

Bar- Ilan University

Will intervention program of book reading in the Arabic society promote maternal beliefs, maternal mediation, and child's socio-emotional understanding and story comprehension?

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Abstract

In this study, we examined whether the intervention program of mother-child book reading in early childhood in the Arab community would promote mothers' beliefs, their actual behavior while reading, and the children's socio-emotional understanding and story comprehension? The program was carried out through remote digital training using presentations and videos. We hypothesized that (a) mothers who receive the intervention program will improve their beliefs regarding the importance of social-emotional support and story comprehension for the child in the reading activity. (b) There will be a relationship between the frequency of reading to children and their socio-emotional understanding. (c) Mothers who receive the intervention program will improve their mediation to the child in the book reading activity, and will refer more to the social-emotional domain and to the story comprehension during reading more than mothers in the control group. (d) Children in trial group will progress in socio-emotional understanding and story comprehension more than children in the control group. (e) This progress will be beyond the socioeconomic status of the child's family. (f) Mother's beliefs regarding book reading to a child will contribute to children's empathy ability and socio-emotional understanding. (g) Mother's mediation quality during book reading, will contribute to children's socio-emotional understanding.

The study involved 64 mothers and their children aged 4-5 years from the Arab community who attended pre-kindergarten. The families were from three Arab Muslim cities, from the center and north of Israel. They were randomly and equally divided into trial group and control group. In the pre-diagnosis, the children's language level was tested using PPVT test, and the child's empathy level was tested using the Empathy Continuum tool. In addition, the mothers filled a questionnaire of demographic measures, home literacy environment, and beliefs about socio-emotional support and story comprehension during reading. Moreover, the child's level of comprehension of the story was assessed after the experimenter read him the story. The mothers and their children were then filmed during book reading activities at home. In the intervention stage, the mothers in the trial group received a training presentation for self-watching, which included recommendations on how to read for the child. In addition, once a week, for three weeks period, the mothers received a video which was created especially for the purpose of this study. The videos demonstrated a recommended book reading to the child, according to what the mothers were exposed to in the presentation, while focusing on enrichment of the language and emotional fields. The post-training for both groups

tested the mother's beliefs, filmed the shared reading activity of the mother and child and assessed the story comprehension level and emotional understanding of the child from the story.

The findings of the study showed that the intervention program had no effect on improving mothers' beliefs. For general beliefs in both groups the initial level was already high in the pre-tests, and for beliefs about emotional support, the scores were low from the beginning and remained low even after the intervention. The child's reading frequency was found to be related to the level of explanation of his emotions after reading a book. The findings showed an improvement in mediation behaviors of the mothers in the reading activity compared to control group in presenting more questions to the child, in the length of the communication chains, and emotional expansion level. Nevertheless, despite the large consistent progress of the children in the trial group in some of story comprehension measures, no significant progress was found in these measures compared to the children in the control group.

The regression analyses showed, as we expected, that the socio-economic status of the parents didn't contribute to the comprehension of the story's content and emotional understanding. The group made a significant contribution to progress. Mothers from the trial group were able to implement mediation strategies to which they were exposed in the remote training, and at the same time the emotional understanding level and story comprehension of the child were contributed. In addition, it was found that mother's beliefs while reading the story contributed to the children's social-emotional development. A positive relationship was found between mothers' beliefs about the importance of talking about the child's thoughts and feelings and the child's ability to recognize emotions, and a positive relationship between child's reading frequency and mother's beliefs as meaningful words or expressions and the child's ability to explain his feelings.

In addition, the mother's mediation quality contributed to the empathy ability of the children, nonetheless partially and not for all measures. The findings showed a significant interaction between group and level of understanding of emotions in open-ended questions regarding the child's explanation of the character's emotions in the story. Children with high understanding of emotions in the trial group were more accurate in explaining the character's emotions in the story compared to children in the same group whose understanding of emotions was low. There was also a significant group interaction and encouragement behavior of the mother, regarding the accuracy of

the child's explanation of his feelings. The higher the mother's "encouraging" mediating behavior when reading a book in the trial group, the more accurate the children were in explaining their feelings.

The findings of this study suggest a partial effectiveness of the intervention program in the Arab community, which was done using remote technological means, in promoting empathy ability and story comprehension. This study points to a problematic relationship between parents' beliefs about reading a book to a child and actual practice, and can serve as a basis for deepening the examination of these relationships especially in Arab community. Moreover, the study forms the basis for the development of intervention programs for parents in early childhood in the Arab community in order to raise awareness in this group about the importance of providing emotional support to the child in the reading activity, for promoting empathy abilities and story comprehension of young children.