

THE IMPACT OF MATERNAL EDUCATION AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION ON HUNGARIAN STUDENTS' READING PERFORMANCE

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Reading comprehension is a complex process, influenced and shaped by numerous factors, such as maternal education, preschool education (Barnett, Brown and Shore, 2004) and school-readiness skills (Molnár, Józsa, Molnár and B. Németh, 2007). Early years education has been brought to the forefront of the political and research agendas in the past decade; therefore, many international studies have examined the role and efficiency of preschool education. However, the assumption that an early enrollment to preschool is beneficial for children's later reading attainment has not been supported by research evidence in a Hungarian context. Studies examining the relationship between the length of preschool education, maternal education and reading development are also scarce. The aim of the study is to examine the impact of maternal education and the time spent in preschool education on students' reading performance from Grade 2 to Grade 6 and to analyze the relationship of these background variables with reading achievement over time. A nationally representative sample participated in the study (N=2,191). The DIFER (Cronbach- α =0.91) school-readiness test battery was administered at the beginning of Grade 1. Students also completed reading literacy tests in Grades 2, 4 and 6 (Cronbach- α -s=0.81–0.89). Based on maternal education students' reading achievement differs significantly. Data show that students whose mother accomplished 8 grades or less achieve the lowest test scores ($M_{\text{Grade2-6}}=64.3\text{--}67.5\%$). Students with mothers who completed tertiary education proved to be the most efficient readers ($M_{\text{Grade2-6}}=74.4\text{--}82.1\%$). These tendencies remain stable over time. There is a significant positive relationship lasting over time between students' reading achievement and length of preschool education. Students attending preschool for 3–4 years performed 3.0–7.2%p better in reading in all grades than those who went to preschool for 2 years. The relationship between students' reading performance and maternal education is medium ($r=.37\text{--}.39$). However, there's a weak correlation between reading and time spent in preschool ($r=.17\text{--}.18$). Path-analysis shows the impact of maternal education, length of preschool education, school-readiness test and reading performance in Grades 2, 4, 6. The model fitted well (CFI=.996; SRMR=.022). Results yield evidence that maternal education has a direct effect on all the variables involved in the model. The length of preschool education exerts its influence via DIFER. Results show a significant positive relationship between students' reading achievement and maternal education and the length of preschool education. However, maternal education determines students' reading achievement better than preschooling.

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