

Emergent Literacy Skills of Children with Special Learning Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and the intervention activities provided by SPED teachers in school and parents at home at Ozamiz City Central School – Special Education (SPED) Center for school year 2015-2016. This employed a descriptive-correlational research design, making use of a validated questionnaire, rubric, interview, class observation, and home visitation. The participants of the study were 31 children with special learning needs ages 6-13, three SPED teachers, and 18 parents. Findings of the study revealed that generally, the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs fall under the beginning level. Moreover, it was found that SPED teachers and parents frequently reinforce the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs in school and at home. However, further analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special needs and the intervention activities conducted in the school and at home literacy environment. Despite the high level of support provided by teachers and parents, emergent literacy skills remained undeveloped. Factors may include the low level of intellectual functioning, limitations in memory, misalignment of intervention activities, and their actual needs and lack of exposure to a print-rich environment.

Keywords: Emergent literacy skills, home literacy, school literacy, special learning needs, intervention

INTRODUCTION

The development of emergent literacy skills in children with special learning needs has burgeoned interest in a growing body of research. Convincing evidence exists that the future success of children in our schools is dependent upon their emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy is a developmental precursor to reading and writing before children enter formal schooling. Children with special learning needs are individuals with a combination of deficits in both cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. The severity of their condition is determined by the divergence between the individual's learning capabilities and the environmental expectations. They usually lag in acquiring literacy compared to grade-level peers reflected in their low literacy level. To reinforce the least mastered literacy skills of these children, teachers and parents provide appropriate school and home-based intervention activities.

Most of these children were referred by regular school teachers to a SPED class because of the difficulty they have in meeting the demands of a regular class. These children have not undergone formal diagnosis by a developmental pediatrician to determine the category and severity of the disability. Rather, these children were assessed by a group of SPED teachers as they enroll in a SPED Center using a modified and teacher-made assessment tools.

Assessment of individual needs is a crucial step conducted before the beginning of formal lessons of these children. Each child must have their own Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) describing the program modifications or adaptations for the student and the services to be provided (McCausland, 2005). This means that each child has his/her IEP unique from the others because of their distinctive needs. Each learner is expected to have different needs compared to other classmates.

The making of IEP in Ozamiz City Central School-Special Education (OCCS-SPED) Center is accomplished through the collaborative information contributed by different stakeholders: teachers, administrators, parents and medical experts (developmental pediatrician, ophthalmologist, psychologist, and occupational therapist). The result of their assessment is used as a basis for intervention activities needed for children with special learning needs. As to the administrators, they follow-up teachers to have IEP for every child and requiring them to submit a progress report at the end of each school year.

The Special Education Department (2009) maintains that parents are advocates of the child's best interests. As members of the IEP team, parents and the school are

equal partners. Parents contribute valuable information about the student's learning approaches and interests. As a team, school personnel and parents work together to accomplish the goal of identifying and meeting the child's educational and support needs. Also, collaboration between school and home helps ensure continuity and consistency in reinforcing the goals of the IEP at home.

According to statistics, Special Education (SPED) in the Philippines has only served 2% of the targeted 2.2 million children with disabilities in the country who live without access to a basic human right: the right to education. The primary goal in SPED which is the inclusive education for children with disabilities is still perplexing. SPED has also envisioned to mainstream educable children with special needs; however, due to lack of basic academic foundation, these children remain in a self-contained class. Constant reinforcement of their emergent literacy skills could be the key towards the desired inclusion in a regular class setting and ultimately become independent and functional individuals in the future. As observed in Ozamiz City Central School- Special Education Center, a high number of pupils are still far off from achieving conventional literacy. With that, only a few out of the total population of children with special learning needs were mainstreamed in a regular class.

It is very essential that accuracy in determining the emergent literacy skills of these children is done. Hence, assessment of the level of their literacy skills is a primary step to identify which among the skills need reinforcement. Also, possible factors which may affect the emergent literacy skills of these children are the intervention activities they receive both in school and at home. Therefore, it is very significant to determine the activities teachers and parents do to address the skills of the children and the relationship between skills and intervention activities.

The Department of Education has organized the urgency to address this problem and, therefore guarantees the right for these children to receive appropriate education within the regular or inclusive classroom setting (DepED Order No. 72 series of 2009). This is also aligned with the agenda "Education for All" (EFA) stipulated by the 1990 Jomtien Declaration in the United Nations discussion. Education for all in a broader vision is addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to exclusion, thus providing them with a quality education. Division, regional and national training are conducted to enhance teaching skills of SPED teachers in developing emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs. Through established literacy skills, Special education's mission in mainstreaming these children in the least restrictive environment or regular setting could come to reality.

International studies on emergent literacy were already explored by several researchers (Clay, 1966; Lonigan, 1998; Sulzby, 1989; Teale, 1991) but their studies focused only on regular preschool children. There were also international studies on emergent literacy dealing with children with special needs (Ricci, 2011; Williams, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor, 2009; Erickson & Hatton) but each of the researchers focused on different categories of disability. Ricci (2011) focused on emergent literacy of children with Down Syndrome including their reading interest. Williams (1994), Strauss and Corbin (1990) focused their study on the emergent literacy skills of children with hearing impairment. Then, Taylor (2009) conducted a study on children with mental retardation and their comprehension and mathematical skills while Erickson and Hatton (2007) focused on emergent literacy in young children with visual impairments. But emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs in the local setting are yet to be discovered.

Although the previous researches explored emergent literacy skills, it is apparent from the cited studies that most of them are conducted in an international setting which usually focus on emergent literacy skills of regular pre-schoolers and kindergarten. Little research has been undertaken on children with special learning needs in a local setting. Also, none in the local setting focuses on the relationship between the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and the intervention activities provided by teachers and parents in a school and home literacy environment. The above-mentioned studies vary in terms of emphasis of emergent literacy skills usually limiting to any of the following: *phonological awareness/alphabetical knowledge, concepts of print, receptive oral language, knowledge on environmental print and name writing*. The present study would like to focus on the nine emergent literacy skills proposed by Miller (1993).

The conduct of the study on emergent literacy skills on children with special learning needs would provide SPED teachers insight to improve further the emergent literacy skills of the children. The relationship between the level of their skills and the intervention activities provided both in school and at home would provide a deeper understanding of the roles of SPED teachers and parents in the development of the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs. This present study endeavors to give empirical data to District 2, Division of Ozamiz City so that administration, teachers, and parents can create an interesting atmosphere in the teaching-learning process to develop strong linguistic skills for children with special learning needs in more complex and academic language abilities.

FRAMEWORK

The current study revolves around the concept of emergent literacy describing the behaviors of very young children before they learn to write and read conventionally. This early form of literacy develops concurrently and interrelatedly rather than sequentially through active engagement and interaction with adults in their world (Clay, 1966; Teale & Sulzby, 1986, 2005; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Moffat & Vincent, 2009). Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing (Sulzby, 1989; Sulzby & Teale, 1991, 1986). Also, Fitzgerald, Schuele, and Roberts (1992) used this term to refer to a point of view about the importance of social interactions in literacy-rich environments for pre-readers.

Clay (1966) used the term emergent literacy to describe the way young children read and write in a nonconventional sense from birth until they read conventionally. Chall (1983) indicated that emergent literacy develops around 6 months to 6 years. Moreover, this denotes the children's knowledge and behavior in reading and writing that are not yet conventionally literate. This is the period when children acquire knowledge about reading and writing not through formal instruction, but rather the simple acts of observing and participating in informal literacy events (Justice & Kaderavek, 2003). But a child may be fluent in one area and emergent in another because learners may progress in some areas and seem to step back at some areas as well.

According to Miller (1993), emergent literacy skills include the *Concepts of Print, Visual Discrimination and Perception, Auditory Discrimination, Letter-name Knowledge, Knowledge on Environmental Print, Emergent Writing, Word Understanding and Listening Comprehension, Conceptual Ability and Oral Language Usage*. The first competency is *Concepts of Print*. This is when children realize that the print on a page is the source of the text information needed for reading or know that a reader looks at the print from left-right. These concepts, referred to as concepts of print, are important for success in learning to read (Adams, 1990). Children who have had many experiences with language, especially the experience of having someone read to them regularly, may have some concept of what printed words and letters are. It is what we know about print or more specifically written language. It is important for children to understand that the print (not the picture) tells the story.

Visual discrimination is the ability to differentiate one object from another. This involves recognizing the differences between objects by color, shape, pattern, size or

brightness (Lerner, 2003). Visual perception is the ability to interpret what is seen. This plays significant role in school learning, particularly in literacy development. Additionally, Strickland and Ayers (2006) state that it is imperative that children receive support/ instruction during their emergent literacy years that helps develop their visual perception and prepares them for literacy instruction.

Auditory discrimination is a central auditory processing skills that involve the ability to differentiate between phonemes – the smallest significant units of sound in a language. It is the ability to discriminate between words and sounds by their duration (long vs. short), intensity (loud vs. soft) or frequency (high vs. low). Auditory discrimination can affect reading, spelling, writing and following directions. As stated by Strickland and Ayers (2006), this is the ability to discriminate between different sounds that a child hears. This is a key task that children must use when reading, writing and spelling.

Letter-name knowledge is the ability to know that there is an association between letters and sounds or that there are letter-sound relations. According to Torgesen and Mathes (2000), phonemic awareness helps children understand the alphabetic principle, helps children become aware of the regular ways letters represent sounds and makes it possible to identify words in context even if they can only be partially sounded out. Adams (1990) further explains that one of the strongest research findings in the field of reading is the high correlation between knowledge of letter names and success in learning to read.

Emergent writing is the means that children begin to understand that writing is a form of communication and their marks on paper convey a message. This writing ability progresses along a developmental continuum. Reading and writing develop simultaneously and are interrelated. The relationship between reading and writing is bidirectional such that reading facilitates writing abilities and learning how to write in turn improves reading ability (Mayer, 2007). Thus, progress in one skill fuels development of the other (Puranik & Kim, 2011).

Oral language provides children with a sense of words and sentences and builds sensitivity to the sound system so that children can acquire phonological awareness and phonics (Strickland & Ayers, 2006). Moreover, this develops concurrently with literacy development and it includes listening comprehension, verbal expression, and vocabulary development. Oral language development is facilitated when children have many opportunities to use language in interaction with adults and each other and when they listen and respond to stories.

Conceptual ability refers to how children formulate ideas. Such skills include thinking creatively, formulating abstraction, analyzing a complex situation, understanding issues and solving problems. Teacher roles have expanded over the years; researchers have made consistent reference to the significance of teachers integrating specific concept building activities within the context of the children's daily playtime. Teachers have built these purposeful lessons into activities that are fun and child-centered. Role playing has been encouraged, using literacy materials to find answers children might be looking for, offering opportunities to re-tell or creatively modify stories while interjecting global themes, integrating real world elements in play, and allowing children to be creative in their interpretation of their environment (Morrow, 1989; Rowe, 2000; Welsch, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978).

Knowledge of Environmental print refers to children's ability to recognize common words seen in their surroundings. Strickland and Ayers (2006) state that it is the name given to the print that appears in signs, labels, and logos. Street signs, candy wrappers, labels on peanut butter and other examples of environmental print. For many emergent readers, environmental print helps bridge the connection between letters and first efforts to read.

Emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs as explained by Tager-Flusher and Sullivan (1998) have shown considerable evidences that many of these children follow the same basic order of language development as students without disabilities do. However, language development, as a whole, may be delayed for this group. For a variety of reasons, Erickson, Hanser, Hatch, and Sanders (2009) describe that children with special learning needs face numerous barriers to literacy learning opportunities. Further, Hesketh and Chapman (1998) added that difficulties in memory may contribute to this problem, affecting the ability of some pupils to construct more complex verbal messages.

Moreover, children with speech and language disorders usually experience difficulties in learning to read and write (Roth & Raul, 2004). Many students with disabilities experience difficulties in remembering and retrieving verbal information (Mann & Brady, 1988). It is believed that these difficulties result from the learners' ability to make salient connections between abstract verbal information (e.g., concepts) by organizing the information and developing links between related information.

The development of every child's literacy skills has its own timing. But this pacing depends upon the intervention or support given by the adults in the child's environment. Interventions are instructions designed to meet the individual needs of

learners struggling in a specific area. Reinforcement on the emergent literacy skills of these children may help them gain knowledge about reading and writing not just through instruction, but rather through the simple acts of observing and in informal literacy events (Kaderavek & Justice, 2003). According to Smith (1988), intervention applies to children of school age or younger who are discovered to have or be at risk of developing a handicapping condition or other special need that may affect their development.

Early literacy intervention as indicated by Massetti (2009) involves the provisions of services undertaken in both school and home environments to supplement the literacy needs of children with special needs. Effective interventions should also make use of strategies to assess progress and mastery to determine the level of need for each child.

School-based interventions are activities facilitated by the teacher in helping children acquire desired skills and reinforcing deficit literacy skills. It is important to recognize how the development of emergent literacy skills can be promoted, especially in school settings. Within classroom-based interventions, children exhibiting emergent literacy challenges have the opportunity to engage in learning experiences within which peers serve as models, an effective technique building children's code and meaning related skills (Justice, Sofka & McGinty, 2007). Justice and Kaderavek (2002) claim that the awareness required to become a successful reader should be a basic part of every child's life, and that the development of such awareness and knowledge should first come to children as parents and guardians cuddle them on their laps and read to them. Children-directed activities in the classroom also have value for literacy and language development. Children come into the setting and direct their play with the items made available to them, coming up with scenarios relevant to the setting.

Home-based interventions are activities facilitated by parents or guardians who are directly involved in children's literacy activities. The learning process at home about how to read and write may be different from the experiences they encounter at school (Compton-Lilly, 2006). Children are exposed to language events at home that support their literacy development (Ortiz, 2004). A key influence contributing to the development of literacy skills in young children are parents. Mullis, Comille, Ritchson, and Sullender (2004) assert that parents have the ability to provide young children with direction and consistency to support the development of early literacy skills. Also, Hammer, Missio, and Wagstaff (2003) stress that children begin to develop phonological awareness and knowledge of letters when learning about print in the environment.

The provision of an intervention program for children with special learning needs has gained wide acceptance in the past decades. Intervention services provided by the teachers in school and parents at home hasten the child's acquisition of the desirable learning and behavior characteristics for the attainment of his or her potential despite the presence of the disability (Inciong, Quijano, Capulong, Gregorio & Gines, 2007). For many children with special needs, carefully designed instruction plays an integral role in successful learning. Thus, The Arc (2009) generalizes its importance to know what changes and accommodations are helpful to the children with special learning needs as discussed by the IEP team to be included in their IEP, if appropriate. McCausland (2005) suggests that each child must have their own Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) describing the program modifications or adaptations for the student and the services to be provided.

The aforementioned concepts are significant in the current study because it presents the components of emergent literacy important in the development of their conventional literacy skills. Also, these give the researcher an understanding of how interventions in school and at home possibly impact the development of their skills.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to assess the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs enrolled at Ozamiz City Central School – Special Education (OCCS-SPED) Center for School Year 2015-2016. Specifically, this paper intended to: (1) ascertain the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs in terms of its components; (2) identify the intervention activities utilized by teachers and parents to reinforce the least mastered emergent literacy skills in the following domains: School Literacy Environment and Home Literacy Environment; and (3) determine if there is a significant relationship between the level of emergent literacy skills and the intervention activities provided in school and home environments.

METHODS

A descriptive-correlational research design was used in this study. This specifically intended to describe the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and the intervention activities provided in by teachers and parents. Also, it aimed to find relationship between the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and the intervention activities they receive in school and at

home. Purposive sampling was used in this study taking all 31 pupils with special learning needs, particularly exhibiting features of Intellectual disability for assessment of emergent literacy skills with biological age ranging from 6-13. The pre-diagnosis conducted by the SPED assessment team revealed that they all belong to the pre-primary level and the intelligence quotient is 70 and below. Then, three SPED teachers and 18 parents answered the researcher-made questionnaires on the provision of intervention activities. The concentration of this study was Ozamiz City Central School – Special Education (OCCS-SPED) Center, Ozamiz City Division, in the school year 2015-2016.

A rubric on emergent literacy was modified based on Miller (1993) to ascertain the level of mastery of emergent literacy skills on the nine components. Researcher-made questionnaire on intervention activities provided in school and at home was also constructed. The rubric and questionnaires were validated by two experts of SPED. Further, field notes during class observations and home visitations and follow-up interview were also utilized to substantiate the quantitative data.

The researcher used descriptive statistics to interpret the responses on the rubric and questionnaire. Using the mean and standard deviation, the quantitative data were processed and interpreted. The field notes and home visitations were used to substantiate the quantitative data. Pearson r was utilized to test the relationship between the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and the intervention activities provided by teachers and parents in school and at home.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Emergent Literacy Skills of Children with Special Learning Needs

As can be gleaned in Table 1, eight out of nine skills; *Emergent Writing, Conceptual Ability, Concepts of Print, Knowledge of Environmental Print, Visual Discrimination and Perception, Oral Language Usage, Letter-name Knowledge, Word Understanding and Listening Comprehension* fall under the *beginning* level wherein children exhibit an emerging understanding of what books are and how to use them, recognition of some letters and manipulating sounds of a few of the letters in the alphabet, scribbling, creative play and other related tasks usually accompanied with verbal and physical prompts. Table 1 presents the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs.

Table 1

Emergent Literacy Skills of Children with Special Learning Needs

| Skills | Mean | SD | QD |
|--|------|------|-----------|
| Emergent Writing | 2.33 | 1.18 | Beginning |
| Conceptual Ability | 2.11 | 0.93 | Beginning |
| Concepts of Print | 2.04 | 1.05 | Beginning |
| Knowledge of Environmental Print | 2.02 | 1.16 | Beginning |
| Visual Discrimination and Perception | 1.93 | 1.00 | Beginning |
| Oral Language Usage | 1.87 | 0.82 | Beginning |
| Letter-name Knowledge | 1.85 | 1.00 | Beginning |
| Word Understanding and Listening Comprehension | 1.77 | 0.94 | Beginning |
| Auditory Discrimination | 1.58 | 0.81 | Not yet |
| Total | 1.94 | 0.18 | Beginning |

On the other hand, the table reveals that one skill has not yet emerged among the children with special learning needs, which is the *Auditory Discrimination*. The result also indicates that neither of the skills has reached the level of developing nor well-developed. Factors affecting the late emergence of Auditory discrimination skill are *poor attention span and hearing difficulties* of the children.

Intervention Activities Utilized to Reinforce the Least Mastered Emergent Literacy Skills in School Literacy Environment and Home Literacy Environment

In view of the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs, intervention activities are undertaken both in school and at home.

Interventions are instructions designed to meet the individual needs of learners struggling in a specific area. SPED teachers and parents have a general rating implying a high frequency in the conduct of intervention activities with qualitative descriptions of *often* and *always* respectively. SPED teachers and parents frequently reinforce the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs in school and at home by providing literacy-rich materials, teaching letters of the alphabet, facilitating writing activities, storytelling with embedded comprehension questions, teaching print concepts from books and commonly seen prints in the environment, encouraging creative play and the like. Table 2 presents the frequency of intervention activities provided in school and at home.

Table 2

Frequency of Intervention Activities Provided in School and at Home

| Skills | Statements | School | | | Home | | |
|---|---|--------|------|--------|------|------|-------|
| | | Mean | SD | QD | Mean | SD | QD |
| Auditory Discrimination | I present pictures of different animals and let the child produce or distinguish their sounds. | 4.00 | 0.00 | Often | 4.17 | 0.99 | Often |
| | I teach the sounds of the alphabet by letting my child imitate the way I produce the sounds. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 3.67 | 1.03 | Often |
| Word understanding and Word Comprehension | I model to the child how to say some words read in a book or shown in a picture. | - | - | - | 4.11 | 0.83 | Often |
| | I ask the moral lessons learned from the story presented. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 3.44 | 1.10 | Often |
| Letter-name Knowledge | I ask the child about the events in the story and its sequence to check his/her understanding. | 4.00 | 0.00 | Often | 3.61 | 1.04 | Often |
| | I teach the child letters in the alphabet. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 4.11 | 0.83 | Often |
| Oral Language Usage | I give comments about print like pointing on letters and saying “we know this letter – it is an A”. | 4.67 | 0.58 | Always | 3.83 | 0.86 | Often |
| | I follow children’s answers with additional questions to encourage them to elaborate their answer. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 3.83 | 0.99 | Often |
| Visual Discrimination and Perception | In telling stories, I allow my child to continue the story or add details to the story. | - | - | - | 3.61 | 1.04 | Often |
| | Asking open-ended questions regarding the story to give children chance to elaborate answer | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | - | - | - |
| Environmental Print Concepts of | I teach different colors and shapes using various objects or instructional materials in the classroom. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 4.17 | 0.99 | Often |
| | I teach my pupils the big and small letters of the Alphabet. | - | - | - | 3.83 | 0.92 | Often |
| Environmental Print Concepts of | I provide blocks or Legos for children to play on giving them freedom to create own design | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | - | - | - |
| | I introduce names of common food wrappers, movie titles and other familiar prints in the child’s environment. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 3.67 | 1.09 | Often |
| Environmental Print Concepts of | I present pictures or logos commonly seen in the environment and let the child identify them. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 4.11 | 1.18 | Often |
| | I let the child point or locate the title, cover, back, author | - | - | - | 3.33 | 1.33 | Often |

Table 2 continued

| Skills | Statements | School | | | Home | | |
|--------------------|--|--------|------|--------|------|------|--------|
| | | Mean | SD | QD | Mean | SD | QD |
| Print | and/or other parts of the book. | | | | | | |
| | I point on the print when reading for the child to follow the course of the story. | - | - | - | 3.72 | 0.90 | Often |
| | I make reading materials available at home for the child to use. | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | 3.94 | 0.80 | Often |
| | I read stories which are interesting to the children with the use of storybooks. | 4.67 | 0.58 | Always | - | - | - |
| Conceptual Ability | I allow and encourage the child to tell any story he/she likes to share. | 4.67 | 0.58 | Always | 4.28 | 1.07 | Always |
| | I give opportunities that pupils can have pretend play by oneself or with peers providing play props, toys or any material they can use. | 4.67 | 0.58 | Always | 4.22 | 1.06 | Always |
| Emergent Writing | I demonstrate to the child how to write his or her own name and help him/her familiarize and practice writing it. | 4.00 | 1.00 | Often | 4.44 | 0.71 | Always |
| | I provide writing materials at home. | - | - | - | 4.28 | 0.90 | Always |
| | I facilitate activities such as writing, coloring, and drawing | 5.00 | 0.00 | Always | - | - | - |
| | Total | 4.67 | 0.38 | Always | 3.92 | 0.31 | Often |

Relationship between the Level of Emergent Literacy Skills and the Intervention Activities Provided in School and Home Environments

The result reveals that there is *no significant relationship* between the emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and intervention activities provided by teachers in school and parents at home. Although measurable and significant emergent literacy growth was documented in this study, the results suggested that the quality of the environment and adult/child interaction did not have a significant role in the children's emergent literacy growth. This implies that even if there are intervention activities provided for these children, the level of their emergent literacy skills still belongs at the beginning level.

Table 3 presents the relationship between emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs and intervention activities in school and at home.

Table 3

Relationship between Emergent Literacy Skills and Intervention Activities in School and at Home

| Skill | School Intervention Activities | | Home Intervention Activities | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|
| | r | p | r | p |
| Emergent Writing | 0.100 | 0.593 | 0.474 | 0.047 |
| Conceptual Ability | 0.458 | 0.010 | -0.262 | 0.294 |
| Concepts of Print | - | - | -0.208 | 0.407 |

Table 3 continued

| Skill | School Intervention <u>Activities</u> | | Home Intervention <u>Activities</u> | |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|
| | r | p | r | P |
| Knowledge of Environmental Print | 0.054 | 0.774 | 0.385 | 0.115 |
| Visual Discrimination and Perception | 0.191 | 0.302 | 0.252 | 0.312 |
| Oral Language Usage | - | - | 0.199 | 0.429 |
| Letter-name Knowledge | - | - | 0.249 | 0.320 |
| Word Understanding and Listening Comprehension | -0.249 | 0.177 | -0.112 | 0.659 |
| Auditory Discrimination | 0.231 | 0.212 | -0.425 | 0.078 |

*Correlation is significant at .05 level

One of the apparent explanations for this phenomenon is the noticeable level of intellectual functioning of the children with special learning needs. One of the academic characteristics of these children is their difficulty coping with the necessary emergent literacy skills even with the presence of interventions in school and at home. Learning new concepts would take more time compared to their regular age-peers. Research on the academic achievement of children with special learning needs suggested that they will experience significant delays in the areas of literacy. Emergent literacy of some children seemed to be delayed compared to the regular learners because of their mental and physical limitations.

Another factor influencing the result could be their limitations in memory retention. Many students with disabilities experience difficulties in remembering and retrieving verbal information (Mann & Brady, 1988). It is believed that these difficulties result from the learners' ability to make salient connections between abstract verbal information (e.g., concepts) by organizing the information and developing links between related information. This is upheld by Baker, Kame'enui and Simmons (1998) that many of these impairments are unique to the particular individual, most learning difficulties result from differences in memory, strategy knowledge and use, vocabulary knowledge, and language coding.

Another possible contributory factor for this result is the type of intervention activities provided for the children. The primary purpose of interventions is to reinforce the weaknesses of the learners in a specific skill. However, it is possible that the provided activities for these children are inappropriate for their actual needs. Based on the observation and personal experience, there are times that the teachers give similar activity to the children in class due to time constraints. Some similar activities may be applicable, but most of the times, they are not. Giving similar activities to a diverse group of children is defeating the purpose of the IEP. Though these children

have related characteristics, response to their needs must correspond with their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Moreover, the activities provided by teachers were not validated by language experts or any person in authority who are knowledgeable in both language and special education services. For many children with special learning needs, carefully designed instruction plays an integral role in successful learning. Thus, for families and teachers alike, it's important to know what changes and accommodations are helpful to children special learning needs.

Assessment of individual needs is a crucial step conducted before the beginning of formal lessons of these children. Each child must have their own Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) describing the program modifications or adaptations for the student and the services to be provided (McCausland, 2005). This simply means that each child has his/her own IEP unique from the others because of their distinctive needs. Each learner is expected to have different needs compared to other classmates.

In relation to the aforementioned factors, another implication for this result could be the absence of parents and other support services during the making of the IEP. For years, only the SPED teachers make the IEP wherein there should have been the presence of the parents and other support services (medical doctors, principal, etc.) to make the consolidated information more detailed and accurate. Parents are very important in the making of this plan because they know their child better than anyone else. Their knowledge on the strengths and weaknesses of their children are valuable information in the construction of educational plan. However, parents of these children seldom follow-up their child's progress and participate in school-initiated activities. The limitations in their involvement hinder the continuity of learning of the child in school and at home.

As discussed in the article of Special Education Department (2009), parents are advocates for their child's best interests. As members of the IEP team, parents and the school are equal partners. Parents contribute invaluable information about the student's learning approaches and interests. As a team, school personnel and parents need to work together to accomplish the goal of identifying and meeting the child's educational and support needs. The information that parents provide helps to ensure continuity in programming and plays an important role in reinforcing the goals of the IEP at home.

Further analysis of the implication of the result reveals that children with special learning needs could hardly concentrate on the intervention activities provided by both teachers and parents because of their short attention span. It was observed that

they easily get distracted with other matters existing in their environment which leads to unfinished task. If children with special learning needs could not participate well in the intervention activities provided for them, the desired academic result may not be achieved. This corroborates with the study of Spira (2005) which found out that those children with early problems of inattention showed less growth in the acquisition of basic building blocks of literacy.

Another contributory factor could be the constraint in the amount of exposure to a print-rich environment at home. Parents need to attend to other concerns of the family giving them a less time to provide children with literacy-related activities such as story-book reading; playing with manipulative materials like blocks, puzzles and Legos; flashcards of letters, pictures of objects, and animals; and writing tasks like tracing, copying, coloring and drawing.

Belonging to a lower socioeconomic status makes such materials not a major priority. This is also seen to be a contributory factor why children have a limited literacy experience at home. It has been suggested that limited exposure to oral and written language is a circumstance encountered relatively often by young children reared in low-socioeconomic status (SES) households is a factor that may contribute to the relatively low levels of emergent literacy skill observed in low-SES (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Moreover, a study was conducted on the contribution of the home environment to preschool children's emergent literacy skills (Haynes, 2010) which revealed that there was no significant relationship between HLE and the emergent literacy outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the level of emergent literacy skills of children with special learning needs is generally low entailing that these skills are not yet fully-developed. SPED teachers and parents have collaboratively provided the children with special learning need a high level of intervention activities by reinforcing their emergent literacy skills in both school and home literacy environments. The high frequency of intervention activities provided by teachers and parents does not necessarily guarantee a high level of emergent literacy skills among children with special learning needs. Despite the high level of support, children with special learning needs remained at the beginning level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Intervention activities provided by teachers and parents must be tailored according to the actual special learning needs of the children;
2. Parents of the children enrolled in SPED must take part during the making of IEP as part of the team since they hold significant information about their children's behavior at home and for them to suggest what they want for their children. The collaborative information from the IEP team could greatly help in having a holistic plan to address the needs. This is also to ensure continuity and consistency of learning from school to home settings;
3. SPED teachers and administrators must use standardized assessment tools to determine the literacy level of children with special needs;
4. Children displaying delays in cognitive functioning such as language development must be formally diagnosed by medical experts like the developmental-pediatrician to ascertain the category and level of disability. The result would then be used as the basis of the SPED teacher in making of Individualized Educational Plan (IEP);
5. The SPED teachers, and administrators, must organize a seminar, orientation or training for parents of children with special learning needs. This will aid them in their role as agents of literacy at home; and
6. Future studies may include other possible factors that may affect the emergence of literacy skills among children apart from intervention activities provided in both school and home domains.

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