

## AWARENESS FOR READING ALOUD AMONG PARENTS OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND ITS EFFECT ON CHILDREN'S READING HABITS: AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM IN THREE PRESCHOOLS IN ISRAEL IN NETANYA, ACCO, AND TIRAT HACARMEL



 Nitsa Dori<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head of the Department of Early Childhood, Shaanan Academic College, Haifa, Israel

Email: [nitsa.dori@gmail.com](mailto:nitsa.dori@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 12 February 2018

Revised: 22 February 2018

Accepted: 28 February 2018

Published: 5 March 2018

#### Keywords

Reading books aloud  
Preschool library  
Disadvantaged families  
Reading consumption during  
early childhood.

This article examines the importance of reading books and parents reading books to their children, and attempts to grapple with the following questions: Is it possible to use various mediation methods in the preschool to increase the consumption of books by young children from families of low socioeconomic status? Will literacy activity in the preschool library among a population of low socioeconomic status, raise parental awareness of the importance of reading books and how it contributes to the children? How can we encourage parents to read to their young children among a population from a low socioeconomic background? The experimental study was carried out among three populations of kindergarten children, who describe themselves as traditional Jews, and live in neighborhoods of economic distress in Israel – in Acco, Tirat Hacarmel, and Netanya. Each preschool has 35 children, age 5-6. Most children come from a relatively low socioeconomic background, from low income families, with many having various emotional, language, and cognitive difficulties. The intervention program included many and varied activities and was aimed at encouraging the children to exchange books in the preschool library so they would have them read to them at home, and encouraging the parents to read to their children. As a result of the intervention program, the level of interest in books grew among both children and parents. They gradually began to read more and more books, and their interest level and exposure significantly increased.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Until the 1980s, many researchers tended to think reading only takes place when children begin school, and therefore did not invest much in studies regarding preschool children (Teale, 1986). Research findings during recent years indicate that children benefit from reading books from a very young age. For example, when babies are exposed to books, they already learn to leaf through and look at the pictures in the correct direction at the age of one and a half to two years, and are therefore more aware of street signs and even try to “read” them. Studies show that by three to four, these children recognize their names, and at five, their family’s names (Rom, 2003).

Reading books has a powerful effect on both adult and young readers. Books in general serve as a social connection and for transmitting messages about social norms. During early childhood, children internalize the

world of concepts that stories present to them. They connect and identify with characters in children's books, copy them, and aspire to be like them (Abrahami-Einat, 1989).

In addition, reading books to children is considered a parental activity that carries a message of love (Aram and Aviram, 2009). The children's book serves as a kind of transitional object due to its prominent colorful illustrated appearance. A transitional object allows the development of symbolic reference to life – serving as a basis for creativity, play and pleasure, and mediating between reality and imagination. Unlike other transitional objects, such as a toy or piece of blanket, books have capabilities beyond time. They symbolically serve as a calming, comfort, or linking object for what was lost (Carmel, 2009). Likewise, reading books to children contributes to their literacy skills. It allows children to be exposed to how a language is written and its orthography, and familiarizes the child with rich language and vocabulary that the child does not encounter in everyday life, thereby enriching his verbal capabilities (Aram, 2002a).

According to Baruch (2004) there are many and varied reasons for reading literature to children: books enrich their vocabulary and world of thought, greatly improve spoken and written language, promote new ideas for the reader and listener, reveal different cultures, and develop imagination. Ophir-Shacham (2003) even adds that reading stories during infancy greatly and collectively contributes to several systems including the emotional, language, and cognitive. Reading stories also contributes to the relationship with the parents, creativity, self-confidence, etc.

The Israel Ministry of Education, that is responsible for the curriculum for Israeli school children, views the development of an infrastructure for a literacy environment for preschool children as very important, even if such an environment exists outside the preschool educational framework. The serious attitude is reflected in the following quote, "listening to a book [being read] at a young age, invites children to develop a preference for reading as a source of pleasure. Just the exciting and pleasurable experience of listening to stories being read during early childhood can develop children's long-term attraction to books" (Israel Ministry of Education Department of Preschool Education, 2007).

Indeed, early childhood plays a particularly important part in shaping the child's worldview in general, and view of literature in particular (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2008). Children encounter many and varied literary genres daily within the educational framework. This exposure plays an important part in the child's familiarity with the world of literature and books. He already develops patterns of knowledge and social schemas while interacting with his environment. The child shapes his own premises and opinions regarding literature or books in general. Studies demonstrate the importance of the child adopting a positive perspective regarding literature and books for himself, since motivation is a necessary condition for learning to read, and such motivation exists when children believe reading is a source of pleasure, a necessary condition for integration in society, and that they themselves can succeed and learn to read (Snow *et al.*, 1998).

During early childhood, parents and preschool teachers are the primary mediators between the child and the world. Parents and preschool teachers play an important role in the acquisition of different skills and literacy education: parents and preschool teachers have many ways of influencing how much the children will want to read, write, and acquire knowledge (Snow and Guberman, 2008). For a child to acquire optimal reading capabilities, he must be motivated to read – a product of the child believing reading means pleasure, and is a key to integration in society and his ability to be an independent reader (Snow *et al.*, 1998).

Reading for pleasure is not only an enjoyable leisure activity, but a real learning process (Yosov-Shalom, 2014) beginning from infancy. Based on Dewey (1938) that previous experiences greatly influence current and future experiences, reading experiences during early childhood have a decisive effect on the child's reading experience in adulthood. Experiential learning becomes significant when the child takes part in an active, experiential, and sensory learning process. Early childhood is the point of departure for the educational process, and children already

adapt and shape their worldview, beliefs, and basic assumptions about life at this point, in the context of reading books, too. Therefore, experiential activity as part of reading is so important.

The experience of emotional attachment to the mediating or reading adult accompanies the experiential-sensory experience.

Reading poems and stories is often an emotional experience, and the child deals with emotions and fears. When this takes place in a safe setting, with the help of a trusted adult mediator, then the child experiences pleasure from the shared reading, and his motivation to read increases, and vice versa (Shach and Green-Shukrun, 2010). Besser-Biron and Aram (2005) emphasize the importance of the correct choice of books, to allow the child's active participation when working in small groups, and of choosing a literary level suitable for all the children. It emerges from the above, that the more the activities surrounding reading are experiential, sensory, emotional and safe, the greater the child's motivation to read. And the greater the chances the child continues reading and grows up to be a book lover.

This article will examine the importance of reading books and parents reading books to their children, and attempt to grapple with the following questions: Is it possible to use various mediation methods in the preschool to increase the consumption of books during early childhood, by children from families of low socioeconomic status? Will literacy activity in the preschool library, among a population of low socioeconomic status, raise parental awareness of the importance of reading books and its contribution to the children?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Factors Influencing Frequency of Reading and of Parents Reading Books to their Children

In a study among preschool children of different ages and socioeconomic status, the effects of functional-social orientation, such as literacy behavior, the book's orientation, and functional and environmental patterns, were examined. It was discovered that children from families of low socioeconomic status demonstrate a lower level of literacy achievement in areas such as phonological awareness, naming letters, writing words, identifying words, writing texts, and vocabulary, than children from families of medium or high socioeconomic status (Korat *et al.*, 2003).

In another study by Aram and Levin (2001) that compared well-established and culturally disadvantaged families, it was found that parents in well-established families read books to their children frequently – at least once daily, usually at bedtime – in contrast to the parents from culturally disadvantaged families. It also emerged that the parents in the well-established families read books on a higher level than those read by the parents in the culturally disadvantaged ones. The researchers concluded from this data that reading to children from an early age possibly improves their reading comprehension ability when they are old enough to read. Additionally, there was a difference between well-established families and those of low socioeconomic status regarding reading quality and not only the frequency of the reading. In families of high socioeconomic status, the mother connects the information with the child's own life while reading the books, and he can thereby expand his vocabulary and learn the significance of reading. Cullinan (2000) showed that children who learned to read before starting school came from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. A study that tracked libraries in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania for five years proved that sophisticated libraries with high-quality equipment and skilled librarians reduce the literacy and digital gaps between students from high and low socioeconomic status homes (Neuman and Celano, 2004). The results of the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) examinations, that examine and compare achievement levels of students from 15 countries including Israel in a variety of subjects, such as literacy, mathematics, and science, demonstrate that students from homes of high socioeconomic status who do not read frequently, have lower achievements than students from low socioeconomic status but who read consistently. The study by Korat *et al.* (2008) discusses the importance of the socioeconomic connection in structuring parents' mediation level towards their children at a young age, and was conducted among 92 mothers and their children of

high socioeconomic status as opposed to mothers and children of low socioeconomic status. There was correlation between family socioeconomic status and the mothers' mediation while reading the story to the child. The better the family's socioeconomic status, the higher the mediation level of the mothers while reading the book.

It can therefore be concluded, that already developing reading habits or patterns from preschool age, can be significant in closing the achievement gaps between students of different socioeconomic status.

## **2.2. Nurturing a Literacy Environment at Home as Influencing Reading and Reading Aloud**

Many studies show that children exposed to literacy at home (e.g. pages, pencils, books, blackboards, chalk, booklets, newspapers, dictionaries, playing cards, and library visits), tended to be more skilled readers than children who did not have these items. The presence of literacy tools and items at home was found to be the strongest predictor of literacy achievements at preschool and school, out of all the home environment indices. Access to scholastic stimuli is important since it allows the child to be active in his immediate environment (Aram, 2002b). It emerges from a document of the "Committee for advancing and nurturing language in the preschool" that the literacy environment greatly affects the frequency and quality of reading books (Levin, 2002). Reading acquisition demands parental support to advance relevant skills for understanding the alphabet principle, together with a literacy environment working to reduce scholastic gaps. "The preschool framework program" (IMEDPE, 2005) assumes that improving preschool literacy environment will promote three primary literacy fields connected with reading books: nurturing a love of books, understanding book text and language, familiarity with books and writing conventions. Reading is a complex skill. Its complexity lies in the integration of knowledge – that the reader brings with him to the text – and skills – acquired during learning (Kita, 1992). Since a child's early years are critical for the development of this knowledge and these skills, the parental home is seen as providing a unique contribution to this development. The parental home is usually based on two adults – a father and mother – who are, in all practicality, the "experts" for managing the home. Rom (2003) discovered that a child's literacy stimuli at home can effectively predict his phonological and orthographical awareness abilities. Effective stimuli for this are, for example, children's books, puzzles, and writing implements. In families in which parents regularly read books to their children, and families in which the parents mediate the writing to their children by encouraging them – the children express greater literacy independence than in families who rarely do these activities. Meaning, there is great importance to parents mediating language in their sessions with the child. Henig and Milovitz (2012) clarify that participating in "story time" in which the parent reads to, and mediates with, his child, is dependent on cultural and social norms in that place. When a child who has not experienced reading books together with his parents, begins school, he tends to be less skilled in reading books and producing writing products than a child who has already experienced such activities. Dealing with the world of books demands many trials and parental participation before beginning school, so the child can understand book conventions and structure. It is important to note that there is a mediation process in a variety of activities likely to nurture their literacy skills as part of parents' natural relationship with their children: identifying a pattern in the environment, reading a book, writing together, games with letters, rhyming games, watching educational television, and reading books together (Roskos and Twardosz, 2004).

## **2.3. Parents' Attitudes to Reading and Reading Aloud**

Parents are the main mediators and play an important role in their children's literacy development (Murphey and Burns, 2002). They create varied literacy experiences for their children, that contribute to advancing emergent literacy (Wood and Eagly, 2012).

There are various factors in the differing parental expectations from their children in the scholastic field in general, and literacy achievement in particular. This difference emanates mostly from the parents' different social and ethnic sectors (Schanin, 2006). Many parents from low socioeconomic status are very interested in their

children succeeding scholastically since they believe such success will open doors for their children to higher education, good employment, economic success, and social standing (Levin *et al.*, 2003). At the same time, social learning theory sees a person as first and foremost a social creature, and claims that a large part of human behavior is learned by watching others, meaning by imitation (Bandura, 1977). It is therefore important to examine parental attitudes towards reading, so as to understand whether a child, who imitates his parents, feels a connection with this issue. It was found that parents with a positive attitude about reading will influence the child's needs and feelings (Korat and Levin, 2001). These parents will provide reinforcement strategies and expressions of encouragement to read, and will be characterized by asking open questions and in a high register while reading to their children. Parental usage of verbal feedback while reading increases the child's motivation and creates different knowledge functions. This is as opposed to parents who don't sufficiently value the importance of reading, who will read passively, totally ignoring the child, or be overcritical of the story. Such parents may even express a negative attitude to the book (Whitehurst *et al.*, 1988). Rom (2003) and her peers view the effect of parental attitude on their preschool children's reading achievements when attending school, with great importance. They write that parents are a model to their children regarding love of reading, which they encounter at an early age in the literacy world and in which they demonstrate interest.

Correlations were found between how the parent views his child's literacy achievements and the child's performance (Korat, 2004). Mothers who value their children's cognitive abilities raise the children's own view of their reading abilities (Bastaker and Aram, 2008).

#### 2.4. Parent-Child Interaction while Reading Books

Reading books to children is the most natural and effective literacy interaction at a young age. Most parents would agree that if they wish to improve their young children's literacy, they need to read them many books (Aram and Aviram, 2009).

Quality interaction between parents and children, and shared reading activities, are successful in nurturing literacy in very young children, and also affect their later academic achievements at school (Tal, 2001). According to Vygotsky (1978); Feuerstein *et al.* (1979) and Feuerstein *et al.* (1980) it emerges that baby and toddler are dependent on adult mediation during the learning process in order to learn. Wood *et al.* (1976) argue that parents provide "scaffolding" during the learning process, and serve as a mediating agent who makes a significant contribution to the children's future, giving them tools to become active and independent learners.

The quality of the mother-child verbal interaction during the reading process and the child's language skills, affect verbal interaction while reading if there is more varied conversation between mother and child. Conversation can be expressed with the mother changing her intonation or talking speed, to impart significance to the text. There is parent-child interaction while reading books, and this also transmits a message of love (Schapira and Aram, 2009).

#### 2.5. How Parents Choose Books

In recent years, the children's book market has greatly expanded. People have written guides for parents on how to encourage reading with their children as a result of the expectations of normative society that they will read books to their children, particularly during early childhood (Fox, 2001; Darr, 2005). This market includes children's literature without pedagogic or educational supervision. The issue of supervision of literature for early childhood was raised by the Knesset Special Committee for the Rights of the Child in 2005, following complaints by educators and parents regarding advertisements for children's books that were low quality and problematic, both educationally and ethically. The same committee determined "there is no room for any kind of supervision for book publishing", but also publicized the great importance of parental involvement in reading with their children, and

that the educational system should encourage them to distinguish between high and poor quality literature, and consume good, quality literature (Aviram and Aram, 2007).

In the study by Owens (1992) regarding parental reading habits and choice of books by parents of young children, it was discovered that most parents prefer story books rather than other genres such as reference books or poetry. She divided the parents into seven categories according to parental goals in reading and choice of reading material: (1) Professionals – parents who meticulously choose reading material, with their main goal being intellectual. (2) Artists – parents who primarily look for pleasure when reading, and will still read books to their children after they can read for themselves. (3) Journeymen – parents who only read for pleasure, who generally choose light books that do not demand reasoning skills. (4) Laborers – parents who experience reading to their children as a kind of task to advance their children’s reading level, and therefore these parents will choose a book targeted to this goal even if it isn’t necessarily one offering opportunities for thinking or pleasure. (5) Craftsmen – parents who lack motivation for reading to their children, despite their awareness of its importance. The children of such parents will choose books that are easy to decode. (6) Novices – parents who don’t read stories at all to their children, and are unaware of its importance. These parents sometimes don’t read due to their financial situation. (7) Eclectics – parents with various goals for reading who choose books for other reasons than those mentioned.

The questionnaire in the study by Aviram and Aram (2004) showed the three most fundamental criteria for mothers when choosing a children’s book are language (vocabulary etc.), plot, and their own considerations such as reading the back cover. Language is the first criterion for two reasons – language is what makes literature unique compared to other arts, and it places emphasis on public conversation when reading books as advancing children’s spoken and written language. In addition, Aviram and Aram (2007) carried out a study which showed mothers mainly choose books for their children by plot and language. These were the highest-ranking criteria in this study. Whereas the criterion of “choosing according to my own considerations” received one of the last places. The studies regarding mothers choosing children’s books show that the more expertly the mother chooses the book, the higher her child’s literacy (Aviram and Aram, 2004). In conclusion, Owens (1992) notes that despite children being significantly influenced by every encounter with reading a book, the level of cognitive activity is affected during these encounters by parental decisions regarding the goals of the reading, the reading material, and strategies when choosing and reading the books.

### 3. ACTION RESEARCH

We have therefore learned that children from a low socioeconomic background generally grow up in an environment offering poor opportunities for language enrichment and lack intentional means of literacy, such as a large variety of books, listening to stories, and visiting libraries (Bus *et al.*, 1995). Likewise, it was found that children from a low socioeconomic background are less motivated to be involved in such activities (Snow and Guberman, 2008). Motivation and desire to read are so important because they are what motivate the child to read as widely as possible. Through the reading experience the child learns that reading is enjoyable, entertaining, and intellectually fun (Salomonovitch-Asnin, 2015). There is sometimes a cultural disconnect between home and preschool, possibly resulting in the child feeling he belongs to neither (Snow and Guberman, 2008) and a lack of motivation to read. Intervention programs are important among such populations, where home and preschool cultures are disparate, since the educational framework (school or preschool) is responsible for compensating for these gaps.

The research question was, “how can we encourage parents reading to young children among the population from a low socioeconomic background?”

The experimental study was carried out among three populations of kindergarten children, who describe themselves as traditional Jews, and live in neighborhoods of economic distress in Israel – in Acco, Tirat Hacarmel, and Netanya. The preschools have 35 children, age 5-6. Most children are from a relatively low socioeconomic

background<sup>1</sup>, and many have various emotional, language, and cognitive difficulties. There is emphasis in the preschools on developing reasoning skills using literacy and arithmetic, expressed in the preschool's entire daily routine, and the children express willingness to learn and participate.

#### 4. INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The intervention program goal was to encourage the children to exchange books in the preschool library, so that they would have them read to them at home, and encourage the parents to read to their children. The goal was to increase the number of times the children would visit the library for reading, dramatization, or any other reading-related activity – incorporating books, study, and pleasure. The effect of these activities on children's level of interest in books was examined. We were aided by a team for observations, as well as a progress chart where the children added their own stickers to mark each library entry. The activities took place over a month and a half. A book-related activity was held weekly, with seven sessions in total.

Encouraging reading and raising the “level of entries” to the preschool library were themselves goals within the study, but the main goal was linking the reading experience and books to enjoyable experiences and success for the parents too. Obviously reading and its encouragement are not just another tool for enriching the child's language and various knowledge domains and development, or discovering his talents and building his personality as a child and adult. Indirectly, reading is also a way of building an optimal preschool climate and developing social ties. Although this was not the subject of the study, a broad look shows that reading encouragement influenced additional areas and helped achieve other goals other than those set at the beginning of the study. Examining the research results in the preschool encouraged the participants – children, staff, and parents – to realize the book's immense and immeasurable value to our world.

#### 5. RESEARCH TOOLS

##### 5.1. Questionnaire for the Preschool Teacher

##### 5.1.1. What Does the Preschool Library Look Like? What does it Contain?

Acco preschool: The preschool library contains around 50 books that are rotated in line with the subject currently being taught in the preschool, or approaching holidays. The library is in a corner next to the door that exits to the yard. The corner is not well-lit. The library contains a table, chairs, content board, and a basket with the preschool children's notebooks – each child has their own notebook. Some books are in good condition, and others in poorer condition. Some have missing pages or are uncovered. Lately, as part of the intervention program, the book corner has had puppets of people and animals added.

Tirat Hacarmel preschool: The preschool library contains around 100 old and new books. The new books that have been added over the course of the last year and a half are from the Sifriyat Pijama project.

Netanya preschool: A wide range of books, divided according to the opening letter, stories about particular topics, the Sifriyat Pijama.

*Is the library always available for the children? Do the children go into the library during the day? How do they behave in the library?*

Acco: The library is available to the children all the time the preschool is open and the children go into it, although not always to read. Children often come to the library when they want to do puzzles on the library table, or draw a picture. The library is not only intended for activities using books, but has various uses in the preschool.

Tirat Hacarmel: The library is inaccessible to the children, because a paramedical team works there almost every day – an educational aide, occupational therapist, speech therapist, Or project, etc. The children like to listen to stories, and some children remember and already know many stories that I bring to the preschool. Some relate that their parents usually read them a story at bedtime, but in actuality the preschool library remains empty when the paramedical staff is not there, and the children don't go in. Perhaps because the preschool teacher tells them to leave

the room tidy. They play with a fixed number of games and only look at the books if I mediate. This year we learned about authors and poets.

Netanya: The library is accessible to the children. I guide when they read themselves. A parent reads a story to a random group every Friday. The children draw a story sequence. The children sit around a book and try to read.

*Do the children know the rules for library behavior?*

Acco: Before we began the process, there was no clear definition for, or writing or explanation of, library rules.

Tirat Hacarmel: Yes.

Netanya: Yes. To treat books respectfully. No more than three children can be in the preschool library together.

*Do the children borrow books?*

Acco: No.

Tirat Hacarmel: Infrequently.

Netanya: Every Friday, only in their book bag.

*Is the library relaxing for the children?*

Acco: Many times, yes.

Tirat Hacarmel: Yes.

Netanya: Yes.

*Do the children tell themselves stories from the pictures and create a dialogue?*

Acco: Yes, aside from looking at the pictures, there is also conversation about the pictures or story.

Tirat Hacarmel: Yes.

Netanya: Yes. They tell stories from the pictures, and sometimes from memory.

*Is the library varied? (Imaginary books, humor, stories of the Sages, science, etc.)*

Acco: Yes, but we don't deliberately make sure that the library will always have all types of genres. The selection in the library is relatively poor.

Tirat Hacarmel: Yes.

Netanya: All kinds of children's books.

*Do the libraries contain figures for dramatization, pictures of authors, books for beginning readers, in separate baskets?*

Acco: Recently, as part of the intervention program we have added finger and hand puppets, and the children do come and act out stories. We don't have pictures of authors. We also don't have books for beginning readers.

Tirat Hacarmel: Yes.

Netanya: We have dramatizations that change over the course of the year according to topic.

*Do the children sometimes bring a book from home?*

Acco: Very rarely, once in several weeks or months.

Tirat Hacarmel: Only one girl brought some of her Sifriyat Pijama books from previous years before Passover.

Netanya: Yes. In the preschool library, we read frontally or the book they brought from home.

## 5.2. Questionnaire for the Parents

The parents' questionnaire included questions about parents' reading habits to their children, their own reading, library visits, and the importance of reading to children.

These are the questions that were posed to the parents during the study, together with the results.



Table-1. Results of Questionnaire for Parents

1. Are you members of the municipal library?	Yes – 23%; No – 77%.
2. Do you visit the municipal library?	Yes – 23%; No – 77%.
3. How often do you read books to your children?	Every day – 23%; Several times weekly – 53%.
4. Does your child have a particular book that is his/her favorite?	Most parents answered yes.
5. How many books do you have in your home library?	Average of 100 <sup>2</sup> .
6. How often do you read books for your own pleasure?	Not at all – 33%.
7. Is it important to you that your child reads books?	The most common answer was “Yes, because it enriches knowledge, language, and expands the child’s horizons.”

6. ANALYSIS OF FINDING

From the parents’ report about their own and their children’s reading habits, it emerges that the children are in an environment with books and that they have books read to them frequently or infrequently by their parents. It also emerges that reading to the children is important to parents. The vast majority noted the importance of reading stories to children for a wide range of reasons. It seems the parents would be happy if their children would be exposed to appropriate literary texts as much as possible.

The figures regarding the parents’ own reading habits do not indicate high or optimal rates, and most of the parents do not serve as a model of readers – who read for their own pleasure and enrichment during their leisure time – to their children.

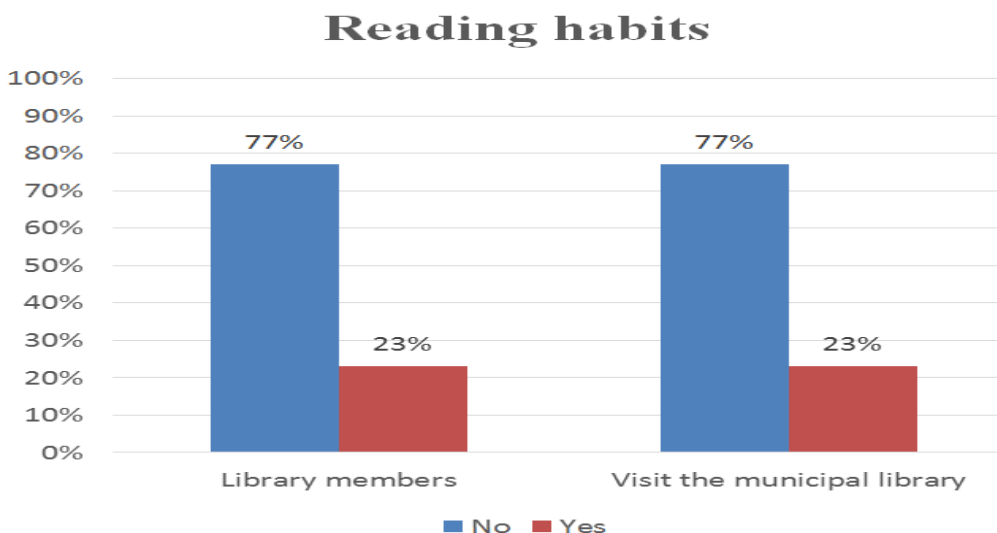
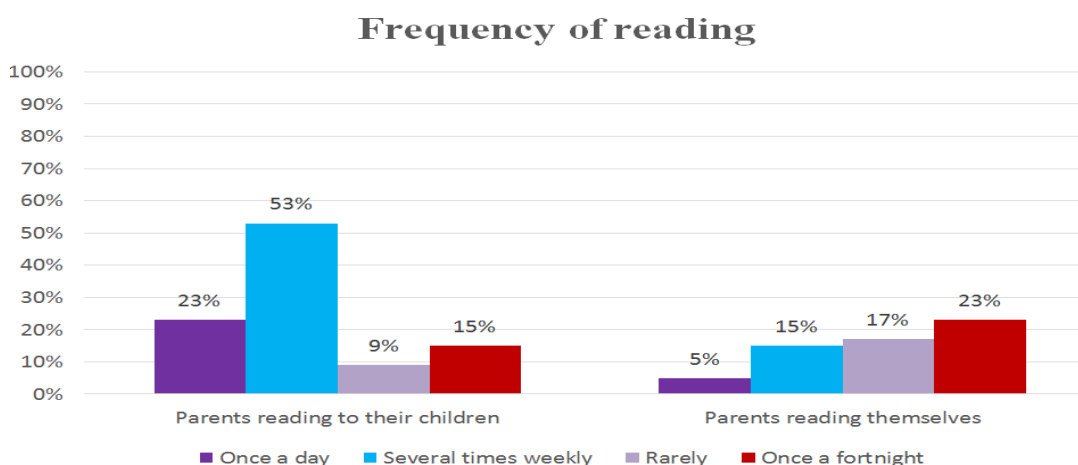


Figure-1. Acco Findings – Reading Habits



Number of books in the home: 100 on average.

Figure-2. Acco Findings – Frequency of Reading

### Reading habits

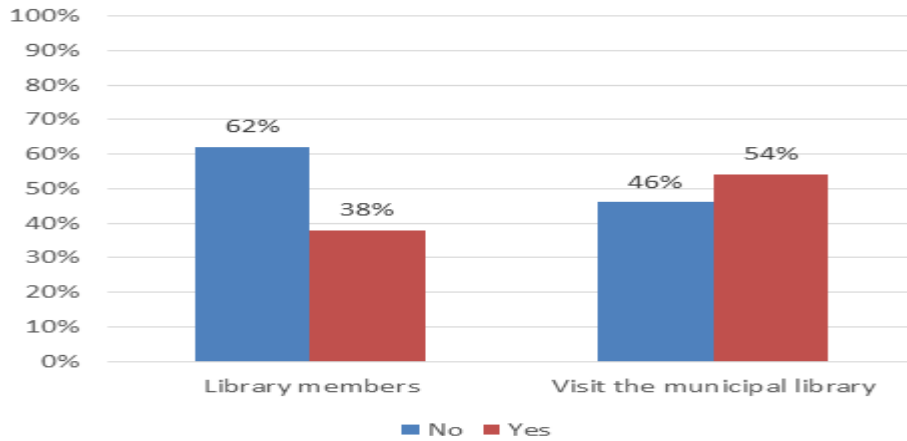


Figure-3. Netanya Findings – Reading Habits

### Frequency of reading

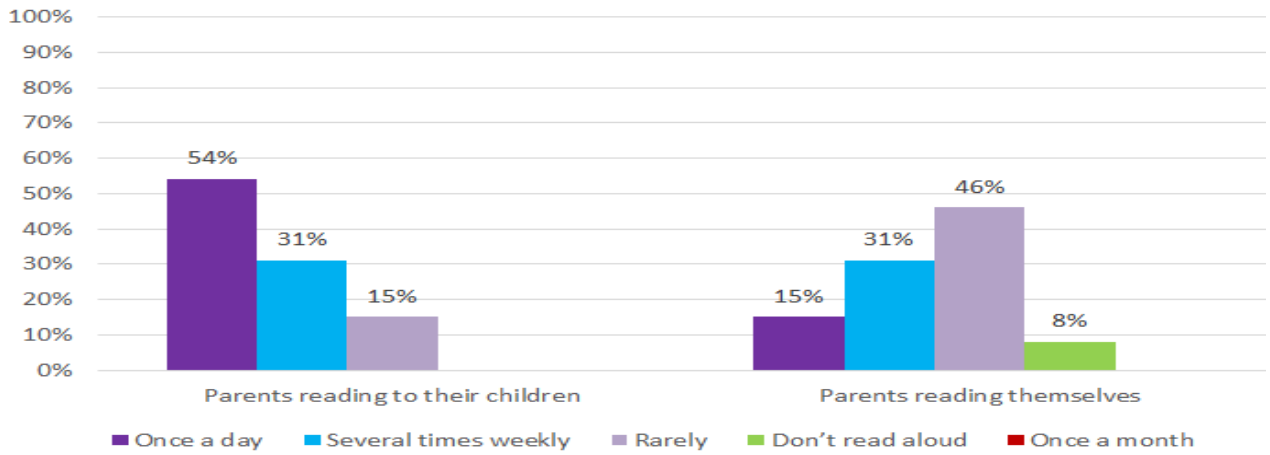


Figure-4. Netanya Findings – Frequency of Reading

Number of books in the home: 106 on average.

### Reading habits

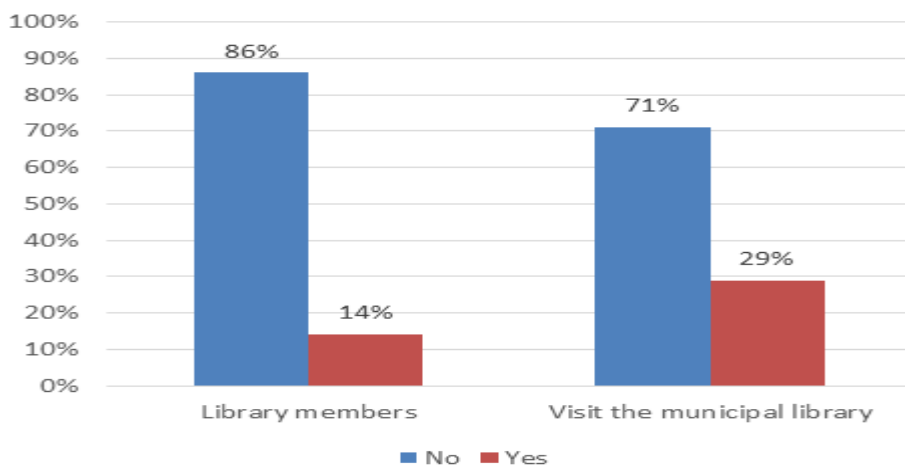
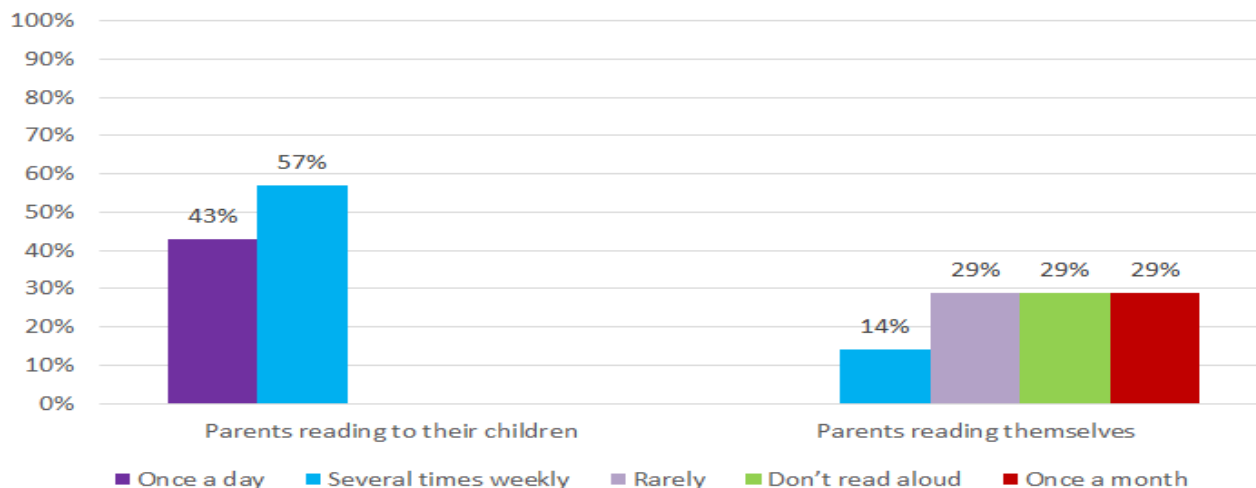


Figure-5. Tirat Hacarmel Findings – Reading Habits

## Frequency of reading



Number of books in the home: 33 on average.

Figure-6. Tirat Hacarmel Findings – Frequency of Reading

## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Just the idea of a study in a preschool environment raised many questions and expectations. Beginning with questions regarding the intervention program itself – how to construct it? What would it contain? And up unto questions regarding the extent of cooperation by staff and parents. It was clear that such an intervention program would bring many positive reactions, and that the children were thirsting for stories as a sensory-cognitive or experiential-social experience. Perhaps it was specifically the lack we encountered in home level of exposure that led to the children devoting themselves to, and cooperating with, the process. Children are usually pliable and soak up any content around them like sponges. An intervention program like this has an impressive ability to create change or even a revolution. For us, this small study proved the strength of preschool intervention programs.

One of the things that most impressed us was how the children and staff “mobilized” to the task. The study results show change, that the children demonstrated signs of becoming young reading consumers. This was an impressive and exciting achievement for us, particularly in light of the limitations. We tried to divide the findings into three main sub-findings, as follows:

### 7.1. Finding a – Greater Motivation for Reading and Library Activity

This study also had difficulties and limitations. One was our position as “outsiders”, not part of the preschool staff and as people who do not spend most of our week in the preschool, to track and quantify the exact changes in the number of children-initiated entries into the library, before and after the intervention began. Such numbers can give a more accurate estimate and clarify the program’s effect, but despite our efforts, thwarted also by the dynamic routine in the preschool, we were unsuccessful in tracking these figures.

Despite this limitation, we and the staff gained a general impression that this program indeed influenced the children’s initiative to enter the library by themselves, use books, and this also impacted how much they borrowed books for their parents to read to them at home – something that had not previously occurred in the preschool. It was significantly clear and tangible that as a result of the intervention program, the children came to the library to read or be occupied with other book-connected activities. During the intervention, the children visited the library more frequently to look at books that had already been read to them frontally in the preschool, read a new book, or act out stories using puppets. During this period, the library’s popularity increased and it became more interactive for the children. If previously, the library had been relatively “empty” during free play in the preschool, relative to the other preschool centers, such as the “playhouse”, after structured activities about books, it could be seen that the children increasingly visited the preschool library. We can see from this that we do have the power to encourage

reading during early childhood. We can, and must, encourage children to read, as part of a broader educational process. Even having children with a low socioeconomic standing and poor motivation does not present an insurmountable obstacle. The actual reasoning, planning and execution of the intervention program in the preschool leads to mobilization of resources and increasing awareness of the issue among everyone who enters the preschool. When the intervention program, as in our case, is involved with encouraging reading, then the conversation in the preschool between children, staff, and parents, also revolves around reading and books.

### **7.2 Finding B – Developing Creativity and Pleasure**

Some of the activity in this study, that was intended, as aforementioned, to link a sense of pleasure to reading books for children, was very exciting and creative. It is important to note that even after the activity had ended, and over the following days, a kind of “echo” remained. For example: in one activity the preschool children wrote a group book. The next day, one of the children approached the staff and asked them to staple a number of pages into a booklet, so he would be able to write and illustrate a story in it.

Obviously, this initiative arose only from the context that had been created between pleasure and excitement and the activity. It is difficult to believe that without the pleasure, fulfillment, and sense of success the child had experienced during the activity, he would have asked again to prepare such a booklet. This finding proves that indeed, children can be encouraged, using experiential activities, to be consumers of reading.

### **7.3 Finding C – Taking Responsibility**

One educational goal we attempted to include in this study, as part of a broader educational process, was encouraging responsibility in the preschool library. How was this expressed? (A) The reading encouragement chart contained stickers, and the children were told they would affix a sticker themselves for each story they had read. The responsibility was transferred to the children because of the staff's difficulty in following and marking every library entry (as originally planned). While this might seem a disadvantage, after the fact this “disadvantage” taught the children to follow their reading level and be honest and trustworthy regarding marking how many readings. In short, this can be defined as the child taking personal responsibility.

(B) Emphasis was placed on keeping rules. The rules of behavior and order required the children to take responsibility for themselves and their friends. In certain cases, we saw children “reminding” their friends of the library rules.

## **8. SUMMARY**

The activities had many consequences. The most important finding was the children's level of interest in the books in the preschool grew. They gradually began to use more and more books. The interest and exposure levels grew significantly. The children entered the library far more than before the activity. Their behavior in the library changed, and became both more structured (keeping rules and order) but also more creative. The creativity was expressed in dramatizing stories, and making things and writing following reading the books. As a result of the children's renewed enthusiasm from the preschool's books, the parents were also infected by their children's excitement and began to visit the preschool library, read the books aloud, and borrow books to take home. It is hoped the children will continue being reading consumers in the present, and be interested in books, use them, read, and read aloud, as they grow up. This greatly depends on their future educational frameworks, the significant educational figures they encounter in these frameworks, and the willingness of such figures to include parents in the process.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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