

How important is it for children to acquire reading skills?

Kheila Aurelius-M, Alison Deringer, Kayla Greenough, & Tiffany Heinz

The debate for early reading will be a concept that every educator and teacher will encounter repeatedly in their career. Early reading can suggest many different options; however, to contextualize what early reading means for this poster, the children's ages range between 3 and 4 years old. It is crucial to understand the benefits and the limitations of the different types of students and their needs when learning how to read. Thus, the debate continues to be of discussion in early childhood settings.

Benefits

“Beginning formal instruction earlier for them would extend the learning time needed to establish foundational knowledge for reading” (Ehri, 2018, p. 212)

Scenario #1

Carl, 7 years old, has a 4 year old brother, Jason. At 4 years old, Carl began to read. He enjoyed it so much that he began reading chapter books on his own when entering school. Carl has an extensive vocabulary for his age, uses proper grammar and shows text comprehension already. His brother, Jason, however, shows no interest in reading. Carl interactively reads Jason's favourite books to him before bedtime. Carl often asks Jason questions pertaining to the story, and Jason responds with enthusiasm using his imagination.

Three years later, Carl is 10 years old and Jason is 7 years old. Earlier in the year, Jason was diagnosed with dyslexia. However, because he read dialogically with Carl, he is more advanced than Max, another child with dyslexia in his classroom who did not receive the same reading technique at a young age. Max has much difficulty with phonemes understanding and decoding new words. Although Jason still has difficulties, he can understand most phonemes with practice and is already learning to decode small, unfamiliar words (ex. dog).

In both cases, Carl and Jason showed how early reading can help children. Carl, who read early and did not have a learning disability, showed stronger literacy skills concerning vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Jason, who has a learning disability, had more time for setbacks. Engaging in dialogic reading allowed him to be more advanced at 7 years old than he would have been if he was not exposed to reading younger.

According to Ehri (2018), “earlier reading instruction and practice hold the potential for making all children smarter when they entered the fourth grade” (p.212). Reading early increases children's vocabulary knowledge at a young age, reduces the amount of children who lack reading skills, and simplifies the understanding of texts at a younger age making it easier when they are older. It also allows children to have setbacks because they have more time to learn the instructions they receive and better the skills they have learned. Children who learn to read at a younger age, had greater fluency when they reached the fourth grade. (Ehri, 2018)

According to McBride-Chang (2018), shared-book reading offers cognitive, emotional and motivational benefits to preschool children that are often long lasting and cumulative. Meta-analyses indicate that shared-book reading appears to have influence on children's language skills; this meaning vocabulary, grammar skills and comprehension skills. A strong source of cognitive development emerges when shared-book reading occurs in a dialogic approach. This approach focuses on scaffolding children's reading experiences, thus leading to gains in the interest of reading. (McBride-Chang, 2018)

According to Ehri (2018), children with dyslexia have difficulty learning the alphabet, processing phonological levels of words, and with the understanding of forming connections to read words. Thus, they need more time to learn to read because they are slower when reading and their reading has less accuracy. If children learn to read earlier, those who are at-risk for dyslexia may be identified, allowing the child and the educator to work together intensely, explicitly, and systematically to lessen the effects of the learning disability. Through this method, they will learn how to master decoding skills with more accuracy before reaching fourth grade. (Ehri, 2018)

Literacy skills

Abilities of reading and writing (Alberta Education).

Shared-book reading

Interactive reading where children are involved in the reading and are guided by a teacher or parent who demonstrates fluency and expression (ReadingRockets).

Cultural Differences

“Various beliefs, behaviours, languages, practices and expressions” of different group members (Mighty Recruiter)

Learning Disabilities

“Any various conditions (such as dyslexia) that interferes with an ability to learn, resulting in impaired functioning in language, reasoning, or academic skills” (Merriam-Webster).

Limitations

“Early success cannot inoculate readers against lack of progress later” (Ehri, 2018, p. 206)

According to Suggate (2018), there is no long-term advantage when children read early. Children will learn the basics, but decoding skills can only be learned as of the ages of 6 or 7 because they need “foundational levels of LCS [language comprehension skills] and thinking skills to profit from reading” (p.225). If they start to read too early, they will feel failure which will stay with them for life. Also, children younger than grade 3 will not encounter new words from reading that they won't hear from speaking with others. It is proven that children who enjoy reading more, improve quicker while children who do not enjoy reading, fall behind. As well, according to Ehri (2018), if a child is advanced and ready to go to the next stage of learning, their class will not all be advanced, so they are stalled in their reading growth. (Suggate, 2018 & Ehri, 2018)

Reese (2018) argues that shared-book reading is beneficial for younger children, although not every young child will benefit from it. Children who do benefit from shared-book reading often develop improvements in expressive rather than receptive language indicating that shared-book reading does not entirely provide children with an advancement in language. Shared-book reading occurs most often with girls and first borns rather than boys and later borns; however, no differences in language development is seen between the two groups. (Reese, 2018)

According to Reese (2018), shared-book reading and dialogic reading techniques may not be the norm in some cultures. Parents interacting during storytime or reading storybooks to children are not concepts that are seen in all cultures. However, other interactions also help children develop the same skills as book reading. Some cultures use reminiscing with their children to help develop metacognitive and metalinguistic skills. The use of decontextualized conversation allows children to have new vocabulary and comprehension skills. There are correlations between elaborative reminiscing talk and the children's skills in language and literacy development. (Reese, 2018)

Scenario #2

Sarah and Willow attend the same school. Sarah was born in an English-European household. Willow was born on a Mohawk reserve.

Sarah's parents began reading storybooks as early as 4 months old with her. Thus, she began reading on her own around 4 and a half years old. She had a very wide vocabulary and could construct grammatically correct sentences. She also knew all the sounds associated to each letter of the alphabet.

Before elementary school, Willow would not read as often. Her family did not prioritize shared-reading. Rather, they preferred engaging Willow in reminiscing conversations, where her parents and grandparents would discuss different legends and tales with her. From this, she began developing a strong vocabulary in both English and her native language. Entering kindergarten, she was not aware of the sounds associated to the letters of the alphabet.

Today, at 8 years old, Sarah and Willow are at the same level of reading. Thus, Sarah's advantage of reading earlier did not show when she grew up. Willow was able to catch up to Sarah's reading skills. Sarah had already mastered the skills of phonemes understanding and word decoding. Thus, she did not have anymore room for improvement when it came to the basic literacy skills learned in the first cycle of elementary school. Due to the fact that Sarah was slightly more advanced than Willow and the rest of the class, Sarah was learning the skills at the same level of her peers. During this time, Willow was able to master the literacy skills herself without being a precocious reader.

Final Statement

Null hypothesis is described as a research treatment that does not have an effect on the tested group(s). Thus, it is argued that since there are no actual long-term results on the effects of learning to reading early, there are inadequate reasons to believe that reading at an earlier age provides benefits (Suggate, 2018).

Contrary to this, when thinking about early reading, we can use a *rope analogy*; where different aspects of development need to be intertwined to make the development of reading skills an easier and enjoyable process for children. Therefore, in order for children to develop the necessary reading skills, many aspects of early development are of necessity in order to ensure success (Ehri, 2018).

Some of Our Ideas

Early reading enforces the idea of **neoliberalism** by wanting to prepare children for their future career in literacy rather than allowing children to enjoy being a child. This concept and early reading encourages children to work their brain at a faster pace than what it is ready for. A preschool child's brain may not yet have the foundational skills necessary to acquire these reading skills.

In society, reading is an important concept for everyone, which is true. However, in some cultures the ideas of early reading can be seen as a **eurocentric idea**. Although reading is important later on, other skills may be more important than reading skills are at the time of early development.

Discussion Question

The texts only look at:

- The limitations that cultural differences bring to early reading
- The benefits of early reading for children with disabilities

What are benefits for cultural differences for early reading and limitations of learning disabilities with the debate of early reading when looking at the two scenarios?

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