



Words for life

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Children's early literacy practices at home and in early years settings: Second annual survey of parents and practitioners

Key Findings

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This report outlines findings from Pearson and the National Literacy Trust's second annual early years literacy survey, conducted in May to July 2014. 1,012 parents of children aged 3 to 5 and 567 early years practitioners who work with this age group participated. Attainment data in the form of vocabulary abilities were available for a subsample of 183 children.

The report not only examines children's access to books and to technology, as well as their early reading habits, but it also examines the impact of these practices on young children's vocabulary. Within this report we seek to answer the following key questions:

- How often do children look at or read stories at home and in early years settings, and what is the impact on children's vocabulary?
- How do parents support their children in story-related activities?
- Are there differences in engagement in reading activities at home and vocabulary outcomes for children from different socioeconomic backgrounds or by gender?
- Does looking at or sharing stories using technology provide any additional benefit to children?
- What are the key changes between 2013 and 2014?

General findings – early literacy practices at home

- 71.7% of children look at or read stories at home and 78.0% of children enjoy stories “a lot”.
- Children who read daily are more likely to have above average vocabulary attainment than children who read less often (19.6% vs. 12.0%); children who enjoy stories “a lot” are also more likely to have above average vocabulary attainment than children who enjoy stories less (17.1% vs. 11.6%).
- Children who look at or read stories daily are four times more likely to enjoy stories “a lot” than their peers who do not look at or read stories in a typical week (89.0% vs. 20.0%).
- The majority of parents say they support their child's reading by talking about the story (81.3%), encouraging their child to notice the pictures (80.8%), or by talking about the characters (76.6%). A third of parents (34.4%) say they do other activities related to the story (e.g. draw, make models, act out scenes). Only 3.2% of parents do not engage in any of the supportive activities asked about.
- 85.9% of parents are “very confident” and 1 in 10 (11.0%) say they are “fairly confident” sharing stories with their child.
- 1 in 5 children of very confident parents have above average vocabulary attainment compared with no children from parents who are less confident (19.3% vs. 0.0%).
- Almost all children have access to books at home (99.7%) and 91.4% have access to a touch screen at home. A quarter (28.2%) of children look at or read stories on a touch screen at least once in a typical week.

Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status is strongly associated with children's early literacy practices at home.

- More children from AB and C1 households look at or read stories daily (77.4% and 71.7% respectively) compared with children from C2 and DE households (59.8% and 62.1% respectively). More children also enjoy stories "a lot" in AB and C1 households (81.5% and 78.3%) compared with children from C2 and DE households (70.5% and 71.2%).
- More parents from AB and C1 households engage in a variety of supportive activities and more are very confident supporting their child (88.3% and 90.2% respectively) compared with parents from C2 and DE households (79.5% and 75.0%).
- Children from AB households are more likely than children from DE households to look at or read stories daily and to enjoy stories "a lot" irrespective of whether they look at or read printed stories or stories on a touch screen.

Yet, building on our findings from 2013, survey data from 2014 shows technology may provide a route in to reading for children of lower socioeconomic status.

Compared with their AB peers:

- Twice as many children from DE households look at or read stories on a touch screen for longer than they look at or read printed stories (29.5% vs. 17.4%).
- Slightly more children from C2 and DE households use a touch screen in a typical week than those from AB and C1 households (31.9% vs. 27.0%).
- More children from DE households use technology more for educational activities than for entertainment (43.2% vs. 30.4%).
- In general, young children are more likely to have above average vocabulary attainment if they look at or read both printed stories and stories on a touch screen compared with those who read printed stories only (19.5% vs. 14.5%). This dynamic holds true both for children from low-income families (9.1% vs. 0.0%) and high-income families (50.0% vs. 20.0%).

There are also differences in the way children from different backgrounds use touch-screen technology at home and the way their parents support them to look at or read stories using touch-screen technology.

- Half of children from DE households use touch-screen technology more with an adult than on their own, compared with a third of children from AB households (51.2% vs. 33.3%).
- Irrespective of the media they share, parents from DE households are slightly more likely than parents from AB households to say they encourage their child to notice the pictures (printed stories: 81.8% vs. 80.6%; stories on a touch screen: 59.1% vs. 54.3%).

Children's gender

Children's gender is also associated with their early literacy practices at home.

- More parents of girls than parents of boys say their child reads daily (75.3% vs. 68.7%) and enjoys stories "a lot" (82.9% vs. 73.7%). They are also more likely to say they support children using a variety of activities and that they are "very confident" supporting their child to read (88.7% vs. 83.4%).

But touch-screen technology may be a useful tool to engage boys.

- More boys than girls use a touch screen more for educational activities than for entertainment (36.0% vs. 28.2%).
- Twice as many boys as girls look at or read stories on a touch screen for longer than they look at or read printed stories (24.0% vs. 12.0%).
- Boys are more likely than girls to look at or read stories more with an adult than on their own (67.8% vs. 57.8%). Conversely, girls are more likely than boys to look at or read stories more without than with an adult (18.1% vs. 10.0%).

General findings – literacy practices in early years settings

- All practitioners say children have access to books (100%) and 2 in 5 (41.3%) practitioners say children have access to a touch screen in their setting, which is double the number in 2013.
- 85.0% of practitioners say children look at or read stories daily and 78.0% say that children enjoy stories "a lot".
- 89.4% of practitioners are "very confident" supporting children to look at or read stories. Practitioners are less likely to say they are "very confident" encouraging parents to share stories with their child (52.4%).
- Practitioners have an appetite to use touch-screen technology in their setting; 59.7% would like to increase the use of touch screens. Yet, 1 in 4 (23.7%) do not think touch-screen technology has a place in the early years.
- Practitioners face barriers to the use of touch screens in their setting due to the availability of funding for equipment (49.9%).

Differences by professional qualifications

Staff qualifications impact on practices in early years settings. Compared with practitioners with postgraduate teaching qualifications, practitioners with entry-level teaching qualifications are:

- Less likely to say they are "very confident" sharing stories with children (71.4% vs. 90.1%). These differences persist irrespective of whether children look at or read printed stories (71.4% vs. 89.5%) or stories on a touch screen (0.0% vs. 58.1%).

- More likely to say that children look at or read both printed stories (57.1% vs. 35.7%) and stories on a touch screen (100.0% vs. 45.2%) with an adult than on their own.
- Twice as likely to say that downloaded stories/story apps are more educational than printed stories (20.0% vs. 11.4%).

However, practitioners' attitudes towards touch-screen technology are also associated with their qualifications:

- 37.5% of practitioners with entry-level teaching qualifications say that children should not use touch-screen technology in their setting, compared with 1 in 4 (24.6%) practitioners with postgraduate teaching qualifications.

Ofsted ratings

Ofsted ratings are also associated with children's early literacy practices. Compared with settings rated as requiring improvement/inadequate, practitioners who work in settings rated as outstanding are more likely to say that:

- Children look at or read stories daily in a typical week (93.2% vs. 78.9%); enjoy stories "a lot" (84.1% vs. 65.8%); and are "very confident" looking at or reading stories (47.0% vs. 36.8%).
- They are "very confident" encouraging parents to share stories with their child at home (61.2% vs. 44.4%).

The gap between settings with higher and lower Ofsted ratings persists both when children look at or read printed stories and stories on a touch screen:

- Children from outstanding settings have access to more books (329 vs. 161) and are more likely to have access to a touch screen (44.7% vs. 34.2%).
- Differences in children's reading practices from different settings are irrespective of whether they look at or read printed stories or stories on a touch screen.
- More children from outstanding settings use touch-screen technology more for educational activities than for entertainment than do children from settings rated as requiring improvement/inadequate (74.1% vs. 50.0%).
- However, nearly twice as many practitioners from outstanding settings than practitioners from settings rated as requiring improvement/inadequate say that touch-screen technology does not have a place in early years settings (27.3% vs. 15.8%).

This research explored the activities parents do at home to support their young child's literacy development, as well as how parents support their child with printed stories and with stories on a touch screen.

It highlights that sharing both printed stories and stories on a touch screen benefits children's vocabulary attainment compared with looking at or reading printed stories only.

Touch-screen technology has the potential to positively influence the reading behaviour of children of lower socioeconomic status and boys.

The survey of early years practitioners shows that twice as many settings say that they use touch-screen technology compared with 2013. Yet, printed materials are central to children's early literacy lives and 1 in 4 practitioners do not think touch-screen technology should be used in their setting. This suggests that whilst some practitioners use touch screen technology to support children's learning, practitioners are more likely to engage in sharing printed stories to support children's literacy development.

For the full report see:

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt_research/6266_children_s_early_literacy_practices_at_home_and_in_early_years_settings_second_annual_survey_of_parents_and_practitioners

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