

PARENT READING BELIEF CONSTRUCTING HOME LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Language acquisition comes as a result of maturity and child learning environment. Children can be taught language acquisition through listening and speaking with adults, especially their parent and caregivers. Another way of teaching language to children is by reading aloud to them since preschool years or even earlier. Studies show that reading aloud is one of the most affecting factors for literacy and language development in preschool-age (DeTemple & Snow, 2003; Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993; Whitehurst et al., 1988). Reading a book to preschool children is an important activity in their life. The sooner parents start to read aloud to their children the better it is for their development. Reading a story, a tale or a book to children every night even before bed time will help their development and spark their imagination. Apart from helping develop reading skills, sharing stories with children also helps in building their self-confidence. Furthermore, reading together strengthens the bond between parent and child. Above all, sharing a story with their children will help preschoolers explore unseen things, events and places like traveling in a virtual journey with their parents. The amount parents read to their preschoolers derives from their belief on the effects of reading aloud to children. This study aims to analyze Parental Reading Beliefs (PRB) and how they construct Home Literacy Environment (HLE). A sample of 265 parents in Tirana, contacted from kindergartens in all mini-municipalities, answered self-reported questionnaires. To measure parent's beliefs about reading to children the author used the 40 items scale Parental Reading Beliefs Inventory (PRBI) (DeBaryshe and Binder, 1994). In the current study, the inventory has a very good reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$) showing a complete understanding of the scale and its items in Albanian context. Results show that most parents have positive beliefs about reading to preschool children activity. Parents create a literacy environment for their preschoolers at home in compliance to their beliefs. There is a positive and statistically significant correlation between parental reading beliefs and the home literacy environment they create for their daughters and sons. A proper home literacy environment involves children's books (not counting school books), playing with alphabet toys, storytelling, and lots of reading activity time.

Keywords: *parental reading beliefs, home literacy environment, reading aloud, preschooler*

Introduction:

Language acquisition comes as a result of maturity and child learning environment. The most common belief between parents is that nature will work its own way to make a child learn to speak and develop vocabulary and grammar of the respective language. Indeed, children can be taught language acquisition through listening and speaking with adults, especially their parent and caregivers. The more a child uses a language the better s/he will be at speaking it, even when her/his native language.

Another way of teaching language to children is by reading aloud to them since preschool years or even earlier. Studies show that reading aloud is one crucial activity that can be an effective factor for literacy and language development for toddlers and preschoolers (DeTemple & Snow, 2003; Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993; Whitehurst et al., 1988). Reading a book to preschool children is an important activity that will help enhance their development in many ways. The sooner parents start to read aloud to their children the better it is for their development.

Vocabulary development is critic in the preschool age, which will also continue through childhood and adolescence. Children utter their first word around one year old and step by step, word by word, they reach the amount of 25-50 words. Chall supports the idea that vocabulary is connected to reading skills and the time spent reading during school age (cited in van Kleeck, 2003) and in the preschool age it is related to the interactive reading children get from their parents (van Kleeck, 2003).

Reading a story, a tale or a book to children every night even before bed time will help their overall development and spark their imagination. Apart from helping develop literacy skills, sharing stories with children also helps in building their self-confidence. Furthermore, reading together strengthens the bond between parent and child. Above all, sharing a story with their children will help preschoolers explore unseen things, events and places like traveling in a virtual journey with their parents.

The quantity of materials parents read to their preschoolers derives from their beliefs on the effects that reading aloud to children will have on their vocabulary, language development and overall child development. Studies show a positive correlation between parental reading beliefs and the home literacy environment they create for their daughters and sons. Parents create a home literacy environment for their preschoolers at home in compliance to their beliefs. The parents that appreciate and have positive beliefs about reading engage their children in more literacy activities (Weigel et al., 2006).

A proper home literacy environment involves children's books (not counting school books), playing with alphabet toys, storytelling, and lots of reading activity time. There are two ways to create a literacy environment at home: 1) informal – exposure to books and 2) formal – parents and children discussing and concentrate explicitly on written materials (Sénéchal and Lefevre, 2002).

Family income and parents' education also affect the creation of a proper home literacy environment. Wo and Honig (2010) using the Parent Reading Belief Inventory discovered that in Taiwan mothers' belief on reading had a high correlation with family economic status, mothers' education and reading activities mothers had with their preschool daughters and sons.

Aim of study/research:

The aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between Parent Reading Belief and Home Literacy Environment they create for their preschool children. The hypothesis presented is that home literacy environment is enriched in compliance to parent reading belief.

Research topics:

The present study explores parent's belief towards reading aloud to children. It also explores how parents of Tirana create home literacy environment for their preschoolers. The main research topic explored in the current study is the relation between parent reading belief and home literacy environment.

Research questions:

This study intends to answer to a number of research questions related to the research topics presented:

- What are parent reading belief and how rich is the home literacy environment?
- Does parent's education affect HLE?
- What is the relation of socio-economic status with HLE?
- How often do you read for pleasure?
- Does PRB affect HLE?

Scientific methods:

A survey of 265 parents was implemented to obtain the results of the current study. Parents of preschool children were contacted from kindergarten staff in the city of Tirana. To provide an equal distribution the author contacted eleven kindergartens located in all mini-municipalities of Tirana. 350 self-reported questionnaires were distributed in all eleven kindergartens and the educational staff handed them to preschool parents by the time they came to pick their daughters or sons up from kindergarten. Some of the questionnaires were not returned in the kindergarten (N=37), other questionnaires were disqualified as they had more than 10% questions unanswered (N=26). During data cleaning outliers and other problematic questionnaires were excluded from the data analysis process (N=22).

The research questionnaire was compound of Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI) and Home Literacy Environment (HLE) questions. A demographic questions session was also prepared to analyze the relationship of education and Socio Economic Status (SES) and HLE.

PRBI prepared by DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) is a forty items Likert scale intending to measure parents' belief on reading aloud benefits to children. It resulted to be reliable in the Albanian context with Crombach's $\alpha = 0.90$. HLE was measured by calculating the sum of 9 questions describing a proper home literacy environment.

Questionnaires were answered by 77.5% mother of the child; 17.4% father; 5% both parents of the child. The sample of parents were parent to 50% girls and 50% boys, whose age varied from 18 to 84 months with a mean 54 months.

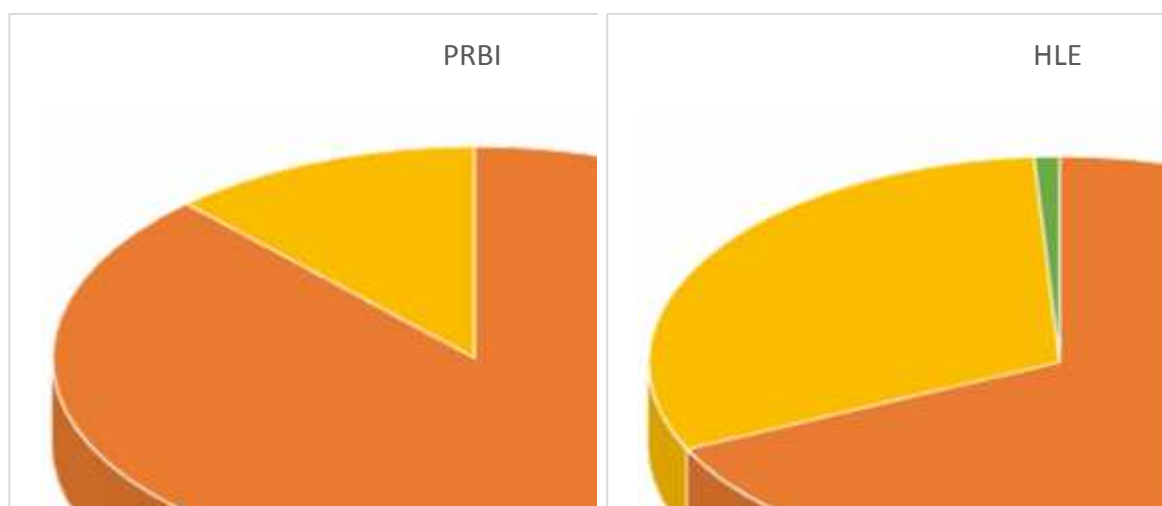
Data analysis:

Analysis of the survey data were made with SPSS-21. The 313 returned questionnaires were entered in the database and after data cleaning process 265 questionnaires were considered to be accurate for data processing.

Descriptive analysis and correlations were made to test the Study Hypothesis and answer to the Research Questions.

Findings:

In the current study was found that most parents have positive belief towards reading aloud to children. It is interesting that none of the parents had less than moderate belief. They also attempt to create a rich home literacy environment in compliance to their belief.



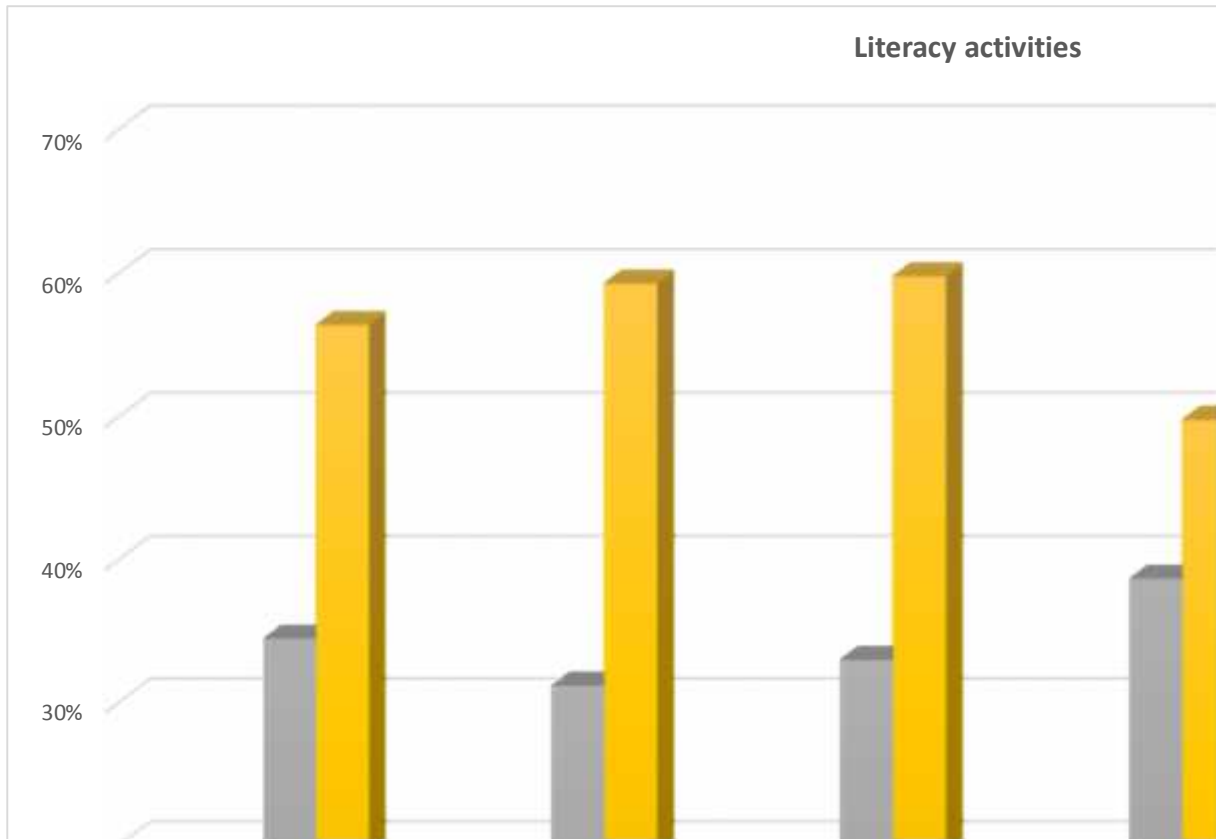
Graph 1: Frequencies of Parent Reading Belief and Frequencies of Home Literacy Environment

Amongst all literacy activities included in a rich HLE the most often activity is the one children do by themselves. They open pages of a book and look at books or magazines themselves.

As shown in the below graph parents tell stories more often than they read to books. This is as good as it can be for parent-child communication but, it is not enough to benefit all the goods that reading has. Reading stories rather than telling them helps keeping the proper and exact syntax and morphology, using a formal language and a lexicon that is not the usual lexicon used by the story tellers; in this case child's parent, in their daily informal communication with children.

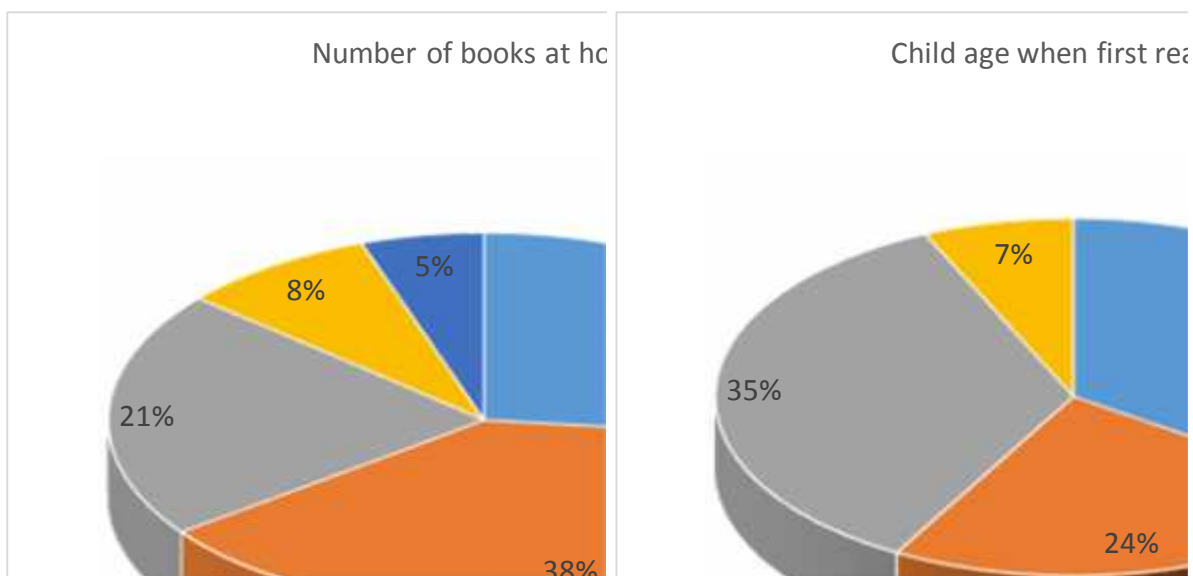
Other literacy activities parents do with their preschool daughters and sons are discussing on the stories and books they have read together. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen as much as reading, demonstrating that some stories are left undiscussed when the book or story is ended.

The less often literacy activity that parents do with their children is visiting a library with them. This shows that parents do not allow children the choice of books. Children are not exposed to libraries to have the possibility to judge on books, covers, colors or stories. The books children possess are either gifts from parents or other relatives. Indeed, children would be more curious to read, or have parents read them the books they choose themselves.



Graph 2: Frequencies of literacy activities parents do with their children

Most of Tirana's homes in the study sample have between 0 to 25 children's books without counting school books. This, obviously is not as large number as it should have been for children aged 18-84 months old. Despite of this, parents declare to have read to their children for the first time at an early age. Starting from earlier than 6 months.



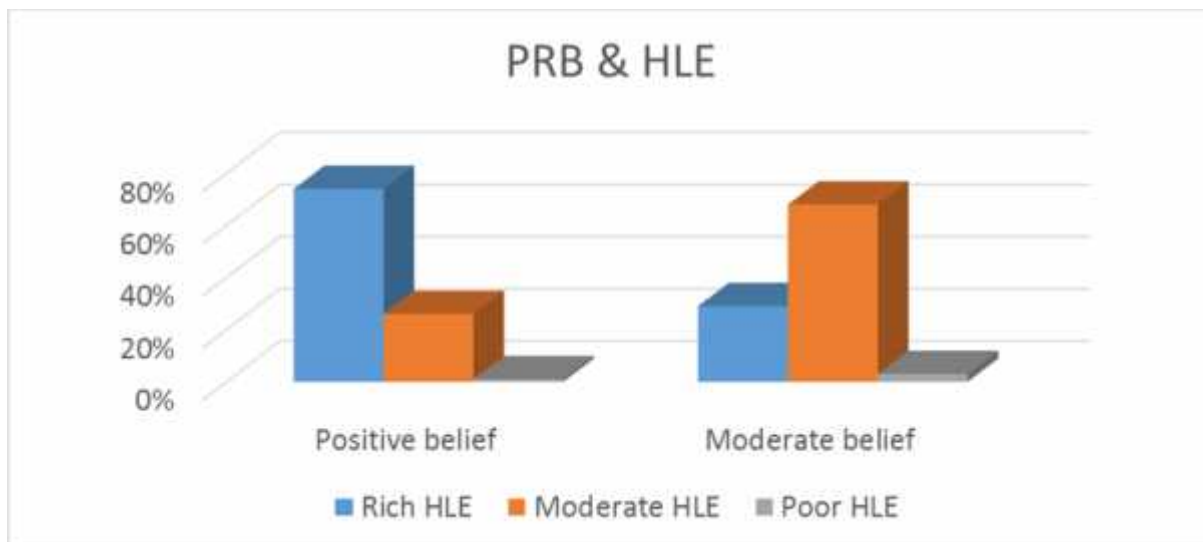
Graph 3: Number of books at home and the age of child when first read to

In response to the research questions of the present study, inferential analysis was made to explore the relations between the key concepts and variables measured in this study.

Results show that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between education of parents and HLE they create for their preschoolers. Mother's education has a greater correlation to HLE, $r(263) = 0.34$; $p < 0.01$ than father's education, $r(263) = 0.29$; $p < 0.01$. This means that home literacy is affected by mother's education in 11.6% and 8.4% from father's education.

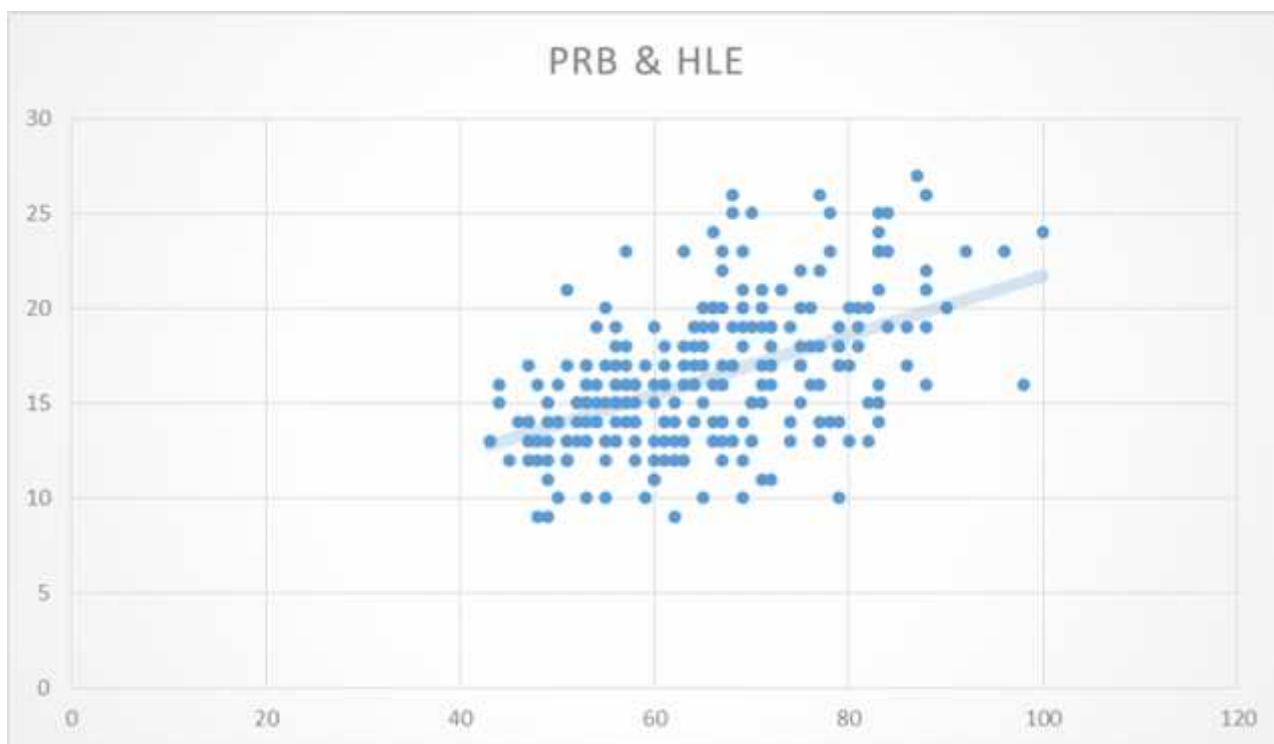
Families with better socio-economic status have richer HLE. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the socio-economic status of a family and home literacy environment created, $r(263) = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$. But, monthly income is not the only determinant of home literacy environment as results show that SES affects HLE only by 9%.

Parents that create a rich HLE for their children read for their own pleasure too. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between parents reading for their own pleasure and home literacy environment they create $r(263) = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$. A statistically significant positive correlation exists between parents reading for their own pleasure and their beliefs on reading to children, too. Though, this correlation is less strong than the one with HLE, $r(263) = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$. This proves that parents that read more often for their own pleasure tend to create a richer HLE despite of their beliefs on reading.



Graph 4: Cross tabulation of Parent Reading Belief and Home Literacy Environment

The above graph shows that parents with positive belief towards reading to children create a richer home literacy environment.



Graph 5: Correlation between Parent Reading Belief and Home Literacy Environment

The inferential analysis shows the existence of a statistically significant positive correlation between parent’s beliefs and the environment they create at home for their children, $r(263) = 0.31$; $p < 0.01$. This shows that HLE is created in 10% of cases based on parent’s belief on reading. There are other factors contributing in proper HLE creation that need to be explored further.

Conclusions:

- Most parents have positive beliefs on the benefits reading will bring their preschoolers;
- Most families have created a rich home literacy environment;
- Parents tell more stories to children than they read to them;
- Children often open and pretend to read their own books;
- Higher educated parents believe more on reading to children benefits;
- There is a positive correlation between socio-economic status and the literacy environment at home;
- Parents that believe on reading and create a literacy environment at home read more for their pleasure too;
- Parents believing in reading create a rich literacy environment for their children.

Recommendations:

As it is very important for child language development, it is crucial to create a rich home literacy environment. It is recommended to make possible a rich HLE.

Parent's awareness on children benefits from reading should be increased in order to intensify the frequency of literacy activities parent do with their daughters and sons.

Further research should be done to explore other factors that affect the creation of a rich home literacy environment.

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