

Bar-Ilan University

**Parental beliefs and mediation in book reading and child's
language enrichment:**

Intervention study in the Arabic society

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Abstract

Reading a book by parents to their young child before school age and giving meaning to new words, is considered an activity that may contribute to the enrichment of the child's vocabulary. Preschoolers learn more words when they are given explanations of their meaning than a situation in which they only listen to stories. This important activity has hardly been examined among Arabic-speaking parents. In the present study, we focused on reading a book by Arabic-speaking mothers to their children before school age. Our aim was to examine whether an intervention program, given to mothers of kindergarten children in Arab society, would promote: (a) parental beliefs about the importance of reading a book to a child in general, and about the importance of word interpretation when reading in particular; (b) Maternal mediation includes the frequency of commenting on new words, asking questions, having a mother-child dialogue, the length of communication chains, and the OMI indices (focus, excitement, behavior regulation, encouragement, and expansion). (c) The child's understanding of the new words. In addition, we asked: (d) whether the progress of mother's beliefs and her mediating behavior will be beyond her socio-economic status; and (e) whether the learning of the new words by the children will be beyond the child's family social status, and the level of the general vocabulary. This issue is especially important for the Arabic-speaking child, since acquiring new words in preschool is a key skill for acquiring the standard language later on, especially against the background of the diglossia in the Arabic language.

The study involved 64 pre-kindergarten children and their mothers from Arab society aged 4-5 from the north and center of Israel. The pairs were randomly assigned to an experimental group (32 pairs) and a control group. Each group was matched according to the child's gender. The socio-economic status of the child's family and the level of general vocabulary (PPVT test) were examined. In the pre- and post-test, we examined comprehension of target words from the book used in the study at the receptive and expressive level. In addition, a mother-child reading activity was videotaped. The intervention program was performed in the experimental group only, and lasted 3 weeks, through which parents were asked to read to their child a story twice a week (a total of 6 times). Once a week the parent received from the researchers an instructional video via WhatsApp, which demonstrated the mediation principles showed in the presentation. The videos were developed specifically for this study, and adapted for the Arabic-speaking population. In addition, the researchers made telephone contact with parents in the experimental group during the intervention period in order to mention, encourage, and make sure that they were conducting the joint book reading properly.

The findings of the study showed (a) that the intervention program did not advance the mother's beliefs about the importance of reading a book. It turns out that the beliefs were high in the first place even before the intervention in the experimental and control group began. Regarding beliefs about the interpretation of words, it was found that in the category "interpreting the difficult word for a child": in the experimental group the

proportion of parents, who marked this category, was higher than parents from the control group.

(b) That the mediation method improved in the experimental group compared to the control group in the length of the communication chains, and in the level of extension

that the mother performed in the reading activity.

(c) Our hypothesis that the children of the experimental group will be more advanced in learning the target words than the children of the control group were partially confirmed, only with respect to expressive word learning.

(d) Our results showed no relationship between family's income level and parents' beliefs on reading to their children. There were also no differences in the improvement of different belief indices between the experimental and control groups. Regarding the progress of maternal mediation, the regression findings partially confirmed our hypothesis that in the experimental group the parent-child mediation behavior in the reading activity will improve, more than in the control group. However, this hypothesis was only confirmed for the extension behavior. Beyond that, the improvement was especially in children, who had a low initial vocabulary level. Also, an important finding that provides support albeit limited relates to the words of the expressive story. A time-group interaction effect was found for the expressive story words, when in both groups the value increased, but the change in the experimental group was higher.

(e) It was not found that the learning of new words by children is beyond the social status, as it was not found that family income contributed to the learning of new words by children of both groups. Also, it was found that the higher the child's vocabulary level, the more the child progressed in learning both receptive and expressive words. But the lower his initial level of receptive and expressive knowledge of the book's words, the more advanced the child was in learning those words.

Examining parents' behavior in the reading activity showed that the two groups dealt with difficult words differently. In the control group parents either did not refer to the difficult word at all or gave meaning by replacing the word with another word, whereas in the experimental group almost all the parents gave meaning to the difficult word. Also, although there were no differences between the experimental and the control group regarding mothers' beliefs about the desired way of reading to the child, there were a number of differences between mothers in their actual behavior when reading a book with the child. It is possible that the mothers knew what behavior to strive for when reading a book with the child, and they present it in their perceptions, but they did not know how to put their beliefs into practice. Also, children in the experimental group showed greater progress in understanding the words of the story (which the parent read to the child) at the expressive level, more than the children in the control group, and at the receptive level both the experimental and control groups progressed similarly. Moreover, in the experimental group the parent-child mediation behavior in the reading activity improved to be higher than in the control group, albeit with respect to the extension behavior only, and with respect to children vocabulary level initially. Regarding the status of the child, it was not found that family income contributed to the learning of new words by children in the two study groups.

The findings of this study highlight the need to raise parents' awareness of their beliefs about cultivating vocabulary and the desired way of reading to a child, and making the connection between these two key aspects. Parental guidance on this topic should include a discourse on their beliefs and connect it significantly to the actual doing in a joint reading activity with the child. The tutorial should include a discourse on new words, at the receptive and expressive level, combined with a discourse on the content of the story. The partial progress of mothers in mediation activity in the experimental group in this study requires rethinking the

implementation of intervention in the parent group for preschool children using only technological tools remotely. There is room to consider hybrid mediation that includes both physically and remotely integrated parental guidance. The development of research-based intervention programs for reading books is very necessary in Arab society. They may serve as a basis for enriching the young child's vocabulary and understanding the story, which may be a more promising starting point for promoting child literacy in the future.