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# The Effect of a Dialogic Reading Program on the Early Literacy Skills of Children in Preschool Period

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of an dialogic reading program on expressive language vocabulary and category naming skills, which are among the early literacy skills of preschool children. The research was designed in the quasi-experimental model, which is one of the quantitative research methods. The sample of the study consisted of a total of 30 children, 15 girls and 15 boys, between 64 and 72 months of age, who attended a kindergarten in Konya. Fifteen of the children were in the control group and 15 of them were in the experimental group. In addition to the existing preschool education program applied to the groups within the scope of the study, a 10-week dialogic reading program was applied to the experimental group. In the research, "Demographic Information Form" was used as the data collection tool and "Early Literacy Test (ELT)" was used as pre-test and post-test. According to the results of the research, the post-test scores of all groups' expressive language vocabulary and category naming skills increased significantly compared to the pre-test scores. However, the post-test scores of expressive language vocabulary and category naming skills of the experimental group were significantly higher than the control group. Accordingly, it was concluded that the dialogic reading program applied significantly increased the expressive language vocabulary and category naming skills, which are among the early literacy skills.

**Keywords:** Early Literacy, Dialogic Reading, Expressive Language Vocabulary, Category Naming

## 1. Introduction

According to Lerner (2000), early literacy is the acquainting of children to books, stories and poems at an early age. This skill encourages children to become acquainted with stories, books and early writing experiences at an early age. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) describe the early literacy process as a process in which the prerequisite skills that children should have before the formal literacy process are developed. There are different definitions of early literacy. These different definitions have a lot in common. These common elements form the basis of literacy and contribute "directly or indirectly" to the process of acquiring literacy (Doyle, 2009). Early literacy is a process that reveals the necessary prerequisites for children to read. Early literacy is all of the prerequisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that children are expected to acquire regarding literacy in the period before they start formal

literacy education in the early period. (Gupta, 2009). When all these definitions and expressions are evaluated, it is possible to say that early literacy skills are one of the main predictors of early reading skills (Kargin et al., 2017).

The development of literacy skills begins before the formal process of learning to read and write. Children form the basis for many literacy skills from birth. In the preschool period, children encounter stimuli that support their language development. This advancement in verbal language significantly supports the development of the child's reading and writing skills. In addition, the cognitive, social and emotional development of the child also provides important contributions to the literacy process. In this context, it can be said that literacy develops in a natural process and that experiences related to these skills from the first years of life will help children to be aware of early literacy (Erdoğan, 2013). enables them to acquire many of the skills that form the basis for literacy (Nelson, 2005; Kargin et al., 2017; Erdoğan, 2013).

Dialogic reading (DR) refers to a process in which the child's verbal language skills and vocabulary are aimed to be developed and adults and children read books interactively (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst, Epstein et al., 1994). In DR, the child and the adult change their roles and with the guidance of the adult, the child learns to be the reader of the story. In this process, the adult assumes the roles of listening actively and asking questions to the child about the story. The children are asked questions about the events in the stories and opportunities are provided for them to talk about the book. Expands by identifying words that children may not know and repeating responses from the child. (Whitehurst, Arnold et al., 1994; Justice & Pullen, 2003).

When the results obtained from the studies on this subject are examined, it is seen that early literacy skills should be supported in the pre-school period and that these skills have an effect on academic success in the short and long term. Reading together with children at school and home environments by adults is most effective methods to support this skills. When researches in this regard are examined, it is observed that children who routinely participate in reading activities with an adult in the preschool period are more successful in language skills, especially in expressive language skills and vocabulary (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Beck et al., 2002; Armbruster et al., 2003; Huebner & Payne, 2010; Greene & Lynch-Brown, 2002). It is suggested that activities that involve reading together create very effective contexts for children to learn new words and words that cannot be learned in a single reading are easily acquired by children through repeated reading of the books (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Senechal & Cornell, 1993). Such results emphasize the importance of providing information infrastructure for dialogic reading and offering educational support to educators and families. In this context, the present study aims to investigate the effect of an dialogic reading program applied to preschool children on expressive language vocabulary and category naming skills, which are among the early literacy skills.

## 2. Method

In this study, the quasi-experimental model with a pre-test post-test control group, which is one of the quantitative research methods, was used in order to examine the effect of the dialogic reading program in the preschool period on children's early literacy skills, such as expressive language vocabulary and category naming sub-skills. Random assignment was not implemented in the selection of the experimental and control groups; since the current order of the school could not be changed, two equivalent classes were determined and groups were assigned.

### 2.1 Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of children attending a public preschool education institution in Konya Meram district. The sample consisted of 30 children aged 64-72 months who attended the public school where the researcher worked. In order to conduct a more suitable experimental study with the participants, the children at the school where the researcher worked were included in the sample using the convenience sampling technique. 15 of the children were in the control group and 15 of them were in the experimental group.

Table 1: Distribution of the preschool children in the study by gender

Groups	Gender	f	%
Experimental	Girl	6	20,0

Control	Boy	9	30,0
	Girl	9	20,0
	Boy	6	30,0
Total		30	100

According to Table 1, 15 (50.0 %) children were girls and 15 (50.0 %) were boys. 6 girls (20.0%) and 9 boys (30.0%) were in the experimental group, and 9 boys (30.0%) 6 girls (20.0%) were in the control group.

Table 2: Distribution of the preschool children in the study by age

Groups	Age(months)	f	%
Experimental	64	2	6,67
	65	2	6,67
	66	2	6,67
	67	1	3,33
	69	2	6,67
	71	1	3,33
	72	5	16,67
Control	64	2	6,67
	65	1	3,33
	67	2	6,67
	68	1	3,33
	69	2	6,67
	70	3	10,00
	72	4	13,33
Total		30	100,0

According to Table 2, 4 (13.33 %) of the preschool children included in the study were 64 months old, 3 (10.0 %) 65 months old, 2 (6.67 %) 66 months old, 3 (10.0%) 67 months old, 1 (3.33 %) 68 months old, 4 (13.33 %) 69 months old, 3 (10.0 %) 70 months, 1 (3.33 %) 71 months old, and 9 (30.0 %) 72 months old.

## 2.2 Data Collection Tools

A demographic information form created by the researchers was used to collect information on the gender, age and number of siblings.

Within the scope of the study, Early Literacy Test (ELT) was applied to the experimental and control groups as pre-test and post-test. ELT consists of 7 subscales (Kargin et al., 2015). Expressive language vocabulary and category naming tests, which are subscales of ELT, were used in the study. The expressive language vocabulary subscale includes a sample item and 15 questions. In the category naming subscale, there is a sample item and 10 questions, and children are asked to say how the pictures shown to them are named in general. The upper and lower factor loads of the items in the expressive language vocabulary subscale were found to be .63 - .45, and the items in the category naming subscale were found to be .62-.43. In the correlation analysis performed with the Turkish Early Language Development Test for criterion validity, the correlation coefficient was calculated as .372 in the expressive language vocabulary subscale and .309 in the category naming subscale. The KR-20 coefficient calculated for the reliability of the expressive language vocabulary subscale was found to be .81, and the two-half test reliability was found to be .80. The KR-20 coefficient calculated for the reliability of the category naming subscale was .72, and the two-half test reliability was .70. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was .89 in the expressive language vocabulary subscale and .68 in the category naming subscale.

## 2.3 Application Process

The dialogic reading program was planned as 10 weeks. It consisted of 3 sessions each week. It was a program consisting of 30 sessions in total. Prior to the program, the books to be used in DR were determined. It was ensured

that the books chosen were suitable for the 3-6 age group of preschool children and contained pictures that involved striking details, were conducive to the language production of the children as well as being clear and understandable. The selected books were presented to experts for their opinions and their opinions were taken. After the book selection, target words were determined for each book. Attention was paid to include words that children had not yet met, as well as words that children had just learned. During the sessions, the child was directed to the book by drawing attention to the character in the book, the characters in the book were introduced to the child, the target words in the books that were selected were supplemented with pictures, the target words were matched with the prepared pictures and repeated, 5W1H questions (What, where, who, why, when and how) were used open-ended questions were asked, repetitions and expansions were performed, and activities such as completing sentences, predicting the end of the story, finding a title for the story, associating (connecting what happened in the story with what happened in the child's life), and producing a new ending were included.

#### 2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The Early Literacy Test (ELT) expressive language vocabulary and category naming subscales used in the study were administered to the control and experimental groups by the researcher as a pre-test before the application and as a post-test after the application. The information form created by the researcher, on the other hand, was filled by the families of the children. The collected data were arranged and analyzed with the help of SPSS program. According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test results of the data obtained from the scale, it was found that  $p > .05$  and it was concluded that it showed a normal distribution. Accordingly, independent samples t-test and paired samples t test was used in the analysis of the data.

### 3. Results

The t-test results of the early literacy expressive language vocabulary pre-test scores of the children are given in Table-3.

Table 3: t-test results of early literacy expressive language vocabulary test pre-test scores

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Control	15	9.33	.90	-.757	.255
Experimental	15	9.67	1.45		

According to Table 3., the mean score of the early literacy expressive language vocabulary pre-test scores of the control group was calculated as 9.33, and the mean score of the experimental group was calculated as 9.67. According to independent samples t-test results ( $t = -.757$ ;  $p > .05$ ), there is no significant difference between the groups' early literacy expressive language vocabulary pre-test scores. Therefore, the groups can be considered equivalent in terms of early literacy expressive language vocabulary scores prior to the application.

Table 4: t-test results of category naming test pre-test scores

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Control	15	6.33	.82	-.902	.115
Experimental	15	6.67	1.18		

According to Table 4., the mean score of the early literacy category naming pre-test scores of the control group was calculated as 6.33, and the mean score of the experimental group was calculated as 6.67. According to the test results ( $t = -.902$ ;  $p > .05$ ), there is no significant difference between the groups' early literacy category naming pre-test scores. Therefore, the groups can be considered equivalent in terms of early literacy category naming scores prior to the application.

Table 5. t-test results of early literacy expressive language vocabulary of the control group

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Pre- test	15	9.33	.90	-3.292	.005
Post-test	15	10.13	1.06		

According to Table 5, the pre-test mean score of the early literacy expressive language vocabulary test score of the control group was calculated as 9.33, and the mean score of the post-test was calculated as 10.13. According to the test results ( $t=-3.292$ ;  $p<.05$ ), there is a significant increase of .80 points in the mean scores.

Table 6. t-test results of early literacy expressive language vocabulary of the experimental group

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Pre- test	15	9.67	1.45	-6.946	<.001
Post-test	15	12.73	1.75		

According to Table 6, the pre-test mean score of the early literacy expressive language vocabulary test score of the experimental group was calculated as 9.67, and the mean score of the post-test was calculated as 12.73. According to test results ( $t=-6.946$ ;  $p<.001$ ), there is a significant increase of 3.06 points in the mean scores in the experimental group.

Table 7. t-test results of early literacy category naming of the control group

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Pre-test	15	6.33	.82	-3.228	.006
Post-test	15	6.87	.83		

According to Table 7, the pre-test mean score of the early literacy category naming test score of the control group was calculated as 6.33, and the mean score of the post-test was calculated as 6.87. According to the test results ( $t=-3.228$ ;  $p<.05$ ), it is seen that there is a significant increase of .54 points in the mean scores.

Table 8. t-test results of early literacy category naming of the experimental group

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Pre-test	15	6.67	1.18	-9.260	<.001
Post-test	15	9.00	1.00		

According to Table 8, the pre-test mean score of the early literacy category naming test score of the experimental group was calculated as 6.67, and the mean score of the post-test was calculated as 9.00. According to the test results ( $t=-9.260$ ;  $p<.001$ ), there is a significant increase of 2.33 points in the mean in the experimental group.

Table 9: t-test results of early literacy expressive language vocabulary post-test

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Control	15	10.13	1.06	-4.919	<.001
Experimental	15	12.73	1.75		

According to Table 9., the mean score of the early literacy expressive language vocabulary post-test scores of the control group was calculated as 10.13, and the mean score of the experimental group was calculated as 12.73. According to the test results ( $t=-4.919$ ;  $p>.001$ ), it was concluded that the experimental group's early literacy expressive language vocabulary post-test mean score was 2.60 points higher than the control group, and this difference was statistically significant.

Table 10: t-test results of early literacy category naming post-test

	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Control	15	6.87	.83	-6.346	<.001
Experimental	15	9.00	1.00		

According to Table 10., the mean score of the early literacy category naming post-test scores of the control group was calculated as 6.87, and the mean score of the experimental group was calculated as 9.00. According to the results ( $t=-6.346$ ;  $p>.001$ ), it was concluded that the experimental group's early literacy category naming post-test mean score was 2.13 points higher than the control group, and this difference was statistically significant.

#### 4. Discussion

In this study, the effect of an dialogic reading program in the preschool period on children's expressive language vocabulary and category naming sub-skills, which are among early literacy skills, was examined. According to the research findings, it was found that the dialogic reading program contributed significantly to both expressive language skills and category naming skills of preschool children. When the pre-test scores of the children participating in the study obtained before the program and the post-test scores obtained after the program were evaluated, the result was seen to be in favor of the post-tests. Similarly, when the literature is examined, it has been found that dialogic reading supports children's early literacy skills (Pillinger & Wood, 2014; Lever & Senechal, 2011; Akoğlu et al., 2014; Wasik & Bond, 2001).

In their study, Akoğlu et al. (2014) aimed to examine the effects of dialogic reading practices on the receptive and expressive language skills of children in need of protection aged 4-5 years. The research consisted of pre-test, application and post-test stages. As a result of the research, it was observed that the post-test results of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test used in the evaluation of receptive language skills, and the average utterance length, the number of different words and the total number of utterances obtained from the natural language samples used for the evaluation of the quantitative measurements of expressive language skills were higher than the pretest scores.

Şimşek and Işıkoğlu Erdoğan (2015) conducted dialogic reading activities with 4-5 years old children from low-income families, twice a week for 4 weeks, and they found that the receptive and expressive language development of the children in the experimental group was higher than the children in the control group.

In an dialogic reading program that Robbins and Ehri (1994) conducted with 45 pre-school children in 1994, the same storybook was read twice with an interval of 2-4 days. They then applied a post-test to measure the meanings of the words whose meanings were also mentioned in the story. The children understood the words in the story better and were able to name the words, which showed that the dialogic reading program was effective in improving their vocabulary. More acquisitions were achieved in children with a larger vocabulary. Repeating words four times was necessary but not enough. According to the results of the research, it was determined that listening to stories improves the vocabulary of young children.

In a study they conducted, Wasik and Bond (2001) evaluated the effects of the dialogic reading technique on children's literacy and language development. While the teachers were reading to the children, the students were also allowed to use the words with the help of objects. Previously, teachers had been trained in asking questions and chatting about the book. Children enrolled in the interactive book-reading program scored higher on language tests than other children.

When the results of these studies and the results of the studies that have been reached are examined, and considering that language and early literacy skills form the basis of future literacy success, the importance of including dialogic reading practices in preschool education programs becomes even more evident. On the other hand, it is observed that scientific studies and field applications on this subject are still very limited in Turkey and teachers generally conduct reading activities in a way that includes very limited interaction. Apart from informal observations, there are no scientific studies examining how book reading activities are performed in pre-school education classes in our country. The studies in the relevant literature indicate that dialogic reading programs in early childhood contribute to the early literacy skills of children; therefore, it is important that the effectiveness of these programs be increased and that the effectiveness of these programs be tested repeatedly with different samples. In addition, according to these results, studies should be conducted to introduce and disseminate dialogic reading activities as good practice in pre-school education.

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