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To cite this article:

Simsar, A., Coskun, L., & Dinler, H. (2024). Impacts of parent's reading habits at home on children' listening skills. *International Journal on Studies in Education (IJonSE)*, 6(2), 240-254. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonse.202>

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Article Info

Article History

Received:

10 October 2023

Accepted:

17 February 2024

Keywords

Listening skills

Early childhood education

Children

Reading books

Parents

Abstract

The early childhood phase is a critical period for the acquisition of various skills. Listening skills are just as vital as speaking, reading, and writing in social life. Nevertheless, an examination of studies in the field of early childhood education reveals that research focused on listening skills necessitates further attention. This study seeks to explore the connection between the listening skills of children aged 60 to 72 months and parents' habits of reading books to children at home. The research data, collected using the Listening Skills Evaluation Scale for Preschool Children and the Questionnaire on Parents' Reading Habits to Children at Home (abbreviated as EVOK in Turkish), was gathered through a relational survey model, which falls under quantitative research methods. The study's participant group comprises 176 parents, selected through random sampling. The data was analyzed through relationship and difference tests. The research outcomes establish a significant positive correlation between the listening skills of children aged 60 to 72 months and the reading practices of their families at home. Furthermore, the study identifies that parental education levels and economic status are statistically significant factors influencing children's listening skills. Based on these findings, the study offers recommendations to parents and other stakeholders regarding the enhancement of children's listening skills.

Introduction

The acquisition of language skills in an individual's life is primarily attributed to their listening skills, a notion supported by Sever (2000). Listening skills, being a child's first language skill, hold significant influence over the development of other language components (Machado, 2010). The development of hearing sensitivity begins as early as the prenatal period, with the fetus listening to the mother's heartbeat from the fifth month onwards (Robinsaw, 2007). Though "listening" and "hearing" are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct concepts. Hearing can be passive and unconscious, occurring without deliberate intent, whereas listening is a purposeful and deliberate act (Nas, 2003). The pivotal distinction between listening and hearing is that in listening, an individual actively engages with and seeks to make sense of what they hear (Ünalın, 2006).

Hearing abilities are known to continue developing until around the age of 15. Nevertheless, experts emphasize the critical importance of the first three years for establishing auditory neural connections in the brain (Chermak & Musiek, 1997); cited in (Jalongo, 2010). Language acquisition stands out as one of the most significant achievements during early childhood. A child's vocabulary, primarily acquired through listening, undergoes

enrichment as they gain new experiences (Nelson, 2007). Assessing vocabulary development is essential because children exhibit receptive language skills as early as nine months. There is a close relationship between brain development and the ability to process speech, which is why many 12-month-old babies begin to produce some words. The progress of speech development in babies accelerates and becomes more practical up to 24 months (Fernald et al., 2006). Toddler vocabularies can vary widely, ranging from just a few words to several hundred words (Thal & Flores, 2001; Simsar, 2021). Children can build their receptive vocabulary even through overhearing conversations that are not directly directed at them (Akhtar, 2004; Floor & Akhtar, 2006).

Conducting research on children's listening skills is crucial because children typically exhibit receptive language skills that are approximately four times more advanced than their expressive language skills (Burak & Simsar, 2022; Fenson et al., 1993). In this context, receptive language involves a child understanding the meaning of a spoken word and being able to name a picture they are shown. On the other hand, expressive language pertains to the vocabulary a child uses when speaking (Whitehurst et al., 1988). There is a growing need to emphasize and nurture listening skills in children to help them become attentive listeners and improve their vocabulary (Rose, 2006; cited in Jalongo, 2010). Focusing on listening abilities is essential because it bridges the gap between a child's understanding of language and their ability to effectively express themselves.

Any activity focused on developing listening skills has a significant impact on the comprehension skills of children. For instance, when children are engaged in listening activities, asking them questions, encouraging them to make predictions, and ensuring their active participation are all strategies that promote accurate understanding (Vural, 2005). The preschool period, spanning ages three to six, is a critical time during which a child learns to speak and grasps most language rules. During this phase, adults often convey stories and fairy tales to children who haven't yet learned to read. The vibrancy and effectiveness of this storytelling foster a child's ability to listen to stories and sustain attention for extended periods. Given that children's attention can be easily diverted, it's advisable to limit listening activities to approximately 15 minutes. Additionally, when conducting listening activities with children of this age group, it's important to use proper sentence structures, choose age-appropriate language, and select words that they can readily understand (Çiravoğlu, 1998). These considerations ensure that listening activities are both engaging and comprehensible for young learners.

Teachers, who play an essential role in developing listening skills, need to pay attention to children's speaking speed, voice volume, distracting stimuli, noise sources in the environment, or language and dialect differences between children to support these skills. It is stated that these variables have a negative effect on children's listening comprehension (Robinshaw, 2007; Swain et al., 2004). Observational studies have also shown that 50% to 75% of the time spent in the classroom is spent listening to the teacher, other students, and auditory devices (Imhof, 2008; Smith, 2008).

Language is a social tool as well as an academic tool. Therefore, listening has important effects on interpersonal relationships (McKay, 2008). The individual is exposed to listening at every stage of his social life. Listening is one of the essential communication skills that an individual needs to make sense of what is happening around him, no matter how much technology develops (Temur, 2001). Listening, one of the primary communication

elements allows the development of meaningful relationships between individuals (Yavuzer, 2008). Since listening is a skill that needs to be learned, this skill should be taught early in the family and at school (Çağdaş, 2009).

Many experts contend that practical listening skills are acquired through the influence of role models. When children observe someone listening and paying attention to them, they understand the value of listening and the importance of reciprocating this attentive behavior in their interactions with others (Dougherty & Paul, 2007; Smith, 2008). Listening enhances a child's ability to understand and communicate with others and plays a pivotal role in developing self-regulation skills and behavior. As defined by Boyer (2008, p.27), self-regulation involves the capacity to initiate, cease, or adjust one's behavior according to the standards set by caregivers and parents. Effective listening contributes to a child's social and behavioral development by promoting self-regulation and fostering constructive social interactions.

Experienced educators often recommend that children use verbal communication to manage strong emotions. This is because words are considered a socially acceptable substitute for physical aggression. For instance, it's more appropriate for a child to express their feelings by saying, "This is not fair; you have to share this," rather than resorting to physical aggression against a friend. It's important to note that poor receptive language skills in preschool children are frequently associated with behavioral problems (Jalongo, 2010). In a study conducted by Estrem (2005), it was observed that boys who scored higher in physical violence exhibited less progress in terms of developing their receptive language skills. This underscores the interplay between language development and behavior in children, highlighting the significance of fostering effective communication as an alternative to physical aggression.

Children struggling with receptive and expressive language skills often struggle at school because they cannot easily learn classroom rules. These children cannot always keep up with the pace of oral instruction, may not consistently understand the content of the ideas being discussed, and may need strong communication skills. When they cannot hear or understand arguments, they may exhibit introversion or engage in socially inappropriate behavior (Cruger, 2005). Listening is one of the ways to obtain information, learn, and understand. Explaining and listening are as necessary as reading and writing daily (Özbay, 2001). It is stated that children who have difficulty in listening comprehension will fall behind their peers throughout their educational lives (Field, 2001). It is stated that listening comprehension is a significant predictor of children's academic success (Skarakis-Doyle & Dempsey, 2008; Sulieman et al., 2024) and that these skills, which are thought to be important in children's primary school preparation skills, support children's later reading proficiency (Florit et al., 2009). Studies have shown a positive relationship between listening skills, reading proficiency, and learning skills (Lamm et al., 1999; Smith, 2006).

According to Mackay (1997), it is thought that there is no help from anyone in the development of listening skills; it is believed that listening skills develop on their own, and therefore, the necessary importance is not given to teaching listening skills. However, it is necessary to allocate enough space to these skills throughout education. In studies conducted at home and abroad, listening skills are less emphasized than other language skills. For

example, listening is a language skill that needs to be addressed by Pinnel and Jaggar (2003); It is described as a forgotten skill by Burley and Allen (1995).

Current Study

Considering that the most used language skill in school and daily life is listening, it is necessary to evaluate these skills and organize the necessary educational activities. However, when the studies conducted in our country were examined, very few studies were found to examine preschool listening skills (Aras, 2004; Ciğerci, 2015; Kargin et al., 2017; Melanlıoğlu, 2011; Özer et al., 2015; Türe Köse, 2019; Yazkan, 2000; Yıldırım, 2007) was found to be aimed at supporting and evaluating the listening skills of primary school children. In addition, studies (Avcıoğlu, 2007; Başdaş, 2017; Mart, 2021) have been found in which listening skill is considered a sub-dimension of social skills and examined within the scope of social skills.

According to Robinslaw (2007), teachers need to know these skills to create activities for these skills. According to Florit et al. (2009), differences in children's listening skills should be analyzed before starting formal education. It is considered necessary to conduct studies that will evaluate these skills of preschool children and reveal their listening processes. The study will contribute to the field in terms of evaluating the listening skills of preschool children and providing a scale that can be used to evaluate these skills. The research aims to reveal the relationship between the listening skills of 60-72-month-old children and the reading habits of families of children. Based on this, this research asks, "Is there a relationship between the Listening Skills Evaluation Scale scores for Preschool Children and the Habits of Families in Reading Books to Children?" The answer to the question has been sought. Based on this problem, the following sub-problems were determined:

- Do the scores obtained from the entire Preschool Listening Skills Assessment Scale and its subscales differ according to parents' education level?
- Do the scores obtained from the entire Preschool Listening Skills Assessment Scale and its subscales differ according to the gender of the children?
- Do the scores obtained from the entire Preschool Listening Skills Assessment Scale and its subscales differ according to the socio-economic level of the parents?
- Is there a relationship between the scores obtained from the whole and sub-dimensions of the Listening Skills Evaluation Scale for Preschool Children and the whole and sub-dimensions of the Children's Home Reading Habits (EVOK) Scale?

Method

It was carried out in the relational screening model, one of the quantitative research methods. Relational screening model: A statistical model is preferred to determine the tendency or pattern of change between two or more variables (Creswell, 2017). This study decided to use the relational screening model because it aimed to reveal the relationships between the listening skills and social skills of children aged 60-72 months.

Participants

The study participants consisted of 176 children aged 60-72 months who attended preschool education institutions in Kilis. A simple random sampling method was used to select the participants. The percentage and frequency distributions of the demographic characteristics of the preschool children and their parents who constitute the participants are given. The findings are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Information about the Participants

Demographic Information		f	%
Child Gender	Boy	79	44.9
	Girl	97	55.1
Participated Parent	Mother	132	75.0
	Father	44	25.0
Education Level of Parents Participating in the Research	Primary education	30	17.0
	High school	60	34.1
	Bachelor	79	44.9
	Master Education	7	4.0
Socio Economic situation	Low Level	21	11.9
	Middle Level	133	75.6
	High Level	22	12.5
Age of the child participating in the study	4 years old	7	4.0
	5 years old	86	48.9
	6 years old	83	47.2
Age of Parents Participating in the Research	20-29 years old	55	31.3
	30-39 years old	102	58.0
	40 years old and older	19	10.7
Number of Children in the House	Single Child	12	6.8
	2 Children	102	58.0
	3 Children	51	29.0
	4 Children and more	11	6.3

When we look at the findings regarding the gender of the 176 preschool children that make up the participants, 97 (55.1%) of the children are girls, and 79 (44.9%) are boys. When we look at the situation of the parents participating in the research, it is seen that most of them are mothers (75.0%). When we look at the parents' education levels of these children, it was determined that most of the participants' educational level was at the undergraduate level (44.9%). However, the majority of the participants were stated to have a middle-level income level (75.6%). However, approximately half of the participants were 5-year-old children (48.9%). Also, a large majority of the participants provided information. The majority of them stated that they had at least two children at home (58.0%). In addition, when the age distribution of the participants was examined, it was stated that most of them were between the ages of 30-39 (58.0%) (See Table 1).

Data Collection Tools

In this study, the Listening Skills Assessment Scale for Preschool Children (Özer Özkan and Coşkun, 2015) and the data collection tools on families' reading habits to children were used.

Listening Skills Assessment Scale (DBÖ) for Preschool Children

The scale was developed by Özer Özkan and Coşkun (2015). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were performed for the construct validity of the scale. As a result of EFA, a structure consisting of two factors, cognitive and social, was obtained, explaining 70.07% of the total variance. The factor model proposed with EFA was tested with CFA. Among the fit indices obtained as a result of CFA, the RMSEA value was calculated as 0.09 and the CFI value was calculated as 0.98. CFA results showed that the two-factor structure had adequate fit. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient calculated for the internal consistency reliability of the developed scale was obtained as 0.94. The Scale for Assessment of Listening Skills of Preschool Children was accepted to be valid and reliable. The scale is structured as a 4-point Likert type as (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Often, (4) Always and is filled in by teachers. The scale consists of two sub-dimensions. These dimensions are: Social Behaviors and Cognitive Behaviors sub-dimensions. From these dimensions, It consists of a total of 30 items, 9 of which are the social dimension and 21 of the cognitive dimension.

Children's Home Reading Habits Scale (EVOK)

It is a survey developed by researchers to obtain information about families' reading habits to their children at home. The survey consists of four headings: Reading, Writing, Phonological and print awareness, and Reading books together. There are a total of 23 items in the survey. The scale is structured as a 5-point Likert type as (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Once a week, (4) Once a day, and (5) Several times a day and it is filled in by parents.

Data Collection Process

During the data collection process, firstly, the necessary permissions for the research were obtained from the relevant institutions. Then, preschool teachers working in Kilis province were contacted. Preschool teachers were informed about the research and asked to fill out the consent form. The scales were completed by each child's teacher in approximately 10 minutes. Later, the parents of the same children were contacted, and information was obtained about their reading habits at home. The data collection process was completed in four months.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study was converted into a data set by the researchers and analyzed in the SPSS package program. First, descriptive analyzes of the data obtained from the scales were performed and the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test was applied to test the normality of the distribution. Since the distribution was not normal, it was decided to use non-parametric tests in the analysis of the research data. Then, Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal

Wallis tests were carried out to determine whether the data obtained from the Listening Skills Assessment for Preschool Children and EVOK created a significant difference according to gender, parental education level and socio-economic status variables. Then, Spearman's correlation analysis, t-test and one-way ANOVA analyzes were performed to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the total scores obtained from the scales and the scores obtained from the subscales.

Results

Scores from the Children's listening skills and EVOK were used to measure children's listening skills and their habits of reading at home. Descriptive statistics for these measures are reported in Table 2 and in Table 3.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Children's Listening Skills

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max
Social Skills	176	31.50	5.24	9.00	36.00
Cognitive Skills	176	63.10	17.90	21.00	84.00
Listening Skills Total	176	94.56	21.20	39.00	120.00

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of EVOK

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max
Reading activities	176	23.63	4.25	15.00	36.00
Writing practices	176	13.23	4.11	6.00	25.00
Phonology and Print Awareness	176	14.41	4.38	8.00	30.00
Reading Books Together	176	10.97	3.73	4.00	20.00
EVOK Total	176	62.23	11.81	36.00	98.00

In relation to parent's socio-economic level, Table 4 presents the ANOVA test results findings regarding whether children's listening skills differ in relation to their parents' socio-economic conditions.

Table 4. Comparison of the Scores based on Parents' Socio-Economic Status

	Variables	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	F	<i>p</i>
Parents Socio- Economic Level	Low	21	83.66	23.90	3.50	.03*
	Middle	133	96.54	21.08		
	High	22	93.04	16.16		
	Total	176	94.56	21.19		

*Significant level at .05.

Table 4 presents the ANOVA test results regarding children's listening skills, which differ significantly from their parents' socio-economic condition. As shown in Table 5, when the ANOVA results were examined for children's listening skills by the type of parents' socio-economic condition, there were statistically significant differences F

(3.172 = 3.50, $p < .05$) concerning higher economic level was observed. Accordingly, it was found that the parents' educational background was significantly related to children's listening skills. In detail, when parents' education level increases, children's listening skills may increase, too. Table 5 presents the T-test results regarding the children's listening skills, showing statistical significance as to the child's gender.

Table 5. Comparison of the Scores based on Children's Gender

	Variables	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Child's gender	Girl	97	98.43	21.12	2.72	.007*
	Boy	79	89.82	20.43		
	Total	176	94.56	21.19		

*Significant level at .05.

Considering the results given in Table 5, it is evident that there is statistical significance between the scores of the girls' and boys' listening skills ($t = 2.72$, $sd = 174$, $p < .05$). Examined in detail, the mean scores of the girls' listening skills (98.43) is higher than the means scores of boys' listening skills (89.82). Table 5 presents the ANOVA test results regarding children's listening skills, which differ significantly according to their parent's educational background.

Table 6. Comparison of the Scores based on Parents Educational levels.

	Variables	n	Mean	SD	F	p
Parents Educational Level	Elementary	30	92.50	23.58	4.28	.006*
	Highschool	60	87.91	19.28		
	Bachelor	79	100.39	20.91		
	Master Education and Higher	7	94.71	12.73		
	Total	176	94.56	21.19		

*Significant level at .05.

As can be seen in Table 6, when the ANOVA results were examined for children's listening skills by the type of parents' educational background, statistical significance was observed concerning higher education levels F (3.172 = 4.28, $p < .05$). In relation to the correlation of Children's listening skills' scores and their EVOK scores were analyzed, and results were shown in Table 6.

The results of the correlational analyses are reported in Table 7. There was a statistically significant small correlation between the EVOK scores and children's listening skills scores ($r(176) = .15$, $p < .005$). There was also a statistically significant low correlation between the reading activities at home and children's listening skills scores ($r(176) = .29$, $p < .005$) and a moderate correlation between reading activities at home and EVOK scores ($r(176) = .52$, $p < .001$). In addition, Table 7 also showed that there was a statistically significant high correlation between the writing practices at home and EVOK scores ($r(176) = .79$, $p < .001$).

Likewise, phonology and print awareness at home showed a statistically significant high correlation. Their EVOK

scores ($r(176) = .76, p < .001$) and a moderate correlation between phonology and print awareness at home and their writing activities at home ($r(176) = .76, p < .001$). Interestingly, there was a statistically significant high correlation between reading books together at home and their EVOK scores ($r(176) = .82, p < .001$) and a moderate correlation between reading books together at home and their writing activities at home ($r(176) = .52, p < .001$) and phonology and print awareness at home ($r(176) = .60, p < .001$) (see Table 6).

Table 7. Correlation between Variables Related to Children's listening skills and EVOK scores

EVOK Total	Listening Skills Total	Reading activities	Writing practices	Phonology and Print Awareness	Reading Books Together	Social Skills	Cognitive Skills
EVOK Total	.15*	.52**	.79**	.76**	.82**	.17*	.13
Listening Skills Total		.29**	.08	-.02	.08	.71**	.98**
Reading activities			.19*	.02	.27**	.21**	.28**
Writing practices				.56**	.52**	.12	.06
Phonology and Print Awareness					.60**	.05	-.04
Reading Books Together						.12	.06
Social Skills							.54**
Cognitive Skills							

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Moreover, children's social skills had a statistically significant low correlation with their EVOK scores ($r(176) = .17, p < .001$) and reading activities at home ($r(176) = .21, p < .001$). However, social skills had a statistically significant high correlation with their listening skills scores ($r(176) = .71, p < .001$). Similarly, children's cognitive skills had a statistically significant high correlation with their listening skills scores ($r(176) = .98, p < .001$) and moderate correlation with social skills ($r(176) = .54, p < .001$) (see Table 7).

Discussion

This study investigated the listening skills of 60-72-month-old children. As a result of the data analysis in the study, it was determined that parents' reading habits at home were related to children's listening skills. Moreover, it has been observed that the education level, socio-economic status of the children's parents, and the gender of the children are related to their listening skills. Researchers have emphasized that it is essential for teachers to create a suitable listening environment and establish rules for listening in the classroom environment to support children's listening skills. Many researchers emphasized that teachers should pay attention to some rules regarding

the classroom environment and their voices (Rubin et al., 2011; Simsar & Kadim, 2017). Similarly, this study determined that creating reading areas for children at home, doing phonics exercises, and doing writing and reading exercises for children positively improved their children's listening skills.

Additionally, parents' role modeling may positively affect children's language development (Duran Yılmaz, 2023; Konca, 2022; Simsar & Jones, 2021; Smith, 2008). According to Çağdaş (2001), every person, especially parents, must develop their listening skills through conscious training to be a good listener. Although speaking usually comes to mind when discussing communication, communication in social development begins with listening. Parents can communicate effectively with their children by giving importance to listening and speaking (Akhtar, 2004; Floor & Akhtar, 2006; Simsar & Çapar, 2022; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020). In the existing literature, it is a common finding that parents with a higher level of education tend to offer more substantial support to their children (Kızıldağ & Duran, 2017; Konca et al., 2023; Kotaman, 2008; McMullen, 2005; Polat, 2008; Silander et al., 2018; Simsar, 2021). Parents must have developed listening skills to be a model for their children. Therefore, in this study, it can be said that parents' education level impacts their children's listening skills. In this case, it can be said that parents support their children's cognitive and social development as well as their language development with the activities they can do at home, such as reading and writing.

Furthermore, this study established a connection between children's listening abilities and their gender, finding that girls tend to exhibit more proficient listening skills than boys. This trend aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Kurt in 2008, which noted that female students tended to have superior listening skills compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Estrem's (2005) study supported this observation, highlighting that girl generally outperformed boys in listening skills based on their behavioral patterns. These collective findings underscore the significance of gender as a crucial factor in language development, emphasizing the need for tailored support to ensure children's language skills develop optimally.

Researchers have pointed to a positive connection between listening skills, reading proficiency, and overall learning capacity (Lamm et al., 1999; Smith, 2006). Since listening stands out as the most frequently employed language skill, both in educational contexts and daily life, it becomes apparent that there is a pressing need to evaluate and structure essential educational initiatives aimed at bolstering these skills (Aras, 2004; Ciğerci, 2015; Doğan & Simsar, 2018; Mart et al., 2022; Melanlioğlu, 2011; Yazkan, 2000; Yıldırım, 2007). Consistent with these prior investigations, the current study has discovered that parents' activities involving reading, writing, phonological awareness, and shared book-reading at home are significantly linked to children's listening skills. This finding suggests that parental involvement and support at home may exert a positive influence not only on their children's language development but also on their social and cognitive development.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigated the listening skills of 60-72-month-old children. As a result of the data analysis in the study, it was determined that parents' reading habits at home were related to children's listening skills. Moreover, children's listening skills relate to their parents' educational and socio-economic levels. Likewise, children's

listening skills are related to their gender differences. The findings of this study align with existing literature, reinforcing the outcomes of similar studies in the field. Notably, the results emphasize the significance of children's attitudes towards reading and writing activities at home, as they substantially impact children's listening and comprehension skills in social contexts. Moreover, a noteworthy conclusion drawn from this study is that parental support in nurturing reading habits in children positively influences the development of their listening skills. This situation can be supported, especially in Simsar's (2021) study, where it is emphasized that the support of parents at home is significant in children's cognitive development while they learn science and mathematics. Furthermore, this study also highlighted that those supports are also effective in children's listening skills.

It should be remembered that listening has an essential place as it is one of the first language skills humans use. Considering that listening skills are acquired from the prenatal period, these skills should be given due importance throughout the pre-school period. Listening, one of the four basic language skills, is as essential as reading, writing, and speaking. Considering that this skill will be acquired through training, activities, and modeling, it is seen as a necessity to carry out studies to evaluate and develop listening skills. Children's development in listening skills will positively impact other developmental areas, and activities related to these skills should be emphasized.

Considering that children's listening skills are fundamental in their social and academic development, teachers and parents have many responsibilities. The following suggestions can be given in line with the results obtained from the research:

- Parents may give time for reading and writing activities at home based on children's interests.
- Parents may support children by providing different reading and writing activities using technological tools.
- Teachers can support books for reading at school and home for children's listening skills.
- Teachers may create a reading center based on different reading materials and ask questions to improve children's understanding.
- Researchers can develop different measurement tools to evaluate the listening skills of preschool children.
- Studies can be carried out to determine the variables that cause deficiencies in listening skills.

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