

## **Factors influencing Early Reading Skills among Pre-School Children in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors influencing early reading skills among pre-school children in selected nursery schools in Selangor state, Malaysia. A questionnaire was administered to examine the factors influencing early reading skills and their development. A total of 150 participants (both teachers & parents) in the age range of 27 to 40 years from 13 purposively selected private and public nursery schools included in the study. The results obtained revealed significant factors associated with early reading skills. There was a significant correlation between classroom learning environment and early reading skills ( $r=0.29$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), home learning environment and early reading skills ( $r=0.29$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and peer group influence and early reading skills ( $r=0.22$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). To conclude, all the correlates such as classroom environment, home environment and peer group influence are significantly associated with early reading skills in preschool going children. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that educators and parents should remember to offer conducive learning atmosphere for pre-school children. Parents and teachers should also engage older siblings or peer group to serve as mentors to early age preschoolers to showcase excellent reading achievements.

**Keywords:** Early reading skills, learning environment, home learning, peer group learning, classroom learning, preschool children.

### **Introduction**

Learning to write and read is a continuing process from early stages of infancy. As opposed to typical rational, it doesn't abruptly start in kindergarten or first grade. From the most punctual years, everything that grown-ups do to help youngsters' language and education is precious. As early childhood education moves up front in the general population policy debate, more consideration is being paid to early education. Early childhood experts have recognized a long time ago the perceived significance of language and literacy in getting ready kids to prevail in school. Early literacy assumes a key job in empowering the kind of early learning experiences

that are linked with academic achievement, reduced grade retention, higher graduation rates and improved efficiency in later stage of education. The relation between supportive parental involvement and children's early literacy development is well established in the literature (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Snow et al (1998) have demonstrated that children from homes, where family promotes children education and engage them in understanding of literacy and its usages, are ready for school. Parents plays significant role on children education when they urge their kids to read.

During language development, children learn skills that are essential to the advancement of proficiency in literacy (ability to read and write). At early childhood phase of development, literacy is considered as emerging, which implies that children simply begin figuring out how to comprehend language to express thoughts and feelings, communicate with others, appreciate and recognize some letters of the alphabet. Progressively, children associate what they know about speaking and listening with what they know about print and become ready to read. Consequently, the proficiencies with comprehension and expression gained during early years make children to learn to read. This implies that early years educational institutions together with the family ought to deliver encouraging environment for children to be able to have extreme skills in language use and advancement in pre-reading and reading skills.

Early childhood period of development is the perfect period for caregivers and parents to encourage and fabricate early reading skills for a solid beginning of formal schooling. The capacity to read fluently is a key to academic achievement during formal education and, in this way, advancement of reading skills must be viewed as a basic part of early childhood curriculum.

Several studies on early education have proved that it is vital to consider certain external conditions, which can advance or discourage the development of the child (Adi-Japha & Klein, 2009; Son & Morrison, 2010; Weinert, Ebert & Dubowy, 2010). As per Ashiabi (2007) classroom environment imparts to children what is anticipated from them. In early year's classroom, the use of learning centers is a vital component to guaranteeing acceptable output from children. Children's learning is improved when their families are included and make essential necessities for deferent types of learning experiences including verbal communication (Sammons, Elliot, & Sylv, et al., 2004).

The classroom has the utmost capacity to deliver excellence educational experiences and interactions to support and strengthen literacy development. Van Hees (2011) conducted a study to investigate the efficacy of teacher's verbal interaction with students in the classroom and its effects on literacy development. Similarly, a child's education initiates at the home with parents being the first teachers building and encouraging a solid basis that will aid that child well throughout school and basically the rest of their lifespan. Research also finds that parental

contribution, commitment in their child's education significantly affect the child success and healthy and nurturing relationship with school teachers (Edwards, 2005; Constantino, 2007; Borgonovi, 2011; & Jeynes, 2011).

With consistently increasing demands for enhanced living conditions, and various factors set on Malaysian parents, not all families have been able to create rationally conducive and stimulating environment at home. Some families rely on the opportunities provided by school environment. In this study the investigator hypothesized that there could be a certain correlation between early reading skills and learning environment at school, at home as well as with peer group influence. Hence, the present study aimed to see the correlates and influencing factors to early reading skills in preschool children.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

A descriptive survey research design was used to identify the factors influencing early reading skills among preschool children. A total of 150 participants (both teachers & parents) in the age range of 27 to 40 years with the mean age of 35.5 years participated in the study. All the participants were recruited as volunteers and were selected randomly from 13 purposively selected public and private pre-schools. Participants were native speakers of Malay language (Official language of Malaysia) in the Selangor state of Malaysia.

### **Materials**

The questionnaire was prepared with the help of experienced teachers and educational psychologists working in this area, to investigate basic information on the correlates of early reading skills in pre-school children. A questionnaire was developed as part of the study which consisted of 3 sections. First section comprised of demographic details of the participants; second and third sections encompassed the information on assessment of early reading skills and factors influencing early reading skills. Four-point Likert-type scale was used to elicit the responses as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire was validated by experts and the test re-test reliability revealed a coefficient of 0.82

### **Procedure**

The present study was carried out within the urban area of Selangor state. The questionnaire was administered by the investigator by seating the participants comfortably on a chair. The investigator initially built rapport with the participants before collecting the demographic details. The following instructions were given to the participants. "Now I will be asking you a few questions related to early reading skills and its correlates and influencing factors. I want you to think and tell me the answer. Are you clear with the instructions? Do you

have any questions to ask? Shall we start?'. The participants were instructed to elicit responses as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The responses were noted and compiled for further analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to see the level of significance.

## Results

The aim of the present study was to understand correlates of early reading skills among pre-school age children. The data was analyzed on the basis of the responses noted using four-point Likert-type scale. Descriptive and inferential statistics were done and results as follows.

Table 1. Correlation between early reading skills and classroom learning environment

Variables	Mean (SD)	r-calculated	r-critical
Classroom environment	15.03 ( $\pm 2.91$ )	0.33	0.195
Early reading skills	15.85 ( $\pm 3.02$ )		

$p < 0.05$

Table 1 depicts the correlation between classroom environment and early reading skills. The calculated  $r$ -value of 0.33 is positive and is greater than the critical ( $r = 0.195$ ) at 0.05 level of significance. This indicated a significant correlation between early reading skills and learning environment in the classroom among preschool children.

Table 2: Correlation between early reading skills and home learning environment

Variables	Mean (SD)	r-calculated	r-critical
Home environment	15.22 ( $\pm 2.98$ )	0.29	0.195
Early reading skills	15.75 ( $\pm 3.16$ )		

$p < 0.05$

Table 2 depicts the correlation between early reading skills and home learning environment. From the results, it was noted that,  $r$ -calculated ( $r = 0.29$ ) is positive and is greater than the critical value ( $r = 0.195$ ) at 0.05 significant level. It proves a positive relationship between early reading skills and home learning environment. This shed a light that home environment creates positive learning atmosphere for a child to perform better in early reading skills.

Table 3: Correlation between early reading skills and peer group influence

Variables	Mean (SD)	r-calculated	r-critical
Home environment	13.99 ( $\pm 3.05$ )	0.22	0.195

Table 3 shows the correlation between early reading skills and peer group influence. The  $r$ -calculated ( $r=0.22$ ) is greater than the critical value ( $r=0.195$ ) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a positive and significant relationship between peer group influence and early reading skills.

### Discussion

The results of the study revealed that, learning environment in the classroom, at home as well as peer group play a significant role in the development of early reading skills among pre-school children. Classroom environment plays a major role at early stages of schooling as children spend most of their valuable time in learning facilitated interactive environment such as classroom. Igwe (2011) found significant relationship between classroom environment and children's learning achievements. Igwe (2011) also stated that the attractive and well-designed classroom facilitate positive interactions and motivates preschoolers to occupy with the work given to them. Current study findings also match with the view of Haugland (2000) who suggested that early childhood classroom must project opportunities to maximize early learning to ensure quality of academic skills. Early literacy development is also influenced by Malaysian government bilingual policies where it mandatory for all Malaysian to learn two official languages: Malay as the first language and a English language as the second language; and optional languages like Mandarin (for Chinese), or Tamil or other Indian languages (for Indians).

The present study also revealed a significant correlation between home environment and early reading skills. This might be due to constant support given by educated parents and caretakers by facilitating shared book reading, access to print, making children's interest in reading. Early onset of shared reading is found to be a predictor of future language and literacy development, school readiness and nurtures a love of reading (Dickinson, Griffith, & Golinkoff, 2012; Nelson, Dudovitz, & Tumaini, 2016), hence parents promotes early reading skills at home.. This finding was supported by Bornstein and Bradley (2008), who stated that reading achievements in school going children are associated with financial and material resources of the family. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Anders, Sammons, and Taggart et al. (2011) and Burchinal, Vandergrift, and Pianta et al (2010) who concluded that children from lower income and less educated families performed less in school than their counterparts. Another correlate of early reading skills such as peer group influence also found to be significant in the current study. This might be due to the fact that the identifying peers who are strong readers within the classroom might influence and motivate other children to be a part

of early reading skills. Peer group plays a major role and has a significant influence on other aspects of development such as language learning (Adeyeni, 2010; Henry & Rickman, 2006).

## Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to identify the factors influencing early reading skills among pre-school children. The results revealed that all the correlates such as classroom environment, home environment and peer group influence are significantly associated with early reading skills in preschool going children. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that educators and parents should remember to offer conducive learning atmosphere for pre-school children. Also provide stimulating classroom environment to enhance early reading skills. Parents should also be conscious to encourage the clear definition of play time and study time at home. Parents and teachers should also engage older siblings or peer group to serve as mentors to early ages preschoolers to showcase excellent reading achievements.

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