have enough time.



Figure 19. Reasons why parents felt low or neutral levels of comfort reading with their child (85 respondents)

The frequency with which parents read with their children seems to be correlated with their comfort level. Eighty-eight percent of parents who said they had a high or very high comfort levels read with their child at least once per week. This is compared with 77% of those who rated their comfort level as neutral or low/very low. The proportion of those reading at least weekly reduces to 60% when just looking at parents who had low/very comfort levels. However, the number of respondents in this group was so low it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the data.

During the focus groups, one participant indicated that she felt her husband was more equipped to help their child due to his higher level of education, and therefore he reads with their child more often:

“My husband always helps to teach our kid when he comes home from work early. I will do if he is busy. However, he teaches our kid more than I do because he finished high school and he knows more than me.”

The data also suggests that children’s levels of interest in reading may be connected with their parents’ levels of comfort reading with them. When parents rated their comfort level with reading as neutral or below, children’s levels of interest were more often also rated as neutral or below (27% of children were in the neutral or low interest groups, compared with 17% of those who had parents who were more comfortable reading with them). However, as the number of parents rating their comfort level as low is a fairly small proportion of the overall sample, these results must be interpreted with some caution.

It also cannot be assumed that there is a causal relationship between any of these factors, even if some sort of correlation does exist. Nonetheless, it could be useful for those working in the early literacy and education sectors to employ strategies aimed at increasing parents’ comfort level with reading with their children to try to address some of these issues.

PARENTS' OWN READING BEHAVIORS

Parents were asked about their own reading behaviors, as previous studies have found a positive association between parents who read frequently and children's interest in reading and their reading frequency.

Sixty-five percent of parents said they read at home. Those who read themselves were asked what they read. Almost all these respondents (96%) said that they read books, with 31% stating they read newspapers, 25% reading magazines and 4% saying that they read other materials (all of whom specified this was reading the news online).

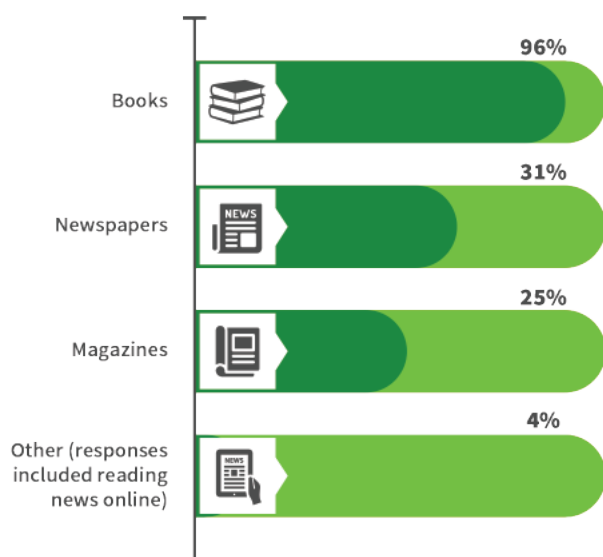


Figure 21. Reading materials of parents

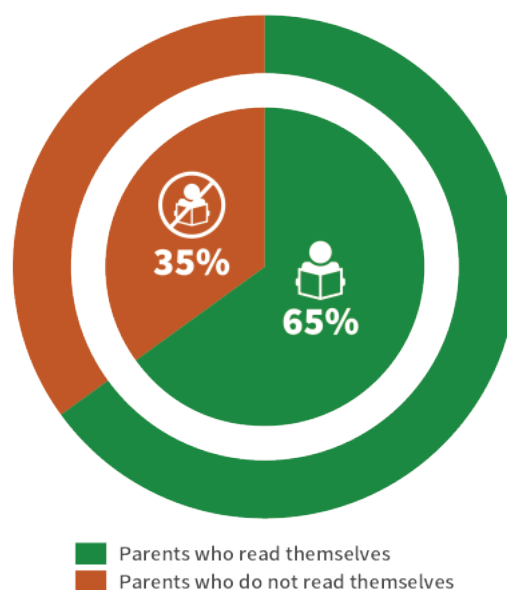


Figure 20. Parents' reading behaviors

Those who read were asked about the frequency of their reading. Thirty-three percent read daily and 49% said once or twice per week. Fourteen percent said once or twice per month, and 3% a few times per year. Parents who read were also asked whether their child had opportunities to see them reading, and 92% said they did.

When parents read more frequently, they were more likely to rate their child's interest in reading as high or very high. For example, 91% of parents who read every day rated their child as having high or very high interest in reading, compared with 75% of those who had parents who never read. This relationship is shown in Figure 22.

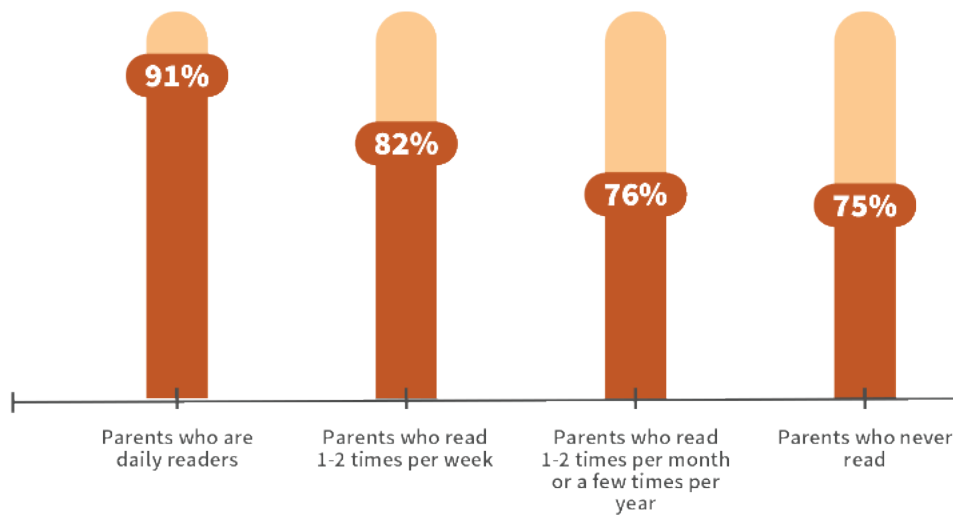


Figure 22. Children who are rated as having high or very high interest in reading in each group of parent reading frequency

Parents who read more often themselves were also more likely to read with their child frequently.

PARENTS' OWN INTEREST IN READING

Parents were asked to evaluate their own interest in books. Eighty-seven percent rated their interest as high or very high. Figure 23 shows the full results.

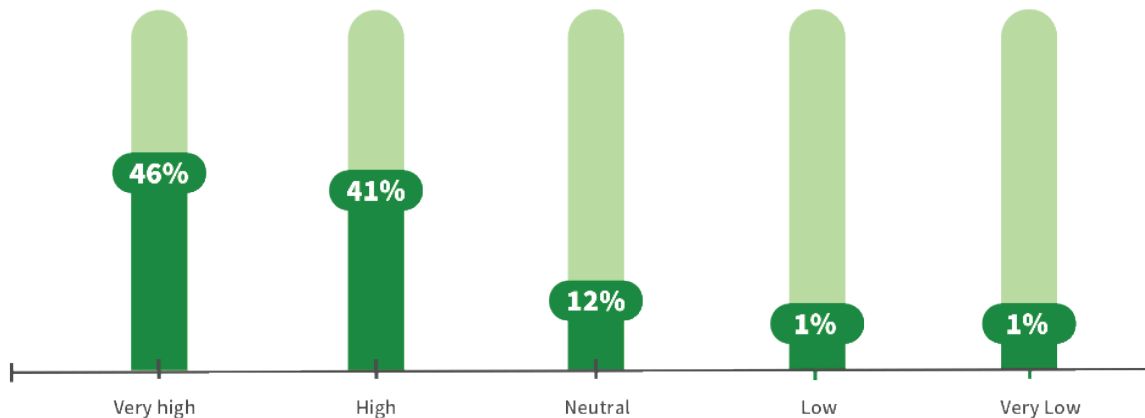


Figure 23. Parents' interest in reading

CHILDREN'S INTEREST IN BOOKS

Parents were asked to rate their child's interest in books generally, as well as their interest when being read to. The majority of parents reported that their child was interested in books, with 81% saying their interest was either high or very high. Eighteen percent were neutral, and 3% said their child had either low or very low interest in books.

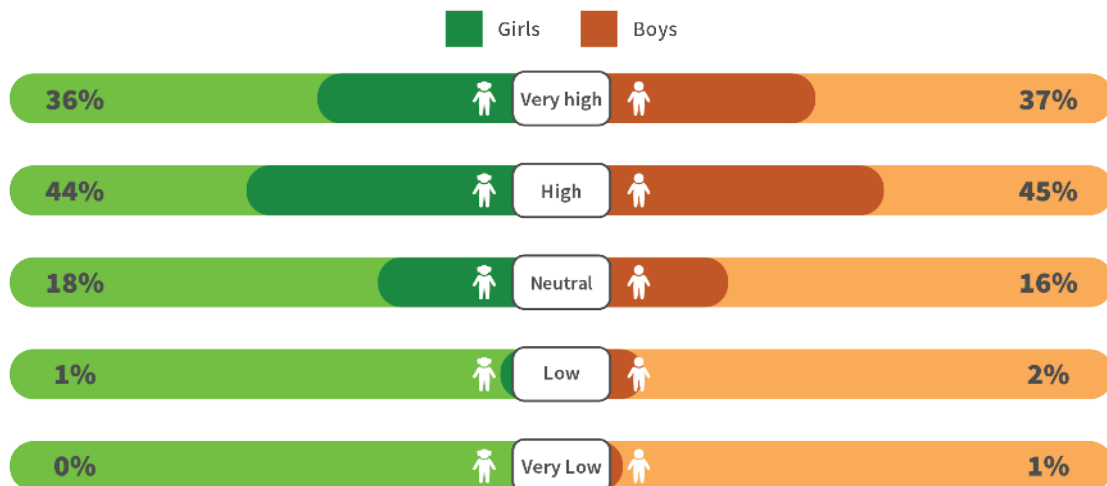


Figure 24. Children's interest in books generally (girls and boys)

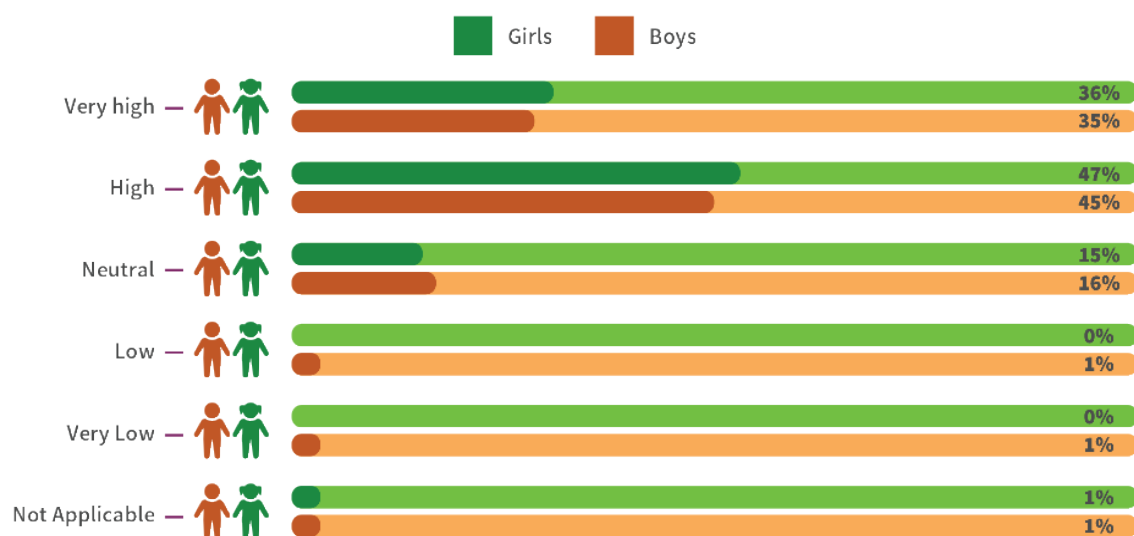


Figure 25. Children's interest when being read to (girls and boys)

Reported interest levels amongst girls and boys was similar. There did not appear to be any clear patterns relating to age or disability. However, children who were read to more often had higher levels of interest in books generally, and interest when being read to. This could suggest that parents reading to children helps them to develop a stronger interest in books, or that reading frequency could be a response to a child's interest (for example, if a child is not interested the caregiver does not push them to read often.)

Respondents whose children were reported to be interested in reading were asked why they thought they liked books. They could select multiple answers and provide their own. The majority said "Because I read them to him/her" (72%), and just over half (53%) said because they enjoyed looking at the pictures. The importance of attractive pictures was also mentioned by parents frequently in the focus group discussions.

Having lots of books at home and having family members reading books often were mentioned by over a third of respondents (37% and 36% respectively). Having books read to them at school/kindergarten and because they had school assignments that involved reading books were factors mentioned by more than one in five parents. The full results are shown in Figure 26. Responses labelled as “other” included that the child wants to go to school, and simply that they love books.

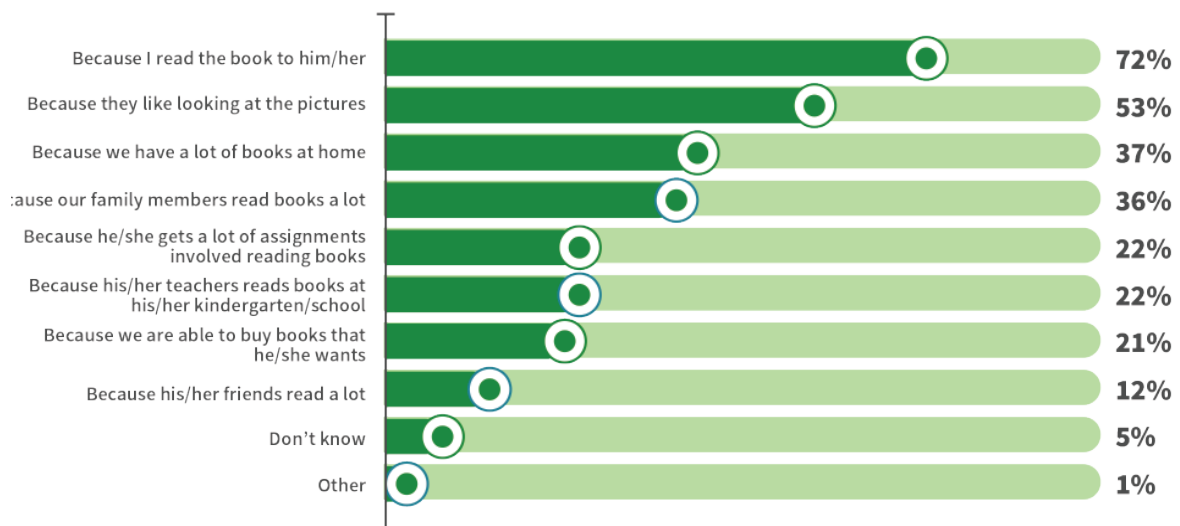


Figure 26. Reasons why children are interested in reading (parents' perceptions)

The very small number of parents (2%) who reported their child does not like books were asked why they thought this was the case. Responses included that they do not buy books for their child or have books at home, they do not read to their child regularly, and that their child thinks books are boring.

BELIEFS ABOUT THE APPROPRIATE AGE TO START READING TO CHILDREN

Parents were asked when they felt was an appropriate time to introduce children to books. All agreed that children should be read to by age 7 at the latest. The majority (66%) said between 3 and 5 years, with 23% of others saying between 0 and 2 years old. Nine percent said older, at between 6 and 7 years old. Three percent said when the child is in their mother's womb.

This is in line with other studies that have found parents to be unaware of the benefits of reading to children as early as possible, even before birth and then throughout childhood. The focus groups also suggested that even when parents did introduce books to younger children, the extent of reading materials they are exposed to may be limited due to beliefs about young children's capacity to benefit from being read to. For example, when asked how many children's books they have at home, one parent responded, "One study board with the alphabet and one book because he is only 4 years old."

Perhaps more worryingly, a teacher of kindergarten and Grade 1 students who was interviewed suggested that the appropriate time to start reading to children was, "When they are in the second grade because kids who are younger don't know how to read yet." However, this teacher did read stories to her kindergarten and Grade 1 students, so perhaps they meant the age at which children should be introduced to reading books themselves.

Nonetheless, it would still reflect a limited awareness of the importance of reading books in literacy development. While children in Grade 1 and below may need carefully levelled text, and/or more support to read themselves, reading actual books as opposed to just the literacy content of the school textbook is crucial for the development of their reading skills.

These findings suggest that there is scope for those working in reading promotion to raise awareness amongst parents about the value of introducing books to children from an early age both to nurture their oral language development, and also to support the development of their reading skills.

CHILDREN'S READING PREFERENCES

Respondents were asked what kinds of books their child was interested in. The most common response was “non-fiction books with pictures” (84%). This was followed by storybooks and coloring books, with 72% of respondents selecting both options. Textbooks and workbooks were less popular, with 38% and 27% respondents respectively choosing these options.

These results suggest that those wishing to encourage early grade reading in Cambodia may do well to provide high-quality non-fiction books.

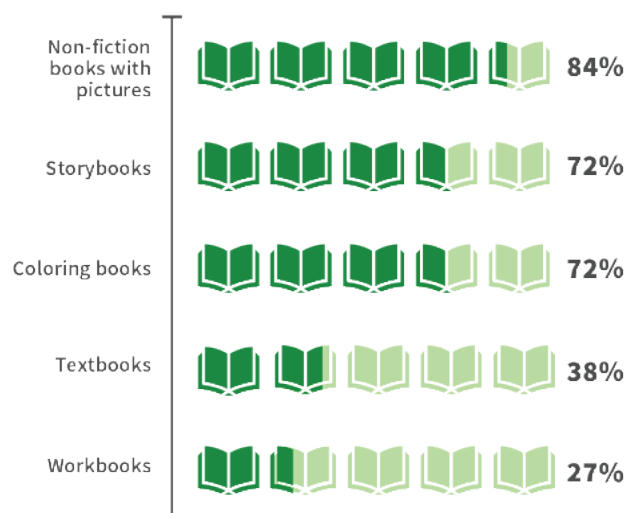


Figure 27. Type of books children are interested in

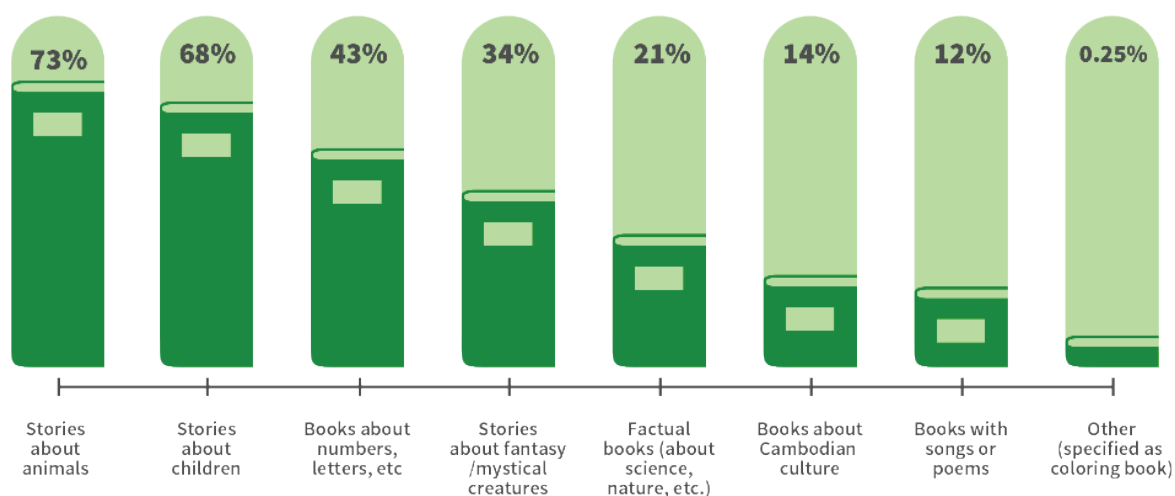


Figure 28. Types of books parents or children would be interested in seeing more of

PARENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE VALUE OF READING WITH CHILDREN

Parents were asked: “In your opinion, what is the purpose of reading storybooks to your child?” and asked to select one or more purposes from a list of responses or give their own response. The most common response was “To teach them moral/social lessons” with 74% of respondents selecting this option. This was followed closely by “To teach them about academic topics (letters/numbers, new vocabulary, facts about animals, food, etc.)” with 71% of parents choosing this response. Sixty percent said “To have fun and entertain them.” and 48% said “To bond and spend time.” with their child. Twenty-eight percent said “To expand the possibilities they can imagine for their own their lives.” One percent provided other purposes, including to reduce the time the child spent playing games or on the phone, and to help them sleep.

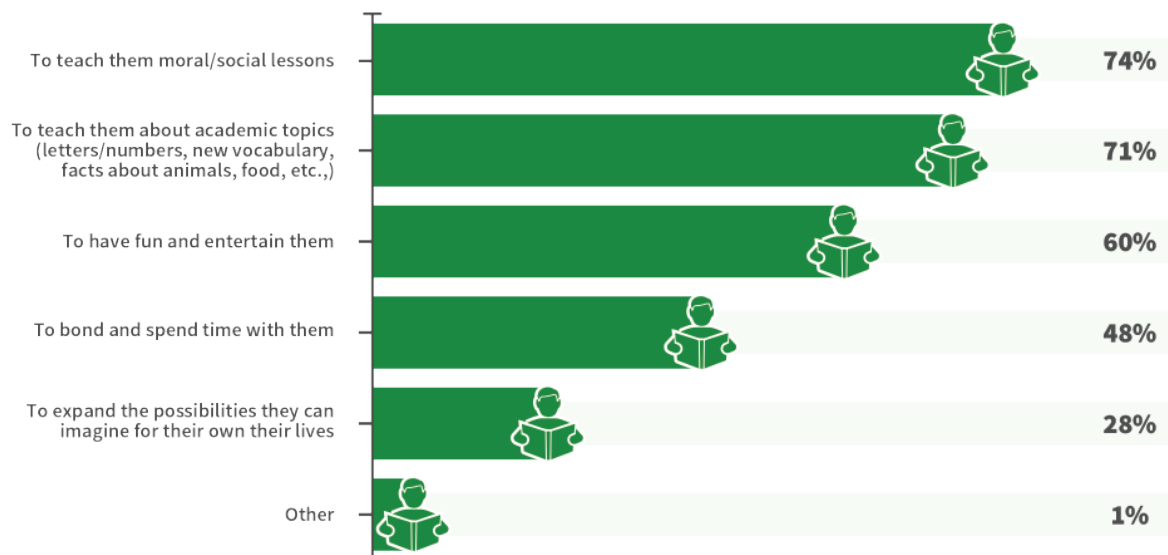


Figure 29. Parents' purposes for reading to children

In the focus group discussions, many parents also talked about the importance of the educational benefits of reading, with some also mentioning how it supports their bond with their child.

Reassuringly, 100% of parents said they believed that reading books to their child is either important or very important.

Participants were asked to explain why they felt that way in their own words. The vast majority of responses (87%) related to the educational benefits of reading (to gain knowledge, to be clever, to get better at reading, and other similar responses). Only 10% mentioned love of reading to “cultivate their spirit of reading” and 2% talked about social benefits, for example to learn about living in society.

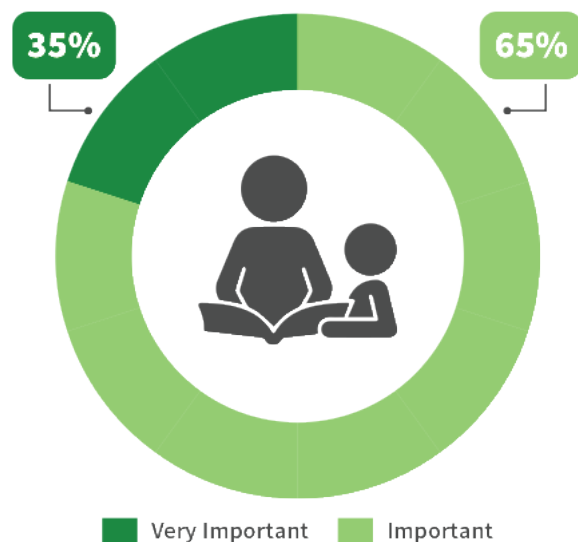


Figure 30. Parents' beliefs about the importance of reading

Parents were also asked to what extent they thought reading contributes to their child's IQ and cognitive development, their communication skills, and their academic performance. Contrasting with Eng, et al.'s (2014) research, which suggested Cambodian parents might not see the value in educational activities, the majority of parents in this study believed that reading has a large impact on all three areas.

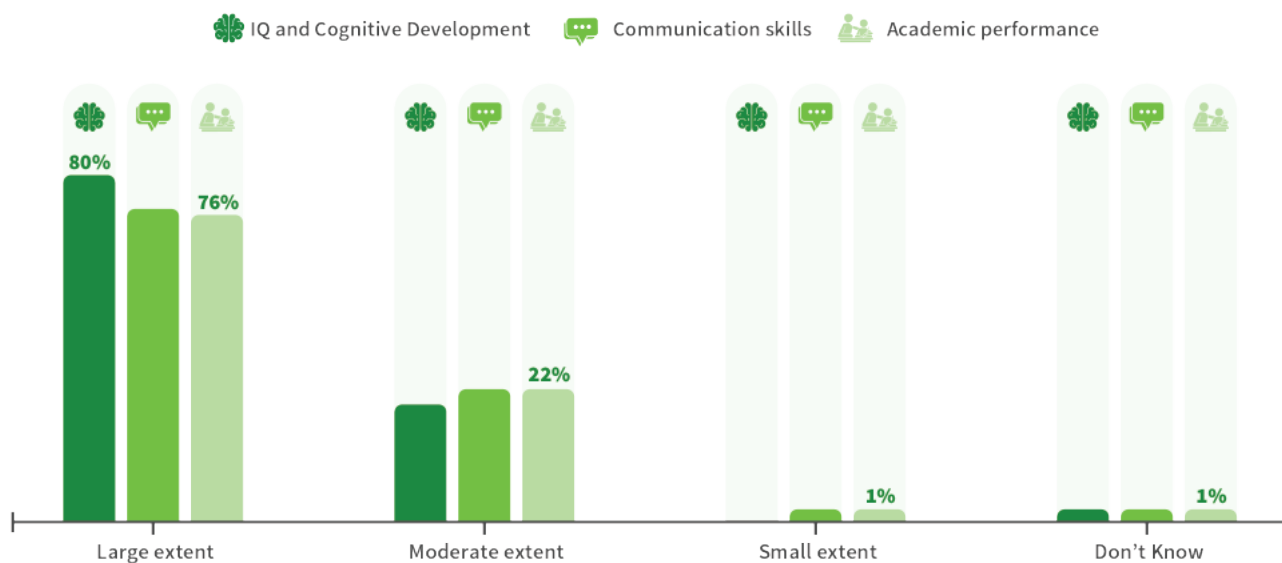


Figure 31. Parents' beliefs about how reading supports impacts children's development and achievement

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RELATING TO ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

The results in this section suggest that parents are aware in principle of the importance of reading, with many placing value on its educational benefits. Organizations working in the early literacy and education sector and who wish to promote reading might not need to focus on the importance of reading books to children, but instead concentrate on other more specific messaging (alongside increasing access to books, which is discussed more in the next section). For example, parents might benefit from specific messaging about when to start reading with children, what reading together and independently might look like for different age groups, and information about the value of reading together daily.

In many households, parents are reading fairly regularly with children. However, there is still room for improvement. One in ten children are never, or almost never read too, and five percent are read to just once or twice per month. Even children who are read to once or twice per week could benefit from daily sessions with parents.

Lack of time appeared to be a common barrier for parents reading with their child (84% reported this regarding their own time and 15% reported the child did not have enough time). Parents might benefit from encouragement to read frequently in short sessions. The majority of parents (62%) reported spending over 20 mins each time reading with their child, including 25% who spent over 30 minutes reading with their child. While longer reading sessions are not to be discouraged if the child is happy and engaged, promotion campaigns should share the message that short reading sessions can also be useful, and frequency is especially beneficial.

A number of parents expressed that their child was too young for reading together, or that reading together was unnecessary as their child was read to by their teacher or their child could now read independently. Specific messaging for each age-group about how they can benefit from different types of reading activities together might be useful, along with tips, techniques, and suggested reading materials for each age group.

Lack of interest on the part of the child could be a good topic to explore further and to attempt to address, as maintaining the child's interest was mentioned as a challenge by 24% of parents, despite most parents generally reporting their children to be interested in reading and reading together. It could be helpful to understand further what triggers a child in specific circumstances to become disinterested and what could help. For example, is the issue due to lack of variety in the books they are reading, or books that are not on their preferred topics? Or could shorter, more interactive shared reading sessions, focusing more on fun and engagement help? Promotional materials and campaigns that include tips to engage and support children at different ages could be useful. Forty-four percent of parents said that suggestions on how to keep their child's attention would be helpful. Fifty-five percent of parents also said questions to ask about the story would be useful; this could also help to engage and keep children interested. Those working in reading promotion could provide questions and songs and games linked to stories to help with this.

Several of the focus group discussions highlighted the way in which parents draw a distinction between learning and play or fun. For example, one parent said:

“I am a stay-at-home mom, so I usually read and teach my kid during the daytime. I don’t do it every day because he might get bored.”

Several participants also mentioned reading being an activity used to stop children playing too much. It could be helpful to seek to promote the message that when children are enjoying activities and having fun, they are more likely to learn, and that reading can be both fun and educational

The data suggests that there might be inequalities relating to gender and disability, with boys and children with disabilities being read to less frequently. Promotional materials and campaigns need to target boys and male caregivers as well as women and girls. .

RECOMMENDATIONS



Those working in reading promotion should ensure that materials are accessible for children with disabilities and that these materials are promoted to parents of this group.



Encouraging caregivers to see themselves as role models for reading might be helpful. In this study, children who see their caregivers reading were reported to be more interested in reading.



Some of these features may also be of use to parents who lack confidence in their reading skills or have impairments that impact their ability to read printed materials. Short videos that highlight how the audio can be played alongside the text could be helpful.



The fact that 41% of parents are already using digital books with children at least once per month demonstrates that there are a significant number of households within Phnom Penh who could be a potential audience for the digital libraries and other online resources. Expanding caregivers' awareness about these types of resources would be helpful. This topic is explored in more detail in the section Digital Consumption.

ACCESS TO PHYSICAL BOOKS

Caregivers were asked a series of questions to gauge the extent of access they and their children had to books.

BOOK OWNERSHIP

Parents were asked how many books they had at home, and then how many children's books they had at home. Thirteen percent said they had between one and five books. Half of all parents reported having between six and 20 books (with 30% owning 6 to 15, and 20% owning 16 to 20). Thirty-eight percent said they had over 20 books.

Parents reported owning fewer children's books compared with books in general. One percent said they owned no children's books and 35% had between 1 and 5 books. Thirty-one percent owned more than 15 books (including 20% who had over 20 children's books).

Households with higher incomes were more likely to have greater numbers of books. For example, only 9% of households in the lowest income group had over twenty books compared with 22% of households with an income of over \$800.

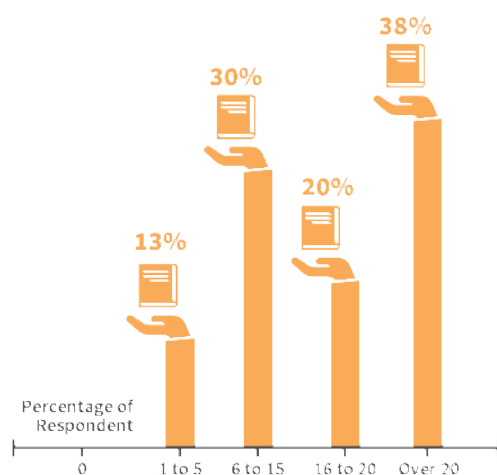


Figure 32. Ownership of books (general)

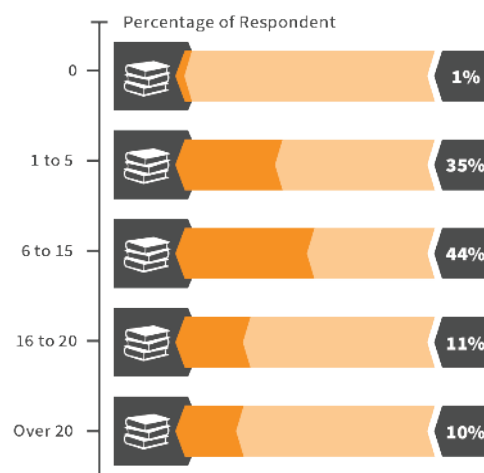


Figure 33. Ownership of children's books

Parents were asked what types of books they had at home for children. The most common type were picture books (reported as owned by 86% of parents), followed by coloring books (83%), storybooks (74%), educational books (72%), literature (54%), and activity books (31%). No parents reported having any other types of books.

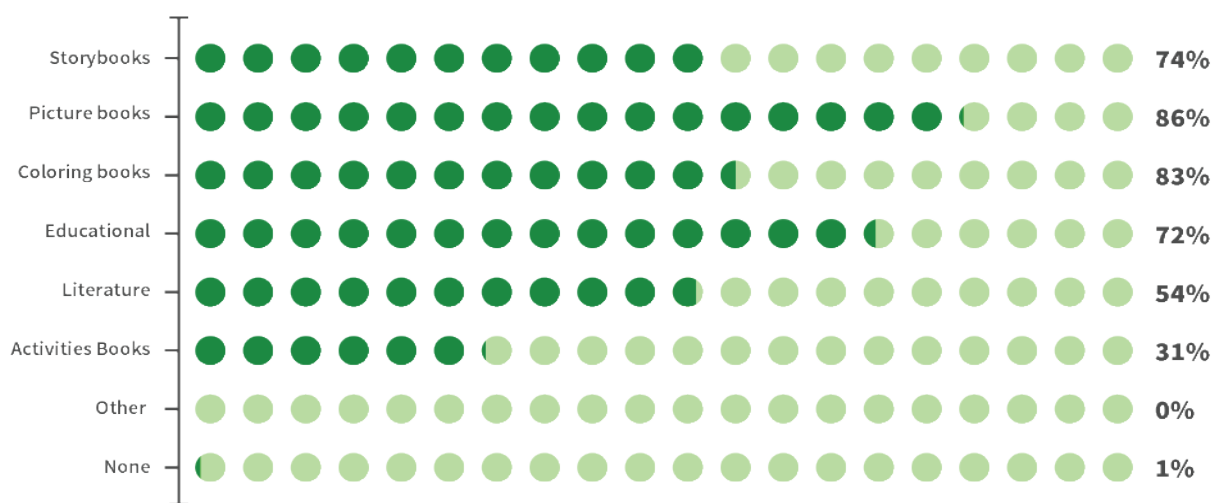


Figure 34. Types of children's books that parents reported owning

Parents prioritized having attractive pictures when buying children's books, with 68% of respondents selecting this from a list of factors. Sixty-two percent of respondents selected age-appropriateness, 46% prioritized books with educational value (e.g., teaches alphabet or facts, etc.) and 42% wanted books to have a good moral lesson. Forty-one percent said they prioritize buying books recommended by the MoEYS. Thirty-seven percent said not having too much text was a priority, and 35% chose books because they have a fun or exciting story. Twenty-seven percent bought books based on recommendations from friends or teachers. Twenty-one percent said price was a priority. As might be expected, price was mentioned more often by households who said their household income was not adequate to afford basic needs.

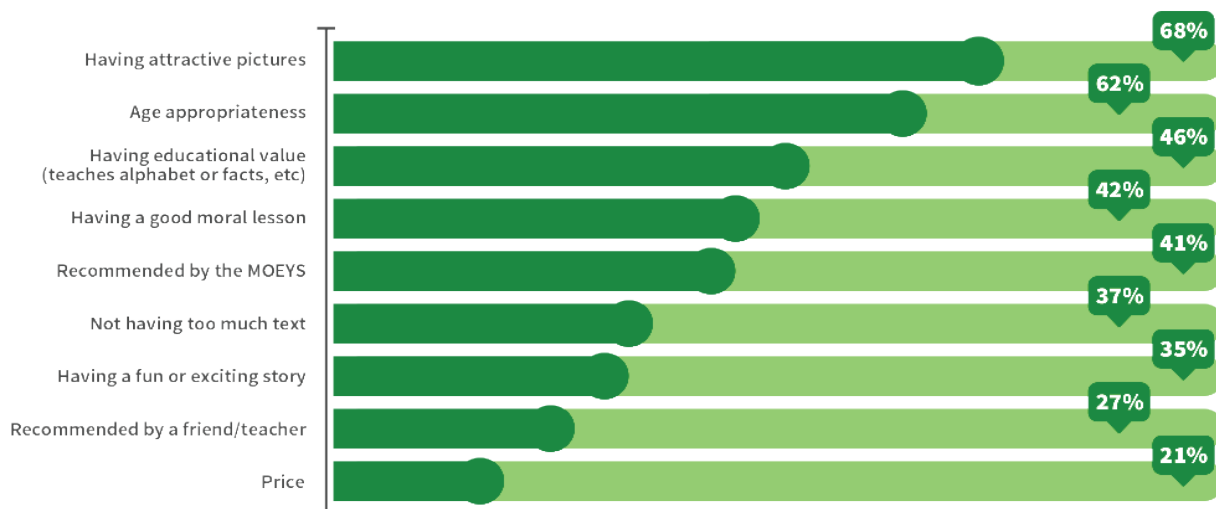


Figure 35. Features parents prioritize when buying books

Parents were asked what challenges they face when buying age-appropriate books for their child. Fifty-three percent of respondents reported not having a bookstore close to home. The next most common response was books being too expensive (31% of respondents reported this as an issue), followed by bookstores not having the books that caregivers were looking for (28%), not being sure which books to buy (16%), bookstores not having books that their child was interested in (13%) and bookstores not having age-appropriate books (12%). Eighteen percent said they faced no challenges.

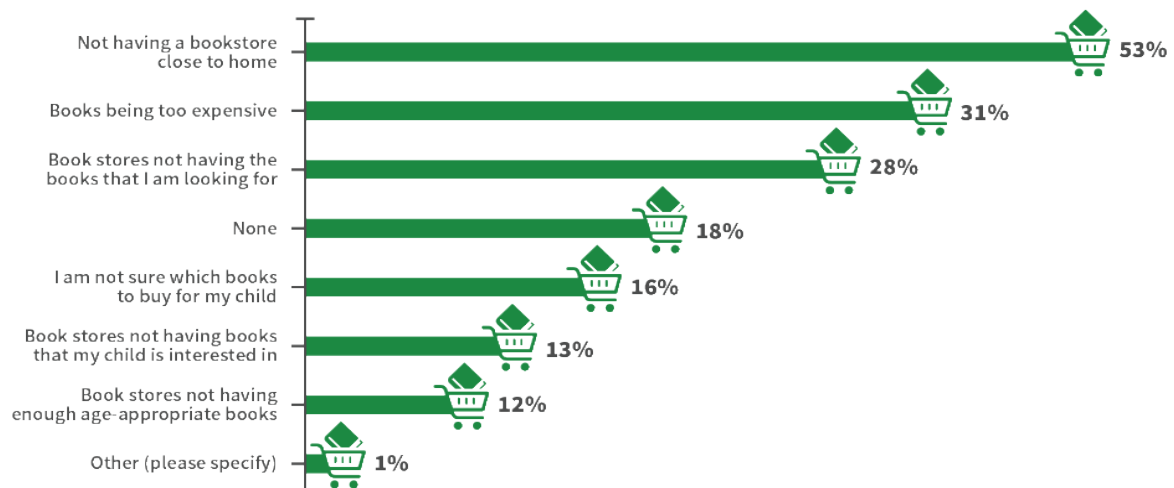


Figure 36. Challenges caregivers face when buying books

LIBRARY ACCESS AND USE

Parents were asked about access to public libraries. Only 9% of parents reported children having access to a public library, 83% said they did not have access, and 8% of parents said they did not know.

The 35 respondents who said their child did have access to a library were asked how often their child visited the library with them, another family member or friend. One respondent said they went every day, 11 respondents said they went once or twice a week, 10 said once or twice per month, four said they went a few times per year and nine respondents said that despite having access they never went.

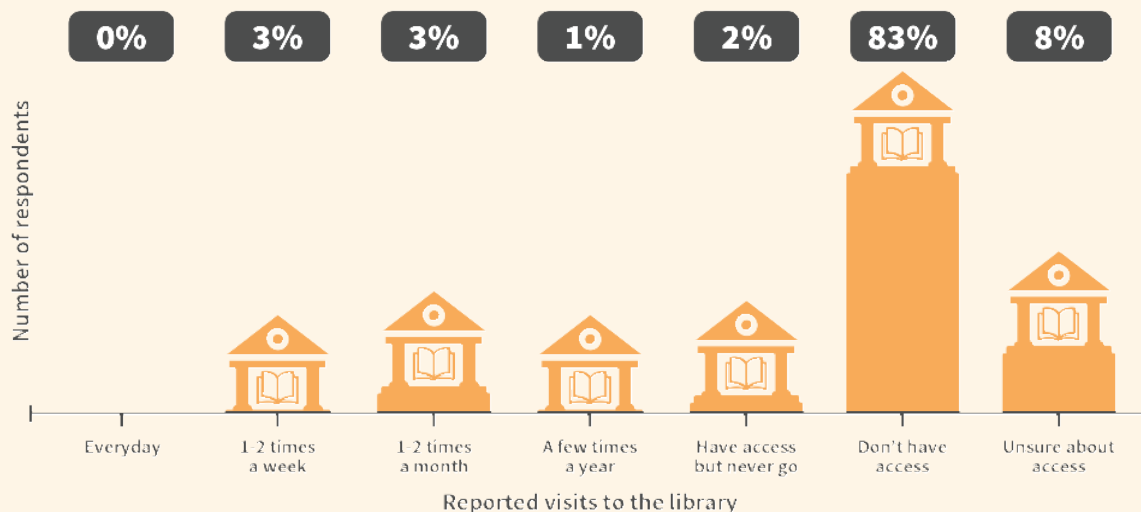


Figure 37. Frequency of library visits

Those who said the child did have access to a library were asked what kinds of books were available there. Picture books were the most reported (by 89% of parents), followed by storybooks (86%) and coloring books (80%). The full responses are shown in Figure 38.

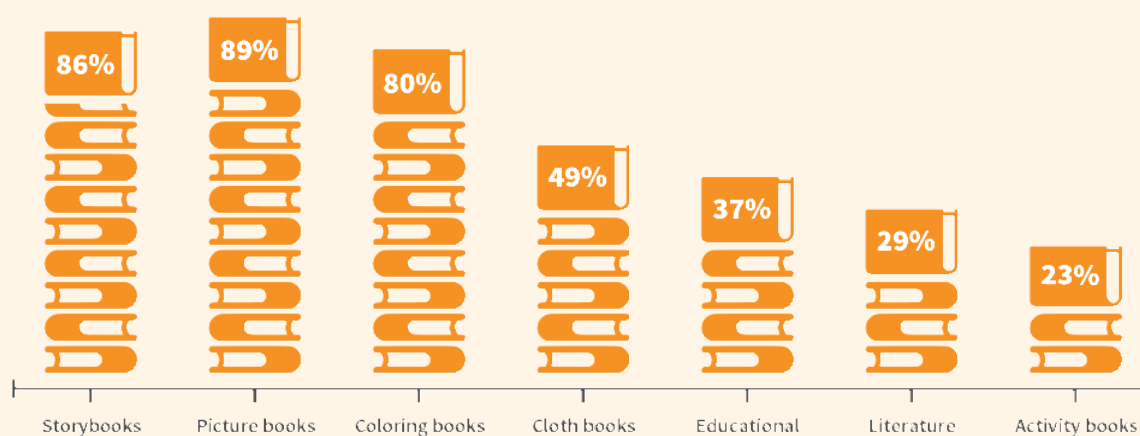


Figure 38. Types of children's books available at public libraries (as reported by caregivers whose child has access)

ACCESS TO BOOKS AT COMMUNITY CENTERS

Parents were asked whether the child has access to a community center. Overall, 10 respondents (2.5%) said that they did, 91% said that they did not, and 7% said that they were unsure. The 10 respondents who said the child did have access to a community center were asked how often their child visited there with them, another family member or friend. Five respondents said they went once or twice a week, four said once or twice per month and one said that they never went.



Figure 39. Frequency of visits to a community center

Those with access were asked if the community center had books, and if so what kinds of books were available. One respondent said they did not know, while the others reported there being children's books (most often picture books, coloring books and storybooks).

ACCESS TO BOOKSTORES

The majority of respondents (87%) said their child did not have access to a bookstore. Those who did tended to go one or twice per year (3%) or less (2%) or did not go despite having access (2%). Just one percent went one time per week or more. Of the 29 respondents with access to bookstores, one said there were no children's books, while all others reported that picture books were available. Storybooks and coloring books were also commonly reported as available.

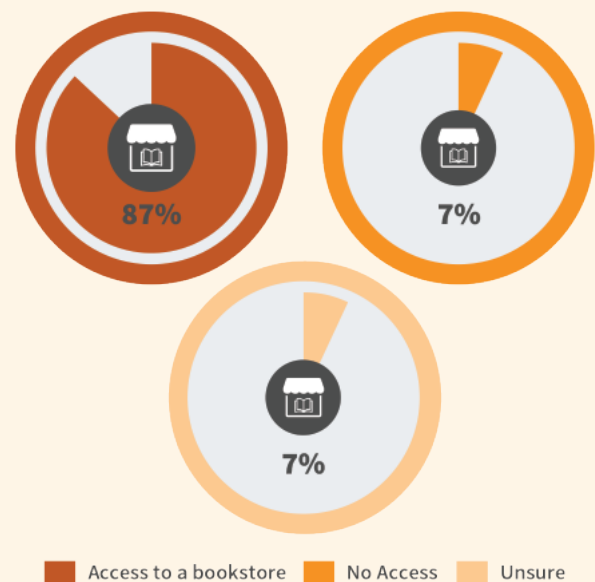


Figure 40. Children's access to bookstores

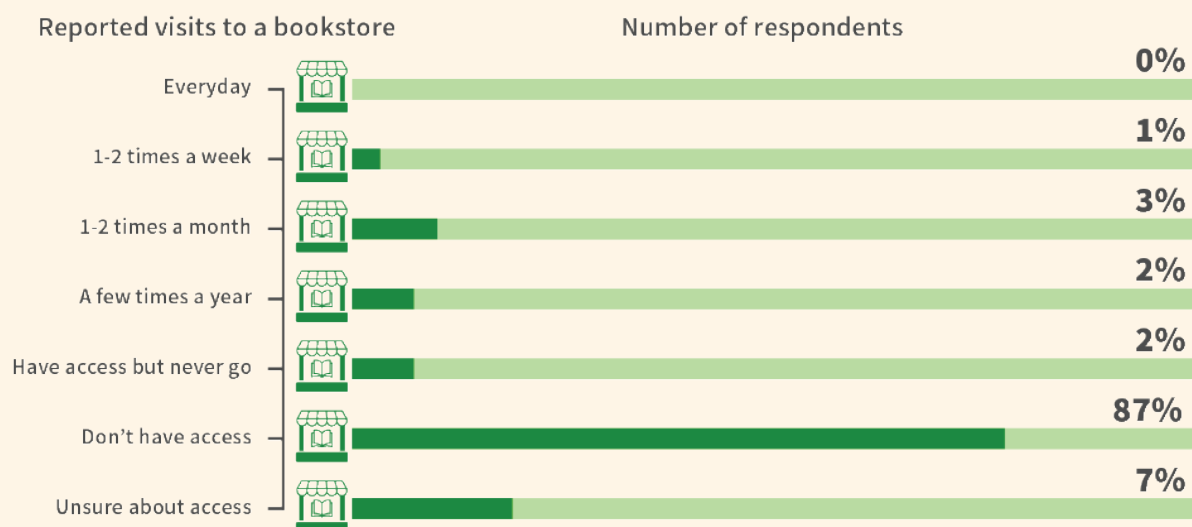


Figure 41. Frequency of visits to a bookstore

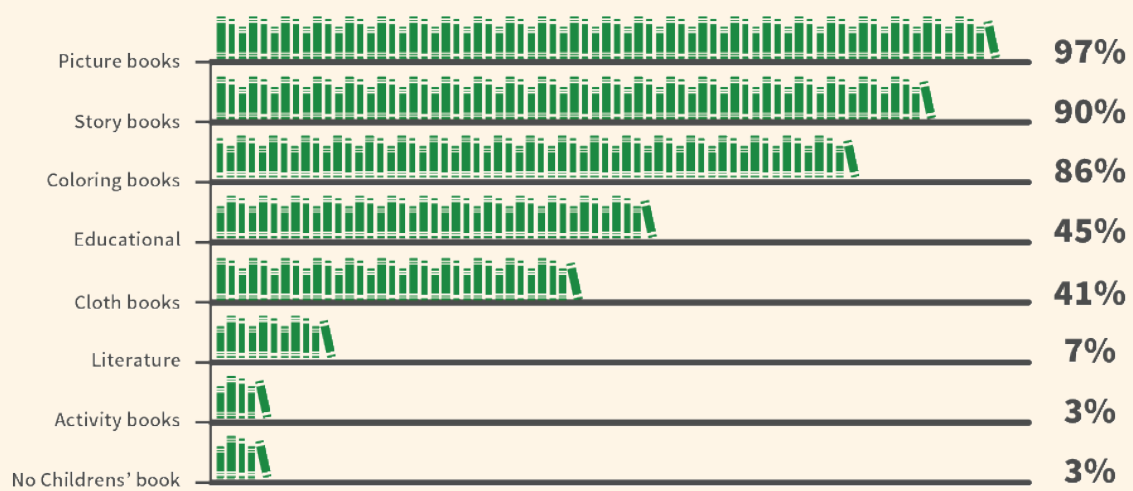


Figure 42. Types of children's books available at bookstores (as reported by parents whose child has access)

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RELATING TO ACCESS TO PHYSICAL BOOKS

While the households in this survey appear to own more children's books than in studies conducted in more rural areas, numbers are still very limited. Only 10% of households had over 20 printed children's books, 36% had five or fewer. While there is no commonly agreed "ideal number" of books that a household should own to support a child's literacy development, one study of 27 countries found that when households had around 500 books children typically complete more than three additional years of schooling than those from otherwise similar homes (Evans et al, 2010).

Given the financial barriers many families in Cambodia face when buying books, owning substantial numbers of printed materials is unrealistic, and families will need to look for other opportunities to expose their children to reading materials. However, the data suggests that children's access to books outside the home or school environment is very limited. Many families report not having access to a nearby public library or community center to borrow or use books. This study did not look at school libraries, but previous studies suggest

that many children are unable to borrow and take books home from school libraries. "Given this limited access to school and public libraries in Cambodia, free digital libraries may represent a realistic alternative for many families. Of course, this assumes that caregivers have access to internet and devices, which will likely exclude the most marginalized households. The next section contains information about digital access for those included in this study.

Expanding partnerships with NGOs and donor-funded projects that have substantial budgets to print and supply books to schools may help to reach more marginalized children. This might also be a way to connect with teachers who can then recommend digital library apps, including free apps, to caregivers who have the resources to use them.

When seeking to attract the interest of potential users of digital libraries, highlighting the factors that appeal most to caregivers – for example, attractive illustrations and educational value – may be of benefit. Helping caregivers to choose books that are the appropriate level for children might also be useful, as this was also identified as a challenge.

Highlighting digital libraries with books created in partnership with the MoEYS or as part of the official MoEYS early grade learning program to parents might be beneficial, as many parents place value on recommendations and endorsements from the MoEYS.

The lack of appropriate books in bookstores reported by parents reflects the fact that, although growing, the number and variety of Khmer language children's books in print is still limited. Further investment in the children's book publishing industry, training and mentoring authors, illustrators and publishers would be useful. Working with publishers to increase the number of children's titles that are printed and sold would also help to increase the range of titles available in the market.

DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

INTERNET CONNECTIONS AND DEVICE OWNERSHIP

All but one family reported owning at least one smart phone, but only 44% said they had internet access at home. Computers were less common, with 27% owning laptops and 13% having a desktop computer, while 19% reported owning a tablet.

Of the 99 households who said their income was not adequate to afford basic needs, 22% had internet access compared with 51% of those who rated their income as more adequate.

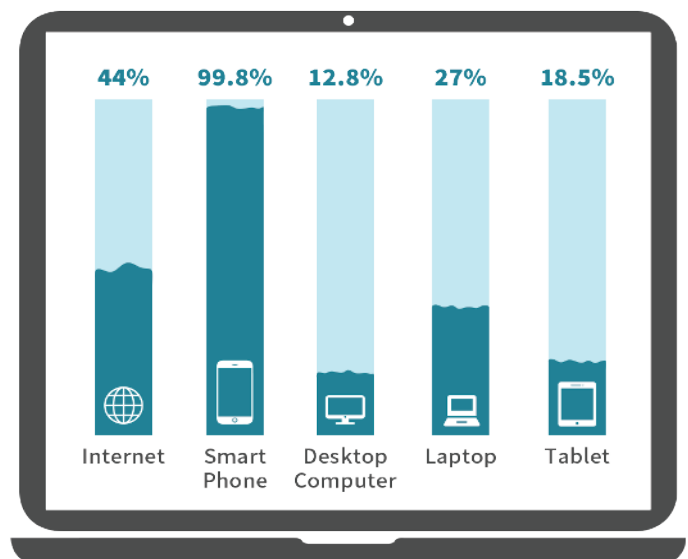


Figure 43. Internet and electronic devices at home

The majority of households (94%) had at least two devices at home, with 61% having three or more.

Families who rated their income as more adequate were also more likely to have greater numbers of devices in their homes. Among those who said their income was not adequate to afford basic needs, 38% had three or more devices, compared with 82% of those who said their income was adequate to afford basic needs and have some money left over, to buy luxuries, or to make savings.

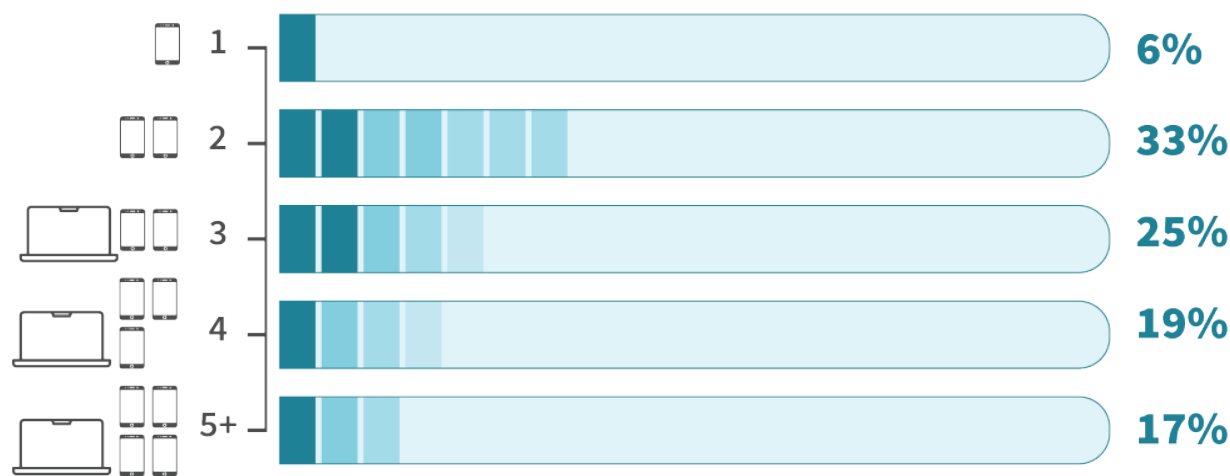


Figure 44. Number of smart devices in the home

PARENTS' RESPONSES TO DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Parents were asked about when they clicked on content, both when browsing social media posts and when they received push notifications from apps on their phones.

Forty-three percent never clicked on posts about unfamiliar websites, products, or services, while 30% clicked on the post if they are interested in the product or service but only if they have heard of the website. Twenty-six percent said that they clicked on posts if they liked the image or text and were interested in the product or service. Forty-four percent said they clicked when interested in the product or service even if they have not heard of them before, and 7% said they clicked on posts even if not particularly interested in the product/service mentioned

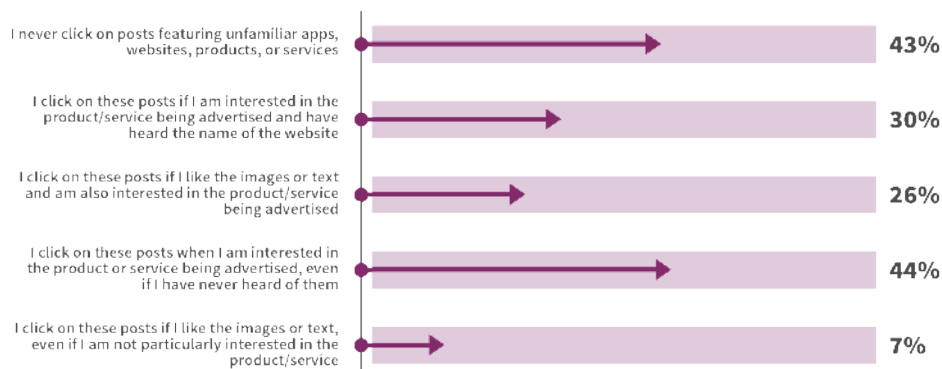


Figure 57. In what situations do parents click on posts featuring unfamiliar apps, websites, products or services

Thirty-nine percent said that they never tap on push notifications that come up on their phones, whereas 22% always tap on notifications. Twenty-nine percent said that they tap when the message interested them, 26% when it is an app that they use regularly, and 15% when it is from an app that they haven't used in a long time.

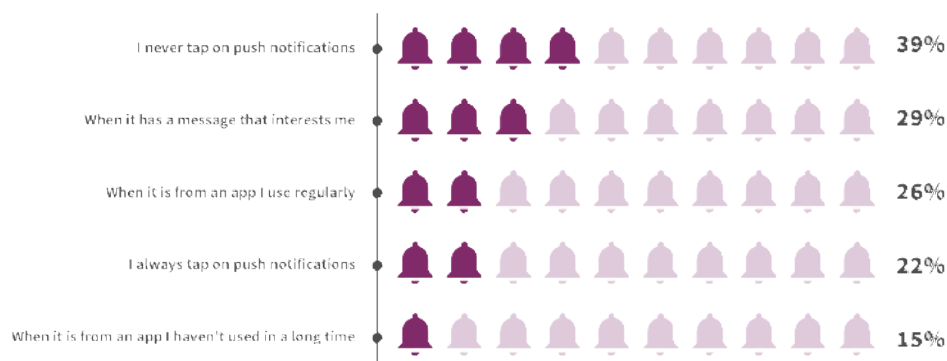


Figure 58. When do parents tap on push notifications that come up on their phones

PARENTS' USE OF DEVICES

Parents were asked about the amount of time they spent using devices themselves. Fourteen percent said they spent less than twenty minutes per day, 30% said 20 to 60 mins, 28% said one to two hours, and 28% said over two hours. Just over half of parents said they spent more of their time on their device checking news, followed by 30% who used it for social media, 8% who said talking or texting, and 5% shopping. Six percent reported other activities.

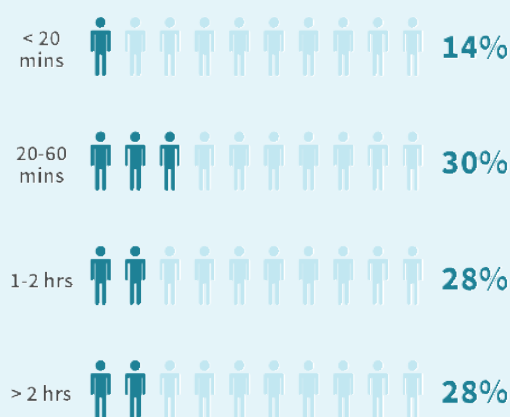


Figure 45. Time spent on devices per day (adults)

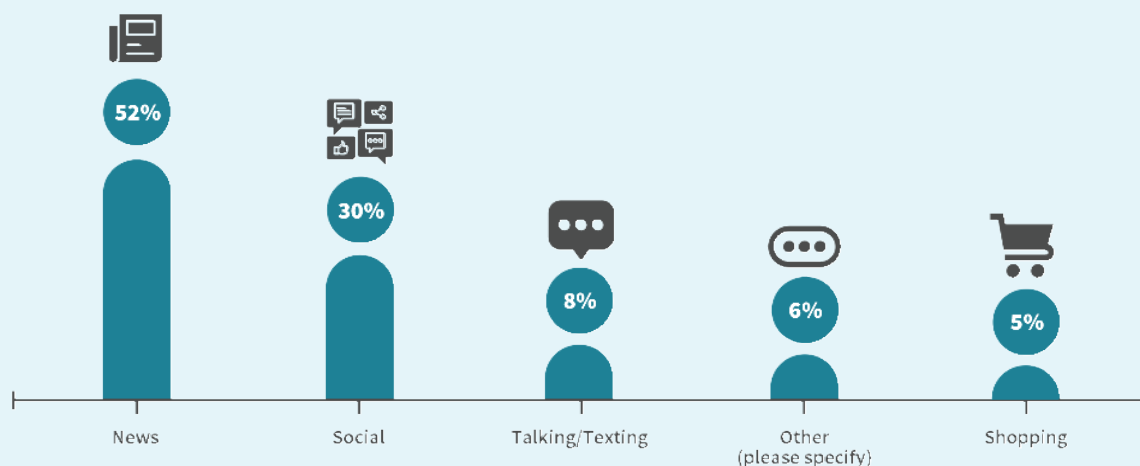


Figure 46. The activity that parents spend most time on when using a smart device

Most parents believed that children aged 7 and under should spend less than 20 mins per day on electronic devices. Parents consistently felt that as children got older it was more appropriate for them to spend more time on devices. However, 100% of parents said that children in each of the age groups should not spend more than 2 hours on electronic devices.

CHILDREN'S USE OF DEVICES AND EDUCATIONAL APPS

Most parents reported spending higher amounts of time with their children on a device per day than they had said they felt was appropriate, with 48% spending 20 to 60 minutes on devices, 15% spending 1 to 2 hours and 1% over 2 hours.

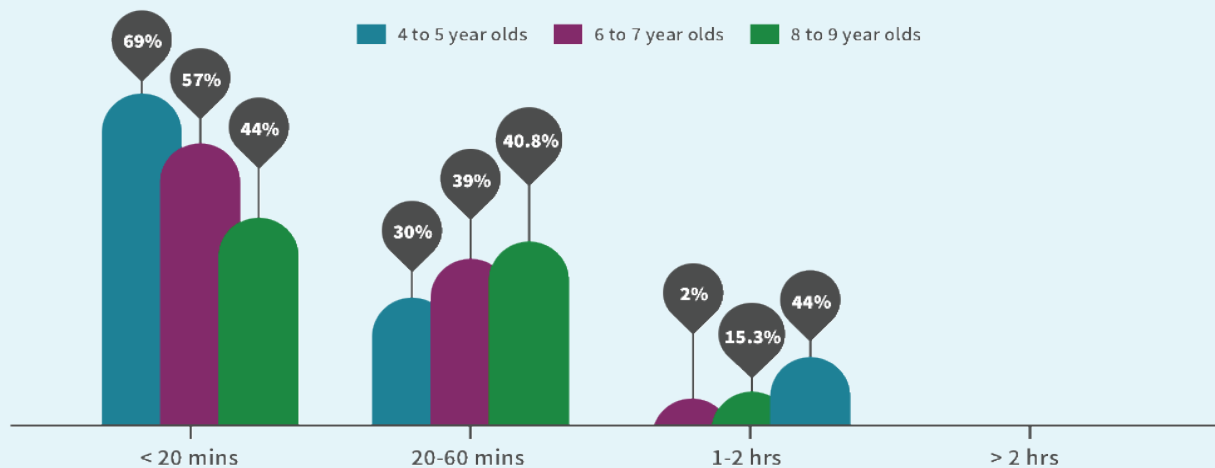


Figure 47. Amount of time parents feel is appropriate for children to spend time on devices (by age of child)

Although parents were not asked specifically about the amount of time their children spent on devices alone, the focus group discussions highlighted that some children were also having unsupervised time online. For example, one parent was asked how much time their child spent on devices, and they replied: "I am not sure because sometimes he does his exam online, and he has his own phone, so I don't know."

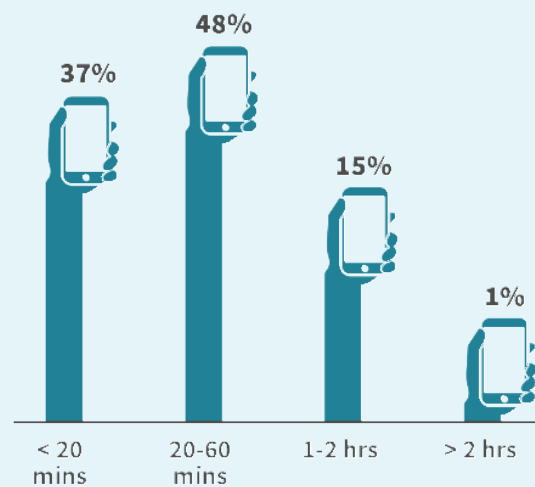


Figure 48. Time spent on devices per day with a child

The parents who said they did use educational or reading related apps (113 respondents) were asked to specify which apps. YouTube was the most popular response, with 76% of parents who used apps saying they used this platform. Twenty-nine percent of app-users said they used Facebook.

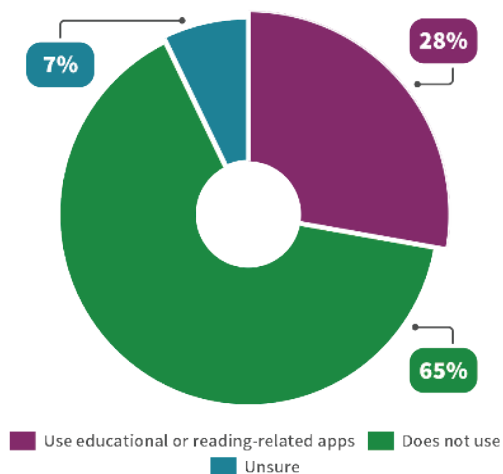


Figure 49. Children's use of educational or reading-related apps

Seven percent of those who used educational apps reported using Telegram, a messenger app that was commonly used by government schoolteachers to share educational content during the school closures caused by COVID-19. Three percent of app-users said they used TikTok. Other responses from one participant each included the child's school app (1%), the MoEYS app (1%), Reading Letters and Numbers, Clever Child, Zoom, and Math Kids. Thirteen percent said they weren't sure of the app.

These respondents were also asked what the apps focused on. Most (78%) said the apps they used focused on reading, with many (70%) also saying creativity. Twenty-eight of the 32 respondents whose child used Facebook considered this to be an app that focused on reading, with many also mentioning creativity, and few others saying it also supported mathematics and/or science.

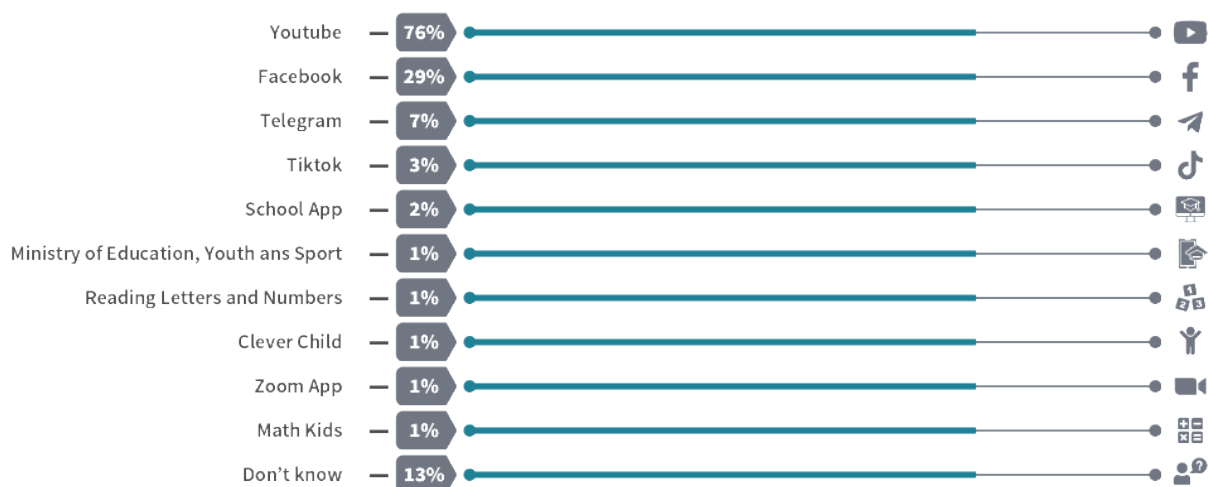


Figure 50. "Educational or reading-related apps" used by parents with children (113 respondents)

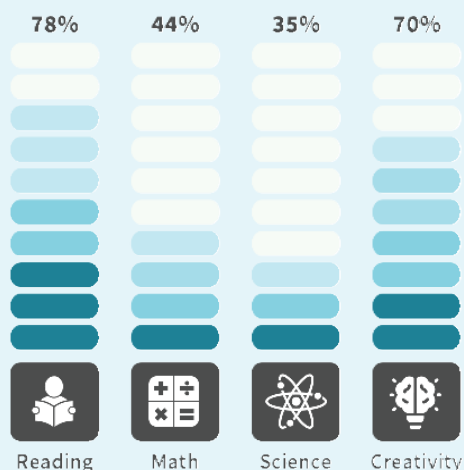


Figure 51. Focus of apps used by parents with children

In the focus groups, some parents expressed concern about children accessing inappropriate content on their phones, and one parent said using electronic devices is not good for children's eyes. Several parents also mentioned not knowing that there are apps that have Khmer content, or not knowing how to use them.

All parents were asked what types of education-related apps they are most interested in having their child use. Most (63%) said apps that help them read books, with 18% saying ones that help teach math and science content. Nine percent said apps that support creativity. Eleven percent said that they did not want their child using education-related apps.

Those caregivers who said they did not use educational apps (259 respondents) were asked why. Just over half (51%) said that they did not want their child to use any apps. Twelve percent cited the child's lack of interest as the reason and 37% said they did not know of educational apps that would be good for them to use.

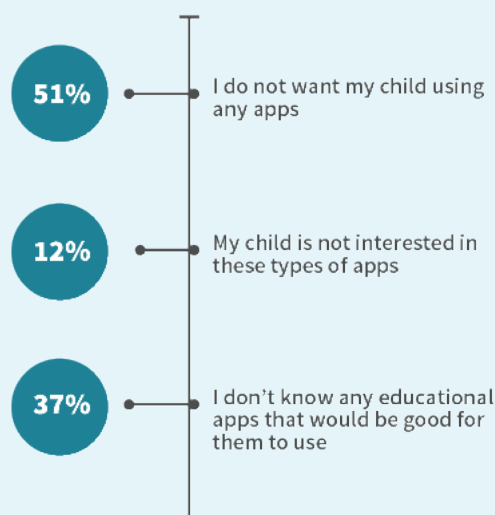


Figure 52. Reasons why some parents do not use educational apps with their children (259 responses)

PARENTS' DECISION MAKING ABOUT APPS AND CONTENT ONLINE

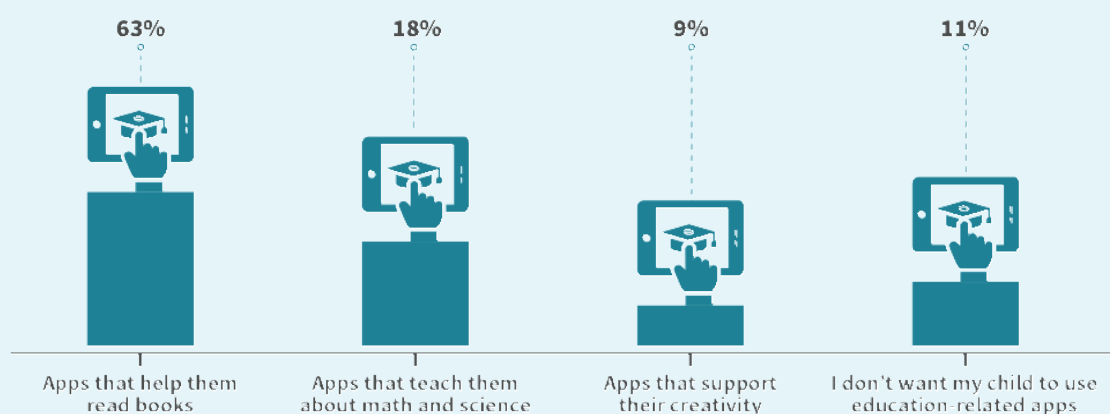


Figure 53. Types of education-related apps parents are most interested in having their child use

Parents were asked how they decide if an app will be beneficial for their child. Eighty-one percent said if the app has educational content, and 61% percent said if the app was recommended by the MoEYS. Fifty-five percent said they are influenced by the app looking fun and colorful. Other responses included recommendations from people they know (37%), the app being labelled as for children on the app store (32%), and seeing information about the app on social media (12%). Seventeen percent said they review the app themselves to see if it will be beneficial.

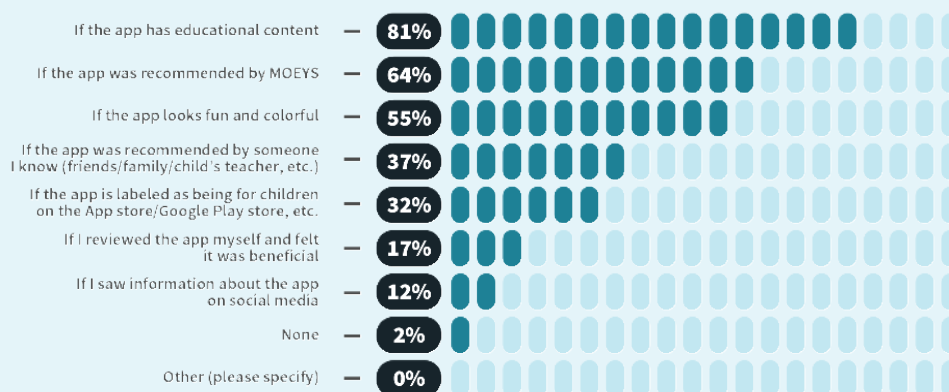


Figure 54. How parents decide if an app will be beneficial for their child

Parents were also asked about sources of trusted information on their devices generally. Government websites (e.g., the MoEYS) were rated most highly, followed by news sites (selected by 57% of respondents), social media (51%), friends and family (39%), Telegram chat groups (42%), their child's school website (37%), and library websites (21%). Two percent said none of the above.

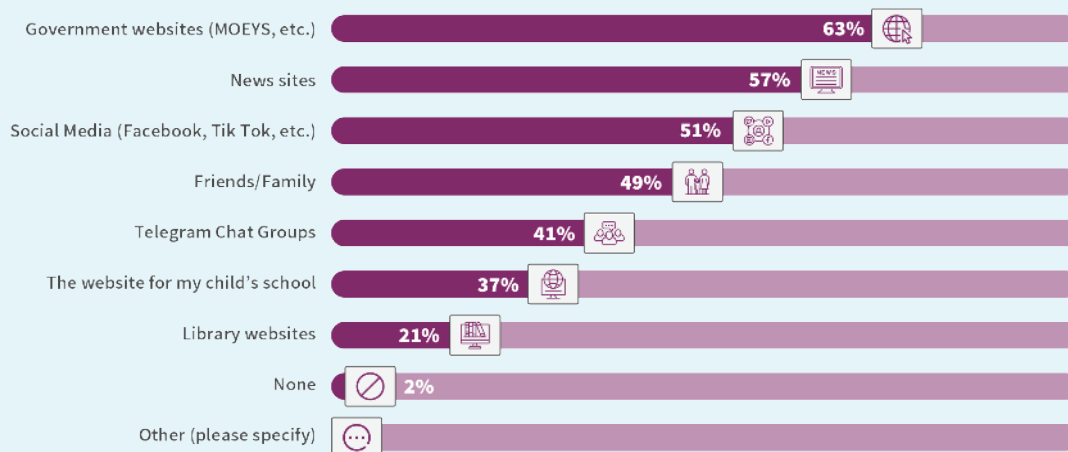


Figure 55. Trusted sources of information on parents' devices

Parents were also asked specifically about when they trust information on social media sites such as Facebook. Again, posts from government agencies rated highly, and were the most trusted with 52% of caregivers selecting this option. Next most common were posts from people they know personally (50%), then posts from someone they know by reputation (e.g., an influencer they follow, or someone from their community). Nineteen percent said they do not trust anything posted on social media and 7% said they trust pretty much everything that they see posted on social media.

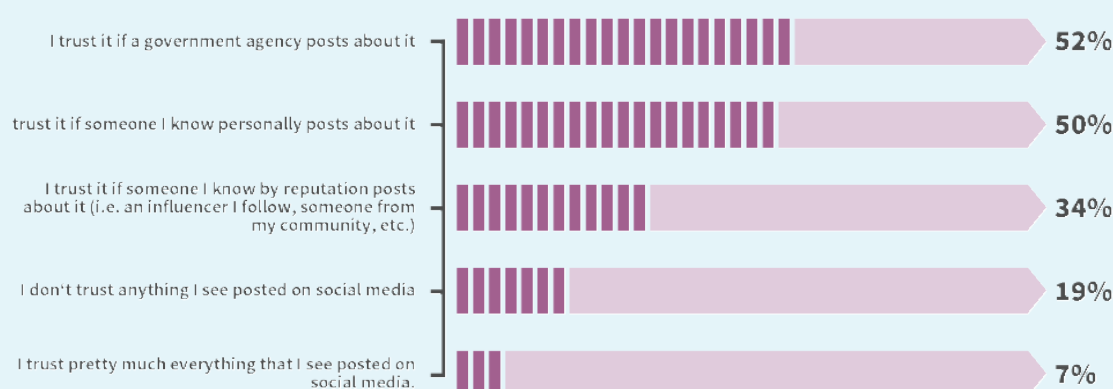


Figure 56. Situations when parents trust information posted on social media sites such as Facebook

Parents in the focus group discussions also mentioned the MoEYS as a trusted source for recommended educational materials. One participant expressed the view that online resources are more reliable than personal recommendations:

"I trust the online sources more because they can be seen worldwide so it is more reliable. People's words are not always trustworthy. For example, if I tell you something and you pass it on, some of the information might be lost."

Others talked about the usefulness of recommendations from people they know. Several talked about recommendations from teachers, with one participant commenting that these apps are often more reliable. The focus group discussions also suggested that recommendations from teachers might have become more common during the school closures due to COVID-19.

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RELATING TO DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

The fact that many households have multiple smart devices and caregivers are already spending substantial time on their devices together with children suggests that there is significant opportunity to promote and utilize digital reading resources more broadly.

Those working in the field of reading promotion could capitalize on parents' use of YouTube for educational resources. This could include promoting literacy resources that already exist on the platform like these examples of Khmer language storybooks or creating new videos. These examples also include Cambodian Sign Language and audio so are useful for audiences who are deaf, have visual impairments or struggle with reading. The focus group discussions suggested that many children are interested in video content, so books with audio in a video format might be appealing to capture interest initially and direct greater numbers of parents to free digital libraries.

Given the popularity of Facebook, using this platform to reach parents with links to digital content is also likely a good strategy. Perhaps also including full books on Facebook as slide shows, or as videos of a reader clicking through books on a digital library with audio might be helpful to showcase specific books, as well as to publicize to parents the existence of digital libraries with these features.

Some parents expressed concern about children's use of devices and the internet. Organizations with content specifically designed for children may need to support education around safe internet practices for kids. Messaging about the potential benefits of appropriate use of devices with young children might also help.

Using quotes from real caregivers, teachers, and the MoEYS on social media campaigns might also be a useful approach for those working in the field of reading promotion.

However, it should be kept in mind that access to the internet is unequal. Exploring possibilities with mobile network companies to provide caregivers with free data when using digital libraries could help to lessen this inequality. If a mobile network provider is willing, preloading digital libraries onto SIM cards could also dramatically increase access to these kinds of resources.



CONCLUSION

Below is a summary of conclusions and recommendations emerging from this study under each theme.

READING BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

85% of parents reported that someone in the household reads physical books at least once per week with the child (including 46% of households doing this daily and 39% one or two times per week).

However, one in ten children are missing out on this experience. Two percent of households said this “almost never” happened and 8% said it “never happened”. An additional 5% of children are read to only once or twice per month.

Children read or play with books on their own more commonly than with parents, with 67% reported as doing this daily and 28% reading on their own once or twice per week.

Children aged 8 or 9 were less likely to have parents read with them than children aged 4 to 7, possibly reflecting a view that older children will not benefit from being read to.

Girls had household members read physical books and digital books with them more often than boys.



Worryingly, children with disabilities appear less likely to have family members engage in educational activities with them. For example, 20% of parents of children with a disability said that they “almost never” or “never” read books with their child, compared with 9% of parents of children without a disability.

Reading digital books was less common than physical books, but 41% of families reported doing this at least monthly. Fourteen percent reported doing this daily with their child, with a further 19% saying one to two times per week, and 8% once or twice per month. uently.

Most children were reported to be interested in reading, with only 3% reported as not interested, and 18% as neutral.

Parents use a range of strategies to engage children during shared reading time, but these could be more interactive. Many parents would appreciate being provided with questions and activities connected with the story.



In principle, parents recognized the importance of reading with children for their development and how it fosters interest in reading. One hundred percent of parents said they believed that reading books to their child is important.

Lack of time appeared to be a common barrier to shared reading at home (84% reported this regarding their own time and 15% said that the child did not have enough time).

Other barriers included the child's lack of interest, not having age-appropriate books, and the parent not knowing how to read books well.

Many parents placed value on the educational benefits of reading. This was more common than those who viewed reading together as an opportunity for fun or bonding.

However, a significant minority (15%) believed that some children in the 4 to 9 age group were too young to be read to. Forty percent said that children's teachers read to them at school so it is not necessary for parents to do it at home, and 22% said that once children can read to themselves, they do not need their parents to read with them.

Most parents said that they felt comfortable reading with their child, but 22% said that they did not. This was due to their lack of confidence in their own reading ability or feeling unsure how to read with young children. Comfort of parents when reading with children might affect reading frequency.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Encourage parents to read frequently with all children (regardless of age, gender, and disability).



Ensure that materials are accessible for children with disabilities and that they are promoted to parents of this group.



Provide specific examples of how shared and independent reading might look for different age groups (including tips, techniques, duration, types of books, etc., as well as the benefits for each age).



Highlight the range of books on various topics (including nonfiction topics) that have been found to be of interest to children and parents.



Share the message that short reading sessions can also be useful when time is limited.



Encourage parents to see themselves as role models for reading, as children who see their parents reading are more interested in reading themselves.



Support parents to have more interactive shared reading sessions, focusing on fun and engagement. Adding questions could help, along with tips on how to read with children and keep them interested. Adding songs and activities connected to the books might also be useful.



Highlight features of reading-related apps and websites that can be useful for parents who lack confidence in their own reading abilities or who have impairments that impact reading.



Ensure that promotional materials and campaigns target boys and male caregivers as well as girls and women. etc., as well as the benefits for each age).



Expand awareness of children's books available on websites and apps.

ACCESS TO PHYSICAL BOOKS

While the households in this survey appear to own more children's books than found in studies conducted in more rural areas, the number of physical books available to children and families is still limited.



Only 10% of households had over 20 printed children's books, and 36% had five or fewer.

When buying books, parents most commonly prioritize attractive pictures, age-appropriateness and educational value, and good moral lessons.

Recommendations from the MoEYS, teachers and friends about books for children were valued by parents.

The biggest barrier to buying books cited by parents was not having a bookstore near their home (mentioned by 53% of respondents).

The cost of books was the second most common barrier (mentioned by 31% of parents).

Parents who could visit a local bookstore still faced challenges related to the kinds of books available to them. Thirteen percent of respondents reported that their local bookstore lacked books that their child was interested in, while 12% said that it lacked age-appropriate books. Another 16% reported being unsure about what books to purchase for their children.

Children's access to books at libraries, community centers, and bookstores is extremely limited. Few children visit these places and those who visit do not do so frequently.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Investment in libraries with physical books would be valuable to ensure that children have access to a wide range of books.



If investment in libraries is unlikely or unfeasible, promote free digital libraries as a realistic alternative to ensure children have access to a wide range of books (when parents have access to internet and devices).



When seeking to attract the interest of potential users of digital libraries, highlight factors that appeal most to parents (attractive illustrations and educational value



Help parents to choose books that are the appropriate level for their children by clearly labelling books and providing advice through promotional campaigns.



Highlight to parents those books which have been created in partnership with the MoEYS and are part of the official MoEYS early grade learning program.



Seek ways to engage the MoEYS and teachers in promoting the use of digital libraries and specific books.



Continue to support the development of the publishing industry through training and mentoring of authors, illustrators, and publishers.



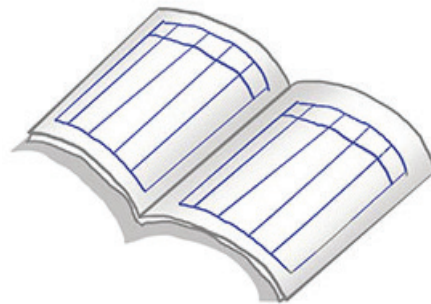
Work with publishers to increase the number of titles that is printed and sold.



Expand partnerships with NGOs and donor-funded projects that have budgets to print and supply books to schools.

DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

All families except one had a smart phone. The majority of households (94%) had at least two smart devices at home, with 61% having three or more.



Fewer had internet connections at home (44%), suggesting that most parents gain access to the internet via mobile phone packages that are typically limited and/or through public Wi-Fi spots.

Most parents felt that children aged 7 and under should not spend more than 20 minutes per day on a device. However, 51% of parents of children in this age group reported spending more than 20 minutes per day on devices with their children, including 12% who spent over an hour per day on devices together.

The majority (65%) of parents reported using educational or reading-related apps, though many applied this term somewhat loosely. YouTube was the most reported “educational” app followed by

Some parents do not want their child to use any apps, whereas some parents who do not use apps report not knowing which apps would be useful.

Among parents who are willing to use educational apps, most are interested in ones that support reading.

Some parents are concerned about content that their children can access online.

The MoEYS and government websites are the most highly trusted sources of information about online content, followed by news sites and social media.

Parents were also influenced by recommendations from teachers and others they know.

Most parents were willing to click on posts about unfamiliar apps, websites, and services when they were interested in the content (however 43% said they never clicked on unfamiliar content). Most would also tap on push notifications, but 39% said they never would.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Promote awareness of existing digital literacy resources. As noted above, the fact that 41% of parents already read digital books with their children at least monthly, combined with extensive smart phone ownership in Cambodia, and the substantial amount of time that families are already spending together on devices suggests significant potential for the use of digital libraries in Cambodia.



Capitalize on parents' use of YouTube for educational resources. Use videos that already exist and/or create more video content. These examples also include Cambodian Sign Language videos and audio resources, which are useful for audiences who are deaf, have visual impairments, or struggle with reading. The focus group discussions suggested that many children are interested in video content, so books with audio in a video format might be more appealing to capture interest initially, and direct greater numbers of parents to free digital libraries.



Use Facebook to promote the use of free digital libraries, as well as to showcase content from specific books.



Consider including full books on Facebook as slide shows, or as videos of the app as a reader clicks through books with audio.



Include messaging about the potential benefits of appropriate use of devices with young children.



Support education around safe internet practices for kids, particularly as it relates to content designed specifically for kids.



Use quotes from real people, teachers, and the MoEYS on social media campaigns. However, keep in mind that digital access is unequal. Explore possibilities with mobile network companies to provide parents with free data when using digital libraries and/or to have digital library apps preloaded on SIM cards.



THANK YOU
FOR READING