

1996

A model instrument to survey the factors in the home environment which affect the reading ability of children

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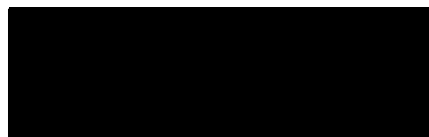
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Approved By:



James Rowley, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank...

The students and parents who
participated in this project.

My parents, who encouraged me
throughout this course of study.

Shawn Fry, for being a good
friend and study-mate.

And, most of all, my husband, Don,
for without his time spent with the
girls and his patience with me and
my work, this would not have
been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction to the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Hypothesis.....	3
Assumptions.....	4
Limitations.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Significance of the Study.....	5
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Reasons for Modeling Reading.....	6
Reasons for Reading Aloud.....	8
Reasons for Guiding the Use of Television.....	10
III. PROCEDURE.....	14
Subjects.....	14
Setting.....	14
Instrumentation.....	15
Data Collection.....	16
Data Analysis.....	16
IV. RESULTS.....	18
Presentation of Results - Section I.....	18
Presentation of Results - Section II.....	21
Discussion of Results.....	23

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27
Summary.....	27
Conclusions.....	28
Recommendations.....	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	30

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a necessary skill in all areas of school. Without the ability to read, a student will not be able to function well in any of the other content areas. In social studies much of the learning is reading from a text book or trade book. In English and spelling, a student needs to know how to read what he is writing. Even in math, reading is important for directions and problem solving. Reading is the foundation of the academic career.

Reading begins with the basics and builds upon those skills. As preschoolers, children read picture books, with or without words. It is at this time that children simply learn what a book is and that it can provide enjoyment. In the primary grades, students often start with narrative stories, and as they get older, they begin reading expository writing. Text books can be difficult to read without good reading skills because in addition to attempting to read on grade level, the students are learning new information. Without the basic skills, children can get frustrated and fall behind very quickly (Rasinski, 1989).

Where does the learning of reading begin? This researcher was concerned that the reading ability of many students is varied even though they have the same teacher and the same school environment. According to research, parents give the child a foundation in reading by reading to them. Even reading to children during infancy can have an effect on their attitude toward reading and their reading achievement (Yaden, Smolkin, and Conlon, 1989). Babies enjoy the physical closeness and the security of sitting on their parents' laps. Small children pick up the habit of reading if it has been a daily routine since day one. They know not otherwise. Toddlers are fascinated by

finding out that words "say" something and that the words follow the pictures. Parents need to be committed to giving their child this foundation. Research has shown that as children reach school age, reading aloud to children decreases and eventually ceases (Roser, 1989). However, even reading aloud to school age children can benefit them as readers.

Furthermore, if children see their parents reading to themselves, does this raise the children's reading ability? This researcher found that the traditional American home environment has changed in the past few decades. With increased time pressures and fractured families, reading time has suffered. In many homes, both parents work, giving the children less time with their parents. When the entire family does finally make it home from work or school, there is laundry to do, bills to pay, chores to be done, and piano lessons to go to. Family time decreases even more when it is a single parent home. However, modeling reading is still one of the most important variables related to reading achievement and positive attitudes toward reading (Anglum, Bell, and Roubinek, 1990). When parents read to themselves, whether it be the newspaper, a magazine, or a novel, they are showing their children that reading is important to them. Children want to be like their parents and imitate their actions (Rasinski, 1989). Since this is true, children will read because their parents read.

Is the increased usage of the television a factor in reading ability? Research shows that television seems to slow the attainment of reading skills (Demers, 1989). The television set is on in the average home more than six and a half hours per day (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1984). People watch it passively, without using the skills required for developing

literacy, such as verbal interaction and creative thinking. TV watching does not require interaction with the family. With less TV watching, children will use more oral language skills, which will in turn positively affect their reading ability (Winn, 1985). The writer has found that in order to improve reading ability, reading time must increase and television watching must decrease.

Many variables are involved in the process of learning to read. These variables include reading aloud to children, modeling reading, television watching, access to reading material, giving opportunities to read, and using reading as a practical skill. As a fifth grade teacher and a mother of two small children, this researcher was interested in finding out more about how the home environment can have an impact on the reading ability of children. The writer wanted to come to some conclusions about how parents feel about their home literacy environment and how it can affect reading.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a valid and reliable measure of a student's home literacy environment (HLE) that can be employed by classroom teachers to gain insight into a student's literacy environment.

Hypothesis

There will be a statistically significant relationship between the attitude of fifth grade parents as measured by a Likert scale attitude inventory and the behavior of fifth grade parents as measured by survey questions in relation to the home literacy environment. Together, the attitudes and behaviors will be measured on the Home Literacy Environment Scale (HLES).

Assumptions

In order to carry out this study, the author needed to make the following assumptions. First, the author assumed that the fifth grade students took the survey home to their parents. Secondly, the author assumed that the participants comprehended the questions on the survey. The author assumed that all the participants were honest in their answers to the survey. The author also assumed that the instrument was reliable and valid. Finally, the author assumed that the study was relevant to teachers' needs in the subject of reading.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study may have been that all of the parents surveyed were from a limited geographical area and had the same socioeconomic background. The writer sampled a middle-class suburban area.

Another limitation may have been the sample size of the fifth grade parents surveyed. The writer surveyed the parents of 40 fifth graders from one school.

The use of the Likert Scale posed another limitation to the study due to the possibility of having over-raters or under-raters respond to the questionnaire.

Definition of Terms

Reading Ability is a skill demonstrating the capability to read.

Modeling is demonstrating a behavior.

Story Structure is the relationship of the parts or elements of a story.

Readiness is a combination of skills that children need to have in order to learn how to read.

An Infant is a child between the ages of newborn and 24 months.

The Home Literacy Environment is the surrounding conditions and influences in the home that affect the development of a child. For the purposes of this study, Home Literacy Environment was defined as consisting of two factors. The first factor was the amount of reading done in the home. The second factor was the parents' attitudes toward reading.

Significance of the Study

This study may be significant to a variety of people. To the researcher it meant being able to gain insight into the HLE. With the information gathered, the writer was able to reevaluate priorities in the home so that the environment was more conducive to reading. The writer also used the information in the classroom to better understand the students' reading successes and difficulties. Other teachers may also be able to use this information for the same reasons and also to better communicate with the parents on how they can help their own children. Parents can use this study to see their strengths and weaknesses as a model of a good reader.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter was to detail some of the factors in the home environment that have an affect on the reading ability of children. It was divided into three sections:

1. Reasons for Modeling Reading
2. Reasons for Reading Aloud to Children
3. Reasons for Guiding the Use of Television

Reasons for Modeling Reading

To model is to demonstrate a behavior. When parents model reading, they are simply reading in front of their children. Just by kicking their feet up and cuddling up with a good book, parents are still encouraging their children to read. In fact, it has been found to be the most powerful influence on children's success (Anglum, Bell, & Roubinek, 1990). One reason for this is that when children see their parents reading, they realize that reading is important. As with any activity children see their parents do, children will pick up on the things that seem important to their parents. When they realize what is important, they will try to mimic that same behavior. For example, if a family always says grace before a meal and folds their hands, a toddler will eventually try to fold his hands, too. So it is with reading. When parents frequently pick up a book to read, a child will mimic this behavior so that they are doing what their parents do. At a younger age, it makes them feel important. As they grow, it is habit forming.

When children see their parents read, they also see that it is an

enjoyable activity(Roser, 1989; Greaney, 1986). Children see this as something their parents *want* to do, not something they *have* to do. And parents have the ability to make just about anything seem fun to their children as long as they do it with enough enthusiasm. Even washing the dishes or doing the laundry seems like fun if the parents show their children that it is not a burden but a joy. It is the same principal when they read. They want to explore the world and have fun, and what better way than with a book?

It is also important for children to see their parents reading a variety of reading materials, and to have that variety available to them. Parents of early readers tend to have plentiful literacy materials available and take their children to the library often (Greaney, 1986). Poor readers have parents who don't read for pleasure because they see reading as a skills process. Poor readers' parents also use the library infrequently (Anglum, Bell, & Roubinek, 1990). The more children go to the library, the more books they will see. There is excitement for children in finding their own new books to read. It gives them ownership and control of the situation. Although children sometimes are not interested in what their parents are reading, a parent can provide a model that there are many ways to enjoy reading. Eventually, children will mature enough to read some of the same material.

As parents go through their daily routine, they do a great deal of reading. They read the newspaper, the grocery list, road signs, directions, recipes, computer screens, and the back of the cereal box. When children see parents do this, they see reading as a practical skill (Holdaway, 1987). Children need to understand that reading is not purely for enjoyment but a skill to help you get through the day. They will realize that in order to function in this world, people

need to know how to read. Small children will want to read because they want to help mom make cookies or shop for milk and eggs. Parents can encourage this behavior by asking them to help them look for the sign along the road that says, "Stop" so that mom knows when to stop. Mom can also say, "How many cups of sugar does the recipe need?" and then have the child read it to her.

Reasons for Reading Aloud

Babies love to be held. They feel love and security from the person who is holding them. Having just been born, babies feel vulnerable in an open position, like lying on the ground. They want to be bundled and held closely. Hospitals swaddle the baby, and parents just love to hold them tight. They can't sit up by themselves yet, so parents hold them in their laps when they read to them. It is because of this that children associate reading with security and love. This encourages them to read to themselves as they get older (Holdaway, 1987). They remember the "feel" of a good book, and how their parents taught them that reading is nice.

As parents read to their children, they often point to pictures or move their finger across the bottom of the words. This teaches children left-to-right eye movement. They learn that we don't just open the book in the middle as they tend to do as infants. They learn that we read the left side first, even if it is just a picture book. Left-to-right eye movement is an important readiness skill (Gray, 1988), and should be learned before entering kindergarten.

Along with proper eye movement, children soon become familiar with story structure and predicting if their parents read to them often (Chew, 1986; Greaney, 1986; Huck, 1992; Yaden, Smolkin, and Conlon, 1989). They soon realize that stories have characters that interact with each other. They see that

these characters are involved in some sort of a plot and that the ending is logical and in a proper sequence. Research even tells us that narrative is our natural way of thinking. It accounts for 80% of our thinking (Huck, 1992). All children need order in their lives. They function better when they have a routine that rarely strays from the norm. For example, bed time is easier for everyone involved when the children know an order of getting ready (ie., brush teeth, read story, tuck the covers, and say good night). In fact, inconsistencies in a child's life may cause lower levels of success (Anglum, Bell, & Roubinek, 1990). Books give order. This is one reason why children are drawn to books. When children figure out that there is a sequence to books, they are able to predict what may happen in the story. They learn beginnings and endings, the role of predictable characters, and a sense of story (Huck, 1992). Any parent who has tried to hurry through a book by slyly skipping pages will find that his child is smarter than that. Soon a familiar book is etched in his child's mind, and the child has learned that print is stable. The story will still be the same tomorrow when he picks up the book.

When children read, they are learning about the world around them. In other words, they are expanding their knowledge base every time they open a book. Babies are fascinated by picture books that have real photographs of other babies in them. These books may show a picture of a baby with a ball and the text may even say, "Ball." Soon the baby reading the book will be turning to that page and saying, "Ball." That same baby will no doubt have learned the word ball without the book, but now she can be learning to associate the word to a book. In the future this will encourage her to read. Virtually every subject in the world is covered in a book. People can read about

anything. When parents read aloud to children at an early age, they are helping them to develop knowledge about any subject on which they read (Chew, 1986; Durkins, 1966; Huck, 1992; Roser, 1987). If adults read aloud a story about whales or otters, the children will learn about whales and otters. Even the adults may learn something!

As parents read to their child, the child will invariably interrupt and ask questions. Also, parents may invite their child to repeat the words on the page. Parents should not stifle such interactions, for reading aloud provides an opportunity to experiment with language (Chew, 1986; Huck, 1992). The better oral language skills a child has, the better the reading ability (Greaney, 1986). Oral language is closely linked with reading and writing. If children can verbalize what they are thinking, the better readers and writers they will be. As parents give this feedback, praise, and reinforcement throughout the story, a child will develop a wider vocabulary.

Books don't tell the whole story. They don't give moving pictures. The pictures can't possibly show the reader everything that is going on in the text. This is a good thing! It forces the reader to imagine what else is going on. Reading forces the reader to make a mental picture of the story. When parents read aloud to their children, they are stimulating their imagination (Greaney, 1986). Children can stop mid-way through a book, think about what they just read by creating a picture in their minds, and then move on. This is very different from television, which gives the viewer the whole picture.

Reasons for Guiding the Use of Television

Almost every home in America has at least one television in it, and it has

become a passive babysitter. When children come home from school, they sit in front of it. When they are home on the weekends, the television is the activity of choice for most of them. Television isn't all bad. In fact, we have benefited greatly due to the invention of television. Some programs are educational, and some are funny but at the same time wholesome. However, parents need to guide the use of television because when kids sit in front of it, they do not get the first-hand experiences with adults that they need in order to develop literacy (Anglum, Bell, and Roubinek, 1990). A child can learn more about animals by actually going to a zoo than watching a show on TV with a dog on it. Parents can take their children to zoos, museums, concerts, parks, fairs, camps, and many other places. These first-hand experiences will develop conversations which will in turn develop better reading skills. Also, if parents do these activities with their children, then they can do a follow-up activity to the library to get books on the subject of interest. Even going to the dentist can spark a trip to the library. This researcher got several children's books about a trip to the dentist before her child went to get her teeth cleaned for the first time. The books eased the child's apprehension because she felt like she knew all about the dentist before she went. She felt more in control of the situation, and three year olds need that.

Just as these away-from-home activities can spark conversations, so can every day situations. Oral language skills have been proven to be a factor in proficient readers, and this is another reason for parents to guide the amount of television their children watch (Winn, 1985). Excessive television viewing tends to deprive children of these oral language opportunities. Because of the disintegration of the family and the availability of television and cable networks,

there is a lack of everyday literacy activities and informal conversation within the family. Children need to sit around the table with their family at dinner and have a conversation. Parents need to turn off the radio in the car and talk to their children about their day at school. Children need to help their parents fix the car or do the gardening. These things give greater opportunity for communication. Reading skills increase as verbal skills increase. Sitting on the couch eating dinner and watching re-runs of *Gilligan's Island* is not going to increase those much needed verbal skills. Unfortunately, most parents work and are tired when they get home. The last thing they want is more verbal interaction. They got enough of that at the office. Some parents, therefore, don't even attempt to start a conversation or engage in any activity with their children.

Another reason for guiding the use of television is that the less television children watch, the more they read (Roser, 1989; Meyer, Hastings, and Linn, 1990). If parents turn off the television, their children will be forced to find something else to do. Now, that could mean making cookies or going outside and shooting hoops, but it could also mean that the children will pick up a book and read it. This researcher has seen this in her own children. They may go off to their room and play, but more than likely, they will go to get a book for me to read to them. Books have all the action of television, and more, because the reader can actually "get into" the mind of the characters. Therefore, as long as children have books available to them in the house, they will read more if they television is off.

Parents should guide the use of television because it slows the development of creative thinking (Demers, 1989; Winn, 1985). Television may

help in the development of attention inertia (Winn, 1985). This means that the longer a child watches television, the more holding power the television has over him. When children watch, they look for movement, alliteration, and peculiar voices. It encourages short segments of attention while reading requires longer spans of attention. When reading books, people can stop and ponder certain sections before going on. In television, people are moved along in their story at a fast pace, only stopping for commercials, which doesn't help because commercials are also meant to keep the viewers attention. Furthermore, television watchers are not required to develop their own images. Everything is laid out in great detail how it is supposed to be. When reading, a reader can and will develop his own images and characters. This will help develop good creative thinking skills, whereas television will not.

Parents also need to guide the use of television because some research has been done about the affects of too many hours in front of the tube. The Departments of Education in many states which include Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Texas, and California have attempted to determine whether the amount of television children watch is directly correlated to their achievement scores. They used several thousand children in the study, and results concluded that the more television children watch, the lower their achievement scores (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1984). In their article, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, quote Lilya Wagner as saying, "Students of lower intelligence watch more TV while those of higher ability turn to reading with increasing frequency as they mature. However, if they continue their extensive TV viewing, their ability to achieve declines." The controversy is far from over whether television has a strong impact on student success in

school, but this researcher believes that the following study will help the parents to see how important reading can be, and how television can hinder a reader from actually picking up a book.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

The researcher's goal in this study was to develop a valid and reliable measure of a student's home environment as it pertains to reading. This instrument was meant to be used as a scale that teachers can use in order to gain insight into a child's literacy environment.

More specifically, the home literacy environment scale (HLES) was designed as a two part measure. Part I consists of five survey questions designed to be answered by a student's parent(s). Part II was also designed to be answered by a student's parent(s), but it consisted of a twenty item, Likert scale, attitude inventory aimed at assessing the attitude of a student's parent(s) toward literacy.

Subjects

The pilot test subjects who participated in the study were a group of parents of 40 fifth grade students. The students were randomly selected to participate from a group of 65 fifth grade students. These 65 students included all of the students from three fifth grade classrooms in one school. These 65 names were placed in a box and 40 names were drawn.

Setting

School. Parents of fifth grade students from one elementary school took place in this study. There were approximately 600 students in the school.

Community. The school system was located in a suburban area of southwest Ohio. There were nine public elementary schools, two public middle

schools, and one public high school in the community.

Instrumentation

In order to explore the question of whether the parents' attitudes toward the HLE corresponded to their behavior in the home, this researcher designed and developed a two-part instrument. Part I was a five item survey designed to explore the actual behavior in the HLE. It asked these five questions:

1. How often did you read to your child as an infant?
2. How often does your child read to himself during an average week?
3. How often do you read to yourself during an average week?
4. How often do you read aloud to your child during an average week?
5. How many hours of television does your child watch during an average week?

These five questions were multiple choice questions worth five points each.

Part II consisted of 20 Likert scale questions measuring ten specific items. It was designed by collecting information from related literature on home environments. These items included reading to children as infants, parents reading to their children of all ages, parents reading to themselves, developing reading skills before formal schooling, learning that reading is a practical skill at the preschool level, preschool children learning patterning and sequence from books with nonsense words in them, television hindering creativity, television affecting reading ability, television slowing oral language skills, and reading being necessary skill in all areas of school. The researcher stated these items in such a manner as to have them negatively and positively stated. Therefore,

there were twenty items on the scale worth a total of 100 points. Collectively considered, the HLES was worth 125 possible points (See Appendix A).

Data Collection

A survey using the Likert Scale was used to gather data for analyzing the factors in the home environment that affect the reading ability of fifth graders. The survey was distributed to the fifth graders at the elementary school on Mon. March 11, 1996 for them to take home to their parents. Following completion of the survey, the parents sent the survey back to the researcher via their child. Most of them were returned by the due date of March 15. The researcher kept track of who returned them and was able to receive 38 of the 40 surveys back within two weeks following the due date. After they were returned, the envelopes were discarded to ensure anonymity.

Data Analysis

This researcher employed several analysis techniques in order to acquire the data needed to compare the results of Part I and Part II of the HLES. First, the author used a point system on both parts of the surveys. On Part I, there were five answers for each of the five questions. The first answer received one point and the last answer received five points. The designated numbers were consecutive for each of the five questions. The author then added up the total, with the highest possible score being a 25.

On Part II, there were five answers for each of the 20 questions. The answers were Strongly Agree(SA), Agree(A), Undecided(U), Disagree(D), and Strongly Disagree(SD). However, on this part, there were positively and

negatively stated statements, so the points were reversed on ten of them. The questions that were scored with SA being five and SD being one were numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 19, and 20. The questions that were scored with SD being 5 and SA being one were numbers 1, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, and 18. The researcher then added the total, with the highest possible score being a 100.

In order to test reliability, Cronbach Coefficient Alpha was applied. The researcher's reliability goal was a Cronbach Alpha of .60.

In order to test the statistical significant relationship between Part I and Part II, a Pearson's r was conducted with Alpha set at .05.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of Results

The researcher will present the results in two sections. The first section will present the results of Part I of the Home Literacy Environment Scale (HLES). The second section will present the results of Part II of the HLES.

Section I

The following demographic information was collected on the subjects as they filled out the survey:

The subjects' sex was as follows:

33 females and 5 males

The subjects education was as follows:

high school or equivalent: 24

2 year college degree: 6

4 year college degree: 5

post graduate: 2

1 respondent did not mark the question asking about education.

The subjects' ages were as follows:

21-29: 2

30-39: 28

40-49: 7

50-59: 1

Over 59: 0

Question #1 was: How often did you read to your child as an infant (Newborn-24 months)?

One (2.6%) respondent reported that he/she did not read to his/her child at all as an infant. Two (5.3%) respondents reported that they read to their child once a week as an infant. 14 (37%) respondents reported that they read to their child two to three times per week as an infant. Eight (21%) respondents reported that they read to their child four to five times per week as an infant. Thirteen (34%) respondents reported that they read to their child daily as an infant.

Question #2 was: How often does your child read to himself during an average week?

One (2.6%) respondent reported that his/her child does not read to himself at all. Four (10.5%) respondents reported that their child reads to himself less than one hour during an average week. 13 (34%) respondents reported that their child reads to himself one to two hours during an average week. Eleven (29%) respondents reported that their child reads to himself two to three hours during an average week. Nine (24%) respondents reported that their child reads to himself more than three hours during an average week.

Question #3 was: How often do you read to yourself during an average week?

No respondents reported that they did not read at all. Three (8%) respondents reported that they read to themselves less than one hour during an average week. Eleven (29%) respondents reported that they read to themselves one to two hours during an average week. Five (13%) respondents

reported that they read to themselves two to three hours during an average week. 19 (50%) respondents reported that they read to themselves more than three hours during an average week.

Question #4 was: How often do you read aloud to your child during an average week?

Twelve (32%) respondents reported that they did not read to their child at all. Six (16%) respondents reported that they read to their child less than 15 minutes during an average week. Eleven (30%) respondents reported that they read to their child for 15-30 minutes during an average week. Three (8%) respondents reported that they read to their child for 31-45 minutes during an average week. Five (13.5%) respondents reported that they read to their child for more than 45 minutes during an average week.

Question #5 was: How many hours of television does your child watch during an average week?

14 (37%) respondents reported that their child watched one to three hours of television per week. Seven (18%) respondents reported that their child watched three to six hours of television per week. Eight (21%) respondents reported that their child watched six to nine hours of television per week. Seven (18%) respondents reported that their child watched nine to twelve hours of television per week. Two (5.3%) respondents reported that their child watched more than twelve hours of television per week.

Section II

The researcher computed the results of Part II. In the following table, the researcher paired the positively and negatively stated items. For each of the items, N=34.

TABLE I
CORRELATION OF PAIRED ITEMS

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Label
1 6	4.23 4.21	1.23 1.01	Reading to children as infants
2 10	2.97 2.71	1.14 0.91	TV watching related to creative thinking
3 15	2.47 3.68	0.90 0.73	TV watching related to oral language skills
4 13	4.62 4.82	0.78 0.39	Reading-a skill used in all subjects
5 11	3.79 4.06	0.95 0.55	Reading to children daily
7 12	2.88 3.21	1.01 1.04	TV watching related to reading ability
8 17	4.12 3.21	1.07 1.12	Children seeing their parents read
9 14	4.59 4.35	0.50 0.77	Children reading prior to former schooling
16 20	3.68 3.50	0.94 0.99	Books with nonsense words teaching patterning and sequence
18 19	2.94 4.21	1.15 0.69	Reading-a practical skill for preschoolers

In the next table, the researcher computed the Alpha of each individual item:

TABLE 2
CRONBACH COEFFICIENT ALPHA

Item #	Label	Alpha
1	Reading to children as infants	.75
2	TV watching related to creative thinking	.71
3	TV watching related to oral language skills	.73
4	Reading- a skill used in all subjects	.72
5	Reading to children daily	.73
6	Reading to children as infants	.73
7	TV watching related to reading ability	.71
8	Children seeing their parents read	.72
9	Children reading prior to formal schooling	.73
10	TV watching related to creative thinking	.73
11	Reading to children daily	.76
12	TV watching related to reading ability	.71
13	Reading- a skill used in all subjects	.73
14	Children reading prior to formal schooling	.73
15	TV watching related to oral language skills	.74
16	Books with nonsense words teaching patterning and sequence	.74
17	Children seeing their parents read	.72
18	Reading- a practical skill for preschoolers	.73
19	Reading- a practical skill for preschoolers	.74
20	Books with nonsense words teaching patterning and sequence	.73

Research Questions

There were two key research questions that were of interest to the researcher. They were as follows:

1. What is the reliability of Part II (Likert Scale) of the HLES?

Answer: Pilot-testing of the instrument on 38 fifth grade students' parents produced a Cronbach Alpha = .73. A deleted variable analysis of each of the 20 items revealed that 18 of the 20 items were highly consistent with .73 summary coefficient. Item #1 was: Reading to children as infants has little or no affect on reading ability. The Cronbach Alpha for this item was 0.75. Item #11 was: Reading to children when they are little is important, but when they get older, they should only read to themselves. The Cronbach Alpha for this item was 0.76.

2. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the results of Part I and Part II of the HLES?

Answer: A correlational analysis of the results of Parts I and II using Pearson's r with Alpha set at .05 produced an $r = .443$.

Discussion of Results

First of all, it is interesting to note that the subjects were mostly female. This could mean many things. It could be that Mom is simply the one who does the school paperwork. This researcher does not believe that it was Mom who filled out the survey because Dad does not read. It is possible that Dad reads frequently but lets Mom take care of the homework, notes, etc. It could also mean that she is the head of the household and/or the only adult in the house.

The researcher was surprised to note that most of the parents only had a

high school education. The researcher was expecting most to have at least some college work finished since the survey was given in a middle-class suburban area.

1. How often did you read to your child as an infant?

Most parents (all but one) read to their children when they were infants. This shows the author that even if the parents were not thinking about future implications as they read to them, they felt it was something they should do and that their children would enjoy.

2. How often does your child read to himself during an average week?

It is encouraging to note that all of the students except one read during the week. Realistically, not much time can be spent reading with baseball practice, girl scouts, piano lessons, and all other after school and evening activities that children attend. This researcher attempted to take these things into consideration when developing the instrument. Since 34% of the students read 1-2 hours per week, they are reading what this researcher would consider average for fifth graders. 24% read for more than three hours, indicating that they probably read some on the weekends when they have more time.

3. How often do you read to yourself during an average week?

All of the parents read for some amount of time during the average week. The parents who read for less than one hour are probably only skimming the newspaper and reading their mail. Unfortunately, the survey did not indicate whether they read in front of their children. For future surveys, a question should be added noting this behavior since the research has shown that children read more when they see their parents read.

4. How often do you read aloud to your child during an average week?

How sad it is to this researcher that most children are not read to after they enter school. 32% of the parents do not read to their fifth graders. As research has shown, children of all ages enjoy being read to and benefit from it. They become better listeners, better readers, and continue to see the importance of reading.

5. How many hours of television does your child watch during an average week?

There does not seem to be a correlation between the amount of television watched and the amount of time spent reading. Although some children read a little and some read for many hours per week, this did not make a difference in how much television they watched. Some read a little and watched television quite a bit. Some read for several hours and still watched quite a bit of television.

The statements on Part II of the instrument came directly from the research. Therefore, the higher the score on Part II, the more the parents tended to agree with the research. The questions remain: Does what the parents believe (Part II) correlate with their behavior in the home (Part I)? Also, do the negative statements correlate with the positive statements. Those questions will be answered in the following paragraphs.

When two variables, such as the items in Parts I and II, are highly related in a positive way, the correlation between them approaches +1. Since Pearson's $r = .443$, the researcher can see that Part I and Part II have a significant relationship.

Cronbach Alpha is used when measures have multiple-scored items,

such as the Likert attitude scale in Part II of the HLES. It will provide an index of reliability. The reliability of any given test is affected by a number of variables. The length of the instrument is a factor, for instance. The longer the test, the greater its reliability. The reliability is also affected by the heterogeneity of the subjects. The more homogeneous the group, the lower the reliability coefficient. Also, the individuals who take the test must not find the instrument too difficult. When a test is difficult, the subjects may simply guess, causing a lower reliability coefficient.

Since this researcher's goal was a Cronbach's Alpha = .60, and the actual reliability coefficient was a Cronbach's Alpha = .73, it can be said that this instrument was reliable.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This researcher believes that reading is a necessary skill for all areas of school. All other skills are based on this foundation of being able to read. Reading begins in the home, and parents need to nurture their children's love for reading. Several factors in the home environment can affect children's reading ability. These include reading aloud to children as infants, having children see their parents read to themselves, and the amount of television that is being watched. Of course, there are many other variables that are involved in the process of learning to read. This researcher wanted to explore the home literacy environment in some students' homes in order to get a better grasp of the impact it has on their reading ability.

This purpose of this study was to develop a valid and reliable measure of a student's home literacy environment (HLE) that can be employed by classroom teachers to gain insight into a student's literacy environment.

The researcher developed a two-part instrument to be used as a scale to be answered by a student's parent(s). Part I consisted of five survey questions that asked questions about the behavior of the parents and their children in relation to the HLE. Part II consisted of 20 Likert scale items designed to survey the parents' attitude about the HLE.

The instrument was distributed to 40 fifth graders for them to take home to their parents. 38 of the surveys were returned within a couple of weeks. The subjects remained anonymous.

The totals were tallied with Part I being worth 25 points and Part II being worth 100 points. From these numbers, Pearson's r and Cronbach's Alpha were established. Pearson's $r = .443$ and Cronbach's Alpha = .73.

Conclusions

Two conclusions can be made regarding this study. First of all, part I (the behaviors the parents display in the home) is highly related to Part II (the attitudes of the parents about the home literacy environment). This conclusion can be made due to the fact that Pearson's $r = .443$.

Also, this instrument is considered reliable due to the Cronbach Alpha = .73. Therefore, this survey would be a legitimate instrument for teachers to use in gaining insight into the home environment as it relates to the reading ability of students.

Recommendations

This researcher recommends the following revisions in the instrument:

1. Add a question in Part I about how much parents read in front of their children. This author had the parents respond to a question about how much they read to themselves, but all this reading could take place after the children go to bed.
2. Add a question in Part I about how often the parents take their children to the library. Although this is not "in the home," it is relevant to the home environment since the parents are the ones who take them, and books usually come home for a period of time. Adding this question could give a teacher a better understanding of parental involvement in their child's literacy

environment.

This researcher also recommends that teachers give this survey to the parents of each student at the beginning of the school year. Knowing background information on a child's home life can greatly enhance the learning process because the teacher can then know how much the parents may or may not support her/him during the upcoming school year.

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Appendix A

Parents,

I am doing a research study for my graduate work on the relationship between the home environment and children's reading abilities. I would appreciate you taking the time to fill out the following survey (front and back) and returning it to me at school on or before Friday, March 15. I have no interest in identifying the respondents; therefore, all data will be held in confidence. Thank you for your time and effort.

Paula Bennett

Demographic Information

1. Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female 2. Education: ☐ Less than high school
☐ High school or equivalent
☐ 2 year college degree
☐ 4 year college degree
☐ Post graduate
3. Age: ☐ 21-29
☐ 30-39
☐ 40-49
☐ 50-59
☐ Over 59

***Please respond to the following questions by checking the appropriate response.**

1. How often did you read to your child as an infant (Newborn-24 months)?
☐ Not at all
☐ Once a week
☐ 2-3 times per week
☐ 4-5 times per week
☐ Daily
2. How often does your child read to himself during an average week?
☐ Not at all
☐ Less than 1 hour
☐ 1-2 hours
☐ 2-3 hours
☐ More than 3 hours
3. How often do you read to yourself during an average week?
☐ Not at all
☐ Less than 1 hour?
☐ 1-2 hours
☐ 2-3 hours
☐ More than 3 hours
4. How often do you read aloud to your child during an average week?
☐ Not at all
☐ Less than 15 min.
☐ 15-30 min.
☐ 31-45 min.
☐ More than 45 min.
5. How many hours of television does your child watch during an average week?
☐ 1-3 hours
☐ 3-6 hours
☐ 6-9 hours
☐ 9-12 hours
☐ More than 12 hours

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***Please respond to the following statements by circling SA for Strongly Agree, A for Agree, U for Undecided, D for Disagree, or SD for Strongly Disagree.**

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Reading to children as infants has little or no affect on reading ability. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 2. TV slows the development of creative thinking. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 3. TV decreases a child's oral language skills. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 4. Reading is not important in subjects such as math and art. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 5. Parents should read to their children of all ages daily. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. Children's reading ability can be positively affected by reading to them as infants. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. The more TV children watch, the lower their reading ability. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. It is important for children to see their parents read to themselves. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 9. Children cannot learn to read until they go to school. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. A child's imagination is stimulated by watching TV. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. Reading to children when they are little is important, but when they get older, they should only read to themselves. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 12. The amount of TV children watch has little or no affect on reading ability. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. Reading is a necessary skill in all areas of school. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. It is possible for children to develop reading skills before entering formal schooling. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 15. The more TV a child watches, the better his oral language skills. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 16. Books with nonsense words in them prevent proper language development. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 17. Children will become good readers regardless of how often they see their parents read to themselves. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 18. Before entering school, children don't realize that reading can be a practical skill. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 19. With parental involvement, preschool children can learn that reading is a practical skill. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 20. Children can learn patterning and sequence by reading books with nonsense words in them. | SD | D | U | A | SA |