IMPROVING EMERGENT LITERACY: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL STORY BOOKS, WORDLESS PICTURE STORY BOOKS, AND ALPHABET STORY BOOKS

by

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Report

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Communication Sciences and Disorders

Elmhurst College

May, 2017
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate what type of storybook yields the most improvement of code-related emergent literacy skills for preschool-aged children who have specific language impairment. The particular emergent literacy skills that were analyzed were alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness. It was found that each book type has a different literacy skill(s) benefit for children learning to read during the emergent period. Specifically, alphabet storybooks seemed to help improve print awareness and alphabet knowledge. Wordless picture storybooks seemed to help improve print awareness whereas traditional storybooks seemed to help improve print awareness and alphabet knowledge. Phonological awareness was not a main focus for many of the studies. Additionally, an adult-led interaction with the text as well as explicit instruction was shown to benefit children the most.

Keywords: Emergent literacy, language weakness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness
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Introduction

The ability to read and write is fundamental in American society. However, according to Lee, Grigg, & Donahue (2007), more than one-third of America’s fourth graders read at levels so low they are not successful in school (as cited in National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). It has been reported that one in three children experience significant difficulties learning to read (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). Children who do experience early reading difficulties are also likely to continue to have trouble learning to read throughout future school years. Many research studies have demonstrated that early cognitive and linguistic development predict later academic achievement. Specifically, research has revealed that preschool learning is closely linked with reading achievement in the primary grades (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). This shows that the preschool years are key for successful learning and performance of reading.

During preschool, children acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills related to literacy development, known as emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy skills refer to the developmental precursors to fluent reading and writing that children develop before formal reading instruction (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) (as cited in National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Thus, these foundational skills are pivotal for children learning to read, as well as developing language.

Enhancing young children’s early literacy development is a top priority in many countries. This can be done through many different types of instruction. Specifically, research has shown that reading aloud to children is an important way to support early literacy and language development (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009). Emergent literacy skills develop primarily out of “literacy socialization.” This refers to the experiences in which the child listens to the book read by the adult and learns about the book and its language style (Paul & Norbury,
2012). It takes intentional planning to provide meaningful early learning experiences to build literacy skills. Implementation of high quality literacy instruction has the potential to improve literacy outcomes for all children, especially those “at risk.” Those who are deemed “at risk,” are individuals who are more likely to have difficulties and weaknesses with reading and writing in the future due to other factors, such as a low socioeconomic status or having early spoken language delays.

The purpose of this literature review was to investigate what type of storybook yields the most improvement of code-related emergent literacy skills for preschool-aged children who have language weakness. Specifically, this report will be answering the question, “For preschool children 3-5 years old with language weakness, do certain types of books (traditional storybooks, wordless picture story books, or alphabet story books) support code-related skills (alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness) that are necessary for the development of emergent literacy?” The specific aims of this report are discussed below.

**Aims**

The current study aims to address the gaps in the literature by investigating what type of storybook yields the most improvement of specific emergent literacy skills for preschool-aged children who have weak language.

*Aim 1: to identify which type of storybook yields the most improvement of emergent literacy skills (specifically alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, or print awareness).*

Print awareness received substantially less attention in the literature than other emergent literacy skills (Justice & Ezell, 2001). In addition, print awareness is shown to be a strong indicator of later reading skills (McGinty & Justice, 2009). By comparing a variety of studies for the
different storybook types this will indicate which type of storybook helped improve alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and/or print awareness the most.

**Aim 2: to identify if a particular type of storybook helps children with language weakness improve their emergent literacy skills.** Researchers have used many different types of stories when examining emergent literacy in preschool age children. However, there has been very little research conducted comparing these different types of stories and the benefit for eliciting emergent literacy skills in children with language weakness. By comparing a variety of studies for children with language difficulties and the different types of storybooks used will indicate whether the type of story plays a role improving emergent literacy skills.

**Aim 3: to contribute to the knowledge for differences between children with language weakness and who are typically developing with emergent literacy skills.** Preschool age children with language weakness tend to have difficulty with print awareness (McGinty & Justice, 2009) as well as other emergent literacy skills. By comparing a variety of studies for children with and without language difficulties, this will indicate the typical proficiency with emergent literacy skills.

**Background and Significance**

This section will include comprehensive information on emergent literacy as well as language weakness and the difficulty in development of emergent literacy with this population. Information on characteristics, diagnosis, prevalence, etiology and effects of the language disorder on emergent literacy will also be discussed.

**Emergent Literacy**

Emergent literacy refers to the reading and writing knowledge that young school-age children acquire prior to the development of conventional literacy (Ezell, Justice, & Parsons, 2000). There
were two important policy publications that brought national attention to emergent literacy as essential for school readiness in the U.S. (Invernizzi, Landrum, Teichman, & Townsend, 2010). The first was a joint statement released by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA), recognizing that emergent literacy is a) a domain of development in its own right b) worthy of the allocation of resources c) capable of supporting its own set of standards. A second important policy publication was *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* by the National Research Council, which placed emergent reading in the public health model of risk prevention, emphasizing the impact early literacy has on school outcomes (Invernizzi, Landrum, Teichman, & Townsend, 2010). The acquisition of this knowledge also starts before formal instruction and does not progress through a series of predetermined, sequential steps (Erickson, 2000). This development usually occurs between three to five years old (Paul & Norbury, 2012). Emergent literacy skills develop in different children at different rates. The amount of literacy knowledge children acquire during this period depends on how much exposure they have to literacy artifacts, events, as well as their interest and facility in learning. This is referred to as “literacy socialization” (Kamhi & Catts, 2012). Literacy socialization refers to the social and cultural aspects of learning to read. These are important factors when learning to read because these influence the acquisition of the foundational skills. If an individual does have difficulty with these foundational skills, this can result in reading difficulties. A leading categorization of developmental reading disorders is referred to as “Simple View.” Below is a table describing the different types of reading disorders that can be as a result of having difficulty with comprehension and/or word recognition.
There is a myriad of emergent literacy components. The National Early Literacy Panel in 2008 identified eleven variables as essential for early skills or abilities relevant to later literacy development (p. vii). These included: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or digits, rapid automatic naming of colors or objects, writing name, phonological memory, concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing (p. viii) (Welsch, Sullivan & Justice, 2003). Emergent literacy skills can be subdivided into code-based skills and meaning-based skills. Code-based skills consist of book/print knowledge, alphabet knowledge, and phonological awareness. Meaning-based skills consist of oral language, specifically considering vocabulary, comprehension and narratives. For the purposes of this research, the focus will be on code-based skills. Code-based skills have been shown in research to be representative of future literacy abilities and for this reason will be helpful in determining the type of storybook that could help improve those skills. However, an interested reader could refer to The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) for more information on the two categories of emergent literacy components.

**Alphabet Knowledge.** Alphabet knowledge refers to the understanding of alphabetic units (graphemes) (Justice & Ezell, 2002). This includes understanding details and distinctive features of letters as well as the names of individual letters. Knowledge of the alphabet is one of the best predictors of children’s early reading proficiency (Adams, 1990) (as cited in Justice & Ezell,
Children tend to learn the names of letters before they learn the sounds that correspond with those letters. However, learning the names of letters is indirectly related to learning to read. Specifically, knowing the names of letters facilitates learning the sounds that correspond to the printed characters because many letter sounds are embedded in the name of the letter. For example, the sound /b/ in the letter “B.” Thus, research has shown that alphabetic knowledge (letter-name and letter-sound knowledge) and phonological awareness are critical for students’ reading acquisition in language with alphabetic orthographies (Kim, Foorman, Petscher, & Zhou, 2010).

**Phonological Awareness.** Phonological awareness describes young children’s implicit and explicit knowledge about the sound structure of oral language (Justice, Pulle, & Pence, 2008). This includes awareness of rhyme and alliterative patterns across words. It can be defined as “the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structure of an utterance as distinct from its meaning” (Stackhouse & Wells, 1997, p. 53). In order to gain phonological awareness children must first understand the sound structure of language (Hawken et al., 2005). This sound awareness is developed through various experiences and factors in a child’s life. However, it does not develop in a series of steps or in a strict order; rather it develops differently for each child at various rates (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). This awareness can be slow to develop in those with language weakness. This awareness is helpful for children because it is essential in learning the alphabet and learning to read and spell. Specifically, children need to learn sound segments and that segments are represented in a written form by letters. When spelling, letters can be blended together to form a word, and decoded back into segments when reading (Stackhouse et al., 1997). However, the development of phonological awareness starts from larger to smaller units. Particularly, developing the sounds of language in order to understand at
the phoneme level, sound level and then word level. For example, the word “sun” has three phonemes /s/, /u/, /n/. The table below shows different linguistic units from largest (sentence) to smallest (phoneme).

Table 2

*Examples of Phoneme Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>The sun shined brightly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllable</td>
<td>sun-ny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onset-Rime</td>
<td>s-un, s-unshine, s-unny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme</td>
<td>s-u-n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While understanding letters and their sounds is vital to reading, children can also struggle with understanding the role of print and its purpose.

*Print Awareness.* Print awareness refers to the ability to understand form and function of conventional print. Print awareness can be defined as “a child’s understanding of the nature and uses of print, and the sound-letter relationships” (Massetti, 2009, p. 555). Specifically, this includes correct orientation of a book, how print is organized (e.g., left to right directionality of print, particularly this skill varies by language/orthography), environmental print recognition, the manner in which pages are turned and read, the understanding that print holds meaning, and letters form the words spoken by the reader (Hawken et al., 2005). Print awareness is mastered through storybook reading and exposure to print (Hawken et al., 2005). That is because development of print awareness requires “direct contacts with print” (Snow, 1991, p. 7), thus
shared storybook reading represents a salient early childhood routine in which direct contact with print is prominent. For instance, Justice and Ezell (2002) found that there was a positive influence of children’s participation in shared reading sessions with a print focus. Specifically, there were greater gains in pre-literacy skills compared to children in the control group who had a picture focus. Overall, emergent literacy is developed during the preschool years, but if a child has difficulty with these foundational skills, issues with language development could be a reason.

**Language Weakness**

Language weakness is an important area to consider with emergent literacy because this can inhibit preschool age children from developing those necessary skills. Within the field of atypical language development, there are many different terms used. The terms “late talkers” or “children with expressive language delay” are used to describe children who are developmentally lagging behind in certain aspects of language (e.g., vocabulary, phonology, syntax). Another term that can be used is “late talkers.” Late talkers are children 18 to 35 months old who acquire language at a slower rate than their typically developing peers. These children tend to have limited expressive vocabulary and/or receptive language with usually no other deficits. Some late talkers manage to catch up during the preschool years while others do not. For the consistency of this review, language weakness will be used as an encompassing term when considering all aspects of atypical language development during the 3 to 5 year ages.

**Prevalence.** Typically, language weakness is a frequently reported concern. Thus data based on parental report checklists suggests that around 10-15% of 2-year olds show expressive vocabulary of fewer than 30-50 words or no word combinations. In 18-23 month old children, the percentage of later talkers is estimated to be around 13.5%, and increases to 17.5% for 30-36 month olds (Hawa & Spandoudis, 2014). Although it is important to note that 3-year olds can be
defined showing language weakness by using checklists or clinical criteria on standardized tests that consider later language markers.

**Etiology.** The cause of some language weakness is known. For example, an individual with cerebral palsy has a speech disorder due to an issue with the nervous system. Additionally, an individual with a cleft palate has a speech disorder due to physical anomalies of the mouth. However, with language weakness it is not always known. One variable, genetic influence, has been shown to be a cause of language weakness in children. Hayiou-Thomas & Plomin (2013), found that parents’ concern about their child’s language development seems to be attributed to heritable reasons and are not predictive of language issues in early adolescence.

There are also factors that place an individual at risk for language difficulties. Children with language weakness have the possibility of recovering during the preschool years, while others do not. Many studies have attempted to identify predictors that differentiate later talkers into those who do or do not recover (Everitt, Hannaford, Conti-Ramsden, 2013). In a recent study of 26 late talkers and 70 average talkers, it was found that a family history of language literacy problems was a significant predictor for persisting problems past the age of 4 years (as cited in Bishop et al., 2012). The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force conducted a review on the risk factors associated with screen for speech and language delay for children up to 5 years old. The most consistently reported risk factors for children with language weakness has included a family history of speech and language delay, male gender, and perinatal factors (as cited in Nelson et al. 2006). These findings were also consistent in study by Bishop, Holt, Line, McDonald, McDonald, & Watt (2012) examining if parental phonological memory contributes to prediction of late talkers. In addition, Zambrana, Pons, Eadie, & Ystrom (2014) found that family history and male gender as well as poor early communicative skills predicted language
weakness trajectories in the preschool years. Everitt, Hannaford, and Conti-Ramsden (2013) conducted a study in which they examined what markers previously identified in older children for language weakness to determine whether they could be used at an earlier age to identify children with language weakness. They found that the ability of recalling sentences (adapted from the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-CELF) was a good indication of language weakness.

Children from lower SES environments were found to acquire language skills at a slower rate than those from more affluent circumstances. Hawa & Spanoudis (2014) found that in their review of the literature of late talkers, children who come from families characterized by low educational levels and poverty are more likely to experience delays and difficulties in expressive language.

**Diagnosis.** Diagnosis of language disorders at 3-5 years old can be difficult to determine due to the young age of children. Clinically, it is generally accepted that it is better to identify children with language weakness at an earlier age so that intervention can be started and to limit any future social and academic sequelae (Everitt, Hannaford, Conti-Ramsden, 2013). However, there could also be negative consequences of treating children at an early age when the diagnosis is not certain. Children with poor language skills have significant deficits in the comprehension and/or expression of language (Petrill, Logan, Sawyer, & Justice, 2014). Children with language problems are six times more likely to develop reading problems than children with typical language skills. Nevertheless, this is not a linear relationship. Meaning, that some children with language weakness may not perform as poorly as expected from their diagnosis.

**Emergent Literacy Skills.** Therefore, children with language weakness show a wide variability in emergent literacy performance (Cabell et al., 2010). For instance, Justice et al.,
(2015) conducted a study examining early literacy skills of children with language impairments. The study’s results indicated that there are specific profiles of early literacy skills among children with language impairments, with about one half of children exhibiting a profile indicating potential susceptibility for future reading problems. Children with language weakness do not do as well with meaning-based skills, but in terms of code-related skills Cabell et al., (2010) found that children with language weakness performed poorly on alphabet knowledge and print concepts as well as phonological awareness. Children with language weakness exhibit substantially lower performance on emergent literacy measures compared to peers with typically developing language skills (Cabell, Lomax, Justice, Breit-Smith, Skibbe, & McGinty, 2010).

**Alphabet Knowledge.** Alphabet knowledge is a robust precursor of future decoding skill (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002); children with language weakness tend to know fewer letters than their typically developing peers at the end of preschool (Cabell et al., 2010). West et al. (2000) reported that children whose mothers that had less education and/or who were from families of lower income had fewer letter naming skills in the preschool years, which put them at risk for low achievement in reading. Researchers have also reported a relation between letter knowledge skills and phonological processing skills. However, it is unknown if one skill facilitates the development of the other skill (Molfese, Modglin, Beswick, Neamon, Berg, Berg & Molnar, 2006). Molfese and colleagues (2006) conducted a study examining the development of reading skills in 4-year old children from low-income households. Fall to spring gains in letter identification were examined and compared with skills in phonological processing, rhyme detection, and environmental print. The study found that children from lower-income households who received an intervention still did not improve in terms of alphabet knowledge in comparison to their peers. The researchers also reported that other cognitive skills in the study were related.
For instance, there was group differences in rhyme detection and print knowledge. For this reason, phonological awareness and print awareness are also an important area to address with language weakness when it comes to reading books.

**Phonological Awareness.** Phonological awareness refers to an individual’s sensitivity to the sound structure of spoken language. Skills in this area have been shown to have a causal association with reading development. This area tends to be a documented area of weakness for many children with language weakness. This also tends to be considered a core-processing deficit in those who have difficulty reading. Thus, we want to address risks of reading delay or any aspects that put children at risk. Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, and Colton (2003) implemented a 12-week intervention program designed to explicitly teach phonological awareness to preschool children with speech and language disorders from low-income environments through a variety of activities. These activities included naming and identifying letters in their name, reciting the alphabet while viewing alphabet cards, and playing games (i.e., rhyme detection, rhyme production, sentence or syllable segmentation, or initial sound identification). Justice and colleagues (2003) results indicated that children in the group receiving explicit intervention had improved on measures of alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness, and other aspects measured in the study. Phonological awareness has received a lot of attention in past research, nonetheless print awareness is an area that has been shown to be an area of difficulty for those with a language weakness.

**Print Awareness.** Print awareness represents children’s knowledge about the form and functions of print. This area is a domain of emergent literacy development that is strongly associated with later reading skills and is a particular area of difficulty for children with language weakness (McGinty & Justice, 2009). This difficulty with print awareness may stem from the
linguistic weaknesses of children with language difficulties. A lot of the research in this area has been conducted in the context of adults playing a role in explicitly teaching children about the form and functions of print during shared-story book reading. For instance, Justice, Pullen & Pence (2008) conducted a study examining the effects of adult verbal and nonverbal references to print on children’s visual attention to print during storybook reading. Justice and colleagues found that children rarely look at print, with about 5%-6% of their attention is allocated to print conditions. However, children’s attention did increase when adults verbally and nonverbally referenced print. Both of which exhibited similar effects. The authors concluded that explicit referencing to print is a way to increase children’s experience with print during shared storybook reading. Thus, storybooks play a big role in developing children’s emergent literacy skills.

Types of Storybooks

It is important to understand what students need to be successful readers and writers as they enter formal schooling. Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003) shared seven teaching strategies with strong research links to early literacy skills, three of which were storybook reading, support for emergent reading and shared book experiences. Shared storybook reading is a highly ritualized teaching activity that has changed across time, in a somewhat predictable manner. Children tend to label and comment on pictures, but are unable to tell a story. They gradually learn to tell a more consistent story, with acquiring more language as they progress that is similar to written language, which then progresses eventually to the child being able to read independently. What makes a good book that can also enhance learning is a difficult debate, and one that many are discussing.

Traditional Storybooks. Traditional storybooks combine visual and verbal narratives that utilize orthography. For instance, Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004) observed how
children relied heavily on illustrations as well as the language to tell the story. Children were then able to make visual associations with the text. Plot and language are both prevalent in traditional storybooks, which are identified as traditional story attributes. Characters in the story are an important feature of traditional storybooks as well. According to educators and researchers, these types of books facilitate discussion due to interest in the pictures and/or the words (Moody, Justice, Cabell, 2010). Although, these are not the only books used in the classroom at the preschool age.

**Wordless Picture Storybooks.** Another type of book used in the preschool classroom is wordless picture storybooks. Wordless picture storybooks are defined as “pure” picture books (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, Zhang, 2002). Jalongo and colleagues reported that “high-quality” wordless picture books should have the pictures telling the story (p. 167). There are many benefits to this type of text as well. One of these benefits could be that this type of text utilizes a preschooler’s cognitive skills from the beginning. For instance, most children learn to recognize, interpret, and express themselves through pictures long before they master print. Wordless picture books also encourage children to apply visual literacy skills not just from inferring from the pages, but also from the quality of the images. These types of books also provide an opportunity for children to invent narratives, develop a new sense of story, and demonstrate an understanding of sequence.

**Alphabet Storybooks.** These books focus on emphasizing alphabet knowledge. In addition, these books can vary in many dimensions, such as the nature of the pictures in them. The main skills fostered with this type of book are: letter-shape knowledge or letter recognition, letter-name knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and letter-picture correspondence (Bradley & Jones, 2007). Regardless of the individual differences that might affect how children learn letter
sounds from letter names, training in letter names and letter sounds appears to benefit children's letter-sound knowledge more than training in letter sounds alone (Piasta & Wagner, 2010b). It has been suggested that children may benefit from this type of book because their teachers emphasize the content in a concise and structured manner. Specifically, children are learning about the alphabet in meaningful contexts, which possibly contributes to print awareness. A joint position paper by the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, states “alphabet books and alphabet puzzles in which children can see and compare letters may be a key to efficient and easy learning” (IRA & NAEYC, 1998). According to Bradley & Jones (2007), while children may have difficulty with the illustration in an alphabet book, reading this type of book provides a medium in which print is discussed significantly more frequently than compared to a traditional storybook. Given that alphabet storybooks focus on teaching the alphabet, it is possible that instruction with alphabet storybooks might have similar effects on letter name and letter sound knowledge. In summation, there are many different types of storybooks for children. However, each book seems to serve a different purpose, especially in regard to emergent literacy skills. Thus, this research will be examining which type of storybook seems to elicit and enhance emergent literacy skills.

**Results and Discussion**

This section will provide the results and discussion from the literature review and analysis conducted. Specifically, results will be explained first, followed by a discussion of the findings. The purpose of this study was to investigate what type of storybook yields the most improvement of specific emergent literacy skills for preschool-aged children who have or are at risk for a specific language impairment. This research investigated a wide variety of research studies that utilized certain types of storybooks or investigated the literature further on emergent
literacy and strategies used with different types of reading instruction. The specific book types that were analyzed in the studies were wordless picture storybooks, alphabet storybooks and traditional storybooks. The emergent literacy factors that were analyzed were print awareness, phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. Results were formed based on the type of text used, emergent literacy skills analyzed and the findings from the study. The discussion will follow each story type and evaluate the findings presented from the results analyzed. Finally, an overview of the results will be discussed after each story type has been discussed as well as Table 3 that summarizes the findings.

**Traditional Storybooks**

Upon analysis of the limited literature that involved and/or utilized traditional books when examining emergent literacy skills in their research, it was shown that print awareness was elicited in various manners. Specifically, the research showed that print awareness and occasionally alphabet knowledge were improved when reading traditional picture books. For instance, Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek and Fan (2010) saw improvement in children’s print awareness scores after having had print reference from adults when reading books. Specifically, children who received print referencing style of reading had significantly higher print knowledge scores than children who did not receive print reference reading style. In addition, Justice and Ezell (2002) examined the impact of a print focused reading style for children from low-income households. The results showed improvement for those that received print focus in their print awareness as well as an increase in alphabet knowledge. Thus, these studies showcase that traditional storybooks can help children develop primarily their print awareness and some alphabet knowledge depending on the approach to instruction.
Similar to the findings with alphabet knowledge, one of the biggest themes from this category of literature was that teacher-led instruction/emphasis was key for children to improve their print awareness and some alphabet knowledge. For instance, Zucker, Justice and Piasta (2009) examined the frequency of which adults reference print when reading to preschool age children. The researchers found that teachers referenced print, especially more often when there was print salient features present which benefitted children. Print salient features refer to instances that of contextualized print in illustrations. Specifically, visible sound or speech bubbles near pictured characters or environmental print on pictured objects. Additionally, Justice, Pullen, and Pence (2008) examined how children examine print within a traditional storybook. The researchers found that while children did not look at print as often as expected, their awareness increased once adults verbally and nonverbally referenced print. In all, these studies showcase that traditional storybooks can help children develop primarily their print awareness and some alphabet knowledge dependent on the instruction.

**Wordless Picture Storybooks**

Upon analysis of the limited literature that involved and/or utilized wordless picture storybooks when examining emergent literacy skills in research, it is shown that wordless picture storybooks help elicit and foster development for print awareness skills. For instance, Justice and Kaderavek (2002) examined the benefit of shared storybook reading and explained that children already tend to fixate on print embedded within illustrations and illustrations in general and that narrative print is rarely attended to during reading. However, it is important to note that most of the illustrations had text embedded in the picture. Justice and Kaderavek (2002) explained that illustrations help children make sense of the storyline without having them distracted by narrative print. Additionally, Justice and Kaderavek (2002) explained that referencing to the print
when reading seemed to show the most benefit as well for children. Thus, showcasing that teacher-led/adult-instruction is key for children learning this emergent literacy skill with these types of storybooks. However, Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad and Zhang (2002) explained that many teachers do not have experience with this type of text. As a result, many do not know how to select quality wordless books for students. Additionally, many reported that their public and school libraries were not well stocked with wordless books. Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad and Zhang (2002) went on to explain that many wordless books are designed for children ranging two years to eight years old. Thus, making them suited for the early childhood years. These studies showcase that wordless books can help children develop their print awareness, but there is truly a limited amount of research to make concrete conclusions.

**Alphabet Storybooks**

Upon analysis of the limited literature that involved and utilized alphabet storybooks when examining emergent literacy skills in research, it was shown that alphabet storybooks help elicit and foster development of alphabetical knowledge in various manners. Specifically, the literature reviewed supports the logic that using an alphabet storybook will help preschool children acquire and foster their alphabet knowledge. The research also showed that adult/teacher led instruction in read-alouds or small groups showed improvement in preschool children as well. Specifically, the research showed that alphabet knowledge and some phonological awareness skills were improved when using an alphabet storybook. For instance, Chiong & DeLaoache (2012) examined the benefit of using alphabet storybooks in two different studies in which it was shown that after an interaction with the text and emphasis on the emergent literacy skill, alphabet knowledge, children improved in their letter recognition. The authors also showed that children did not learn as much when the book had extra manipulative features (e.g., flap, different
textures, etc.). Another study conducted by Nodelman (2001) showed that children developed more alphabetic knowledge from alphabet storybooks than from traditional storybooks because the book allowed for conversations about letters and the alphabet. Thus, these types of books provide the opportunity for the child to learn that specific emergent literacy skill.

One of the biggest themes from this category of literature was that teacher-led instruction/emphasis was key for children to improve with their alphabet knowledge. Specifically, Bradley and Jones (2007), conducted a study examining if the genre of alphabet storybooks would influence what the teacher instructs as well as what aspects they teach during whole-class read alouds. The study showed that alphabet storybooks did influence what teachers emphasize. Specifically, teacher’s “talk” was related to alphabet knowledge, text features and involvement. This then helped students with building this foundational knowledge by using questions and comments geared towards that specific emergent literacy skill (alphabet knowledge). However, when analyzing the literature, it was evident there are limited studies on this subject. These studies showcase important information that using a specific type of storybook that aligns with a particular type of emergent literacy skill when with instruction/emphasis will benefit a child learning these foundational skills.

**Language Weakness**

There was limited research that focused on children with language weakness when examining different areas of emergent literacy. There were two studies that focused on children who were deemed at risk, both of which focused on print awareness. Justice & Ezzell (2002) evaluated the impact of participation in book-reading sessions with a print focus on print awareness in preschool children from low-income households. The results demonstrated the effectiveness of embedding print cues into book-reading sessions for enhancing print awareness
for at-risk children. However, the children in the experimental group made significantly greater gains than those in the control group. Such changes in skill level likely resulted from the inclusion of alphabet knowledge prompts into the print-focus reading sessions. In comparison, Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan (2010) determined the effectiveness of teachers’ use of a print-referencing style during whole-class read-alouds with respect to accelerating 4- and 5-year old children’s print-knowledge development through specific intervention. The results found that there was improvement in print awareness for individuals who received explicit instruction from an adult. Both of these studies showcase that adult-reference and focus on a particular emergent literacy skill can increase pre-literacy foundational skills for children.

Overview

Upon analysis of the three different types of books, it was found that each book type seems to have a different literacy skill(s) benefit for children learning to read during the emergent period. The table below explains the general findings from the studies analyzed for each book type.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Type</th>
<th>Print Awareness</th>
<th>Alphabet Knowledge</th>
<th>Phonological Awareness (PA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet Storybooks</td>
<td>Some studies showcased that print awareness was improved with adult reference</td>
<td>All studies showcased that alphabet knowledge was improved through this book type</td>
<td>Some studies showcased that phonological awareness was improved with adult reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordless Picture</td>
<td>Some studies showcased that print awareness was improved with reference and</td>
<td>There was no mention of alphabet knowledge during the studies</td>
<td>There was no mention of phonological awareness during the studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storybooks</td>
<td>embedded in the pictures, especially with adult reference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>All studies showcased that print awareness was improved with adult reference</td>
<td>Some studies showcased that alphabet knowledge was improved when interacting with</td>
<td>There was no mention of phonological awareness during the studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storybooks</td>
<td></td>
<td>this type of text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. There were 10 studies analyzed for the table. Each study was analyzed based on book type and the type of emergent literacy skill it may elicit.
A huge theme throughout all book types was that an adult-interaction with text showed the most benefit for children. This may have been attributed to “literacy socialization” (Kamhi & Catts, 2012). As explained earlier in the paper, this means that children acquire literacy knowledge dependent on how much exposure they have to literacy artifacts or events. As many of the studies had the teacher and/or an adult referencing a particular emergent literacy skill through read-alouds, small group instruction or shared reading, children’s exposure to text was increased and more explicit than merely interacting with the text. Specifically, certain aspects of how emergent literacy skills were referenced by an adult seemed to increase the likelihood of a child learning more about that skill. For instance, Chiong & DeLoache (2012), had adults reference alphabet books with children one-on-one by focusing on letters through direct reference by pointing to the letter, naming the letter three times and naming the picture associated with the letter. As a result, this increased children’s letter knowledge. In another study, Willoughby, Evans & Nowak (2015), had the children listen to an alphabet book through a read aloud, in which the cover and the title were specifically explained and presented before starting the story. The children were also given time to respond to each page by calling out objects or letters and then afterwards were given time to explore the book. Overall, certain techniques and strategies with read alouds or individual instruction lead to the benefit of children learning particular emergent literacy skills.

Additionally, print awareness was a huge theme throughout all book types. This means that every book type elicited some form of print awareness skill or awareness in the children after having had interacted with the text. This may be attributed to the reasoning that print awareness is indirectly a part of every type of book. Then in conjunction with adult reference, there was an increase in knowledge. As explained earlier in the paper, a majority of the research
has been conducted in the context of adults playing a role in explicitly teaching children about
the form and functions of print during shared-story book reading. Specifically, adults referenced
print awareness in various ways. For example, Justice & Ezell (2002) had the adults by pose
prompts (requests or questions) geared towards print awareness to children. This was the same
process for Justice, Pullen and Pence (2008) and Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan
(2010) as well. Overall, presenting that print awareness can be easily and strategically
implemented into everyday reading with various types of texts.

Clinical Implications
Based on the research reviewed and examined throughout the entirety of this literature
review, it has been concluded that dependent on the objective, certain storybook types are helpful
to increase and develop emergent literacy skills. Additionally, children need adult guidance at
this age, in which shared storybook reading seems to elicit the best benefit.

Specifically in regards to storybook type and benefit, alphabet storybooks would be
beneficial for increasing alphabet knowledge as well as print awareness. Chiong & DeLaoache
(2012) and Nodelman (2001) showed that children’s knowledge of alphabet knowledge and print
awareness increased when using an alphabet book. This was due to a few reasons. For instance,
the type of book provided the opportunity for adults to reference those emergent literacy skills
because they were a part of the book. Wordless picture storybooks would be beneficial for print
awareness (Justice and Kaderavek, 2002). This was because the text was periodically embedded
in the pictures throughout the book, providing the adult the opportunity to reference the emergent
literacy skills. Lastly, traditional storybooks would be beneficial for print awareness and alphabet
knowledge (Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek and Fan, 2010) (Zucker, Justice and Piasta,
2009). This type of storybook also posed the opportunity for adults to reference these emergent
literacy skills due to being a part of the book. Overall, it would be advised to use a particular type of storybook with a client based on the emergent literacy that it has been shown to elicit.

Specifically in regards to adult guidance and emergent literacy skills, children seem to benefit the most from explicit and structured instruction. Throughout most of the literature, the studies were conducted with an adult instructor and as a result, children showed improvement versus not receiving instruction from a teacher or adult. Thus it would be recommended to conduct therapy that focused on improving emergent literacy individually or in a group dynamic, in the classroom or at home.

**Limitations and Future Research**

While there is an abundance of information on emergent literacy and the different types of skills during the period, there are a few limitations that warrant discussion and require future research to be conducted. Specifically, there is limited literature on the different storybook types as well as focusing on phonological awareness. Additionally, there is a lack of research involving children who have a language weakness.

Due to the lack of studies focusing on the topic of emergent literacy skills and storybook type, future research should be conducted in this area of speech-language pathology to be more thorough regarding different book types for children and their benefit with emergent literacy skills. Since books are a pivotal part of developing children’s emergent literacy, it is key to have a deeper analysis of the different types of books conducted in order to fully understand their benefit. During the research process, there was more literature conducted on alphabet storybooks than any other type of storybook. There was a huge lack of research on wordless picture storybooks. This may be attributed due to the lack of wordless picture storybooks used in the classroom or household (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad and Zhang, 2002). There is also a lack of
research focusing on phonological awareness as a whole with different storybook types. This is an important area because this area tends to be a documented area of difficulty for many children with language weakness (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, and Zhang, 2002). Thus, if there were storybook types that helped children improve this skill, then adult interaction would be more structured and beneficial.

There was also a lack of studies involving children with language weakness. A small amount of studies focused on children who were at-risk. For example, Justice & Ezell (2002) and Justice, McGinty, Piasata, Kaderavek, & Fan (2010) showed an increase in emergent literacy skills when given explicit instruction from an adult for children who were at-risk. However, those were the only two studies which incorporated children at-risk for language difficulties out of ten studies analyzed. Since language weakness is a prevalent issue in preschool children and can manifest to bigger difficulties, it is important to address these issues as soon as possible. Thus, future research should be conducted with this population using different types of books.
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