



## Measures of preschool children's interest and engagement in literacy activities: Examining gender differences and construct dimensions

Alison E. Baroody<sup>a,\*</sup>, Karen E. Diamond<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Virginia, United States

<sup>b</sup> Purdue University, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 25 October 2011

Received in revised form 20 June 2012

Accepted 6 July 2012

#### Keywords:

Literacy  
Interest  
Engagement  
Preschool  
Measures

### ABSTRACT

Multiple approaches to measuring preschool children's literacy interest and engagement (i.e., parent-, teacher-, child-reported child literacy interest and observer-reported child literacy engagement) were examined in a sample of 167 four- and five-year-old children ( $M = 56.62$  months,  $SD = 6.01$ ) enrolled in Head Start. Associations among measures as well as gender differences and dimensions of preschooler's literacy interest and engagement were examined across measures. Measures were not strongly associated. There were small, but significant correlations between parents' and teachers' reports of children's literacy interest, and teachers' reports of children's literacy interest and observers' reports of children's literacy engagement. Gender differences were found for parent- and teacher-report measures, with teachers and parents rating girls higher on interest. Patterns of factor loadings differed between adult and child measures. Implications of findings are discussed.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Children's interest and engagement in school-related learning activities is significantly associated with children's early academic success (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Children are more likely to participate in activities that they find interesting and may persist longer with ones that are interesting but challenging (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). There is evidence across a number of studies with early elementary students that reading motivation and achievement are strongly related (Morgan & Fuchs). Understanding children's interest and engagement in learning activities may provide an avenue for understanding subsequent achievement within a domain, for children from preschool through post-secondary education. In this study, we focus specifically on preschool children's interest and engagement in activities related to emerging literacy skills.

A number of recent studies have reported associations between preschool children's interest in literacy activities and emergent literacy skills, including skills related to expressive and receptive vocabulary (Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006; Lonigan, Anthony, & Burgess, 1995) and to letter and sound knowledge (Bracken & Fischel, 2008). With few exceptions (cf., Deckner, Adamson, & Bakeman, 2006), studies of preschool children's interest in literacy activities have relied on parents' reports of their child's interest, an approach that is subject to positive report bias and inaccuracy (Frijters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000). In this study, we examine

several different approaches to measuring young children's interest in literacy activities, including adults' reports, children's self-reports of interest in literacy activities, and observations of children's participation and engagement in activities in preschool. We are interested in understanding whether different approaches to assessing preschool children's interests are associated with reliable differences between and within children, including gender differences.

In school-age children, interest in an activity or learning domain is a component of academic or achievement motivation (Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). Children's enjoyment of, and the value that they place on, an activity are also important components of achievement motivation (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). Elementary age children who enjoy a task and find it motivating or interesting are likely to choose to participate in that task and avoid tasks which they do not find motivating (Wigfield et al.). Achievement motivation may not be a developmentally appropriate construct for understanding preschool children's involvement in learning-related activities. However, a number of researchers have focused on associations between preschool children's interest in learning activities, including those related to emerging literacy skills, and literacy-related learning outcomes.

What does it mean for young children to be interested in literacy activities? Some studies have equated interest with enjoyment of literacy activities (Deckner et al., 2006; Frijters et al., 2000), while others defined interest as frequency of participation in literacy activities (Farver et al., 2006; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). Still

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: aebaroody@gmail.com, aeb6k@virginia.edu (A.E. Baroody).

other studies include both children's enjoyment and frequency of participation in specific activities as indicators of children's interest (Bracken & Fischel, 2008). Both children's enjoyment and frequency of participation in literacy-related activities may be related to their emergent literacy skills. Preschoolers who think that a particular activity is enjoyable may be more likely to participate in the activity. Enjoyment of and frequency of participation in literacy activities may both be needed to link interest in literacy activities to emerging literacy skills during the preschool years. This study will examine both components of interest.

In the present study, we use the term 'interest' to refer to children's and adults' ideas about how much a child enjoys or likes specific literacy activities and how often a child participates in specific literacy activities. We use the term 'engagement' to refer to children's observed attention to and interactions with people or materials related to the activity. If the child's attention is focused on the activity (e.g., watching or listening), if the child is manipulating and/or talking about materials related to the activity (e.g., turning the pages of a book, asking what a word means), or moving (e.g., acting out parts of a story) the child is considered engaged (cf. Ritchie, Howes, Kraft-Sayre, & Weiser, 2002). We expect interest and engagement to be associated since children who are interested in an activity are likely to be engaged when participating in the activity.

## 1. Gender differences

In research with elementary school age children, gender differences related to reading interest or motivation have documented girls' higher levels of interest in literacy compared to boys (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Meece, Glienke, & Burg, 2006). Although less research has examined gender differences in children's literacy interest during the preschool years, the studies that have been done report similar findings. For reports of children's interest or learning motivation in literacy, parents rate girls higher than boys (Alexander, Johnson, Leibham, & Kelley, 2008; Baroody & Dobbs-Oates, 2011; Raty, 2003). Therefore it appears that at least for parent-report measures, gender differences in literacy interest are reported during preschool. Yet, adult-report measures, such as parent and teacher reports of children's literacy interest, may be biased by adults' expectations that girls are better at reading and that boys are more likely to have reading difficulties compared to girls (National Research Council, 1998; Robinson & Lubienski, 2011). Thus, examining gender differences using a variety of literacy interest measures contributes to the literature by highlighting similarities and differences between child and adult reporters.

## 2. Approaches to measuring preschool children's literacy interest

Deciding how to measure literacy interest is important since each approach has advantages as well as potential challenges and a multi-faceted approach may be needed to better understand the construct (Fulmer & Frijters, 2009; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). Furthermore, research on children's social and problem behaviors has found poor to modest cross-informant correlations with most correlations between parents' and teachers' ratings being below .40 (Klyce, Conger, Conger, & Dumas, 2011; Konold, Jamison, Stanton-Chapman, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010; Winsler & Wallace, 2002). Children's interest and engagement in literacy activities has been measured in several ways—parent-report questionnaires/interviews, child interviews, teacher-report questionnaires, and observations. However, since these approaches have rarely been used together within the same study, it is difficult to compare them across studies due to differences in sample characteristics

such as age or family income level. It is unclear if each approach measures the same construct of interest or if each approach taps into different aspects of the construct. If approaches do measure the same construct it is expected that they would be strongly inter-correlated; however, previous research suggests that context or informant-related factors (e.g., experience with the child) may influence ratings and account for lower cross-informant correlations (Konold & Pianta, 2007; Konold, Walthall, & Pianta, 2004).

### 2.1. Parent-report measures

Parent reports have been used to measure parents' perceptions of their child's literacy interest in the home setting. This may be due to the ease with which these questionnaires can be administered compared to other methods of measuring interest (Baroody & Dobbs-Oates, 2011). Additionally, parents have opportunities to observe their child in multiple settings for extended periods of time, which gives them an advantage when reporting on their child's typical behavior. The majority of parents report that their child shows a high level of interest in literacy activities irrespective of income or ethnicity (Baker & Scher, 2002; Bracken & Fischel, 2008; DeBaryshe, 1995; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005). This may suggest a social desirability effect. Baker and Scher found more variability in parents' reports of their child's literacy interest when they asked parents to report on specific behaviors that would indicate literacy interest versus asking parents to provide an overall rating of their child's literacy interest. Therefore, including specific behaviors that may indicate literacy interest (e.g., pretending to read) may make parent reports less subjective and less prone to social desirability, improving the validity of the items.

### 2.2. Teacher-report measures

Teacher report has been used to measure children's interest in activities related to reading (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Since many preschool-age children spend at least part of their day in a child-care or preschool setting, asking teachers about children's interest in literacy activities may be another way to tap into the construct since, like parents, teachers may be able to report on children's typical literacy enjoyment and participation. Teacher reports of children's literacy interest have been used in studies with children in kindergarten and first-grade (Dunsmuir & Blatchford, 2004; Lepola, Poskiparta, Laakkonen, & Niemi, 2005; Morrow, 1983). Like parent-report methods, teacher reports may be subject to social desirability or bias. Teachers' expectations that girls are better readers than boys may bias their perceptions of children's literacy interest, leading them to rate girls higher (National Research Council, 1998; Robinson & Lubienski, 2011).

### 2.3. Child-report measures

A third way of measuring children's interest in literacy is through child-report measures. Although few published studies have used child-report measures to assess literacy interest for preschool age children, they have been used with kindergarten and first graders (Baker & Scher, 2002; Ecalle, Magnan, & Gibert, 2006; Frijters et al., 2000; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Similar patterns of association between children's literacy interest and letter-knowledge have been found across studies using child-report (Baroody & Diamond, 2010; Frijters et al., 2000), parent-report (Bracken & Fischel, 2008), and observation measures (Deckner et al., 2006). Although published studies have not often used child-report measures of preschool children's literacy interest, they have been used in other areas (e.g., parenting behavior, peer sociometric ratings) and have evidence of reliability and validity (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, & Hymel, 1979; Sessa, Avenvoli,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/354017>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/354017>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)