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Is There a Connection between Reading to Children and the Child's Involvement in Reading Activities?

Katarina Matijević[1] and Renata Bernić[2]
[1]*Public Open School HD Petrinja*
[2]*Technical School Sisak*

Abstract

The ability to read is vital. Reading paves the way to success in school, which can build self-confidence and motivate your child to set high expectations from life. Children are "learners" by nature and they learn from the prenatal phase. The child learns by observing the environment and imitating the role models. Likewise, children learn to read encouraged by examples from the environment. Reading aloud to children is the best way to get them interested in reading. By reading, they will grow to love stories and books. Eventually they will want to read on their own. To research parental involvement in reading activities with children, we used Questionnaire of the Hanen Center for Evaluating Parental Involvement in the Development of Reading Skills. We wanted to investigate if there is a statistically significant difference in parents' engagement in reading to children and with children with regard to their parents' academic education, number of parents who live with a child, and financial income in the household. We also wanted to find out if there is a statistically significant association between parental involvement in the child's reading activities and their child's involvement in reading activities. There were 716 respondents. Findings indicated that demographic data, such as parents' academic education, number of parents who live with a child, and financial income in the household have a statistically significant impact on parental involvement in reading activities with their children, but also on their child's involvement in reading activities. The results show statistically significant association between parental involvement in the child's reading activities and their child's involvement in reading activities, as expected. This paper points out the importance of reading to children,

no matter their age, since the use of those kind of activities has been proven to be effective in promoting literacy skills, in previous researches as well as in this one.

Key words*: parental involvement; promoting reading skills; reading; reading activities; reading skills.*

Introduction

A child begins to learn from the very beginning. At the same time, many important skills are taught. For example, developmet of speech takes place in a stimulating environment and spontaneous learning which involves a multisensory approach to all senses, balance, propriosity and motion (Fox et.al, 2010). Reading is also a skill that needs to be learned. Process of learning to read actually demands the acquisition and practice of the skills necessary to understand the meaning behind printed words (Smith, 2004). The knowledge and skills which are required for learning to read are extensive.

The development of reading is influenced by internal and external factors. According to Čudina-Obradović (2014), internal factors are the functions of the genome, as well as the undetected functions and structure of neural connections. External factors are the factors of the prenatal period, social environment of early childhood, unintentional and intentional teaching, schools and peers and, of course, cultural factors.

Reading is presented as a pleasure first and it is desirable it stays so. During school education, reading becomes an obligation, but we should try to keep reading as a fun activity. According to Grginič (2007), the child of preschool age adopts some rules over time: 1 the concept of printing, i.e. the recognition of the inscription (global reading), as well as the reading direction; 2 graphic awareness; 3 phonological awareness; 4 the awareness of the association between sounds and letters and 5 reading as a process of decoding words.

In the last decades, educational researchers are interested in the positive effects that parental involvement may have on academic achievements and student success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein, 2007; Sezer, 2016). Epstein emphasized the "involvement of parents as an essential part of school improvement in relation to curriculum, instruction, assessment and other aspects of school management"(Epstein, 2005, p. 199). Bedeniković (2009) states that successful students come from educated families and families who are motivated to work directly with a child to meet school assignments. It is also important to mention that immediate help from a mother is useful at first, but not as useful for a longer period of time. Research often shows that the advantage of children with higher knowledge at the beginning of schooling can be seen even later, some say it is noticeable until the third grade level (Deming & Dynarski, 2008).

Many studies have shown that children coming from families with lower monthly income and of parents with lower education have poorly developed reading (El Nokali et al, 2010). Parents' attitude towards reading plays a major role in the development of successful reading of a child. The stimulating environment is necessary for the child's development. Thus, the environment equipped with various books and journals will

be encouraging for adoption of the child's reading habit. While reading with parents, the child adopts text structure (Honchell & Schulz, 2012). The development of school readiness skills is increasingly perceived as a result of interaction between a child and a family. Early experiences are a key factor in the development of children's reading skills (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fox et al., 2010). The reading content should include both literary and non-literary texts in order to help the child develop reading habits.

Younger generations are very attracted to reading and writing through modern media; motivation for reading, writing and learning generally increases with the help of the media (Rodek, 2011). Researches conducted in institutes for language development in the most developed countries show that the brain centers responsible for these two ways of reading and writing (information presented on paper and screen) are not identical. The development of the the brain in babies can not be the same in predominantly graphomotor or haptic (tactile) reading and writing (Higashiyama et al., 2015). Learning to write (on paper) makes it easier to memorize graphic forms or graphemes (Mangen & Velay, 2010). Today reading is presented to children in both traditional and digital form. Haptic reading and writing are still insufficiently explored and, given that they are very important for the cognitive and linguistic development of man, they require more intensive research (Mangen & Velay, 2010).

In this paper we wanted to examine the impact of parental education, monthly income and number of parents in the household (one or both parents) on the involvement of parents in promoting the development of (pre)reading and (pre)writing skills. There is also an insight into the frequency of reading to children, ways of sharing reading activities with children and into the accompanying activities parents use. From the results we can see how children react to the reading activities with their parents. Given the fact that there are currently no standardized questionnaires which examine parental engagement in promoting reading skills, this research uses the Hanen Center questionnaire and additional variables such as academic education of the parents, household income and the number of parents in households in order to gain an insight into engagment of parents in promoting reading skills through reading activities. The aim of this study is to explore the parental engagement in promoting reading skills, considering the child's gender, the level of parental academic achievement and other demographic variables such as family's monthly income and number of parents in the household. This research is designed to get information on whether the involvement of parents in reading activities has an influence on the child's reactions and involvement in these activities and which parental behaviors encourage the child's more active engagement in reading activities.

Method

First research problem was to look into the differences in parents' engagement in their child's reading activities with respect to parents' academic achievement level, number of parents living in households and monthly household income. Having the stated

research problem in mind, we set the hypotesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the parents' engagement in reading to children and with children with regard to their parents' academic education, number of parents who live with a child and financial income in the household. Considering the first hypothesis, it was expected that there will be statistically significant differences in the involvement of parents in the reading activities of children with regard to all the mentioned socio-demographic variables. By discovering the differences in groups, the researchers would be able to conclude which group of parents is more prone to participate in reading activities with children, and thus encourage the development of (pre)reading skills. This hypothesis seeks to examine in more detail whether the impact of parenting, monthly income and number of parents in one household (one or both parents) on parental involvement in promoting the development of reading and writing skills varies, and whether parents from different socio-demographic groups are different from each other. The second research problem was to examine the link between parental involvement in child reading activities and their child's involvement in reading activities. Therefore, the second hypothesis was that there is a statistically significant correlation between parental involvement in child reading activities and child involvement in reading activities. Given that Bedeniković (2009) points out that successful students come from educated families and families motivated to work with a child on successfully completing school assignments, this hypothesis sought to investigate whether such a relationship between parental involvement in reading to children and child involvement in reading activities exists. This hypothesis is about to give an answer to whether the children of parents who read more often to their children are more actively involved in reading activities, or whether there is a correlation between these two variables, and if so, what is the relationship between them.

The measuring instrument is the Questionnaire of the Hanen Center for Evaluating Parental Involvement in the Development of Reading Skills. The questionnaire consists of two parts and it has been translated and adapted into the Croatian language. The first part of the questionnaire concerns self-assessment of parental involvement in reading with a child, while the other part of the questionnaire relates to the parental assessment of their child's involvement in reading activities. The first part consists of 15 particles where parents respond on a 3-degree Likert type scale (rarely, sometimes, often). The second part of the questionnaire consists of 5 particles where parents also evaluate their own child on a scale of 3 degrees (rarely, sometimes, and often) on a Likert type scale. Additionally, the instrument included a section on parental demographic information.

We assesed 716 parents of preschool children from Croatia. The survey was performed online. Web-surveys provide a significant number of advantages – they are user-friendly, low cost, allow fast response, attractive formats, fewer unanswered questions, better response to open questions in comparison with common self-completion questionnaires (Bryman, 2004).

Results

36.3 % of the participants have female children, 35.9 % have male children and 27.8 % participants have both female and male children. Considering academic achievement, 0.1 % finished elementary school, 16.3 % finished high school, 17.3 % have a bachelor's degree diploma and 66.3 % have a graduate degree diploma. The academic achievement of the participants' spouses is: 2.2 % elementary school, 45.3 % high school, 18.9 % bachelor's degree, 33.6 % graduate deegree level of academic achievement. Monthly incomes for the participants are divided in five groups: 0.6 % estimated their monthly incomes as very low, 6.8 % as low, 41.6 % estimated their incomes are in the state average, 39.4 % consider their incomes as good and 11.6 % as very good. 6.7 % of the participants live in single-parent households, while 93.3 % of the participants live with their partners. Tables 1-5 show data on socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1

The children's gender

	Frequency	Valid Percent
1 male	260	36.3
2 female	257	35.9
3 both male and female	199	27.8
Total	716	100.0

Table 2

The parents' academic degree

	Frequency	Valid Percent
0 elementary school	1	0.1
1 high school	117	16.3
2 bachelor's degree	123	17.3
3 graduate degree	475	66.3
Total	716	100.0

Table 3

The spouses' academic degree

	Frequency	Valid Percent
0 elementary school	16	2.2
1 high school	324	45.3
2 bachelor's degree	135	18.9
3 graduate degree	241	33.6
Total	716	100.0

Table 4

Monthly income of the household

	Frequency	Valid Percent
1 very low monthly income	4	0.6
2 low monthly income	49	6.8
3 in the state average	298	41.6
4 good monthly income	282	39.4
5 very good monthly income	83	11.6
Total	716	100.0

Table 5

The number of parents in the household

	Frequency	Valid Percent
1 single parent	48	6.7
2 both parents	668	93.3
Total	716	100.0

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (version 20.0). The researcher interpreted the data using Kruskal Wallis and Man Whitney U test, as well as Spearman correlation. Cronbach's alpha was used to check the reliability of the study: the reliability was 0.837, so we consider our scale to be reliable. We conducted Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test to see what the distribution of results is. Considering the distribution of the results, it was decided to use non-parametric procedures for quantitive analyses of the results. Table 6 shows descriptive statistics for the used scale.

Table 6

Descriptive statistics for the used scale

Variable (1- once a week, 2- few times a week, 3- often)	label of variable	N	minimum	maximum	mean	St.dev.
Do you point out upper and lower case letters and punctuation marks?	differClSl	716	1	3	1.69	.811
How often do you read to your child?	QuestFreq	716	1	3	2.41	734
My child acts out parts of the story.	acting	716	1	3	2.13	.701
My child answers my questions.	AnswQuest	716	1	3	2.74	.479
My child points out things in the pictures.	pictures	716	1	3	2.87	.390
My child listens to the whole book.	wholeStory	716	1	3	2.73	.537
My child makes comments or asks questions about things in the book.	Comm	716	1	3	2.66	.552
Do you explain what unfamiliar words mean?	unfamWords	716	1	3	2.77	.488
Do you ask your child to guess what might happen next in the story?	expect	716	1	3	1.82	.703
Do you show your child how we read from left to right and from top to bottom on a page?	ReadDirect	716	1	3	1.97	.804

Do you draw your child's attention to letters and make the sound that the letter makes (e.g. "That's the letter 'S'. 'S' makes the sound *sss*?")	PhonAware	716	1	3	2.23	.767
Do you repeat new words in different situations?	newWords	716	1	3	2.16	.675
Do you ask questions to encourage your child to think about the story (e.g. Questions that start with "Why…?", "What do you think about…?", "What would you do if…?")	Quest	716	1	3	2.31	.700
Do you relate new words to your child's experience?	newWordsExp	716	1	3	2.43	.658
Do you track the words with your finger as you read to your child?	FingerTrack	716	1	3	1.94	.792
Do you talk about the story and make connections to your own lives?	Conn LifeStory	716	1	3	2.37	.690
Do you ask questions during the reading and explain what is happening to make sure your child understands the story?	Understan Check	716	1	3	2.45	.642
Do you pause during the reading to talk about what interests your child?	pause	716	1	3	2.49	.599
Do you draw your child's attention to words that rhyme?	rhyme	716	1	3	2.23	.772
Do you read the same book over and over again on different days?	sameBooks	716	1	3	2.47	.619

To test the hypotesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the parents' (Table 7) engagement in reading to children and with children with regard to their parents' academic education, number of parents who live with a child and financial income in the household, the researchers used Kruskal Wallis and Man Whitney U test depending on how many groups a variable has.

Statistically significant differences between the groups are highlighted in Table 7. The results point us to the conclusion that there is statistically significant difference between parents' engagement in reading to children and with children regarding the gender of a child. Kruskal Wallis test showed that there is statistically significant

difference at the significance level of 0.05 between the three groups on variables. To see which groups differ, since 3 different groups were compared, Mann Whitney U test was conducted, comparing each group with another. There was a statistically significant difference between the groups of parents who have only female children, compared to the parents of male children. The test pointed out the difference on the variable "My child acts out parts of the story." (p=0.01, z=-3.409, Mean Rank=279.74), which brings us to the conclusion that female children are more likely to act out parts of the stories read to them than the male children.

Table 7

Statistically significant differences between groups of variables (Sig.)(Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.)

	gender of a child	parents` academic education	spouses` academic education	monthly financial income in the household	number of parents in the household
QuestFreq	***.019***	.342	.345	.345	.277
acting	***.002***	.151	.153	.153	.514
wholeStory	.615	***.001***	.241	.241	.316
expect	.432	***.029***	.159	.159	.956
PhonAware	1.000	.703	.610	***.030***	.462
ConnLifeStory	.948	***.032***	***.012***	***.012***	.303
pause	.645	.184	***.044***	.067	.102
sameBooks	.241	***.000***	.343	***.001***	***.019***

The results suggest that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of parents with high school and bachelor's degree level of academic achievement on the variable "Do you ask your child to guess what might happen next in the story?" The group of parents with bachelor's and graduate degree level of academic achievement encourage their children more to guess what might happen next in the story (p=0.05, z=-2.783, Mean Rank=131.,55). The groups of parents with high school and graduate degree level of academic achievement differ on the variables "Do you talk about the story and make connections to your own lives?" and "Do you read the same book over and over again on different days?" The parents with graduate degree level of academic achievement make connections between stories and their lives (p=0.000, z=-3.925, Mean Rank=306.49) and read the same book over and over again more often (p=0.000, z=-4.241, Mean Rank=309.59).

Parents with a graduate degree are more likely to connect stories with their lives (p=0.001, z=-3.201, Mean Rank=305.68).

Mann Whitney test pointed out that the group of parents with low monthly incomes differ from the groups with good and very good monthly income on the stated variables. The results showed statistically significant difference on one variable, "Do you read the same book over and over again on different days?"

The conclusion is that the hypotesis that there is a statistically significant difference in the parents' engagement in reading to children and with children with regard to their parents' academic education, number of parents who live with a child, and financial income in the household can be partially accepted. It can be accepted on the following variables: "How often do you read to Your child;" "My child acts out parts of the story;" "My child listens to the whole book;" "Do you ask your child to guess what might happen next in the story;" "Do you talk about the story and make connections to your own lives;" "Do you read the same book over and over again on different days;" "Do you pause during reading to talk about what interests your child" and"Do you draw your child's attention to letters and make the sound that the letter makes (e.g. "That's the letter 'S'. 'S' makes the sound *sss*?")".

To test the hypotesis that there is statistically significant correlation between parental involvement in the child's reading activities and their child's involvement in reading activities, Spearman`s (rho) Correlation Coefficient was used. Table 8 shows that there is statistically significant correlation between the variables concerning parental involvement in reading with a child and their child's involvement in reading activities. It was found that there was weak and medium statistically significant positive correlation between parental involvement in reading with a child and their child's involvement in reading activities. The highlighted coefficients in Italic represent weak statistically significant positive correlation between the variables, while the underlined correlation coefficients represent moderate statistically significant positive correlation between the variables. All statistically significant correlations are significant at the level 0.01 (2-tailed). Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Table 8

Spearman`s (rho) Correlation Coefficient

	acting	AnswQuest	Pictures	wholeStory	Comm
newWords	*.284***	*.177***	.168**	.071	.234**
Quest	*.270***	.314**	*.145***	*.127***	.323**
newWordsExp	*.201***	*.232***	*.126***	*.121***	*.242***
FingerTrack	*.146***	.066	*.108***	-.043	.051
ConnLifeStory	*.235***	*.222***	*.113***	.072	*.270***
UnderstanCheck	*.209***	.304**	*.154***	.065	*.276***
Pause	*.134***	*.155***	*.186***	.028	*.218***
Rhyme	*.178***	*.231***	*.136***	*.136***	*.175***
sameBooks	.009	.050	*.097***	.070	.068
differClSl	*.124***	*.160***	*.051***	*.095***	.067
QuestFreq	*.136***	*.155***	*.142***	*.228***	*.115***
unfamWords	.305**	.390**	.343**	*.297***	.323**
Expect	*.140***	*.248***	*.178***	*.200***	.323**
ReadDirect	*.298***	*.219***	*.192***	*.110***	.310**
PhonAware	*.163***	*.092***	*.151***	.004	*.104***

Discussion

The survey was done anonymously among 716 parents. The highest percentage of parents is highly educated (66.3%). The majority of respondents think that their families are at the average state income (41.6) and 93.6% are living with a partner. The first hypothesis was partially confirmed. It was confirmed that parents with higher academic education and families where both parents are present perform reading activities more regularly and they read in a way that links experience from stories to life experiences, which is in line with the findings of El Nokai et al (2010). Parents who have only female children, compared to the parents of male children, are more likely to read more often, and female children are more likely to act out the parts of the stories read to them. Parents with bachelor and graduate degree level of academic achievement more often ask their child to guess what might happen next in the story, talk more about the story, make connections to their own lives and read the same book over and over again on different days (compared to parents with the high school level of academic achievement) (Bedeniković, 2009). The group of parents with low monthly incomes differ from the groups with good and very good monthly income. They are less likely to draw their child's attention to letters or try to connect letters and sounds, they talk about the stories less and rarely make connections to their own lives or read the same book over and over again on different days. Čudina-Obradović (2014) also states that financial revenues affect the development of reading in a child. The research found only one difference between single parents' households and households with both parents (households where both parents read the same stories all over again). The highest statistically significant positive correlation was found between parental explanation of unfamiliar words during reading activities with the child's reactions such as commenting the stories, pointing to pictures, answering the questions about the stories and even acting out some parts of the stories (Honchell & Schulz, 2012). Children who are more likely to comment the stories and talk about them have parents who connect the stories with their own lives, ask them questions about the stories and ask them what they expect to happen next in the story. This research points out that children who are more likely to ask and answer questions about the stories are the ones who are usually asked questions about the stories; their parents explain unfamiliar words to them and use them in different contexts afterwards (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fox et al., 2010). The results of this research are in line with similar researches in this area.

Conclusion

Many studies concerning child development show that children learn even before birth. To help children gain knowledge, the importance of a stimulating environment is emphasized. Stimulating environment is the "conditio sine qua non". Researches (Hutton et al., 2017; Ceren Simsek, 2015; Arnold et al., 1994) typically find that shared reading experiences are highly beneficial for young people. Benefits of shared reading include

facilitating enriched language exposure, fostering the development of listening skills, spelling, reading comprehension, vocabulary and establishing foundation for developing literacy skills (Hagen, 2018). They are also valued as a shared social opportunity between parents and their children to promote positive attitudes toward reading.

Most of the parents who participated in this research read to their children on regular basis. Reflecting upon the results of this research, it can be concluded that parents' reading activities affect children's behaviour with respect to their reactions to reading activities. Furthermore, we should continue reading with our children until they no longer wish to share this activity with us. It is important we ensure that these experiences are enjoyable, as they can influence children's future attitudes toward reading as well as build their confidence and competence as readers. Even though we live in a busy world, it is worth the effort and time of sharing this experience with our children in the early years and beyond, because the positive effects of such experiences are far-reaching (Fox et al., 2010).

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Katarina Matijević
Public Open School HD Petrinja
Matija Gupca 2, 44250 Petrinja, Croatia
katarinakadic@gmail.com

Renata Bernić
Technical School Sisak
Lađarska ul. 1, 44000, Sisak, Croatia
renata.bernic@gmail.com

Postoji li veza između čitanja djeci i uključenosti djeteta u aktivnosti čitanja?

Sažetak

Sposobnost čitanja iznimno je važna vještina. Čitanje utire put uspjehu u školi, koji može izgraditi samopouzdanje i motivirati dijete da postavi visoka očekivanja za život. Djeca uče čitati potaknuta primjerima iz okoline. Čitanje naglas najbolji je način da djecu zainteresirate za čitanje. Čitajući djeci, potičete ih da samostalno počnu čitati te da na kraju zavole aktivnost čitanja. Kako bi se istražila roditeljska uključenost u aktivnosti čitanja djeci, korišten je Upitnik Hanen centra za procjenu uključenosti roditelja u aktivnosti koje potiču razvoj vještina čitanja. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 716 ispitanika. Rezultati ukazuju da demografski podatci, kao što su akademsko obrazovanje roditelja, broj roditelja koji žive s djetetom i financijski prihod u kućanstvu imaju statistički značajan utjecaj na uključenost roditelja u aktivnosti čitanja vlastitoj djeci, ali i na uključenost njihova djeteta u aktivnosti čitanja. Rezultati pokazuju statistički značajnu povezanost između uključenosti roditelja u aktivnosti čitanja djetetu i uključenosti djeteta u aktivnosti čitanja, kao što je bilo očekivano. Ovim radom naglašava se važnost čitanja djeci, bez obzira na njihovu dob jer je dokazano da je čitanje, kao aktivnost, učinkovito u promicanju pismenosti.

Ključne riječi: *čitalačke aktivnosti; čitanje; poticanje čitalačkih vještina; uključenost roditelja; vještina čitanja.*