E-books and Emergent Literacy in Early Childhood Settings: Research-to-Policy Resources

There has been a dramatic increase in young children’s access to and use of media on mobile devices (such as smartphones, tablets etc.) and children are becoming familiar with these devices at a younger age. Electronic books or e-books are one example of interactive media that are being used by young children. E-books are books that have been converted into a digital format and include text, audio, images, animations, and other features and can be displayed on a computer screen or other handheld device. Children are engaging more with digital texts in the form of e-books both at home and in early childhood settings as the number and availability of electronic books has grown over time.

In recognition of a growing use of technology by young children, NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media issued a joint statement in 2012 emphasizing the need for interactive media and technology to be used “within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice to support learning goals established for individual children.” The statement further highlighted the issue of equity and access for all children, given that disparities exist in access and use of technology based on socioeconomic status. Associated with these disparities, children from more affluent families often have more advanced technology and digital literacy skills before they begin school. Using tools like e-books in a developmentally appropriate way in early childhood settings could offer an opportunity to address disparities in access and in early literacy skills.
Emergent or early literacy refers to a range of skills in the domains of oral language, phonological awareness, and print and letter knowledge that serve as precursors to conventional reading and writing. Past research has found that shared-reading interventions can improve oral language and print knowledge of young children. Whether the use of e-books confers the same benefits is an issue that researchers are beginning to explore. Some of the topics that have been addressed so far in the literature include: how children engage with e-books in early childhood settings; which features of e-books can contribute to specific emergent literacy skills; whether e-books can be effective in promoting emergent literacy skills with specific populations (for example, children at risk for learning disabilities, English Language Learners); and whether there are differences between e-books and print books in promoting emergent literacy skills.

This resource list includes research on the effects of e-books on emergent literacy in early childhood settings from 2010 to the present. The focus of this resource list is on the use of e-books in early childhood settings, some of the literature reviews and syntheses below also include studies of parents’ use of e-books. While not included in this list, there is also a body of research focused on parents’ use of e-books with their children in the home.

Resources are grouped under the following headings:

- Literature reviews and syntheses on e-books and emergent literacy

- U.S. studies:
  - How children engage with e-books
  - Effects of e-books on emergent literacy skills
  - Effects of e-book use on specific populations
  - Comparing the effects of e-books versus print books in promoting early literacy

- International studies:
  - Effects of e-books on emergent literacy skills
  - Effects of e-book use on specific populations
  - Comparing the effects of e-books versus print books in promoting emergent literacy skills
Literature Reviews and Syntheses on e-books and emergent literacy


U.S. studies:

*How children engage with e-books*


**Effects of e-books on emergent literacy skills**


**Effects of e-book use on specific populations**


**Comparing the effects of e-books versus print books in promoting emergent literacy**


comprehension: The influence of the medium on preschoolers' story understanding. *Reading and Writing*, 30(8), 1753-1771.

**International studies:**

**Effects of e-books on emergent literacy skills**


Strouse, G. A., & Ganea, P. A. (2016). *Are prompts provided by electronic books as effective for teaching preschoolers a biological concept as those provided by adults?*. *Early Education and Development*, 27(8), 1190-1204.

**Effects of e-book use on specific populations**


**Comparing the effects of e-books versus print books in promoting emergent literacy**


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