



Universidad de
los Andes

HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT LAB

POLICY BRIEF N°0924004

**Family Literacy and Early Reading Outcomes:
How Shared Reading Contributes to Children's
Emerging Literacy Skills**

Pelusa Orellana

Family Literacy and Early Reading Outcomes: How Shared Reading Contributes to Children's Emerging Literacy Skills

Pelusa Orellana G.

Context

It has been well documented in the literature that the home language and literacy environment play an important role in children's oral language development and emerging reading skills (Tabors et al., 2001; Sénéchal, 2006). Children who are exposed to rich linguistic interactions and book reading experiences are better prepared to learn to read and write when they enter school (Crosby et al., 2014; Saracho, 2017). Among others, early language and literacy exposure at home facilitates the acquisition of alphabet knowledge and narrative skills, both of which are strongly related to beginning reading outcomes and comprehension in the upper elementary grades.

However, there are large differences in the extent to which children from more and less vulnerable contexts are exposed to language-enhanced home language and literacy experiences (Niklas & Schneider, 2013), and these differences negatively affect the literacy outcomes of less privileged children (Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021). To reduce the impact of lack of early language and literacy interactions, several family literacy programs that promote shared reading have been developed and evaluated around the world, with mixed evidence supporting their implementation.

The study

In this study we assess the impact of an evidence-based shared reading family literacy intervention among 121 dyads of children and their parents/caregivers in highly vulnerable contexts in Chile. These dyads were compared to a control group with similar sociodemographic characteristics. We assessed children's alphabet knowledge and narrative skills before and after the intervention and collected data about home language and literacy environment via a survey that parents/caregivers responded before and after the intervention.

Parents and caregivers from the treatment group attended 12 workshops on a biweekly basis. During the workshops, they observed, practiced, and received feedback about how to do a shared reading activity with their children. Trained educators modeled shared reading to ensure parents could read the picture books with their children with adequate fluency, prosody, and could make open-ended questions that enhanced dialogue. Parents took the book and some language games home to use with their children for 2 weeks. This sequence was repeated for each workshop. Parents and caregivers reported the frequency with which they did shared reading with their children.

Results showed that, although both groups of children improved their alphabet

knowledge and narrative skills, children whose parents/caregivers attended the workshops had significantly higher scores than their peers in the control group. Similarly, the home language and literacy environment scores were significantly higher for those participating in the shared reading program after the intervention.

Policy implications

The results from this study show that evidence-based family literacy programs can positively impact low SES children's early literacy skills. Previous studies had looked into activities that parents did with their children (Sénéchal, 2006), the home setting (Harris & Goodall, 2007), and the relation between language and literacy environment and maternal education (Melhuish et al., 2008) in other countries. Our study shows that, for Chilean preschoolers of highly vulnerable contexts can benefit from the interactions that a low-cost activity such as shared reading can provide. Among the key components of a high-quality shared reading program are careful selection of picture books, thorough modeling of the steps and features of shared reading, and fidelity of implementation. At the state level, low-cost interventions such as shared reading can help reduce the literacy gap that prevails among school children from the beginning of their formal education and well into their adult lives.

References

1. Crosby, S.A., Rasinski, T., Padak, N. & Yildirim, K. (2014): A 3-Year Study of a School-Based Parental Involvement Program in Early Literacy, *The Journal of Educational Research*, DOI: 10.1080/00220671.2013.867472 Fikrat-Wevers, S., van Steensel, R., & Arends, L. (2021). Effects of Family Literacy Programs on the Emergent Literacy Skills of Children From Low-SES Families: A Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 91(4), 577-613. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321998075>
2. Harris A and Goodall J (2007) *Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement: Do Parents Know They Matter?* London: DCSF. Available at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW004.pdf (accessed 10 August 2016).
(9) (PDF) *The impact of family literacy programmes on children's literacy skills and the home literacy environment*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301204744_The_impact_of_family_literacy_programmes_on_children's_literacy_skills_and_the_home_literacy_environment [accessed Sep 10 2024]. Niklas F., Schneider W. (2017, April). Home learning environment and development of child competencies from kindergarten until the end of elementary school. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 49, 263–274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2017.03.006>
3. Melhuish E, Phan Mai B, Sylva K, et al. (2008) Effects of the home learning environment and preschool center experience upon literacy and numeracy development in early primary school. *Journal of Social Issues* 64: 95–114.
(9) (PDF) *The impact of family literacy programmes on children's literacy skills and the home literacy environment*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301204744_The_impact_of_family_literacy_programmes_on_children's_literacy_skills_and_the_home_literacy_environment [accessed Sep 10 2024].
4. Saracho, O. N. (2017). Research, policy, and practice in early childhood literacy. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3-4), 305–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1261512>
5. Sénéchal M. (2006). Testing the home literacy model: Parent involvement in kindergarten is differentially related to Grade 4 reading comprehension, fluency, spelling, and reading for pleasure. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10(1), 59–87. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532799xssr1001_4
6. Tabors P. O., Roach K. A., Snow C. E. (2001). “Chapter: home language and literacy environment: final results,” in *Beginning Literacy with Language: Young Children Learning at Home and School*, (Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes Publishing US;), 111–138.