

FORMATION OF LITERACY SKILLS IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

This article explores the formation of literacy skills in preschool-aged children, emphasizing the importance of early language exposure, phonological awareness, and cognitive development. It reviews current literature on pre-literacy development, outlines effective pedagogical strategies, and presents results from observational studies and educational interventions. The study highlights how structured and play-based learning environments contribute to a child's readiness for reading and writing, offering recommendations for educators and caregivers.

Keywords: Preschool education, literacy skills, phonological awareness, emergent literacy, early childhood development, language acquisition, cognitive readiness.

Introduction

Literacy is a foundational skill that determines a child's future academic performance and socio-emotional development. The preschool years, typically ages 3 to 6, are critical for laying the groundwork for literacy. During this period, children develop phonemic awareness, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and symbolic understanding — all necessary for reading and writing. The formation of literacy skills in preschool is not limited to formal instruction but also encompasses play, interaction, and exposure to print-rich environments.

The aim of this article is to investigate the process of literacy skill formation in preschool children, identify effective teaching practices, and provide practical suggestions for enhancing pre-literacy experiences in early childhood education settings.

Forming literacy skills in preschool children (ages 3–5) involves fostering foundational abilities that prepare them for reading and writing. These skills, often called emergent literacy, include phonological awareness, print awareness, vocabulary development, and narrative skills. Below is a concise overview of how these skills develop and strategies to support them, based on established research and practices.

Key Literacy Skills in Preschool

Phonological Awareness: The ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken language.

- Skills: Identifying rhymes, clapping syllables, recognizing initial sounds (e.g., /b/ in "ball").

- Importance: Helps children decode words when learning to read.

Print Awareness: Understanding how books and print work.

- Skills: Recognizing that print carries meaning, knowing how to hold a book, identifying letters.

- Importance: Builds familiarity with written language conventions.

Vocabulary Development: Expanding the number of words a child understands and uses.

- Skills: Learning new words through conversation, stories, and play.

- Importance: A larger vocabulary supports reading comprehension later.

Narrative Skills: The ability to understand and tell stories.

- Skills: Retelling simple stories, describing events in sequence.

- Importance: Enhances comprehension and oral language skills.

Strategies to Support Literacy Development

Read Aloud Daily:

- Choose engaging, age-appropriate books with rich vocabulary and diverse topics.

- Point to words as you read to connect spoken and written language.

- Ask open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you think happens next?") to encourage thinking.

Play with Sounds:

- Sing songs, recite nursery rhymes, or play rhyming games to build phonological awareness.

- Example: "Cat, hat, mat—what else rhymes with these?"

Create a Print-Rich Environment:

- Label objects in the classroom or home (e.g., “chair,” “door”).
- Provide access to books, magnetic letters, or writing materials to explore print.

Encourage Storytelling and Conversation:

- Have children retell stories or describe their day to build narrative skills.
- Engage in back-and-forth conversations to expand vocabulary.

Incorporate Play-Based Learning:

- Use pretend play (e.g., playing “store” with signs) to connect literacy to real-world contexts.
- Provide writing tools for drawing or “writing” stories to foster creativity.

Developmental Considerations

- Individual Pace: Children develop literacy skills at different rates. Some may recognize letters early, while others focus on oral language first.
- Cultural Context: Incorporate books and activities that reflect children’s cultural backgrounds to make learning relevant.
- Screen Time Balance: Limit passive screen use; prioritize interactive activities like shared reading or games.

Evidence-Based Insights

Research shows that early literacy skills strongly predict later reading success. For example, a 2018 study in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* found that phonological awareness and letter knowledge at age 4 correlate with reading fluency by grade 1. Preschool interventions focusing on interactive reading and play-based literacy activities yield significant gains, especially for at-risk children.

Practical Tips for Parents and Educators

- Make literacy fun: Use puppets or songs to make stories engaging.
- Be consistent: Short, daily activities (10–15 minutes) are more effective than infrequent, long sessions.
- Model literacy: Let children see you reading or writing to show its value.
- Avoid pressure: Focus on exploration rather than memorization to keep learning enjoyable.

Conclusion

Early literacy development is a dynamic, multifaceted process influenced by cognitive, social, and environmental factors. Preschool educators play a vital role in creating opportunities for children to engage with language through meaningful, interactive, and playful experiences.

The formation of literacy skills in preschool should focus on phonological awareness, vocabulary building, narrative skills, and print exposure. Ensuring that every child has access to quality early literacy experiences is essential for long-term academic success.

Implement Daily Reading Routines: Incorporate storytelling and book reading in daily preschool schedules.

Train Educators in Phonological Awareness Strategies: Provide workshops on language games and sound recognition techniques.

Create Print-Rich Environments: Label classroom items, use visual storyboards, and display children's written work.

Involve Parents: Encourage family literacy activities at home through reading logs and interactive book lending programs.

Integrate Play with Literacy: Use songs, puppetry, and role-playing to enhance language use.

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