

A Review of Research on the Influence of Family Literacy Environment on Preschoolers' Narrative Ability

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Abstract

This review aims to sort out the relevant research on family literacy environment and preschoolers' narrative ability, define the concepts of family literacy environment and narrative ability, introduce the research status of measurement tools at home and abroad, and analyze the influence of various aspects of family literacy environment on preschoolers' narrative ability. It seeks to provide theoretical basis and reference directions for follow-up research and early childhood education practice, and finally puts forward educational suggestions and solutions.

Keywords

Narrative ability; Family literacy environment; Review.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of technology, many parents use smartphones to accompany their children, replacing parent-child reading time and communication time with short videos. This has led to many preschoolers becoming highly dependent on smartphones, only able to passively receive information without active expression. Their language skills remain limited to words seen on mobile phones—monotonous and divorced from real-life contexts—hindering the development of narrative ability. Narrative ability is a fundamental competence that preschoolers must develop [1]. When interacting with others, children need not only to understand others' expressions but also to judge communication contexts, organize their thoughts, and express their feelings. Additionally, narrative ability is crucial for the development of early childhood language and other domains [2]. The Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial) formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China emphasizes creating a free and relaxed language communication environment for preschoolers, supporting, encouraging, and attracting them to converse with teachers, peers, or others, experiencing the joy of language exchange, and learning to use appropriate and polite language. As the primary environment for children's growth, the family literacy environment has a significantly positive correlation with children's narrative ability. Early reading plays a vital role in preschoolers' language development and other domains. This classification method is the most widely used in researching family literacy environments.

2. Definition of Key Concepts

2.1. Family Literacy Environment

The family literacy environment refers to the sum of various material and spiritual conditions in the family that provide literacy stimulation and support children's exposure to and participation in literacy activities. The material dimension includes books, writing tools, electronic devices, etc., available for preschoolers to read; The spiritual aspect encompasses family members' reading habits, their attitudes towards reading and writing activities, and the

interactive communication between parents and children centered around reading and writing. The family literacy environment is not only a physical space for preschoolers to contact written language but also a crucial scene for emotional communication and knowledge transmission between parents and children, playing a fundamental role in enlightening children's literacy awareness and developing their literacy skills [3]. Regarding the classification of family literacy environments, there are generally two approaches [4]: (1) Perspective of Human Development Ecology Theory: This perspective argues that various elements in the family literacy environment directly influence children's language development and literacy ability. Foreign researchers (Leichter, 1984; Griffin & Morrison, 1997; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) divide the family literacy environment into three aspects: family literacy resources, motivational atmosphere, and various literacy activities. (2) Perspective of Interaction Theory: This perspective classifies family literacy environments into informal literacy activities and formal literacy activities according to the nature of activities. Informal literacy activities focus on interactions in natural contexts, such as family book resources (number of children's books, frequency of library visits), parent-child shared reading activities (storytelling, daily conversations), and children's spontaneous interest in writing (e.g., asking about the meaning of Chinese characters). Formal literacy activities involve conscious teaching behaviors, such as parents teaching letters, pinyin, or simple Chinese characters, guiding writing practice, and designing structured literacy-related activities. In general, the two classifications have different focuses and complement each other.

2.2. Narrative Ability

Narrative ability is an individual's capability to use language to organize and express events, requiring the storyteller to arrange a series of events in a logical order and convey them through coherent and clear language, enabling listeners to understand the story's content and theme. Domestic scholars define narrative as storytelling, a language ability for organized expression beyond specific contexts [5]. Oral narrative ability includes three aspects of knowledge and skills: grasping the logic of experiences and stories, linguistic ability to connect logical relationships, and pragmatic and psychological theory skills to ensure smooth communication [6]. Given the complexity of the definition, selecting narrative content and evaluation dimensions is crucial in different research fields. For preschoolers, narrative ability is manifested in using simple language to describe daily experiences, tell stories and nursery rhymes, and fabricate plots. Narrative ability not only reflects the fluency and logic of preschoolers' language expression but also involves the development of multiple aspects such as imagination, memory, comprehension, and social interaction skills.

3. Research Status at Home and Abroad

3.1. Measurement Tools for Family Literacy Environment

Abroad, early measurements of family literacy environments mainly relied on questionnaires. The research by Ninio and Bruner (1978) laid the foundation for studies on family literacy interactions, and subsequent research developed questionnaires based on this, such as the Family Literacy Experience Questionnaire [7]. This questionnaire quantitatively evaluates the family literacy environment from dimensions like the frequency of parent-child reading and the availability of family reading resources. With the innovation of research methods, observation methods have gradually been applied. Researchers comprehensively understand the family literacy environment by field-observing parent-child literacy activities and recording activity forms, frequencies, and interaction quality. Digital tools have also begun to play a role in research, such as analyzing parent-uploaded videos of parent-child reading to code and analyze parent-child interaction patterns and language communication, obtaining research data in more natural contexts.

Domestic research has developed applicable measurement tools by drawing on foreign achievements and combining with local cultural characteristics. The study by Zhang Wenjie, Long Ruyi, and Zhu Jia (2024), which focuses on the influence of family socioeconomic status and family literacy environment on rural preschoolers' reading comprehension ability, indirectly verifies the practical application value of family literacy environment measurement tools [1]. The Chinese Family Early Literacy Environment Scale comprehensively evaluates the family literacy environment from aspects such as family literacy resources and parent-child literacy interaction, with good reliability and validity.

3.2. Measurement Tools for Preschoolers' Narrative Ability

Abroad, the measurement of preschoolers' narrative ability started early, and various standardized testing tools have been developed. However, there is still no gold standard for evaluating children's narratives, but an international consensus has been reached to analyze them from two levels: macro-structure (narrative structure level) and micro-level (narrative language level) [8]. The Boston Narrative Ability Test assesses preschoolers' narrative ability from dimensions such as story structure, language use, and emotional expression through tasks like story retelling and creation, and its reliability and validity have been verified in numerous studies [9].

While introducing and revising foreign scales, domestic scholars have also explored measurement methods suitable for local preschoolers. Some studies use picture narrative methods, presenting preschoolers with pictures with plot connections and requiring them to tell stories, evaluating their narrative ability from aspects such as story integrity, logic, and language richness. For example, the experience of Li Xia (2024) in evaluating students' language expression in primary school English structured literacy teaching practices can provide some reference for evaluating preschoolers' narrative ability [10].

4. Influence of Various Aspects of Family Literacy Environment on Preschoolers' Narrative Ability and the Moderating Role of Family Size

4.1. Family Literacy Resources

Abundant family literacy resources form the basis for preschoolers to contact written language. Studies have shown that having a large number of age-appropriate books at home can stimulate preschoolers' reading interest and increase their opportunities to engage with written language. These books not only provide children with rich vocabulary and diverse sentence patterns but also broaden their horizons and enrich their cognitive experiences, providing materials for narrative. Meanwhile, the availability of writing tools also promotes the development of preschoolers' narrative ability. Through activities like doodling and writing, children can express their thoughts and feelings, exercise their written language expression skills, and transfer them to oral narratives.

4.2. Parent-Child Literacy Interaction

Parent-child literacy interaction is one of the most influential factors in the family literacy environment. Positive parent-child reading interactions, such as parents asking questions, guiding children to think, and discussing story content during reading, can stimulate children's thinking abilities and cultivate their language expression and logical thinking skills. Parents' questions can guide children to pay attention to story details and help them understand the story's structure and theme, enabling them to use reasonable logical order to organize language when narrating. Additionally, parent-child communication and sharing around daily life events provide preschoolers with opportunities to narrate, helping them learn to use language to

express their experiences and feelings, and improving the fluency and vividness of their narratives [11].

4.3. Parents' Literacy Attitudes and Behaviors

Parents' literacy attitudes and behaviors have a subtle influence on preschoolers. If parents love reading and often engage in reading activities in front of children, children will be inspired by the example and gradually develop an interest in reading. Parents' emphasis on literacy activities also affects children's attitudes toward literacy. When parents actively participate in children's literacy activities and give them affirmation and encouragement, children's self-confidence and enthusiasm are enhanced, and they are more willing to attempt narrative expression. Furthermore, parents' own language literacy and expression ability will influence children's language development in parent-child communication, thereby affecting children's narrative ability.

4.4. Moderating Role of Family Size

In the early social field of preschool children, sibling relationships, as high-frequency interaction carriers, have exceeded the level of ordinary peers and constitute core ecological elements for the development of children's emotions, behavior shaping, and social cognition. From the perspective of family systems theory, this special peer relationship with both blood ties and daily companionship, through the social learning mechanism formed by continuous interaction (Bandura, 1977), plays an irreplaceable foundational role in children's socialization process. Peers are the group that preschoolers contact the most besides teachers and parents. As children grow older, the status of peers in their lives continues to increase. Relevant studies have shown that when children reach a certain age, the influence of peers on children can even exceed that of parents. In the process of interacting with peers, preschoolers can obtain others' cognition of themselves, which helps them continuously improve their self-awareness and gain a sense of belonging, promoting the development of a healthy personality and emotional socialization [12]. Interacting with peers can also strengthen children's vocabulary use and oral expression, and more easily stimulate their enthusiasm for communicating with others. Interactions between preschoolers and peers provide them with a large amount of language learning materials and models to imitate. In this process, children continuously accumulate vocabulary, attempt to express their wishes accurately and appropriately, and thus form their unique thinking characteristics and language styles [13].

The family literacy environment provides very important environmental support in the process of children's early reading development, but existing research mainly focuses on the role of parents, especially mothers and fathers. Existing studies have shown that the participation of siblings plays a unique role in children's development in multi-child families, especially in low-socioeconomic status families with low parental involvement [14]. Therefore, if there are two or more children in the family, especially peers with a small age gap, the influence of the family literacy environment on preschoolers' narrative ability will be greater.

5. Educational Suggestions

5.1. Optimizing Family Literacy Resources to Consolidate the Foundation for Narrative Ability Development

5.1.1. Enriching the Types and Levels of Book Resources and Providing Targeted Graded Guidance by Parents

Families should build a gradient book system according to different development stages of preschoolers. For 3-4-year-old young preschoolers, select rhyming children's songs, nursery rhymes, and other reading materials with strong rhythm. Additionally, children at this stage

prefer intuitive materials related to their daily lives, such as toys, daily necessities, and food. These books, with repetitive sentences and simple plots, can not only help children establish initial language perception and narrative logic but also allow them to transfer some simple sentences and words to daily life.

4-5-year-old middle preschoolers have a higher degree of daily oral language acquisition and rapid development of written language. Compared with young preschoolers, they are good at thinking and love to ask why during reading, showing preference for puzzle-based reading materials. Parents can provide philosophical enlightenment, social, and science fiction reading materials for them. Meanwhile, to enrich middle preschoolers' life experiences and expand their knowledge, parents can use reading materials to increase children's knowledge structure and improve the quality of family parent-child reading.

5-6-year-old older preschoolers are transitioning from concrete to abstract thinking, preferring imaginative, challenging, and complex plot reading materials with text. As children at this stage are in the transition period from kindergarten to primary school, parents can choose some text-based reading materials about entering primary school to help children smoothly pass the kindergarten-primary school transition. While enriching children's knowledge structure, parents can orderly develop children's intelligence, thereby improving the reading ability of older preschoolers [15].

5.1.2. Innovating the Presentation Forms of Literacy Resources

In addition to traditional printed books, parents can leverage modern technology to enrich literacy resource forms. Use audiobook apps such as Kaishu Storytelling and Himalaya to provide children with professionally dubbed stories, stimulating their interest through vivid sound effects and intonations. Introduce interactive e-books, such as the Magic School Bus electronic series, where children can click the screen to trigger animations and sound effects, participating in story interactions to enhance reading fun and engagement. The more diversified the presentation forms of literacy resources, the more they can mobilize children's multiple senses, enabling multi-sensory linkage, so that children can perceive more diverse narrative methods and remember them longer. Furthermore, families can collect old magazines and newspapers, make collage storybooks with children, and encourage them to freely combine and write stories based on the cut-out pictures, integrating the collection of literacy resources with the creative process to cultivate children's hands-on ability and narrative creativity.

5.1.3. Creating Diverse Expression Tools

Provide preschoolers with rich expression tools. Diverse painting materials help stimulate children's different imaginations and creativity. Expressing with materials of different colors, textures, and shapes allows them to feel fun in writing activities and avoid boredom. In addition to common paper and pens, prepare painting materials such as colored cardboard, watercolor pens, crayons, and stickers, enabling children to record stories or create picture books with drawings. Provide recording devices such as children's voice recorders, encouraging children to record their own stories and improve the fluency and coherence of language expression by listening to their narrations. Studies have also found that families with abundant types of painting materials, sound-producing materials, and children's books have a higher probability that their children develop good core pre-writing experiences compared to deficient families, which to a certain extent confirms the view that sufficient "objectified" cultural capital contributes to academic success [16].

5.2. Deepening Parent-Child Literacy Interaction to Build a Bridge for Narrative Ability Development

5.2.1. Carrying out Diverse Parent-Child Reading Strategies

During parent-child reading, use strategies such as questioning, predicting, and discussing to guide children to deeply understand stories and improve narrative ability. When asking questions, parents should pose open-ended questions like "Why do you think the little bear did this?" or "If you were there, how would you help the little rabbit?" to encourage children to think about the cause-effect relationships and character emotions in stories and cultivate critical thinking. Before reading, guide children to observe the cover and table of contents to predict the story content; during reading, let children guess the subsequent development according to the plot, such as "What difficulties might the little protagonist encounter next?" Through prediction, exercise children's imagination and logical reasoning abilities. After reading, organize family discussions to share understandings and feelings about the story. Parents can guide children to compare the behaviors and choices of different characters, helping them sort out the story context and learn how to express ideas systematically.

5.2.2. Expanding the Forms of Parent-Child Literacy Interaction

In addition to traditional reading, parents can carry out more diversified literacy interaction activities with children. For example, co-create stories: parents tell the beginning of the story, and then children continue to compile it, continuously enriching the story content through turn-taking narration. Story adaptation is also feasible: encourage children to change the ending or character settings of the story, such as changing the material used by the little pig to build a house in *The Three Little Pigs* from bricks to other materials, stimulating children's creativity and innovative thinking. Furthermore, parent-child collaboration in making story posters and picture books, presenting key plot and characters in the story through painting and text, can deepen children's understanding of the story and improve their narrative ability combining pictures and text during the creative process.

5.2.3. Paying Attention to Effective Feedback in Interaction

In parent-child literacy interaction, parents' feedback is crucial for the development of children's narrative ability. When children express opinions or tell stories, parents should listen attentively and give positive responses through nodding, smiling, eye contact, etc., making children feel respected and concerned. When providing feedback, specifically point out children's strengths, such as "You just told the process of the little fox stealing things very clearly and used nice words like 'sneakily' and 'softly'—great!" At the same time, for shortcomings in children's expressions, put forward suggestions, such as "If you can tell the order of the little monkey climbing the mountain, the story will be more complete," avoiding direct criticism that may dampen children's enthusiasm. Through positive and effective feedback, help children build self-confidence and continuously improve their narrative expression.

5.3. Creating a Good Family Literacy Atmosphere to Stimulate the Driving Force for Narrative Ability Development

5.3.1. Creating a Physical Space for Family Literacy

Families should set up a special literacy area to create a quiet, comfortable, and attractive literacy environment for preschoolers. A warm reading corner can be arranged in the corner of the room, with soft floor mats and small bookshelves. Books on the shelves should be classified by theme or type for easy access by children. The wall can display children's paintings, story notebooks, or reading-related decorations such as cartoon bookmarks and famous quotes, allowing children to feel the fun of literacy in a bookish environment. Additionally, maintain a

quiet and tidy home environment to reduce external interference and provide conditions for children to focus on literacy activities.

5.3.2. Constructing a Family Literacy Cultural Atmosphere

Parents should set a good literacy example by themselves. In daily life, parents should reduce the time spent on electronic devices such as mobile phones and TVs, read more books and newspapers, write reading notes or diaries, and let children see parents' love and emphasis on literacy activities. Families can regularly hold activities like "Reading Day" and "Story Night," where the whole family reads together, shares stories, and exchanges reading experiences. In family communication, encourage preschoolers to share interesting stories about kindergarten and their own thoughts. Parents should listen carefully and respond actively to create an equal and open communication atmosphere, allowing children to feel the importance and joy of narrative in daily life.

5.3.3. Integrating Literacy Activities into Daily Life Scenarios

Combine literacy activities closely with daily life to allow preschoolers to naturally develop narrative abilities in real-life contexts. For example, after shopping, ask children to record purchased items by creating shopping lists with drawings or simple words; when going out for a trip, guide them to write travel diaries describing the scenery and interesting events they encounter; during dinner, organize a "Today's Fun Stories Sharing" session where family members take turns recounting interesting daily occurrences. Through these literacy activities in life scenarios, children learn to observe daily life, accumulate narrative materials, and improve their ability to describe life events in language—thereby enhancing narrative skills through practical experience.

5.4. Transforming Parents' Attitudes toward Literacy Education to Strengthen Guidance for Preschoolers' Narrative Ability Development

5.4.1. Updating Parents' Educational Concepts

Parents should fully recognize the significance of the family reading and writing environment in the development of children's narrative abilities. They should abandon the notion of "emphasizing knowledge imparting while neglecting ability cultivation", and instead focus on the cultivation of children's language expression, thinking development and creativity. They should understand the laws of preschoolers' language development and scientific methods for nurturing narrative abilities—learning advanced educational concepts and practical experiences by attending parent schools, reading parenting books, following educational social media accounts, etc.—and integrate narrative ability cultivation into daily family education to provide scientific and effective guidance for children.

5.4.2. Enhancing Parents' Literacy Guidance Skills

Parents need to master basic literacy guidance techniques to better promote children's narrative ability development. In parent-child reading, learn to use methods like questioning, guidance, and modeling to help children understand story content and improve expression skills. For example, if a child tells a story in a disjointed manner, parents can model sentence structures like "First... Then... Finally..." to guide sequential narration. Meanwhile, parents should understand the developmental characteristics of narrative abilities at different age stages, adjusting guidance strategies based on children's actual levels to avoid overly high or low expectations. For children with weaker narrative skills, offer more patience and encouragement, starting with simple story retelling and gradually advancing; for more capable children, provide challenging tasks like complex story creation to stimulate their potential.

5.4.3. Strengthening Home-School Cooperation and Communication

Parents should actively maintain close contact with kindergarten teachers to understand children's in-school language development and narrative performance, promptly obtaining professional advice and guidance. Meanwhile, feedback on children's at-home literacy activities to jointly explore suitable educational methods. For instance, parents can bring children's home-created stories and paintings to kindergarten for sharing with teachers and peers, while teachers can design extended courses related to family literacy activities to form a collaborative home-school education network, promoting the comprehensive development of children's narrative abilities.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the family literacy environment plays a multi-dimensional role in promoting preschoolers' narrative ability development. Although domestic and foreign studies have achieved phased results in developing measurement tools and exploring the relationship between the two, there is still room for optimization: Some imported measurement tools (e.g., ECERSL scale) lack cultural adaptability and need modification based on local family literacy characteristics (such as dialect use and traditional story integration). Existing research mostly focuses on static environmental factors (e.g., book collection size, parent-child reading frequency), while paying insufficient attention to dynamic processes in family interactions (e.g., dialogue strategies, feedback models). Therefore, educational suggestions are proposed: At the family level, build an interactive literacy ecosystem by stimulating children's imagination through "scaffolding questioning" and organizing theme literacy activities during local festivals. At the kindergarten level, strengthen home-school collaborative education to develop localized assessment tools, conduct regular follow-ups, promote excellent interaction strategies through case sharing sessions, advance theoretical application through technologies like eye-tracking, and advocate for government-funded special projects to support community "Parent-Child Literacy Workshops"—particularly ensuring resource supply for left-behind and migrant children's families. Future research should further improve the localization adaptation of measurement tools, combine longitudinal tracking with micro-level observation to analyze the dynamic mechanism between family literacy environments and narrative abilities, and provide more precise theoretical support and practical pathways for early family literacy education.

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