

Original article:

Analysis of Employed and Unemployed Mother's Perspectives towards Story Narration in Typically Developing Children

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Abstract

Introduction: Early shared reading experiences positively predict outcomes in language and literacy development of children who experience rich communicative and affective interactions by parents during story narration. However, research is yet to be systematically explore mother's practices and perceptions towards story narration and how employment of mother may influence their perspectives and practices. **Aim:** To analyse the perspectives of employed and unemployed mothers of typically developing children between 2 to 5 years towards story narration. **Materials and Methods:** The study followed a cross sectional design. A total of 60 participants were selected in three age groups (Group I, II & III) of employed and unemployed mothers. A questionnaire was developed to analyse perceptions and practices of mother of typically developing children between 2 to 5 years towards story narration. The responses were scored and analysed using SPSS Software, where a Chi-Square Test was performed to check the association. **Results:** Chi-square analysis revealed no significant association of employment in maternal perceptions towards story narration activities. **Conclusion:** The study revealed that employment does not influence maternal perceptions towards story narration. The increase in mean score with age indicated a positive change in mother's perception. This finding is an important contributing factor to understand the role of mothers in children's developing language and early literacy skills. The study emphasises and highlights the lacuna in early interaction of mothers in pre-literacy based activities, which can contribute to better academic performance in later stages.

Keywords: Child; Developmental; Maternal; Perception; Preschool

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Introduction

Language acquisition is an important product of cognition and social processes. Kushnir T et al., referred to the developing brain as social brain which is highly influenced by social interaction between parent and child¹. Parent-child interactions are responsible for building up emotional tone, receptiveness, guidance, and reassurance all of which

have a positive effect on the child. Specific kinds of parent-child interactions that are warm and receptive, influence development of linguistic, cognitive and socioemotional skills that is crucial for academic achievements and beyond². Among the various parent-child interactions, the highly recommend one involves story narrations and book reading. Parents initiating and supporting literacy-rich activities with

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children can significantly influence the development of early literacy skills.

Studies highlight the importance of reading stories to children early³ and often⁴. Research has consistently shown the importance of story narrations, in development of early literacy, reading attainment, and language development^{4,5}. Children who are exposed to story reading earlier with increased frequency have demonstrated better language skills unlike those exposed late⁶. The early exposure enhances the child's comprehension, reading and spelling skills, which gets intensified with schooling⁷. The quality of the parent-child relationship such as sensitivity, responsiveness, guidance, and attention are important predictor for language proficiency^{8,9}. The joint parent-child storybook reading activity is argued to be a strong predictor of successful emergent readers and child's later reading achievement¹⁰. It helps children make sense of the abstract language they are about to learn, use and understand¹¹. Despite being a challenging task for a child to read a book, storybook reading activity provides a meaningful social involvement that encourages parent-child bonding as well as exchange of rich language and literacy content in relation to the story that is read together¹².

Children's development of early literacy skills has significant association to maternal education, employment, motivation and beliefs towards story narration and shared story book reading. Culture does play an important role in language, where maternal values, attitudes and beliefs strongly influence their perceptions towards activities that will assist children in language development¹³. Comparative study on maternal beliefs towards story reading revealed that Taiwanese mothers place value on moral and practical knowledge gained through stories, whereas American mothers viewed positive emotions during joint book reading as more important. The study also concluded that maternal education is associated with home literacy resources and child's literacy behaviours¹⁴. Similarly, another study¹⁵ revealed that preliteracy skills of children were found to be better when mother's had a positive belief towards shared-reading interactions. The past few years have witnessed an increase in the rate of employment of mothers of young children. India has also witnessed the same and little is researched on how employment can affect the parental perceptions towards story narration, which forms an important part of mother child interactions. Employment may or may not have

detrimental effect on interaction^{16,17}. The current study highlights story narration activities, maternal belief's and attitudes towards story narration.

Materials and methods

The study followed a cross sectional design and was done in the sub district of Mangalore under Dakshina Kannada from January 2017– March 2018. The samples were selected through Non Random Convenient Sampling. The residential homes at Mangalore sub district was considered for the selection of the participants. Prior to the initiation of the study, the mothers of the children were explained the purpose of the study and written consent was obtained from them. The sample size was estimated to be 60, based on the formula, $n = (z\alpha + z\beta) \frac{2}{c/2 + 3}$, where, $c = 0.5 * \log(1 + r/1 - r)$; r = correlation coefficient; $Z\alpha = 95\%$ confidence (1.96); $Z\beta =$ power (0.84), $P < 0.05$ considered as significant with respect to¹⁸. The study protocol obtained an ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethics Board. The ethical clearance number for the present study is ECR/541/Inst/KA/2014. A total of 60 participants, with equal number of participants in each group were included in the study. The participants of the study were mothers and typically developing children between the age ranges of 2 to 5 years, grouped as employed and unemployed category with graduation as minimum qualification. Three groups were formed, where Group I consisted of children between 2-3 years, Group II consisted of children between 3-4 years and Group III consisted of children between 4-5 years. Each group consisted of 10 employed and 10 unemployed mothers [Table-1]. The inclusion criteria were Mothers belonging to middle socio economic status who were within the age range of 25-35 years, which was ascertained by Kuppuswamy's Socio-Economic Status Scale [19]. The Kuppuswamy scale one of the regularly used instruments for scientific and field research. The scale measures Socio Economic Status by assessing three variables, which are income of the family, education and occupation of the head of the family in India. Employed mothers were those working (not in jobs requiring human communication in mass) on a regular time basis from 9am to 5pm. Mother and/or child with the complaint of any speech, language, hearing, neurological, developmental and intellectual disorders were excluded. The participants were recruited based on the criteria mentioned above. Prior to testing, a written informed consent was obtained from mothers. They were also asked to complete a demographic

questionnaire to gather basic information pertaining to age, ethnicity, language spoken, level of education, and work experience. The demographic questionnaire consisted on ten sections covering demographic data, prenatal, natal, and postnatal history, family history, socioeconomic status, developmental history, informal speech, language, hearing screening, and educational history.

Table 1: Age group divisions for child and mother

Groups	Age range of the child (years)	Age range of mothers (years)	No. of participants (Unemployed Mothers)	No. of participants (Employed Mothers)
Group I	2- 3	25-35	10	10
Group II	3.1-4	25-35	10	10
Group III	4.1- 5	25-35	10	10
	Total		30	30

The questionnaire was developed by the investigator after performing a focus group discussion (with other Speech Language Pathologists) and also by collating information from literature review^{4,6,8,16,20-22}. The Mother-Child Story Narration Interaction Questionnaire was compiled to assess the mother’s perception towards story narration and its role in child’s growth and development. The questionnaire consisted of two sections; Section I: Story Narration Exposure and Section II: Attitudes and Belief’s Towards Story Narration. Section I of the questionnaire consisted of 18 questions (Example: Is your child exposed to story narration? Do you narrate stories before bedtime? etc.,). Section II of the questionnaire consisted of 13 questions (Example: Do you think story narration can facilitate language acquisition? Do you think story narration provides an opportunity for imagination? etc.,). Every questions in the questionnaire was given a score of 1 for a response of ‘yes’ and 0 for a response of ‘no’ or ‘can’t say’. The greater the score indicated a more positive attitude and perception towards story narration activities. A higher score in Section I of the questionnaire indicated that the mothers engaged in positive story narration exposure and practice with their child. A higher score in Section II of the questionnaire indicated that the mothers had positive attitude and beliefs towards story narration activities with their child. The developed Mother-Child Story

Narration Questionnaire was validated by three experienced Speech Language Pathologists with minimum five years of clinical experience in Child Language Disorders. For each of the domains and items in the questionnaire, experts were instructed to provide a Likert style rating on a 5 point scale where ‘1’ indicated extremely irrelevant, ‘2’ irrelevant, ‘3’ can’t say, ‘4’ relevant and ‘5’ extremely relevant. The formula used for the calculation of the content validity index has been provided below²³.

$$Content\ Validity = \frac{(Number\ of\ Speech\ Language\ Pathologists\ who\ rated\ the\ item\ as\ '4'\ or\ '5')}{(Total\ number\ of\ Speech\ Language\ Pathologists\ involved\ in\ Validation)}$$

Any question which obtained the content validity score of greater than 0.8 was considered in the final version of the questionnaire. The content validity score was greater than 0.8 for all the questions except for question 18 in Section I of the questionnaire. For Section II of the questionnaire, content validity score was greater than 0.8 for all the questions except for question 3 and 13. The face validity of the test was also determined by the subject experts who validated the appropriateness (appropriate, inappropriate, or requires modifications) of the questions based on the framework of the question, grammar, content, relevance, and complexity. Those that were inappropriate or required modifications were either modified or removed²³. Necessary modifications were incorporated to prepare the final questionnaire where all the questions, which received a score less than 0.8 score was, rephrased as per the content validators suggestions.

Statistical analysis

The obtained scores averaged across all the Groups were analysed using SPSS version 16. Pearson Chi-Square test was performed for Section I and Section II of the questionnaire to check the association between maternal perceptions and employment.

Ethical clearance: The Study Protocol obtained an ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethics Board. The ethical clearance number of the present study is ECR/541/Inst/KA/2014

Results

The present study focused on analysing the perception of employed and unemployed mothers of typically developing children between 2 to 5 years towards story narration. A questionnaire to assess perception of mothers towards story narration was administered on all the participants. The questionnaire consisted of

two sections focusing on maternal practices as well as attitudes and beliefs towards story narration. The participants responded with “agree” or “disagree” or “can't say” for each question. The Questions in Section I of the questionnaire, which focused on story narration exposure, was analysed using Pearson Chi-Square test, to check the association between maternal perceptions and employment. The statistical analysis performed for Section I of the questionnaire showed no significant relationship between employment and maternal perceptions towards story narration, where $X^2(10, N = 60) = 13.16, p = 0.21$.

Pearson Chi-Square test was performed for Section II of the questionnaire, which focused on attitudes and beliefs towards story narration, to check the association between maternal perceptions and employment. The statistical analysis performed for Section II of the questionnaire showed no significant relationship between employment and maternal perceptions towards story narration where $X^2(10, N = 60) = 13.14, p = 0.21$.

Discussion

The questionnaire consisted of two Sections, Section I and Section II. Section I consisted of questions assessing story narration exposure whereas Section II consisted of questions assessing attitudes and beliefs towards story narration. Statistical Analysis revealed no significant association between employment and maternal perceptions indicating that employed and unemployed mothers had positive attitudes and beliefs towards story narration. The change in attitudes and beliefs among employed and unemployed mothers could be attributed to various factors such as increasing awareness, exposure to literacy based activities, parent-parent interactions, parent-teacher interactions, influence of play homes and schools to name a few. Each of the questions were analysed in detail to understand the percentage of parents who held a positive belief, attitudes and practices towards story narration.

Section 1: Story Narration Exposure

The obtained responses for Section I of the questionnaire was analysed in detail to understand the percentage of parents who held a positive belief towards story narration. Questions in Section I targeted on exposure to story narration, exposure to different genres of story books, involvement of mothers and family members in narrating stories, exposure to bedtime stories, story preferences and time schedules.

Story Narration Exposure

Queries on story narration exposure revealed that only few employed mothers exposed their children to story books specially in the younger age groups in comparison to unemployed mothers. As the age of the child increased, it was observed that more and more employed mothers were exposing their children to story narration. A gradual increase in employed maternal perception from 40% to 100% across the age groups was observed whereas nearly 90% of unemployed mothers across all the three age groups did expose their children to story narration. Maternal involvement and participation in shared book reading is identified as a crucial factor contributing to child's development¹⁰. The joint parent-child storybook reading activity is argued to be a strong predictor of successful emergent readers and child's later reading achievement¹¹. In the present study, it was observed that only few mothers in the younger group exposed their children to story narration, which needs to be addressed. Young children as seen in the present study are unfamiliar to the structure and manner of stories, and immensely require parental assistance. Hence, the benefits of story book reading will strongly depend on how parents find ways to support their children in capitalizing their personal interests and motives towards story books. In the present study mothers in the younger age groups are failing to expose their children to stories, which can impact on building child's interest to literacy activities. Studies have revealed that story books and joint book reading activity should be initiated at home through parents in order to build the child's interest²⁴, emphasizing on educating mothers on the importance of exposure to story books and story narration for children.

Exposure to Variety of Story Books

Exposure to variety of story books was found to be very poor among employed and unemployed mothers. Both the groups of employed and unemployed mothers introduced limited variety of books to children. Among employed mothers it was only 20% in Group 1, 40% in Group II, and 80% in Group III, whereas among unemployed mothers it was observed to be around 30% in Group 1, 30% in Group II, and 50% in Group III. Both the groups of employed and unemployed mothers did not introduce different genres of stories for their children specially in Group I and Group II. Only older children (Group III) were being exposed to different genres and it was observed that a greater percentage of employed mothers did so, whereas only 50% unemployed mothers

in Group III exposed their children to a variety of books. Studies have highlighted that parents may postpone book reading activities as they perceive that the child is not old enough to enjoy the book reading activity thereby making it less rewarding²⁵. The finding is in consensus with the present study where it was observed that exposure to variety of story books was found to be very poor among employed and unemployed mothers. Young children being unfamiliar to the structure and manner of stories require parental assistance which is critical for the development of children's interests towards literacy activities. Bus AG noted that parents play a crucial role in creating an interactional context that boosts a child's interest in reading²⁴. In order to do so, it is crucial for parents to expose to variety of story books to build up the child's interests towards story books. However, the change in maternal perceptions was only observed for older age group where they were exposed to a variety of story books. The change in perception could be due to influences of preschools, school enrollment, parent-parent interactions, parent-teacher interactions, which may have encouraged in introducing variety of story books to the child.

Mother Narrating Stories and Other Family Members Narrating Stories

For questions on mother narrating stories and other family members narrating stories, it was observed that mothers and other family members contributed almost equally towards story narration. Encouraging family members to get involved in story narration was found to increase across the age groups from 40% in Group I, 50% in Group II, and 70% in Group III among employed mothers, whereas among unemployed mothers it was 20% in Group I, 70% in Group II, and 50% in Group III. The trend was observed to increase among employed mothers only and among unemployed mothers for unknown reasons Group III had a poorer score. Encouraging family members to take part in story narration activities is important for the rich exposure to language and variety of narrating styles. Studies have supported that responsive and sensitive parents who encourage a positive interactional environment for the child at home facilitates development of child's language and early literacy²⁶. Several studies on positive home environment which reinforced literacy based activities at home for children was found to show a qualitatively and quantitatively better outcomes in children's linguistic, cognitive and academic skills²⁷. Craig L opined that employed and highly educated

mothers were more sensitive towards academic achievement of their children²⁸. In this study, all the mothers were well educated. Over and above, the employment would have added to the sensitization in exposing the child to stories and narrating it themselves.

Bedtime Story Exposure

Bedtime story exposure was observed to be increasing across age. In Group I it was observed that 45% of unemployed mothers and 55% of employed mothers exposed their children to bedtime stories; however, the percentage increased in Group II to more than 70% of unemployed mothers and greater than 80% of employed mothers. The trend continued to increase to more than 90% of employed and unemployed mothers in Group III exposing their children to bedtime stories. The drastic increase in the number of mothers narrating bedtime stories to children in Group III can be attributed to the changes in maternal perceptions where they view story narration as a more rewarding activity as the child grows older. With increase in age mothers feel that the child will be able to enjoy the story or even understand it. However, several studies have emphasized on the use and implementation of consistent bedtimes routines in which reading a story is an important part of the routine for improved achievement of a sound sleep which in turn is associated with good health, behaviour and cognitive outcomes²⁹⁻³¹. Bedtime stories being an important part of bedtime routine were found to be poorly practiced among younger age group children's mothers.

Story Narration Location Preference

It was observed that all the mothers (employed and unemployed) of Group I (2-3 yrs), and Group II (3-4 yrs) encouraged story narration predominantly only at indoor location and none preferred narrating stories at outdoor location. The same was also observed in Group III (4-5 yrs), with more than 90% of employed and unemployed mothers choosing indoor location. The preference for indoor location for story narration shown by majority of the mothers could be to reduce the environmental distractions and enhance the child's attention towards story narration. Only in Group III few mothers (employed and unemployed) preferred outdoor locations for story narration. Choosing an outdoor location is also beneficial, as the child is exposed to a rich environment which is beneficial for learning. Several stories have origin in natural settings and hence story narration in such

settings can enhance the learning experience. Besides the increased mobility of the child as the child grows older and the changing interests to experience and explore the outside environment could have facilitated outdoor location preference in the older age groups.

Sperry LL et al., in their study revealed that young children benefit in many learning opportunities when early learning settings are located at outdoor spaces³². Outdoor spaces in comparison to indoor spaces encourage the child to observe, move around, pretend and socialize with others. These findings have implications for mothers to implement outdoor story narration activities.

Story Narration Time Scheduling Preferences

Pertaining to time schedule for story telling in each group, less than 50% of parents had fixed time schedule. In Group I only 20% of the unemployed as against the 40% of employed mothers had specific time schedule, in Group II only 10% of the unemployed and 30% employed mothers had specific story telling time and in Group III, 40% of employed and 50% unemployed mothers had specific time schedule for story narration. It was observed that a higher frequency of Employed mothers had specific time schedule for story narration as they were also adhering to time schedule of work and home. Employed mothers did not have the whole day to spend with their children, whereas unemployed mothers did not have such time constraint, and so were flexible with the time of story interaction. Besides studies have highlighted how employed mothers working hours compromise on the time spent with the child in various activities including reading³³. However, it is observed that in Group I and Group II, only few unemployed mothers had a time schedule. Having a time schedule for story narration may have variety of benefits, it designates few hours in a day for story narration, which when practiced on a regular basis, have varied benefits for child's language development³⁻⁵. Moreover, the schedule can be an interesting part of the day that the child looks forward to. Time schedule is an important part of a child's learning experience, the quantity of time that the child spends on an activity determines the absorption of knowledge and skills of the context³³. Time is an estimate of the exposure to variety of rich social experiences, which in the current study was found to be poor. Most mothers failed to adhere to

a fixed time schedule for story narration, which is a contributing factor poor exposure and poor language development.

Language Preferences for Story Narration

Research has shown that parents (mostly mothers) vary in their interactional styles during joint book reading²⁰. Almost 65% employed and unemployed mothers narrated story in more than one language and in Group I, they encouraged family members to participate during story narration. 75% employed and unemployed mothers of Group II and Group III narrated story in more than one language and also encouraged family to participate during story narration. The reason for this could be higher awareness by the mothers on the fact that story narration is a joint-activity which improves family-bonding along with parent-child interaction. Almost all the children from Group II and Group III were attending play-homes with medium of instruction being English. Both employed and unemployed mothers read story book in English and narrated it in their native language (Kannada) as they believed that along with native language it is good to expose children to English language as the medium of instruction is English in the schools. Exposing the child to two languages can positively influence the course of literacy acquisition. The employed mothers were more concerned about their children who had to start pre-school. Specific kinds of parent child interactions, such as story narration has been found to influence child's development in socio-emotional, language, and cognitive domains, all of which have central importance to children's success in academic performance²¹.

Section II: Attitudes and Beliefs towards Story Narration

In section II predominantly focused on understanding the maternal perceptions of the importance of story narration, their attitudes and beliefs towards story narration. It was observed that more than 90% of mothers of employed and unemployed mothers from Group I, Group II, and Group III believed that story narration facilitated language acquisition, provided an opportunity for imagination and higher level thinking, influenced child's language and literacy development, and helped children to learn about things they never see in real life. Nearly all employed and unemployed mothers understood the importance of story narration in child's language, literacy and imagination development and hence, the importance

of exposing their children to stories. However, it is observed that despite mothers knowing the importance of story narration, when it comes to story narration exposure it was observed to be poor. In the previous section on Story Narration Exposure it was observed that mothers in the younger age groups poorly exposed their children to stories, they had limited story book exposure.

Greater than 70% of employed and unemployed mothers from Group I, Group II and Group III believed that story narration interactions are important for increasing family bonding. A study³⁴ has highlighted that parents who are receptive, sensitive, and tolerant of a child's actions, provide a positive emotional environment at home with good stimulation and interactions which facilitates language and early literacy development. It was observed that all employed mothers across the age groups perceived that stories are facilitators for later literacy development, however not all unemployed mothers of the younger age groups had similar perception. Around 20% of Group I, 10% of Group II unemployed mothers of young children felt that story narration is not an important precursor to literacy development. The present study findings are in consensus with studies that have concluded that parental reading beliefs are important in creating an environment of acceptance and warmth around language and literacy³⁵. Besides parents positive beliefs about literacy is also instrumental in developing children's motivation and interest in reading³⁶. Only 70% of unemployed mothers across all age groups felt the need to introduce stories to children, however more than 90% of employed mothers felt the need to do so even before schooling.

Less than 20% of mothers visited library to take books to read for their children. Instead of visiting libraries, many mothers brought home story books as the availability of library for children were limited near their residence and story books were also provided by the play-homes. Less than 50% of employed and unemployed mothers thought that their children were too young to be exposed to story narration (across all groups). This might be correlated to the findings by Pizzo L et al.,²², who stated that home environment based on the belief and thoughts about providing story book exposure and literacy to children prior to proper schooling varies with culture. Greater than 95% of employed and unemployed mothers took up the responsibility of buying story books for their children and felt every parent must buy story books

for their children. The awareness by parents about the importance of story book reading which further improves the literacy skills observed in the present study is in consensus with the findings of Dodici BJ et al.,³⁷. Parents reading story book to their child fosters pre-literacy development. Hence, if the value of story book reading is known at home, children will be exposed to it prior to the initiation of formal schooling³⁸.

The present study highlighted that employment does not affect the maternal perceptions, attitudes and beliefs towards story narration. However, the maternal awareness towards story narration was poor in mothers of young children in comparison to mothers of older children. Though the richness of story narration is understood by mothers, they delay in introducing stories, story books and literacy based activities at home. The present study highlights the importance of converting beliefs and attitudes to practices. The finding has strong implications of spreading awareness among mothers about the importance of introducing story narration and shared book reading at a young age. It is known that maternal responsiveness towards joint-book reading predicts the language abilities of children in later stage³⁹. The beliefs of the mothers help in shaping the child's language, which is strongly influenced by the quality and quantity of interactions⁴⁰. Story book reading has been a very popular qualitative and quantitative interaction facilitating later grammar and vocabulary development. The change in beliefs and attitudes observed in older children's mothers could be due to the influences of playschool and preschool.

Conclusion

The present study findings indicate that as the age of the child increased the mother's perspective towards story narration had a positive change, which was not evident in the younger ages. This is an important factor contributing to children's language outcomes, early literacy skills, as the story narration enriches the vocabulary of the child. Parent's guide and support their children from early childhood facilitating learning at every stage. The parental interaction assists linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and social skill development in children. Parents play a crucial role in the early literacy development of children by initiating and supporting literacy-rich activities with children, such as story narration and shared story book reading interactions.

Limitation

Although the study reached its aim, there were some limitations were present. The study was limited to one geographical area; it would be interesting to understand how maternal perceptions are at different areas. The study was conducted on one socioeconomic status, and smaller group of employed and unemployed mothers.

Future Directions

It would be of interest to study story narration

interaction in different socio economic groups and also to explore the longitudinal benefits.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have made substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data. All the authors have been involved in drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and have given final approval of the version to be published.

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