

A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS ON THE IMPACT OF LITERACY ENVIRONMENT ON YOUNG CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE ABILITIES: AN EXAMPLE OF HOME AND CLASSROOM LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

Children's language ability in preschool is a strong predictor to academic achievements in later years. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, children grow and learn through the interaction context between family and school. Studies showed that both family and preschool institution were important factors in influencing children's language development. However, very few studies explored two factors at once on how children's language development was influenced by the two factors and the interaction between them. Therefore, this study explored the direct effects of family environment and classroom environment on young children's language abilities, and also the two environments' contextual effect on young children's language abilities.

METHOD

Participants were 134 kindergarten teachers and 478 parent-child dyads in Tainan city. Stratified random sampling technique was employed. The instruments included questionnaires for parents and teachers, and a language measure for children. The two Language & Literacy Environment Questionnaires (LLEQ) for parents and teachers were developed by the researchers for the purpose of the present study. Two standardized language measures were used to assess children's 4 languages abilities in vocabulary comprehension, vocabulary expression, language comprehension, and oral expression. All language tests were administered one to one in a quiet room of the kindergarten participated in the study. Each session took about 20-30 minutes.

RESULTS

1. Significant Difference Between Different Classrooms Was Found in 4 Measures of Young Children'S Language Abilities.

Vocabulary comprehension explained 15.10% variance of classroom differences. Vocabulary expression explained 6.61% variance. Language comprehension explained 6.27% variance. Oral expression explained 17.48% variance.

2. Home Language and Literacy Environment Was Found to Have a Positive Effect on Young Children'S Language Abilities.

Family SES was found to have a significant positive effect on young children's vocabulary comprehension, vocabulary expression, and language comprehension. Home literacy resource was found to have a significant positive effect on young children's language comprehension and oral expression. Family literacy activities were found to have a significant positive effect on young children's vocabulary comprehension and vocabulary expression. Parent-child shared book reading was found to have a significant positive effect on young children's language comprehension.

3. Classroom Language and Literacy Environment Was Found to Have a Positive Effect on Young Children'S Language Abilities.

In classroom language and literacy environment, only classroom language instruction activities were found to have direct contextual effects on young children's vocabulary comprehension, vocabulary expression, language comprehension, and oral expression. Classroom literacy resource was no effect on any dimension of children's language abilities.

4. Classroom Language and Literacy Environment Was Found to Have Moderating Effect on Young Children'S Language Abilities.

In classroom language and literacy environment, classroom language and literacy activities had a negative moderating effect on home SES, vocabulary comprehension and oral expression. The result indicated that low SES family will benefit more from the help of preschool education, whereas the high SES family will benefit less.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Conclusion

- (1) Home language and literacy environment had a direct effect on young children's language abilities.
- (2) In classroom language and literacy environment, only classroom language teaching instruction had a direct contextual effect on young children's language abilities.
- (3) In classroom language and literacy environment, classroom language and literacy activities had a moderating effect between home language and literacy environment and young children's language abilities.

2. Suggestions

- (1) Parents of young children should enrich their home language and literacy environment to promote their children's language development.
- (2) Teachers of young children should arrange diversified language teaching activities to enrich children's language experiences and to promote their language development.
- (3) Teachers of young children should pay more attention to children with low SES. Teachers should encourage these children to participating more in language related activities as to make-up the insufficiency of their home language environment.