

# Task-Focused Behaviour and Literacy Development: A Reciprocal Relationship

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The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of task-focused behaviour on reading fluency, spelling and comprehension and to examine the role of the different literacy skills in subsequent task-focused behaviour. Finnish-speaking children (N = 207) were followed from preschool until fourth grade and were tested for reading fluency, spelling and reading comprehension, and teachers rated the children's task-focused behaviour. Task-focused behaviour was a significant predictor of later reading comprehension and spelling skills. All three literacy skills predicted subsequent task-focused behaviour.

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- It is reasonable to assume that other factors besides cognitive ones may impact children's literacy development.

- Children's positive self-concept and efficacy beliefs are grounded upon positive experiences in previous learning situations.
- Efficacy beliefs and self-confidence promote expectations of success in new learning situations, which further lead to more effort and task-focused behaviour.
- The extent to which children's task-focused behaviour may impact their literacy learning might vary according to how challenging the particular task is.
- It may be assumed that motivational factors, such as task-focused behaviour, are more likely to affect the process of learning to read in opaque languages.
- The difficulty of literacy learning tasks may also vary within a particular language.
- For example, in a longitudinal study with Greek primary school children, it was found that task-focused behaviour predicted children's subsequent spelling and reading comprehension, but not their reading fluency in later grades (Georgiou et al., 2010)
- The present study aimed to extend Georgiou et al.'s findings in a sample of Finnish-speaking children followed through from preschool to Grade 4.



## **The study**

The present study highlights the benefits of engaging ELLs in multiliteracies pedagogy, based

This study aimed to determine the cross-lagged relationships between children's task-focused behaviour and their literacy skills. The research questions were:

1. Does task-focused behaviour predict reading fluency, spelling and comprehension after controlling for the preceding literacy level?
2. Do reading fluency, comprehension, and spelling predict task-focused behaviour after controlling for earlier task-focused behaviour?

## Methods

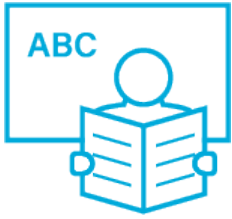
A total of 207 children (111 boys and 96 girls) were examined during their preschool and first, second and fourth school years. Children's prereading skills were tested, and the teacher rated their task-focused behaviour during preschool. In the first, second and fourth grades, the children were tested in reading fluency, reading comprehension and spelling; their task-focused behaviour was rated by the teacher.



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## Results

- After controlling for the effects of gender, phonological awareness and letter knowledge, task-focused behaviour accounted for 1–2% of unique variance in reading fluency, 3–5% of unique variance in spelling and 2–5% of unique variance in overall comprehension.
- After controlling for the effects of gender and previous task-focused behaviour, 3–10% of unique variance in task-focused behaviour was accounted for by phonological awareness and letter knowledge, 2–4% by reading fluency, 1–5% by spelling and 1–5% by comprehension.



## Conclusions

- The results showed that task-focused behaviour measured one year earlier contributed to the prediction of reading comprehension and spelling skills over and above their previous levels. However, it did not add to children's reading fluency prediction.
  - Children's task-focused behaviour predicted their spelling skills almost as strongly as it predicted their reading comprehension.
  - On the other hand, reading fluency, comprehension, and spelling measured a year before accounted for almost an equal amount of the variance in children's task-focused behaviour after controlling for earlier levels of task-focused behaviour.
  - Being good at something strengthens one's self-efficacy beliefs and expectations of future success and motivates one to try and learn, thus increasing task-focused behaviour. On the other hand, having difficulties affects one's self-efficacy beliefs negatively and makes one give up and avoid challenges.
  - Attention, therefore, must be directed to how children interpret their success in learning situations because negative learning experiences are likely to lead to low efficacy beliefs and expectations of failure, leading further to low levels of effort and task-avoidance behaviour.
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