

Interventions Enhancing Early Language Development Through Parent-Child Interactions: A Systematic Review

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Introduction

Parent-child interaction is transactional (Song et al., 2014). There are several parental behaviors that may shape the nature and quality of interactions: sensitivity (Neuhauser et al., 2018), responsivity (Madigan et al., 2019), amount of talk (Golinkoff et al., 2019), quality of talk (Rowe & Snow, 2020), scaffolding (Lowe et al., 2021), parental guidance (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2012a, 2012b), positive emotional tone (Morningstar et al., 2019) and joint attention (Rudd et al., 2008).

It is critical to know parental behaviors that have previously been the focus of interventions because these parental behaviors influence language development.

Purpose and Research Questions

We systematically reviewed interventions aiming at improving early language and literacy through parent-child interactions to address the following questions: Which populations have been studied? Which parental behaviors have been targeted by interventions? How do parental behaviors relate to early language and literacy development?

Method

Search engines used: Academic Search Premier, APA PsychInfo, ERIC, JSTOR, PubMed (MEDLINE), and Google Scholar

Inclusion criteria: 1) published in English in peer-reviewed journal; 2) was an empirical intervention study; 3) conducted with children aged 0 to 4 years; 4) aimed at enhancing parent-child interactions; 5) reported child vocabulary/language outcomes; 6) involved typically developing children, and 7) involved parents and children as participants.

40 articles met the inclusion criteria

Conceptualization of Parental Behaviors

- Parental responsivity: meeting children's communicative or exploratory actions with prompt and contingent responses or replies
- Parental sensitivity: accurately reading children's vocal, affective and gestural cues and providing appropriate, warm, and contingent responses
- Quantity of talk: number of utterances
- Quality of talk: lexical diversity of language and reciprocity in parent-child interactions
- Parental scaffolding: parents or significant others' attempts of extending children's communication
- Parental guidance: supporting children to discover their role as conversational partners and acknowledge the different perspectives of conversational partners
- Joint attention: episodes of common focus and exploration
- Positive emotional tone: warm tone or voice during interactions

Results

Preliminary results

- 72.5% of studies used randomization

Which populations have been studied?

- 72.5% conducted in the United States
- 75.0% targeted toddlers
- 40% reported parents' age; *M* age = 30.6 yrs.
- 7.4% targeted fathers
- 7.1% targeted caregivers with low education
- 2.5% included both parents

Which parental behaviors have been targeted by interventions?

- 20 (50%) studies intervened on one parental behavior; 19 (47.5%) studies intervened on two behaviors.
- 1 (2.5%) study was a multimodule intervention intervening on three behaviors: sensitivity, responsivity, and quality of language input (Guttentag et al., 2014).
- The most intervened upon behaviors were parental responsivity (32.5%), (32.5%) parental guidance, and quantity of talk (32.5%).
- 9 (22.5%) intervened on quality of language input and 8 (20%) intervened on parental sensitivity.
- 2 (5.0%) studies intervened on joint attention, 1 (2.5%) on scaffolding, and 1 (2.5%) on positive emotional tone.

How do parental behaviors relate to early language and literacy development?

- 22 (55%) of studies assessed receptive vocabulary and 21 (52.5%) expressive vocabulary.
- 8 (20%) studies measured words (i.e., unique, count, mean length of utterances MLU).
- 7 (17.5%) studies measured children's vocalizations, 3 (7.5%) children's use of gestures, and 2 (5%) studies measured sentence diversity.
- 1 (2.5%) study measured babbling, 1 (2.5%) measured diversity of conversations, 1 (2.5%) measured reading outcomes, 1 (2.5%) measured narrative skills, and 1 (2.5%) measured print skills.
- All studies (100%) reported that targeted parental behaviors increased significantly among the participants in the treatment and single group cases as attested by post-tests.
- Only one study reported no significant difference between experimental and control groups on post-test language measures (Pae et al., 2016).

Discussion

- Most studies targeted toddlers with very few targeting infants.
- Fathers were less targeted in the interventions and very few studies targeted both parents.
- Caregivers with low levels of education were less targeted by interventions.
- Very few studies intervened on joint attention, scaffolding and none intervened on positive emotional tone.
- Parental behaviors are malleable and affect children's early language and literacy development.
- Effectiveness of the interventions may be limited considering that they have largely studied USA population.

Implications

- There is a need to diffuse the interventions to other contexts and target low-income participants.
- There is need to indigenize interventions procedures and methods for easy diffusion to other parts of the world.
- More research involving infants, fathers and both parents.
- Explore why joint attention, scaffolding and positive emotional tone are less intervened in interventions seeking to enhance early language and literacy through parent-child interactions.
- Establish whether parental behaviors enhance children's early language and literacy longitudinally.
- Continue training parents and other caregivers on the need for quality interactions with children.