Home Storybook Reading and the Development of Linguistic Abilities During the Acquisition Stage in Spanish-speaking Children

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Abstract
Traditionally, it has been thought that education starts at school age, however, recent reports show the necessity of improving children’s communicative and reading skills at home. As a result, this study examined how providing home storybook reading along with a significant caregiver involvement influenced children linguistic development in their mother tongue. Participants in the study were children (N=26) between two to four years old, from low socioeconomic status Mexican families. The main purpose of this paper is to present the results obtained from a research regarding an early home storybook reading intervention program and its impact on the development of children’s linguistic and social abilities within the family environment. By using both qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout a twelve-week period, it was observed a meaningful increase in children’s language development as a result of the early reading intervention plan.

Resumen
Tradicionalmente se ha pensado que la educación inicia en la edad escolar; sin embargo, reportes recientes muestra la necesidad de mejorar las habilidades comunicativas y lectoras de los alumnos desde el hogar. Como resultado, en este estudio se examinó cómo a través de la lectura de cuentos junto con el involucramiento significativo delos padres de familia influyeron en el desarrollo lingüístico de los niños en su lengua materna. Los participantes de este estudio fueron niños (N=26) entre dos y cuatro años de edad provenientes de familias mexicanas de bajo nivel socioeconómico. El principal objetivo de este artículo consiste en presentar los resultados de un trabajo de investigación relacionado con una intervención temprana de lectura y su impacto en el desarrollo de las habilidades linguísticas y sociales de los niños dentro de un contexto familiar. Se recolectaron datos cuantitativos y cualitativos durante un periodo de 12 semanas, en las cuales se observó un aumento significativo en el desarrollo lingüístico de los niños como resultado de la intervención temprana de lectura.

“The more reading aloud there is at home, the more children read later in life”

Weinreich (2000)
Background

Most of times, literacy is usually defined as the ability to read and write, but if we take into consideration all the benefits we can get from it, we come to the conclusion that this definition does not illustrate the real significance of those abilities. According to Koïchiro Matsuura, General Director of UNESCO,

"Literacy is about more than reading and writing - it is about how we communicate in society. It is also about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture." (Information provided by UNESCO, 2003)

In 2006, the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA, hereafter) in collaboration with the Applied Research Area and the Research Institute from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) conducted a national survey (Encuesta Nacional de Lectura 2006) regarding the culture of reading among Mexican population. As a result of this study, Uribe (2006) reported “in Mexico it was found that schooling was the main reason for reading activities”. (p. 51)

In addition, it was found that Mexican families do not include reading activities in their daily routines. In contrast, it was reported that four out of ten informants occupy their spare time watching television (41.1%), followed by resting (29.2%), spending time with friends and relatives (21.7%), and listening to music (20.6%); while reading books occupy the last positions in the list of spare-time favorite activities (12.5%).

Nationwide, a major concern pertaining education has been the lack of awareness about the importance of reading as a non-academic task. This lack of reading habits represents a factor that has led Mexican population to be placed in the last positions internationally in terms of reading attainment and proficiency. Gutiérrez (2005), on the other hand suggests the following:

"De acuerdo a las últimas cifras difundidas por la UNESCO, México ocupa el penúltimo lugar de hábitos de lectura de una lista conformada por 108 naciones del mundo, con un promedio de lectura de 2.8 libros anuales por habitante, cifra muy alejada de los 25 volúmenes recomendados por este organismo internacional, y del promedio de lectura de la sociedad Japonesa, Noruega, Finlandesa y Canadiense que ocupan los primeros lugares a nivel mundial con 47 títulos per cápita. (p. 94)"

However, by doing a further in depth analysis of the reported 2.8 read books per capita, it is found that this figure mainly shows that the main reason for reading is the use for academic purposes. Then, reading is considered as an academic duty instead of a personal leisure activity. In other words, for the majority of Mexicans, reading is not part of the culture. The low figures presented in the above paragraph may also decrease at an alarming rate if parents do not promote reading activities at home.

New models and reading habits urged to meet need for developing a reading culture among the Mexican population. Therefore, this paper addresses the need for parental involvement in order to maximize their children’s future academic opportunities by adopting and developing a reading culture at home.
Reading, Language Acquisition and Social Interaction

Early literacy has to be recognized as a basic tool for young children to improve their communicative skills and language development. The earlier a child is introduced to reading activities, the better he/she will develop his linguistic skills (Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994). One reason that reading aloud to children is effective is that it enhances and promotes language acquisition, which is linked to children’s later academic success (Elley, 1989; Pemberton & Watkins, 1987; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993; Whitehurst et al., 1988). Children successfully master the basic structure of the language in a variety of conditions. According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), it through reading that “children achieve different levels of vocabulary, creativity, social grace, among other characteristics, but the majority of them achieve mastery of the structure and social aspects of the language spoken around them”. (p. 17)

The idea of children having an innate capacity to acquire language has been one of the most representative underpinnings in language acquisition (Chomsky, 1965, 1975, 1980). Foster-Cohen (1999) mentions that language acquisition cannot be explained in isolation. It is rather a “cooperative effort between Universal Grammar and learning from the input” (p. 110). Both of them lead to language development where children have to be exposed to language forms to deduce the rules by ‘general learning mechanisms’. However, it is through social interaction and through experience that children learn to deal with cultural conditions to convey language meaning. In addition, Clark (2001) suggests that “acquisition, then, must be a product of both cognitive and social influences. On the social side, caretakers (adults or older siblings) talk to young children and thereby provide the linguistic categories and grammatical distinctions pertinent to each language”. (p. 379)

As mentioned in previous lines, social interaction is essential for language development and books serve as the social milieu to exchange points of view with children. Parents need to be aware of the benefits that come from reading activities such as spending time with children, supplying good quality short-stories and turning their home into a comfortable and suitable place to enhance reading. Therefore, the main purpose of this investigation consists of analyzing and portraying the impact of home storybook reading as a method of socialization and language development at a very early age, long before schooling. A growing body of research evidence (Molina, et al. 1992; Crystal, 1997; Wang, 2000; Bialystok, 2001; Colomer, 2005) shows that early reading experiences are linked with later academic achievement, as well as emotional and social wellbeing. For instance, Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006) coincide that early childhood professionals have long recognized the importance of language and literacy in preparing children to succeed in school.

Finally, research evidence also suggests that early literacy is strongly linked with dropout rate reduction, higher graduation rates, and enhanced productivity in adult life.

Reading and Language Development

Home storybook reading and verbal interaction expose children to language development and help them to acquire and master their language from birth on, and before. Those activities provide input in non-threatening environments, lowering levels of anxiety and stress periods children might experience by involving stories children really want to hear.

Krashen (1981, 1982) argues that “extensive reading will lead to language acquisition”. Reading books to children or telling them stories, triggers out their imagination and sharpens their literacy skills. Short-stories are told in all cultures constituting an important part of the oral tradition in a great number of western cultures. Additionally, Crystal (1997) suggests that: “literacy has long
been considered the main evidence of a child’s educational progress. Reading plays a fundamental role in promoting children’s critical and imaginative thinking, and thus their intellectual and emotional development". (p. 252) Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006), for instance, report that “literacy development starting early in life is highly correlated with school achievement” (p. 1). Those facts have to motivate people and widen their view and positive attitudes towards reading as a daily activity at home.

Bialystok (2001) also suggests “reading aloud to preschool children provides a rich opportunity for exposure to the conventions and style of language used in created stories”. Children who had been read regularly at home had greater facility with the style of language used in books that did children who were not (Molina, et. al., 1992). Reading to children exposes them to linguistic rules and patterns that can guide and foster children’s linguistic growth so that language development can occur earlier than it normally does.

To explain this, Foster-Cohen (1999) points out:

Children in linguistically supportive environments continue to receive feedback on their communications, and learn thereby how to design messages so that they communicate what the children intended [...] In other words, being active as a communicator builds functional (pragmatic) skills of message design, and gives practice in fluency. (p. 98)

Moreover, two and four year-old children have normally certainly been exposed to certain narrations, if not from books, from grown-ups in daily life. They have basis but yet they have not developed their narrative skills to produce a good quality story. Lloyd and Merle (1997) use the term of Emergent Readers for those who are at the beginning of the reading adventure, and quote;

Emergent Readers have learned that books contain stories that they can visit as often as they like, that the words will be the same each time they return, and that the pictures accompanying the stories help construct and develop meaning. (p. 256)

Cameron (2001, p. 45) also mentions that “emergent readers often begin to know by heart sentences from favorite books, learning them from hearing them over and over, and will say them along with the adult reader then they begin to pick up known words from texts linking the shapes with the sounds”. When the child develops his first narratives, he uses basic strategies to provide their organizational structure. It is through time and the quality of social interactions that they strengthen their competence in this domain.

Parental Involvement and Reading

Traditionally, it has been taught that education starts at school age. However, since a baby is born, he/she is constantly exposed to new socio-cultural rules he/she needs to acquire in order to fit later in the new environment. The content of linguistic and non-linguistic material children must acquire is sometimes complex in nature. Therefore, this is why children need to be encouraged by adults since they serve as role models for the development of children’s linguistic productions.

Family represents the primary social environment for children during the preschool years, and it is the base from which they venture into new social contexts. Family, therefore, also plays
an essential role in developing reading skills. Wang (2000, p. 1) states that “there are various factors that influence children’s attitudes toward reading such as: Children’s personal experiences in reading, children’s confidence in reading and parents’ attitudes towards reading”. Rogoff (1990) sustains that children develop rapidly their thinking skills “from actively observing and participating in culturally-defined problems with more skilled members in their society”. (p. 7)

The rationale behind these previous research findings is that parents, as the *more skilled* performers and the more sophisticated interactional partners, facilitate their children’s linguistic growth in important ways. During early development, parents are the social agents that best understand children’s intentions and thus can best provide the feedback children may need. Home storybook reading is not as simple as it might be seen. Consequently, in Mexico, well-designed interventions are needed to get children’s attention and interest in reading activities such as: Selecting books or short-stories, reading in a non-threatening environment, using visual aids and puppets, planning a game among other interesting reading activities that parents can adopt. However, storybook readers or tellers then need to know that the actual reading exercise is not enough; they have to communicatively interact with children in meaningful manners to facilitate the acquisition of new vocabulary and to help them develop other linguistic strategies linked to reading skills such as comprehension and communicative skills.

**Statement of the problem**

School days are, generally, when students, teachers and the entire school community face several conflicts due to lack of reading. Low academic performance, lack of vocabulary, low practice or deficiency in skills such as summarizing, analyzing, organizing, integrating and problem solving are some of the main conflicts students have at school. Therefore, children must start developing high order thinking skills long before schooling, starting at home to reach academic achievement later. Home environment and the amount of time parents devote to literacy activities with their children could make the difference.

Zaid (2006) declares that children inherit the interest for books from their parents. This paper is driven by the lack of parental involvement in their children’s reading enhancement in Mexico, as well as the lack of awareness that exists in regards to the significance of home literacy for young children.

Although a large body of research pertaining home storybook reading and its benefits has been conducted, little research has been done in Mexico regarding this issue. The previous studies have been mainly focused on the description of either individual gains and analysis or school practices linked to a specific reading program; however, little feedback is provided to the implementation of such plans. Nationwide, another problem is the lack of continuity of the reading programs since they largely emerged as part of the political agenda of the Party in charge. As a result, the benefits of reading cannot be the product of a top-down campaigns; it needs a more bottom-up effort to evaluate the short and long-term effects of reading at home. For this reason, further studies are badly needed on this topic.

**Hypotheses of the study**

The following premises drove this study:

1) Home storybook reading leads to a gradual increase in the quantity of lexical items (number of words and length of phrases) and quality of structuring (openings, closings, and interruptions) produced during their narrations.

2) The quality of the interactions around the reading activity contributes highly to the
development of reading habits in children at an early age.

Variables of the study
This study was limited to the following variables.

A) Independent variable: The frequency of exposure to home storybook reading activities at home as well as the quality of the interactions before, during and after the reading activity.

B) Dependent variable: Gradual increase in the quantity of lexical items (number of words and length of phrases) and narrative awareness (openings, closings, and interruptions) produced during their narrations.

Description of Participants
The group was consisted of 26 participant students. They were enrolled in the course of Language acquisition and language learning in the Department of Languages at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. The participant students were asked to choose a child to take part in the experimental group of this study (N= 26). These students were in charge of visiting the children in their homes, choosing and evaluating the home storybook activities, and performing either as the storyteller or as the observer. Besides this, they were in charge of recording the story telling sessions and elaborating written reports describing the children’s language progress.

The 26 children who formed the experimental group had a low socioeconomic background and they all lived in urban areas. The first requirement and the main characteristic considered due to the purposes of this paper was that children knew neither how to read nor how to write in order to observe if those who were exposed to the early reading treatment at home show a significant increase in the quantity of lexical items produced in their narratives (number of words and phrases), and narrative awareness (structure of the quality of structuring (opening, closings and interruptions), as well as structuring complex utterances.

Creswell (2003) states “[…] when one group receives a treatment and the other group does not, the experimenter can isolate whether it is the treatment and not the characteristics of individuals in a group (or other factors) that influence the outcome” (2003: 154). The control group (N= 26) was selected according to the characteristics of the experimental group in order to avoid biases.

While the sessions recorded with the experimental group totaled 12, two recordings (one at the beginning of the reading intervention and the other at the end) were necessary for each child from the control group to compare the results. The children were recorded having a conversation with somebody they knew in order to avoid a forced or artificial environment. Each session lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. The purpose of the recording was to obtain an insight into the process of the children linguistic abilities in order to evaluate the impact of the early intervention plan.

Methodology
This study used a triangulation mixed method by using both qualitative and quantitative designs (Creswell, 2003). On one hand, research techniques such as recordings and opened interviews with parents and the participant students were utilized along with the recordings (in-site) and written reports. Categorizing the informants’ responses and analyzing the children’s linguistic productions these data was analyzed. On the other hand, an independent samples t-test for equal variances was performed to assess whether the mean of lexical productions differ significantly for a group of 26 two to four year old children who received a home storybook intervention compared to that of 26 two to four old children who did not.
**Instrumentation**

Two instruments were utilized in this study. First, a twenty-two-survey was adapted and modified from the instrument used in the *Encuesta Nacional de Lectura 2006* pertaining to the following component: *Reading and the familiar environment*. It was administered to explore reading habits at home. Second, a fourteen-survey administered to the participant students attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of the reading treatment on the development of the children’s linguistic abilities. The purpose of using these two instruments was to evaluate the impact of the reading treatment on children’s linguistic development and compare the parents’ responses with the participant students’ responses in order to triangulate the results. The rationale for this research consisted of capitalizing on the benefits of both sources of data collection driven by a quasi-experimental research design (Mertler, 2006).

**Treatment Description**

The treatment consisted of the following stages:

A) **Parents’ authorization:** Parents were asked to give their permission by signing a consent form.

B) **Length and frequency:** The children were exposed to one different home storybook reading during a 12 week-period. The sessions started in the last week of September 2009, and ended in the first week of December 2009. Each session lasted from 10 to 20 minutes.

C) **The role of participants:** The story teller had to read aloud a short-story to the child. The child was allowed to interact with the adult before, during, and after the reading activity. In the meantime, the child’s speech was recorded to have the evidence of each activity. Some participant students performed as storytellers and some other just as observers, in either case they had to prepare a written report at the end of each session.

D) **Characteristics of the reports:** Written reports presented by participant students consisted of the following elements: Date, the short-story title, the name of the reader, the length of the activity, a brief description of the relevant issues and some observations.

E) **Storybook selection:** Lloyd and Merle (1997) underline the importance of choosing books for emergent readers tailored according to their needs and competencies. The books had clear plots and illustrations preceding the text in order to assist emergent readers in the process of predicting what the text may imply and its possible sequence. The home storybooks were selected according to the children’s age and linguistic development mainly. Special attention to the length of the story, number and size of pictures was given when selecting the material.

**Scenarios**

The setting was a crucial factor for this study. The reading activities took place in the children’s home to preserve the familiar environment as the main pivot conducive to the development of reading skills, which represents a non-threatening environment for children exposing them to reading as an activity shared with their parents and not as a day-to-day-school practice. Maintaining the home environment as natural as possible was a priority for this study.
Data analysis

The method of data analysis in this study was two-folded. First, the findings obtained in the written reports, the recordings, and the questionnaires were presented in a graphic manner to facilitate the interpretation of the results. Textual transcriptions of the participants’ responses were needed to group them accordingly. These transcripts obtained through the written reports along with the survey responses were classified and divided into different categories. Attempts were made to elicit interpretations about the participants’ responses. As mentioned, an independent samples \( t \) test was carried out to assess whether mean of lexical productions differed significantly for a group of 26 children who received a home storybook intervention compared to those 26 children who did not. Preliminary data screening indicated that the number of lexical items produced along with the number of phrases elaborated by children receiving the reading treatment was higher compared to that obtained by children who were not exposed to the reading intervention in the twelve-week period. The SPSS program was used.

Results: Hypothesis 1) Home storybook reading leads to a gradual increase in the quantity of lexical items (number of words and length of phrases) and quality of structuring (openings, closings, and interruptions) produced during their narrations.

The data collected in the twelve-week period was analyzed in two sets. The first cut corresponds to the weeks 1 through 6 and the second corresponds to the 7th to the 12th week, respectively. Both home storybook reading and training events for family caregivers and their children were held prior to week 1 and week 7. This, to ensure the caregivers knew the characteristics and nature of the reading activities. The training emphasized the following features: enjoying the storybook reading, sitting close together pointing to the print, reading the story as many times as the child requested, interact with the child before, during, and after the activity (naming, labeling, pointing, elaborating, expanding, and extending). However, an important aspect to be considered in order to obtain the overall results for this hypothesis was the caregivers’ (parents, mainly) level of schooling. This information was needed in order to have an insight into the home reading practices, and its relationship with the caregivers’ academic background. According to the Encuesta Nacional de Lectura, 2006, it was found that reading is narrowly linked to the academic years of the individuals. For instance, the portion of the population with the highest levels of reading is located among those informants between 18 to 22 years old (69.7%), and 12 to 17 years old (66.6%). However, when these figures are analyzed, it can be observed that the majority of participants in the study reported low schooling levels. According to the national survey, the lower the socioeconomic level is reported, the lower the reading habits are also reported. The factors for those low reading levels may obey to different aspects. For instance, when the informants in the study were asked on the reasons why they did not practice reading at home varies. Some of the most common responses are enlisted below:

- Lack of time
- Lack of money to buy books
- Preference for other type of leisure activities
- Priority for other home activities such as house cleaning, and other home endeavors.
Figure 1. The position that reading activities occupies among the caregivers who participated in the study.

As a result of the comparison between the above figures it is observed the small amount of time devoted to reading activities compared to activities such as: Watching TV (Ver television), rest (descansar), and gatherings with relatives and friends (reuniones con amigos y familiares). Children who did not have support at home to develop their early reading skills did not achieve the level of oral production than those children who are exposed to story-telling. In this study, it was observed that the short-story telling process sharpened children oral production since the language contained in the books served as a pattern for their language development.

Those were the three most frequent responses informants reported as in regards to their reasons for the scare reading activities at home. It was also confirmed the relationship between the amount and frequency of home reading practices and the caregivers’ levels of schooling.

Figure 2. Level of schooling of the caregivers

Overall, it was found that the reading practices at home depend greatly on the caregivers’ reading practices.

Serra (2000) declares that,

\[ \text{son los adultos quienes proporcionan la mayor parte de la estructura y el contenido de la narración, sin la ayuda de los adultos es muy difícil que los niños sean capaces de producir una narración organizada y completa. (2000:529)} \]
From the previous quote it is possible to infer that the richer the input provided by the adults is, the more competitive the individuals (in this case, children) would be in regards to their linguistic outcomes. The results obtained by analyzing the recordings show that home storybook reading led to a gradual improvement in discourse sequence. Aspects such as starters, closures and linking phrases (y, luego, y aquí, después, además, etc) among other discursive markers were perceived after the reading. A comparison between the connectors used by children of the experimental group and children from the control group are detailed in the chart below.

In the following tables the children’s linguistic productions progress is presented in two different stages. The information presented in the first table corresponds to the 1 through 6 week, whereas Table 2 shows the information gathered from the 7 to the 1 week of the reading intervention plan.

**Table 1**
Means, maximum points and minimum on the number of words, sequencing words, openings, closings, and number of interruptions for weeks 1-6.

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<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Means</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sequencing markers</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of openings and closings used in narratives</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interruptions</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>9</td>
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Table 2
Means, maximum points and minimum on the number of words, sequencing words, openings, closings, and number of interruptions for weeks 7-12.

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<th>Experimental Group</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Means</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sequencing markers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of openings</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>and closings used in narratives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interruptions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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Although children did not perform complete descriptions of the stories, children who received the treatment showed an increased use of connectors for their narratives compared to those who did not receive the treatment. In addition, it was proved that reading triggers children’s oral production improvement. Through time and with the support of home storybook readers, children’s retelling potential turned into more complete and well-described stories. For instance, they added details about the setting, the context, and the environment. They used sequence discourse markers and provided information about the order of episodes. Home-storybook reading helped children to learn about the organization of narratives, they naturally followed the pattern of written texts (introduction, body, and conclusion).

The following transcription of a child’s linguistic production is presented as an example to support qualitatively the results shown above. These transcriptions show a comparison of the first and last sessions of the treatment. The child was randomly selected from 1 of the 26 children of the experimental group to compare the quality in her narration.

First session: September 22, 2009
Length of child’s production: 3 min

Había una vez Blanca Nieves estaba echando agua con su canasta y los pajaritos estaban con ella y la bruja la quería matar con su corona, le dio la manzana a Blanca Nieves y estaba en la escalera y al castillo se fue la bruja y se acabó el cuento [interrupts] (vamos a jugar) [pauses] los enanitos los despidió Blanca Nieves porque ya se fueron a trabajar hoy porque estaban en el castillo,
la quieren atrapar porque no dejaba a los enanitos, le dio una manzana y Blanca Nieves se murió y se murió, después le dio un beso el rey y los enanitos estaban buscando flores le dio un beso y ya[interrupts]… vamos a jugar ya.

Había una vez una bonita princesa y hermosa que se llamaba cenicienta pero la madrastra no quería que saliera a ningún lado, la cenicienta tenía que hacer todo el trabajo de la casa y después la regañaron y llegó una invitación del palacio y dijo la madrastra “¡tú no vas a ir porque no has acabado todo el quehacer de la casa, te vas a quedar aquí y hasta que termines te vas a ir!” Así la regañó, después la puso a barrer y después ¿qué crees que pasó? Toda la casa se llenó de luz porque estaba llegando una hada madrina que le dijo a Cenicienta “¿por qué lloras hija mía?” Y dijo la cenicienta “porque mi madrastra no me dejó ir al baile”- y dijo la hada madrina- “no te preocupes mi niña sí vas a ir al baile, te arreglé tu vestido para que te vayas y tus caballos y tu carroza y todo todo”- y dijo la cenicienta- “gracias hada madrina [to be continued…] la vio el príncipe y supo que era verdadero amor, se casaron y fueron felices para siempre. Colorín colorado, este cuento se ha terminado.1

The transcript above shows how this child improved significantly not only in the amount of lexical items produced but it also improved the structuring of the narrative. The participant students reported that at the beginning of the home storybook intervention, most of the children interrupted during the reading sessions, they seemed to have no interest in the activity and they did not want to collaborate. However, according the results obtained, home storybook sessions proved to reduce the number of interruptions considerably2. At first, children’s interruptions were not related to the short-story per se. After the treatment, it was observed that the interruptions children made during the activities dealt with the activity in place.

However, the following chart provides a final comparison of discourse sequence, conversational starters, closures, linkers and the amount of interruptions.

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1 The second transcript here presented was reduced due to space restrictions.
2 However, more research is needed regarding the pragmatic meaning of interruptions during a reading activity. According to the results in this study, it was observed that interruptions may be conducive to language development as well since they may be part of children’s interactions rather than a disruptive behavior.
Table 3
Means, minimum and maximum points on the length of words, number of phrases, and length of phrases during the 12 week period of reading intervention.

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<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Means</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of words</td>
<td>5.7 letters</td>
<td>8 letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of phrases</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The length of phrases</td>
<td>15 words</td>
<td>1 word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, an independent t-test for equal variance was carried out in order to compare the means for the experimental and the control groups. Our T value was 3.796. We had 10 degrees of freedom. Therefore, we can infer that there was a significant difference between the two groups (the significance is less than .05). In addition, we can say that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

Table 4
Independent T-test for equal variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.796</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>3.073E-02</td>
<td>4.819E-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.796</td>
<td>9.966</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>3.073E-02</td>
<td>4.816E-02</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Children who were exposed to the early reading intervention produced significantly more lexical items than those who were not exposed to the reading intervention.
Results: Hypothesis 2
The quality of the interactions around the reading activity contributes highly to the development of reading habits in children at an early age.

During the early reading intervention, the participant students prompted children to perform independently and cooperatively in each session by making use of a wide variety of images contained in books, questions after each session, descriptions events related to the story as well as predictions. Some of the inquiries utilized to elicit the children’s responses were: Did you like the story? What happened to X (the character)? What do you think about the story? What is this (while pointing out a picture)? Tell me something you liked about the story, which is your favorite character? What is it that you like the most about? This technique allowed children to explore books and expand their imagination while developing their linguistic abilities. In this regards, participant students reported that children gave more emphasis to their narrations and some of them even performed some of the scenes.

In regards to the quality of the interactions before, during and after the reading activities, it was observed that the structuring of the prompters that the participant students utilized influenced greatly the quality of the children’s responses. Based on the analysis of the transcriptions some conversations were chosen randomly. In the following lines two interactions are shown to illustrate that the quality of children’s responses depended significantly on the type of requests, example (1).
In contrast, in a more open interaction, with more elaborated requests and prompted comments, the results were different as shown in the following interactions:

(2) Participant student: ¿La bruja es buena o mala?
Child: Es mala porque se quiere comer a todos los enanitos y les quiere dar manzanas malas.
Participant student: ¿Tú conoces a alguien malo?
Child: Sí, un niño me pegó mañana.
Participant student: ¿Y cómo es ese niño malo?
Child: feo y con su panza grande.
Participant student: y ¿conoces a alguien bueno?
Child: Sí, mi mami me compra dulces.

In the previous examples, it was observed that the elicitation techniques were a key aspect in the way children responded to the reading activities. In the article entitled Convering Helps Language Development More than Reading Alone (2009), it is highlighted the significance of the interactions while reading to children. It was found that language development depends highly on the quality of such interactions that occur while reading. In this study, for instance, children adopted reading sessions as a habit; they even adopted a place of the house to perform the reading sessions under the name of ‘my reading place’. The effects of this treatment made them want to read by themselves and invite other people to join their own reading sessions. A significant number of parents reported that their children were interested in having their regular reading session on weekly basis (80%). Some of the participant students’ written reports suggested the following:
A) Child 1 – week 11: La niña pide un cuento diario aunque ya haya terminado el tratamiento, cuando voy a su casa por otra cosa ella siempre quiere un cuento.

B) Child 2 – week 7: El niño se comportó y cada vez que me ve me pide que le lea un cuento, nunca se opone a ser él quien cuente los cuentos.

C) Child 3 – week 4: La niña se ve muy interesada en lo que leemos, de hecho llevó a la sesión a su hermanita que tiene dos años. Me dijo: traje a mi hermanita porque quiere que le cuenten el de cenicienta, Le gusta la lectura porque su mamá me dijo que le preguntaba,”¿cuándo es lunes? Porque vamos a leer otro cuento el lunes.

D) Child 4 – week 5: Le causa mucha emoción cuando es una página nueva y advierte alguno de sus elementos. Después de que finalizamos el cuento siempre me pregunta cuál le traeré la próxima semana.

E) Child 7 – week 3: Al llegar a la casa de la niña para leerle el cuento la niña ya estaba sentada con dos muñecos abrazándolos y me dijo: ellos también vienen a escuchar el cuento ¿sí? (y los abrazó)

F) Child 8 – week 4: Se ha podido observar un avance ya que es él ahora quien escoge los libros, e incluso pidió que este libro se le leyera en varias ocasiones después de ésta.

G) Child 10 – week 5: La niña vio el cuento de los tres cerditos y me pidió que lo volviéramos a leer. Me pide que le lea más cuentos.

H) Child 15 – week 5: Esta vez al llegar a la casa, la mamá de la niña me hizo el comentario de que la niña agarraba libros y se ponía a “leerlos” así como también que le platicó a todos los demás miembros de su familia de qué trataban los cuentos que ya se le habían leído.

I) Child 17 – week 7: Cuando llego me pregunta que si le traje un libro para leer, le digo que sí y de inmediato se va al sillón en donde se sienta para que se lo lea.

J) Child 21 – week 4: Al momento de llegar, la niña nos recibió con una sonrisa y alegría, inmediatamente me preguntó que si le iba a leer un cuento.

K) Child 24 – week 11: El niño se emociona cada vez que me ve llegar y eso me hace sentir muy contenta.

L) Child 26 – week 6: Después de la quinta lectura me la encontré un día en la calle y me preguntó que si ya le iba a leer un cuento, cosa que me sorprendió muchísimo.

Overall Results

It was by the third or fourth session that children gained enough confidence to perform as story tellers, they showed interest asking for their turn to read using phrases such us: Ahora yo; me toca a mí; tú ya leiste; me va; ahora yo te leo ¿sale? among others. At the beginning of the treatment, children considered books as if they were part of their toys. It was also noticed that they learned how to handle the book and followed an order when turning the pages. They observed and followed patterns when giving emphasis while narrating their version of the short story; the way they performed sounds and changed the tone of their voice according to each character clearly changed. Sometimes it was a princess talking and some other time was a mean wolf trying to blow down the three little pig’s houses.

A very important aspect for this study was the environment where the home storybook activities were developed. The interaction that children had after each reading intervention helped them to better understand the readings they were working with. After the twelve weeks, results revealed that home environment was conducive to children’s self-confidence development while expressing their comments and points of views.
Moreover, throughout the twelve-week period of interactive reading exposure, children had the opportunity to talk and be listened to, to read and to be read to. Since children did not have to develop any scholar task, they enjoyed those minutes sharing a story in a familiar place and talking to someone at the same time they were stimulating their verbal abilities and acquiring new vocabulary. This document attempts to show the richness that early reading may bring to children, as well as the linguistic growth children gained through a constant reading exposure. The results show that if a child is frequently being read there is a higher probability for them to improve their linguistic skills and raise their interest towards reading at an early age. Most importantly, early reading at home helps to prepare children to encounter academic challenges by providing them with the tools and skills they will need at school. If we look at the future demands children will face, then it is important to emphasize the importance of parents as role models for their children in their linguistic development.

The quality of the linguistic interactions that took place after the story-telling activities contributed to obtain positive outcomes. Home literacy environment represents an essential setting in the early reading performance of the children. It is important to mention that most of the children were enthusiastic about reading activities. When the conditions in the family and the environment are appropriated to encourage reading, positive outcomes will arise due to the affective context and nonthreatening environment.

Families are known for being basis of the society. They contribute and promote any possible change to improve their lifestyle; if we all are part of the society it is our responsibility to improve it. By doing this the interest in doing something to address the problem might be more meaningful.

Finally, the results gathered from this document support and encourage the development of reading programs at home. Helping parents improving their reading strategies increases the possibility for them to help their children strengthen their reading and communicative abilities later at school. The impact of early reading on later academic achievement happens to be a fruitful area for future research.
References


