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Research Article

Parents' Perceptions and Awareness about Reading Aloud to Preschool Children

Beyza Aksu Dünya *1 , Merve Yavuzdemir 2

- * Corresponding Author, baksu@bartin.edu.tr
- ¹ Bartın University, Turkey
- ² Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

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Research has repeatedly cited importance of reading aloud to children in early ages to promote brain development, build literacy skills and foster school readiness. This study was conducted to understand parents' perceptions and awareness regarding importance of regular read-aloud activities with their children. Data was collected from a representative sample of 487 parents from various cities in Turkey using an instrument adapted from ReadAloud Survey conducted in the U.S and two open-ended items. The instrument was developed based on the Read Aloud Campaign, which is a national project in the United States aiming to encourage parents to read-aloud with their children regularly. Demographic information such as parents' level of education, age, gender, number of children at home, number of books at home, and income were also collected. The analyses included calculation of descriptive statistics to describe participant characteristics. Quantitative analyses including bivariate correlations and regression were conducted to estimate associations between selected variables and reading awareness. In addition, responses to the open-ended item was coded and analyzed to provide more detailed qualitative evidence and support the numerical findings.

Ebeveynlerin Okul Öncesi Çocuklara Sesli Okuma Konusundaki Algıları ve Farkındalıkları

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ÖZET

Araştırmalar, çocuklarla, özellikle okul öncesi dönemde sesli kitap okumanın, beyin gelişimine, dil ve anlatım becerilerine ve okula hazırlığa katkılarını vurgulamaktadır. Bu araştırma, ebeveynlerin çocuklarıyla sesli kitap okuma aktivitelerine bakışlarını ve bu aktivitelerin önemine dair farkındalıklarını anlamak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Farklı coğrafi bölgelerden, evreni temsil eden 487 katılımcıdan, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde yürütülen ulusal bir sesli okuma kampanyası kapsamında geliştirilen anket adapte edilerek veri toplanmıştır. Demografik değişken olarak katılımcıların eğitim düzevi, yası, hane halkı geliri ve cocuk sayısı verisi toplanmıştır. Katılımcıların özelliklerini özetlemek için betimsel istatistiklerden yararlanılmıştır. Seçili değişkenlerin sesli okuma davranışıyla ilişkisini incelemek için korelasyon ve regresyon analizleri yapılmıştır. Son olarak, açık uçlu maddeye verilen cevaplar içerik analizine tabii tutularak, nicel bulguları detaylı açıklayacak nitel sonuçlar elde edilmiştir.

1. Introduction

Reading aloud is one of the most important activities that parents, and teachers can engage with children. Reading aloud supports a range of foundational literacy skills including spelling (Mol & Bus, 2011), labelling (Ninio & Bruner, 1978), vocabulary (Farrant & Zubrick, 2012) as well as cognitive skills (Kalb & Ours, 2014). Through shared read aloud activities, children make new neural connections associated with mental imagery and narrative comprehension (Hutton et. al., 2015). In terms of long terms effects, studies showed that children who have enjoyable literacy experiences at home in early ages are more likely to read frequently in following years and beyond (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). Regardless of family background, frequency of reading aloud at young ages has a direct causal effect on student outcomes (Kalb & Ours, 2014; Mol & Bus, 2011). This in turn have potential effects in scores, grades, even college and job admissions (Kalb & Ours, 2014). The benefits of reading aloud are not limited to academic skills. Read aloud activities are also associated with healthy emotional connection between parents and children and emotional well-being (Merga & Ledger, 2018). Shared reading experience can also reduce parental stress level (Karrass, VanDeventer, & Braungart-Rieker, 2003).

According to a national survey held in the U.S.by Read Aloud Foundation (2018), 30% of parents with children ages 0-8 read aloud to their children at least 15 minutes a day since birth. There are number of predictors of frequency of read aloud activities at home which include mother's educational attainment, child's age, number of siblings (Yarosz & Barnett, 2001), parents' socioeconomic status (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Becker, Boldin & Klein, 2016; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001; Yazici & Kandir, 2018), number of books at home (Bayraktar, 2018; Farver, Xu, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2013) and content and variety of children books at home (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda & Mendelson, 2020). Parents and caregivers reported several significant barriers to frequency of reading aloud with their children. Lack of time has been one of the most frequently cited reason of not being able to read aloud (Merga, 2017a; Merga & Ledger, 2018). This factor has been followed by lack of access to children books, which emphasizes the importance of outside sources for supporting families' literacy activities (Dickinson, McCabe, & Anastasopoulos, 2003; Strickland, 2002). Lastly, parenting duties itself and as a result, lack of parents' engagement for shared reading with their children (Merga & Ledger, 2018) can account for less frequent read aloud activities at home.

Emergent Literacy Theory

The term "emergent literacy" was first employed by Marie Clay (1966). It refers to a period in a child's life between birth and when the child can read and write at a conventional (approximately third-grade) level. The theory is

grounded on a set of beliefs regarding the ways in which children's early literacy development occurs. One of the main assumptions of Emergent Literacy Theory is that children's development in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all interrelated (Morrow, 2005). Another important assumption of Emergent Literacy Theory is that literacy development starts at birth and is continuous and ongoing (Morrow, 2005). Children's emergent literacy skills start developing in early ages and are highly impacted by the quality and number of parents' home literacy practices (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002).

As the awareness about the importance of early literacy practices at home setting increases worldwide, projects and initiatives for fostering reading aloud activities have been launched in different countries. Read Aloud is one of these examples that has been held in the U.S. since 2013. In 2013, Read Aloud was launched as a 10-year National Campaign to make reading aloud every day for at least 15 minutes, from birth, as aligned with the national caregiving standard. In Turkey, similar campaigns have been launched by governmental and nonprofit organizations in recent years. While increasing awareness in reading aloud through national campaigns exists, little is known about parents' perceptions on the practice.

The purpose of this study is to understand parents' perceptions and awareness regarding importance of regular read aloud activities with their children in Turkey. To achieve this goal, we collected qualitative and quantitative evidence about the factors associated with parents' reading aloud habits, perceptions and awareness. Five research questions were addressed in the study:

- 1. Does number of children books at home predict parents' frequency of reading aloud to their children?
- 2. What is the relationship between parents' frequency of reading aloud to their children and household income?
- 3. What is the relationship between parents' frequency of reading aloud to their children and parental age?
- 4. Does the frequency of reading aloud differ by gender among parents?
- 5. What are the parents' perceived reasons that hinder reading aloud to their children?

2. Method

Research Design

Descriptive research design was employed in this study. The major purpose of a descriptive research is to describe characteristics (i.e. beliefs, attitudes, perceptions) of a given population or area of interest (Dulock, 1993). In descriptive research, potential relationships among selected variables are investigated without manipulation for a particular group of interest. The most common modes of data collection in descriptive research are survey questionnaires (by mail, phone or in person) or interviews (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993).

Participants and Sampling

Data was collected from a total of 487 participants (*N*= 487) in Turkey. 96.7% of the participants were women and only 3.1% of the participants were men. Sample characteristics are displayed on Table 1. Participation to the study was voluntary and the participants could withdraw from the survey at any point. A call for participation was published in the website and social media accounts of the *Kutupanne platform* (www.kutupanne.com), which is a nonprofit group, committed to increase awareness about early literacy and public libraries. Parents and caregivers who are eligible and interested in the topic could use the link and access the survey through Google Forms. The only eligibility criteria as stated in the announcement was having or caregiving at least one child who is between the ages of 0-6. The purposive sampling approach which is a non-probability sampling method for selecting participants based on study objectives was employed to reach respondents.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	n	%
	Gender	
Female	471	96.7
Male	16	3.1
	Age	
≤ 34	287	59
35-44	190	39
≥ 45	10	2
	Household income	
≤ 3500 TL	107	22
3500-6000	190	39
6000-10000	127	26
≥ 10000	63	13
TOTAL	487	100

Data and Instrument

Data collection instrument was translated and adapted to Turkish from ReadAloud Project's (2018) survey instrument. The original survey was conducted in the United States to assess parents' perceptions and awareness regarding read aloud activities at home. After careful revisions and expert reviews, the final survey instrument in Turkish composed of a total of 9 scaled items that were scored on nominal and ordinal-level scale and two open-ended items for deeper understanding of participant perceptions. In addition to the adapted survey items, demographic data relevant to the study objectives, including respondents' age, gender, number and ages of children, geographic region, and income data was collected. The final adapted instrument in Turkish is displayed in Appendix A.

Data Analyses

All analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25.0 (IBM, 2017). First, descriptive statistics were calculated and reported for summarizing sample characteristics. In order to respond research questions one, two, and three, Kendall's Tau-b correlation coefficient was calculated. Kendalls' Tau-b is used to quantify strength and direction of association between two variables measured on at least ordinal scale (Kendall, 1976). It is the non-parametric alternative to Pearson Product Moment (PPM) that is used when two variables are measured at least interval level. The reason of selecting Kendall's tau instead of PPM was that the variables of interest except income were measured on ordinal level (i.e. number of books at home, age, number of children, frequency of reading aloud activities at home) so the assumptions for PPM would not be met. In order to examine fourth research question, a chi-square test for association was run. The chi-square test for association is employed to examine if there is a relationship between two categorical variables, measured on either nominal or ordinal level (Assumption 1). The second assumption of this test is that the variables must have two or more levels. Gender has two levels and frequency of reading aloud has five levels in the data. The last research question was addressed using descriptive statistics and the results were compared to ReadAloud survey conducted in the U.S.

3. Result

Out of 487 people who completed the survey, 336 respondents (69%) indicated that they regularly read aloud to their children since birth. Almost 90.8% of the respondents defined reading aloud to children as an "extremely important" activity while 8.6% indicated it is important. With respect to the first question (Does number of children books at home predict parents' frequency of reading aloud to their children?), a moderate and significant

association was found between number of children's book at home setting and frequency of reading aloud to children (τ_b = 0.43, p < .05). Similarly, a low to moderate but significant association between income and frequency of reading aloud to children (τ_b = 0.35, p < .05) was obtained based on the results. Yet, there is not a significant relation between parental age and frequency of reading aloud activities at home setting. The association between gender and frequency of reading aloud to children was also significant (X^2 (4)= .38, p=.03), meaning that proportionally, males (1) tended to read-aloud with their children less frequently than females (2), as also seen on Figure 1.

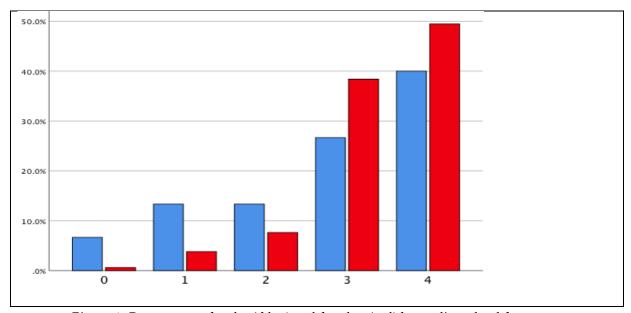


Figure 1. Percentages of males (blue) and females (red) by reading-aloud frequency.

The last question was about factors that parents perceived as hindering to read aloud activities with their children. The results were promising since 68.8% of the respondents reported that they read-aloud with their children every day. As seen on Table 2, ranking of factors differed between the survey conducted in Turkey and the U.S. Read Aloud National Survey Results in 2018. The most frequently reported reason of not being able to read aloud was lack of time, followed by children's short attention span in those ages. On the contrary, according to the U.S survey results, engaging other activities as fun as read aloud and children's resistance for sitting still were highlighted by parents as much as lack of time.

Table 2. Top Factors that Prevent Parents from Reading Aloud

Hindering factor	Percentage of Participants in Turkish Sample*	Read Aloud 2018 National Survey Results*
I cannot find time in the day	27.3%	33%
My child does not sit still long enough	12.5%	34%
Children books are too expensive	9.2%	6%
We do other activities that are as fun as reading aloud	8.6%	35%
We cannot find quality children books	1.4%	7%
Child is read-aloud to at daycare/school so I don't have to do it.	0.6%	7%
I was not read aloud when I was a child, so I don't see it as a necessary activity.	0.2%	3%

^{*}Respondents could select more than one option in this question. Additional response options that were culturally-relevant were added to the Turkish instrument. For comparison purposes, only mutual response options are displayed on this table.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was understanding parents' perceptions regarding read aloud activities with children at home setting. The findings in the study were partially overlapped with previous study findings. The significant association between number of children's book at home and frequency of reading aloud to children, supports previous study findings that emphasize importance of home literacy environment (Bayraktar, 2018).

Families' socio-economic level has also been cited as a predictor of home literacy activities in recent studies (i.e. Yazici & Kandir, 2018). As aligned with previous study findings', there is significant association between income and frequency of literacy activities such as reading aloud to children. Families with higher degree level and income level read more frequently with their children. This gap among families from different socio-economic status (i.e. income, educational level) emphasizes the importance of nonprofit associations and projects to raise parental awareness regarding home literacy activities such as "Kütüpanne" and "Reach Out and Read".

The parents reported that they do not have time for regular read-aloud activities with their children. In today's conditions, that both parents work in most families, this barrier is meaningful. Yet, this finding is also consistent with past studies that were conducted in 80s (i.e., Smith, 1989). The reason why parents think lack of time as a barrier might not be completely related to today's parental roles and work-home balance but to the degree of

perceived importance of reading-aloud by parents. On the other hand, lack of access to quality children books has been reported as a barrier a lot less than previous studies (Dickinson, McCabe, & Anastasopoulos, 2003; Strickland, 2002), which can be attributed to the recent development of children literature, and increasing number of public libraries in Turkey.

A number of parents reported that children's desire for moving while reading with them is barrier for conducting read-aloud activities together. This finding indicated that parents may perceive children's cognitive activity and interest while reading with them require sitting still and listening. This finding is consistent with previous research on parental perceptions on reading:

Parents more frequently read, tell stories, and sing songs to their children if

they expect their children to be cognitively active during storybook reading. (Sackes et. al. 2016).

However, children in early ages have very short attention span and may not sit still till end of a book on the contrary to some parents' expectations. For this reason, researchers suggested dialogic reading strategies which include using different voices and tones, asking open-ended questions, and completing repetitive phrases (Acosta-Tello, 2019).

It should be emphasized that the promising findings in this study should not be interpreted as the overall parents' perceptions in Turkey since the study has some limitations due to the sampling approach employed for data collection. Since the survey respondents were already following *Kütüpanne* web platform, it is safe to assume that the data has been collected from a sample of parents who have some awareness regarding read-aloud activities with their children. In addition, the sample was not balanced in terms of gender since only 3.1% of the participants were men. Further studies should employ random sampling approaches such as stratified sampling by gender to select a more representative sample.

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Appendix A

OKUMA KÜLTÜRÜ ANKETİ

I. <u>BÖLÜM: KİTAP OKUMA YAKLAŞIMINIZI BİZİMLE PAYLAŞIR MISINIZ?</u>

Bu anket, Read Aloud paydaşlarından biri olan Kütüp-Anne Platformunca, 0-6 yaş arası çocuk sahibi ebeveynler arasındaki çocuklarına kitap okuma konusundaki eğilimin ve var olan algının tespit edilmesine yönelik hazırlanmıştır. Ankete katılımınız, ülkemizde okuma kültürünün geliştirilmesine yönelik çalışmalarda okul öncesi dönemin önemini ortaya koymamıza ve daha doğru hizmet üretmemize destek olacaktır. Şimdiden zaman ayırdığınız için teşekkür ederiz.

l.	Çocuğunuzun beyin gelişimini desteklediğine inandığınız/bildiğiniz aktiviteleri işaretleyiniz.
	Birden çok seçenek işaretleyebilirsiniz.
	□Sohbet Etmek
	□Kitap Okumak
	□Oyun Oynamak
	□TV İzlemek
	□Sarılmak
	□Eğitici-Öğretici Oyunlar Oynamak
	□Şarkı Söylemek
	□Aile üyelerinden masal dinlemek
	□Müzik dinlemek
	□Karakter Oyunları
	□Diğer
2.	Çocuğunuza düzenli kitap okumanızın onun gelişimine etkisi nedir?
	\square Kesinlikle çok olumlu etkisi vardır.
	□ Olumlu etkisi var.
	\square Az çok etkisi vardır.
	□ Etkisi Yoktur.
3.	Cocuğunuza doğduğu andan itibaren düzenli kitan okuvor musunuz?

 $\Box 40-49$

□ 50-99

 \square 100 ve üzeri

7.	Evinizde Bulunan kitapları nereden temin ettiniz? Birden fazla seçeneği işaretleyebilirsiniz.
	□ Kitapçı
	□ Doğum günü hediyesi
	□ Farklı zamanlarda gelen hediyeler
	□ 2. El
	□ Kitap Fuarı
	□ Doğum Hediyesi-Bebek Görme Hediyesi
	□ Kütüphane
	□ Okul aracılığı ile
	□ Diğer
8.	Çocuğunuza kitap okumaktan sizi alıkoyan ya da sizi engelleyen sebepler nelerdir? Birden çok
	seçenek işaretleyebilirsiniz.
	☐ Kitap okumak kadar yararlı başka aktiviteler yapıyoruz.
	□ Çocuğum kitap okuduğumda uzun süre oturup beni dinleyemiyor.
	☐ Günlük koşuşturma içerisinde zaman bulamıyorum.
	☐ Okulda/Bakıcısı ile yeterince kitap okunuyor, benim okuma gerek kalmıyor.
	□ Okumak için yeterince iyi kitap bulamıyoruz.
	☐ Kitaplar çok pahalı.
	☐ Kitap okumayı sevmiyorum
	□ Çocukluğumda kimse bana kitap okumadı, bunun çok gerekli olduğunu düşünmüyorum.
	□ Okula başladığında zaten kendi okuyacak, benim şimdiden okumama gerek yok.
	☐ Her gün düzenli kitap okuyorum.
9.	Çocuğunuza kitap okumayı, çocuğunuz kaç yaşına geldiğinde bırakmayı planlıyorsunuz?
	□ 5 yaş ve daha öncesinde
	□ 6-8
	□ 9-11
	□ 12 yaş ve daha büyük bir yaşta
	□ Bilmiyorum

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BÖLÜM: SİZİ BİRAZ TANIYALIM

II.

1.	Yaşadığınız İl:
2.	Cinsiyetiniz
	□ Erkek
	□ Kadın
3.	Yaşınız:
4.	Çocukla Yakınlık Dereceniz
	□ Anne
	□ Baba
	□ Diğer
5.	Hane halkı toplam gelir grubu
	□ 1750 tl ve altı
	□ 1750tl - 3500tl
	□ 3500tl - 6000tl
	□ 6000tl-10000tl
	\square 10000 tl ve üstü
6.	0-6 yaş arası kaç çocuğunuz var?
7.	Çocuklarınızın yaşlarını girebilir misiniz?
III.	BÖLÜM: SON SORULAR
1.	Çocuğunuzun okumanızdan en çok keyif aldığı kitabının adı nedir?
2.	Eklemek istedikleriniz: