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**The Relationship Between Preschool Teachers'
Phonemic Awareness to Children's Emergent
Literacy Assessment**

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PRESENTATION**

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Author

Myra G. Crouch, PhD

Graduate

School of Psychology

myra.crouch@waldenu.edu

[Myra G Crouch | LinkedIn](#)

Supervisory Committee

Carl Valdez, Chairperson

Ann Romosz, Member

Neil McBride, URR Member

Abstract

This exploratory study examined the relationship between preschool teachers' content knowledge in early literacy, education level, and years of teaching experience to emergent literacy assessment; and if differences in students' emergent literacy assessment across different preschool program settings was significant. Results from a multiple regression analysis indicated the findings were not significant, however, in conducting simple linear regression analyses, preschool teachers' content knowledge in early literacy had a predictive relationship with students' emergent literacy skills. Results from a one-way ANOVA found emergent literacy assessment scores for the pre-kindergarten group as significant from the Head Start group.

Doctoral Capstone

Problem

For children who attend some form of preschool education in the American education system, they are expected to have developed the **basic literacy skills by the end of 3rd grade** (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Preschool programs, such as, Head Start and childcare prepare children to be ready for kindergarten with a focus on early literacy skills aimed at reducing achievement gaps.

With the emphasis placed on the quality of preschool programs and teacher qualifications, only a modest amount of evidence has emerged indicating how the quality of teaching practices in preschool affects child outcomes, specifically as it relates to emergent literacy (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative, exploratory study was to examine the relationship between preschool teachers' content knowledge in **early literacy, education level, and years of teaching experience** to emergent literacy assessment; and if there were differences in **students' emergent literacy assessment** across different preschool program settings was significant.

Significance

The significance of this study centered on two issues: 1) preschool teacher preparation in early literacy instruction within early childhood education, 2) increased awareness of the value that early literacy skills developed in preschool has on school readiness.

Acquiring **well-developed literacy skills** has been well documented to reveal that continuity between reading-related skills in preschool to when they are in the elementary school to be a significant predictor of later school success (Lonigan, Burgess & Anthony, 2000).

By revealing **potential inequities** that may exist across preschool program settings regarding developing early literacy, the results from this study can inform improvements to make in professional development, as well as **preschool teacher preparation** in early literacy instruction.

This study is significant in that it conveys awareness to the value that quality **early literacy instruction** brings to the academic readiness of preschool-age children before they enter kindergarten.

Theories

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) **ecological systems theory**, coupled with Piaget's (1952) **theory of cognitive development** were the theoretical foundations of this study.

Relevant Scholarship

Increasing evidence over the past two decades has shown preschool education's prolonged-term effects on the social and cognitive development of preschool-age children, specifically early literacy skills (Barnett, Votruba-Drzal, Dearing, & Carolan, 2017).

While acquiring **early literacy skills** has been well documented in the research as a significant predictor of later school success (Lonigan, Burgess & Anthony, 2000), there has been a gap in the research that has examined a measure of preschool teacher content knowledge in **early literacy instruction** that is tied to later school success (Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Calhoun, 2009; Foorman & Moats, 2004; Hindman, & Waski, 2010; Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Moats, 2009; Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010).

Goodrich and Lonigan (2017) argued that early literacy skills are the foundation to traditional reading skills and are measurable during preschool and before formal reading instruction occurs. Saracho (2013) suggested that when teachers use their instructional knowledge in classroom practices, they can motivate children and teach children. Saracho's study also revealed inequities in how early literacy is instructed across different preschool program settings, which can have an influence on **children's later success**.

In this study, gaps in the research are examined that currently exist related to preschool teachers' content knowledge in early literacy instruction and the differences that may exist in instruction across different preschool program settings.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a relationship between teachers' content knowledge in early literacy, education level and years of experience to emergent literacy assessment?

RQ2: Are there differences in the emergent literacy assessment between Head Start, childcare, and pre-kindergarten program settings?

Participants

Convenience sampling was used to recruit 88 preschool teachers employed by a Head Start, childcare or public school pre-K program as participants.

Procedures

Participants completed an online version Survey of Teacher Phonemic Awareness Knowledge and Skill (PhaKS) Cheesman, McGuire, Shankweiler, & Coyne (2009).

Archival data of students' emergent literacy assessment scores resulting from the administration of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Kindergarten (PALS-K) were obtained (Invernizzi, Juel, Swank, & Meirr, (2013).

Analysis

Multiple linear regression answer RQ1.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was to test differences between the preschool program settings and emergent literacy assessment (PALS-K) for RQ2.

Findings

Preschool Teachers' Content Knowledge in Early Literacy Instruction by Program Setting

Variable	M	SD	n	SE _M	Min	Max
PhaKS Overall						
Pre-K	7.48	2.78	27	0.53	2.00	13.00
Head Start	5.69	2.92	68	0.35	0.00	12.00

Preschool teacher content knowledge in the PhaKS (early literacy) was a moderately significant predictor of children's emergent literacy upon entering kindergarten. While the results indicate variability across preschool settings, public pre-k teachers with an advanced degree combined with training in phonemic awareness answered more questions correctly on the PhaKS compared to Head Start preschool teachers.

The table represents the mean scores of the PhaKS, indicating public school pre-k teachers answered more questions correctly. As teacher's content knowledge increased, student assessment scores increased.

RQ1: the overall regression model findings were not significant.

RQ2: ANOVA results ($F(1, 85) = 4.32, p = .041$) demonstrated significant differences. PALS-K scores were higher for children enrolled in public school pre-k programs ($M = 57.60$) compared to Head Start ($M = 51.65$).

Additionally, a Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted on ranked scores because the distributions of the variable for the two groups in this study were not normally distributed. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test was significant ($U = 135.00, z = -5.40, p < .001$).

The PALS-K mean score for the pre-k group was 68.26 and 37.22 for the Head Start group.

Interpretation

Public school pre-k teachers answered more questions correctly compared to Head Start and childcare preschool teachers, implying that they had received training in teaching the concepts of PA and phonics, which was closely associated with a higher education level than their counterparts.

Preschool teacher requirements and credentials vary across different preschool program settings, which has further implications for the quality and delivery of early literacy instruction.

Additionally, students were more likely to achieve higher assessment scores, when a teacher's content knowledge in early literacy was higher.

Limitations

Exclusion of other preschool program arrangements that could have been more representative of the study population.

Selection of one domain of kindergarten readiness was examined versus domains, such as math, social-emotional, and self-regulation or factors associated with family and home environments.

Reliance upon self-reported data from preschool teachers.

Sample size for teacher participants across each preschool program setting was not normally distributed, therefore decreasing the generalizability of the results.

Recommendations

For future research

- Expand research to other preschool program settings and their kindergarten counterparts, which could expand on sample size, student demographics, as well as other literacy skills related to academic readiness between preschool and kindergarten programs.
- Examine how curricula are used to support early literacy instruction in preschool classrooms. This research could be combined to understand how preschool teachers acquire knowledge in the teaching concepts of PA and phonics.

For educational practice:

- Provide specialized training and professional development aimed at enhancing preschool teachers' knowledge to improve early literacy outcomes for young children.

Social Change Implications

The results from this study may promote positive social change in a few ways:

- Informing educators at the local and state level with a deeper understanding of the need to support professional development in early literacy instruction across all sectors in early childhood education.
- Contributing to the improvement of preschool teaching practices by instituting early literacy instruction, specifically in phonemic awareness.
- Improving future coursework in early literacy instruction that spans from preschool to third grade in teacher preparation programs.

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