THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESCHOOLERS’ READING ENGAGEMENT AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Aalia Fields (Dr. Seeung-Hee Claire Son)
Department of Educational Psychology

Engagement in literacy-related tasks strongly predicts development of literacy skills and achievement for elementary age children (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2004). Engagement in learning tasks is a multidimensional concept, encompassing behavioral components such as involvement in activities and following directions; cognitive components such as self-regulation of attention and commitment to the learning process; and emotional components such as affective reactions to teachers, peers, and activities (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Executive functioning (EF) skills—self-regulation of attention, working memory, and inhibitory control—may predict reading engagement, as they are strong predictors of classroom behaviors associated with engagement (McClelland et al., 2007). Our research questions are framed to explicitly examine dimensions of engagement such as: (1) how preschoolers’ reading engagement develops over time; and (2) whether reading engagement and EF scores are associated.

Participants of the study were low-income preschoolers’ (N=175, aged 3-5) from three Head Start sites in urban areas of Mountain West Regions. Preschoolers’ skills were assessed during the fall and spring of school year. Teacher surveys evaluated engagement during storybook reading (Son, 2014), and a series of behavioral regulation tasks measured EF (Ponitz et al., 2008). Fall and spring measures of reading engagement indicated that children’s reading engagement improved on average over the school year (t = 11.407, p < .000). Though reading engagement is associated with EF skills, development of EF skills over a school year did not predict changes in engagement in book reading over time. However, increased reading engagement over time significantly predicted development of EF skills. Correlation analysis showed that fall EF scores and fall engagement scores (r = .442, p < .001), as well as spring EF and spring reading engagement scores (r = .475, p < .001), were associated. Ultimately, results indicate that engagement in book reading and EF skills share a bidirectional relationship.

References


