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Identifying the relationship between children's language skills and parents' self-efficacy in story reading

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate whether there is a relationship between parent's self-efficacy in story reading, the frequency with which they read stories to their children and their children's language skills. The research was carried out with five year old children who go to preschool and their parents. A 'General Information Form' was used to get information about the children and their parents. For identifying the competency of the parent's story reading, we used a scale called 'Parents' self-efficacy for storybook reading' developed by Kotaman (2009). For assessing the children's language skills, we used a sub-dimension of the scale called 'Brigance early child development inventory II' developed by Brigance (2004) and adapted into Turkish by Aral et al. (2008). At the end of the study, a positive relationship was found between the mothers' and fathers' self-efficacy in story reading. There was no significant difference between parents' story reading self-efficacy and their children's language development. However, a difference was obtained between parents' story reading frequency and their children's language development.

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1. Introduction

The importance of the early years to children's lives is now beyond question, not only for the effect during their early years but also throughout their lives. A good start to life is well recognized as the foundation for future development, health and wellbeing (Elliott, 2006). Early childhood is a precious period when children make the most rapid progress in terms of emotional, physical, cognitive and language development (Crain, 2005). During this period, one of the most significant indicators is that of how well children use their mother tongue (Yıldız, Bıçakçı, & Aral, 2009).

As a child's biological capacity grows, his language improves, dependent on environmental factors and his educational level. Between three and six years of age, language capacity expands rapidly, the main structure of

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the mother-tongue is acquired and the child gains the ability to express himself (Yıldız, Bıçakçı, & Aral, 2009). Satisfactory language development is a good predictor of later ability to read and write well (Kotaman, 2009). For these reasons, when children are in the process of acquiring language, it is crucial they benefit from the supportive role of education. If they are to benefit, identifying the factors which influence language development and creating a supportive medium for language development play important roles. Research has shown the importance of sex, family, environmental stimulants and other factors on the language development of children (Jamieson, 2007).

In terms of environmental effects, stories play a crucial role. Stories offer numerous opportunities for children to learn the target language, with their rich vocabulary, repetition of language, rhymes, metaphors and dialogues; all these help to enrich the language of children (Cameron, 2001). If children are taught using an appropriate story, they can engage in the activities easily because they combine their thoughts with the storyline and acquire the language naturally, in a contextualized way (Garvie, 1990). Storybook reading is one of the most studied formats for increasing language learning in children. Many research studies have shown that children make significant gains in various areas of development through shared storybook experiences. Children who have stories read to them regularly have improved literacy and language outcomes (Bus, Ijzeendorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Aram & Levin, 2002; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004). Moreover, experimental studies have been conducted which show that parent-child storybook reading is an effective way to strengthen children's language development (Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, & Valdez-Menchaca, 1988; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstien, 1994; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003). Snow (1983) asserts that children acquire language and literacy skills, experience vocabulary growth, gain the knowledge of handling books and many other skills.

Many researchers have shown important connections between reading stories aloud to preschoolers and their later success (Ferreiro & Taberosky, 1982; Kontos & Wells, 1986). Wells (1986) claims that the amount of time a child is read to during their preschool years is the best predictor of the child's later reading achievement in school. According to Silvern (1985), reading stories to young children not only increases reading achievement scores but also listening and speaking abilities. These children are more likely to use complex sentences, have increased literal and inferential comprehension skills, gain more story concept development, increased letter and symbol recognition, and they develop positive attitudes towards reading. Huck, Helper and Hickman (1989) think that the children who are exposed to the most literature, have higher linguistic competencies. Chomsky believed that an increase in syntactic complexity and a growing vocabulary in young children could be attributed to their adult-child reading experiences (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lowrance, 2004).

The home literacy environment is a robust predictor of children's word recognition skills and vocabulary development (Bennett, Weigel & Martin, 2002). Parents can support their children's language development and thereby their children's literacy development by storybook reading (Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998; Aram & Levin, 2002). Research studies show that reading stories to children has a positive effect on their language development. Therefore, it seems essential to investigate the self-efficacy of parents in story reading, especially during early childhood, and to draw conclusions from the results obtained. Next, we intend to compare the language development level of five year old children with their parents' self-efficacy in story reading. This study also intends to identify factors affecting the child's level of language development in relation to their parents' self-efficacy in story reading, whether there is a relationship between these two things, and to make suggestions for improving the language development level of children and parents' self-efficacy in story reading, in accordance with the results obtained.

2. Materials and methodology

2.1. Study model

This study was planned using a descriptive scanning model.

2.2. Participants of the study

Children attending independent preschools under the Ministry of Education in Ankara and their families participated voluntarily in this study. 248 children, 248 mothers and 247 fathers were obtained with random sampling. 52% of the children were girls and 48% of them were boys.

2.3. Means of data collection

‘A general information form’, developed by the researchers, was used to get information about the child and the family. In order to obtain the child’s language development level, a ‘Brigance early child development inventory II’ was used. The ‘Parents’ self-efficacy for storybook reading scale’ was used to find the parents’ self-efficacy in reading stories to their children.

2.3.1. General Information Form.

This was developed by the researchers in order to gather information about the child’s age and sex, the parents’ ages and educational background and the frequency with which they read stories to their children.

2.3.2. Brigance Early Development Inventory II

This was designed to evaluate the development of children from birth to age seven. It includes the following five sub-dimensions: motor skills, receptive and expressive language skills, academic/cognitive skills, social emotional skills and daily life skills. Each correct answer is given one point, while incorrect responses receive no points. The total score for the inventory is calculated by adding together the sum of the scores obtained from each of the sub-dimensions. The higher the sub-dimension and total scores, the greater the child’s skills and general development. The inventory is implemented by starting from one year below the child’s biological age. While responses to certain items are elicited from others who know the child closely (parents, child minder, teacher, etc.), other items are scored in line with the responses given by the child. The assessment is terminated when a child gives consecutive incorrect responses (ranging between two and five). The duration of the assessment lasts between 20 and 55 minutes, depending on the child’s age (Brigance, 2004).

The Brigance Early Development Inventory II was adapted for use in Turkey by Aral et al. (2008) with a study conducted on 464 Turkish children under the age of 6. Correlation between all the sub-dimensions was meaningful ($p < 0.01$); internal consistency reliability coefficients varied between 0.67 and 0.98; test-retest correlation revealed consistent results over time (r 0.72 to 0.96); concurrent validity results were consistent ($p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$); lower 27% and upper 27% item analysis showed the items of the inventory discriminated well. From among the scale’s seven sub-dimensions, only the language skills part was implemented in this study.

2.3.3. Parents’ self-efficacy for storybook reading scale: the Parents’ self-efficacy for storybook reading scale is a ten item scale developed by Kotaman (2009). It is a four point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). To assess content validity, a panel of experts reviewed the questionnaire. These experts suggested some changes to the wording of the items and the structure of the scale. After the review, three Turkish early childhood education PhD students scored each item for validity on a scale of 0 to 100. Items which averaged 80 or higher remained in the scale. Fifty-eight parents with a child between the ages of 0 and 6 participated in the study. An analysis of the participants’ answers determined a reliability score of 0.901.

In this study, the scores obtained from the parents’ story reading self-efficacy analysis are described as low, medium or high. The mean of the mothers’ story reading self-efficacy scores is 35.47 with a standard deviation of 3.72; the lowest value is 24 and the highest value is 40. Scores were classified as follows: 40 and above are high, 39 to 32 are medium and 31 and below are low. According to this description and classification, 16.9% ($n=42$) of mothers have low story reading self-efficacy scores, 63.7% ($n=158$) have medium scores and 19.4% ($n=48$) have high scores. The mean of the fathers’ story reading self-efficacy scores is 34.59 with a standard deviation of 4.11; the lowest value is 25 and the highest value is 40. Scores were classified as follows: 39 and above are high, 38 to 31 are medium and 30 and below are low. According to this description and classification, 19.4% ($n=48$) of

fathers have low story reading self-efficacy scores, 57.7% (n=143) have medium scores and 22.6% (n=56) have high scores.

2.4. Data analyses

One way variance analysis was used to decide whether there is any difference between the scores for children's language development, the parents' self-efficacy for storybook reading and the frequency with which they read stories to their children. According to the results of the analysis of variance and in order to find out from which group the difference occurred, a 'Scheffe Test' was administered.

3. Findings

The results of the study to find whether there is a relationship between parent's self-efficacy in story reading, the frequency with which they read stories to their children and their children's language skills are shown in the tables below.

Table 1. ANOVA results for parents' story reading self efficacy and their children's language development scores

E							
	Language Score	N	Mean	SD	F	p	Dif.
Mothers	Low	42	144.07	8.537	1.659	0.192	-
	Medium	158	144.96	7.780			
	High	48	146.77	4.218			
Fathers	Low	49	143.44	8.438	1.658	0.193	-
	Medium	143	145.53	7.571			
	High	56	145.71	5.675			

The means of the language development scores of children who have parents with low story reading self-efficacy (Mothers = 144.07; Fathers = 143.44) are lower than the means of the language development scores of children who have parents with high story reading self-efficacy (Mothers = 146.77; Fathers = 145.71). According to the analysis of variance, there is no significant difference between parents' story reading self-efficacy and their children's language development scores (Mothers: $F=1.659$, $p>0.05$; Fathers: $F=1.658$, $p>0.05$).

Table 2. Mean, standart deviation and analysis of variance results of parents' story reading frequency and their children's language development scores.

Parents' Story Reading Frequency	N	\bar{X}	S	Analysis of Variance Results					
				SD	Mean Square	F	P	Dif.	
Every day/Always ¹	88	144.77	7.14	Intergroup	2	340.475	6.502	0.002	2-3
Twice a week or more /Frequently ²	140	146.14	6.12						
Once a week/Rarely ³	20	140.00	12.94	Intragroup	245	52.362			

The results in Table 2 show that the frequency of parents' story reading to children has a significant difference on language development scores ($F_{2,245}=6.502$, $p<0.05$). The Scheffe test shows the difference

between children's language development scores comes from those parents who read stories twice a week or more.

4. Discussion

Early intervention programs across the world aim to inform families about the importance of reading books to their children in order to support their children's language development (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstien, 1994; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). Although it is the same in Turkey (Bekman, 1998; Özkök, 1998), no relationship has been found between parents' self-efficacy in reading story books and their children's language development in this study. In other words, even though parents think that they are efficient in reading stories, no positive reflection of this is seen in their children's language development scores. This may arise from the parents' lack of ability to choose the correct book or to use qualified reading techniques or to arrange the best time, and amount of time, to read stories to their children. It is important to choose books which appeal to the children's special interests and that will help to expand their knowledge. In addition, parents must not read stories just for something to do with their children. Showing excitement, pointing to illustrations and varying the tone of voice with the story will attract the attention of children. It may be fun to give the characters different voices. Giving children time to look at the pictures and to ask questions about them and, when words or phrases are repeated in a story, encouraging children to say them will help a lot with their concentration (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001; 2002). After reading a book, discussing it with their children and identifying parallels between experiences in the book and those in the children's lives will add greater depth and meaning to the story (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Stevenson & Newman, 1986; Spira, Bracken & Fischel, 2005). According to Kaderavek and Justice (2002), story reading can foster communication skills when children can discuss the text and illustrations. The reason why there is no relationship between the language development scores of the children and the parents' story reading self-efficacy scores may be that the children experience a pre-school education which already helps the development of language.

5. Results and suggestions

There is no significant difference between the language development of children and their parents' self-efficacy in reading story books. The frequency with which parents read stories to their children has a significant effect on language development.

In respect of the findings above, the following suggestions can be made:

- E Instead of relying on parents' own self-efficacy in story reading, different techniques can be applied to improve the efficacy of story reading.
- E Workshops can be organized on applied story reading techniques for parents.

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