Changes in Quality of Family Home Literacy Environment Following Child Participation in a Prekindergarten Emergent Literacy Intervention

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Abstract

Prekindergarten children screened as at risk for reading failure and their parents participated in a RCT study in which families randomly were placed into one of four intervention groups, including emergent literacy classroom intervention, parent intervention, combined classroom and parent intervention, or no treatment control. All parents completed a questionnaire evaluating their home literacy environment (HLE) prior to and following the 10-week intervention. This study presents changes in HLE by group membership. Results and implications for researchers, educators and parents are discussed.

Introduction

As a child’s first teacher (DeBruine-Pareig, 2009), parents have many opportunities to provide learning during the first four years of life before their children enter formal schooling, an important time for the development of pre-reading skills. Providing a rich home literacy environment (HLE) is one way in which parents can have an early and persisting influence on their children’s language and development (Burgoon, Hecht & Lorigon, 2002; The Children’s Literacy Foundation, 2010). Home activities that involve letters contribute to letter name and sound knowledge (Foy & Mann, 2003). Time spent engaging in literacy activities, time spent reading, and parents’ interest in reading is significantly associated with child book knowledge and receptive and expressive language skills (Bennett, Wight & Martin, 2002; Frijters, 2008). The number of children’s literacy activities done at home is related to children’s vocabulary skills (Fitial, Baaret & Brunello, 2006). Parents who completed both the pre- and post-FELP questionnaires and those who did not were not significantly different on the intervention component and those who did not complete both, parents who completed both were significantly likely to attend more parent workshops.

Method

In the larger study, 318 families were randomized to receive classroom intervention, parent workshops, both, or neither throughout a 10-week program after being identified as at-risk for reading difficulties based on their score on a 25 question early literacy screen, the Get Ready to Read- Revised (Whitehurst, 2009).

Child Intervention

- Explicit, multisensory, research-based, early literacy intervention program designed to build skills in print awareness, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, oral language, and emergent writing
- Intervention historically builds skills in Phonological Awareness, Print Awareness and Letter Knowledge (Ballett et al., 2009; 2013),
- Thirty, 30-minute lessons delivered by early literacy specialists to small groups of children, twice a week for 10 weeks; lessons delivered in the fall of pre-K year

Parent Component

- Parent-administered early literacy activities aligned with the child intervention program
- Early literacy specialists met 3 times with parents assigned to these parent groups during the timeframe corresponding with the classroom intervention
- Guided Activity pages, songs, games explained & demonstrated each activity to parents, tips, troubleshooting, rationales provided
- Materials to do activities, including children’s books & an alphabet song CDs; instructional DVD to help parents

Participants

- 99 of the 318 participating families of 4-year-old children in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programs in northeast Florida at risk for reading failure who completed the pre- and post-FELP questionnaire. The families included in this analysis were randomized to receive:
  - No treatment control
  - Parent component (on 26)
  - Child and parent intervention component (n = 30)
  - Screening only (no treatment control) (n = 27)

Measures

Family Early Literacy Practices (FELP) (Ginsburg-Block, Lewis & Pizzini, 2010)

Child Skills increase over time for the sample from fall (M = 2.76, SD = .87) to spring (M = 3.54, SD = .77), was statistically significant, F(1, 98) = 18.26, p < .01. The Child Skill increase over time for the sample from fall (M = 1.13, SD = .85) to spring (M = 3.54, SD = .77), was statistically significant, F(1, 98) = 26.94, p < .01. Average Parent Modeling and Interactive Reading subscale scores increased, but not significantly (p > .05). Average Parent Expectation subscale scores decreased, but not significantly. (p > .05).

Referenced

• Reading as a leisure activity.

Results

Repeated measures analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to evaluate growth for each of the FELP subscales and total home literacy environment scores for the total at-risk Prekindergarten sample from fall to spring, as also a function of intervention group participation.

- The average composite FELP score increase over time for the sample (M = 3.5, SD = .56) to spring (M = 3.7, SD = .59), was statistically significant, F(1, 98) = 18.26, p < .01.
- The Skill Building increase over time for the sample (M = 3.14, SD = .87) to spring (M = 3.54, SD = .77), was statistically significant, F(1, 98) = 18.26, p < .01.
- Average Parent Modeling and Interactive Reading subscale scores increased, but not significantly (p > .05).
- Average Parent Expectation subscale scores decreased, but not significantly. (p > .05).

Conclusions & Discussion

- Home literacy environments, as rated by parents, improved significantly from fall to spring. Specific improvements in Child Skill and Skill Building were noted by parents.
- Those patterns of improvement were not dependent on intervention group participation in the larger study, suggesting that the children’s attendance in pre-kindergarten may be the driving force behind the change in HLE that occurred during the Pre-K year.
- Alternatively, three parent workshops targeting improvement in child-emergent literacy skills may not have been enough to provide significant changes in the HLE.
- This study was unable to separate the role of pre-kindergarten participation from study participation on the effects of improved HLE. Pre-Kindergarten attendance may increase communication between parents and educators as well as engagement between parents and children as home with new activities and skills they learned in the classroom. Consequently, changes in the home environment found in the present study may reflect child participation in pre-kindergarten that are not dependent on training provided to parents. Future research should examine the impacts of parent workshops on the home literacy environment over and above the influence of prekindergarten participation alone.
- Future research involving a parent intervention consisting of more meetings, focused activities, and education surrounding the importance of the home literacy environment may allow the ability to increase measures of home literacy environment over and above the increases of families who do not receive the intervention.

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