

A Study on Teachers' Perceptions of Early Childhood Language Teaching Methods

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze differences in teachers' perceptions of teaching methods in early childhood language education, divide it into oral and written language areas, and propose directions for effective teaching methods to support future language development in early childhood. The study included 188 kindergarten and daycare teachers and utilized SPSS 26.0 to calculate the mean and standard deviation, as well as one-way ANOVA and Scheffé post-hoc analysis for each items in oral and written language area. The results, which examined and analyzed differences in teachers' perceptions of teaching methods in oral and written language in early childhood education based on the age of the class they taught or teach, are as follows. First, oral language teaching methods were considered more important than written ones in general. Second, there were differences in perceptions among teachers based on the age of the class they taught or teach in terms of supporting reading and writing experiences, providing writing experience, and providing integrated writing experiences based on picture books. This study found that teachers rated emergent literacy education support as highly important in both oral and written language teaching methods. Furthermore, the study is significant because it explored appropriate educational support directions for different developmental stages based on age.

Keywords : *Early childhood language & literacy education, Teaching methods, Teacher's perceptions*

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Introduction

Children use language to express their thoughts and feelings, form relationships with others, and facilitate new learning (Law et al., 2017; Peterson, McIntyre, & Forsyth, 2016). Language allows children to communicate with their human and physical environments and develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Furthermore, rich language experiences in early childhood are closely related to later language development (Cash et al., 2015; Dickinson, Tabors, 2002) and serve as an indicator of academic achievement and well-being in life, thus constantly being treated as important (Jalongo, 2013; Law et al., 2017). Therefore, educational experiences that include appropriate support and interaction for language development in children are crucial, and teachers must accept responsibility for this (Jalongo, 2013).

The language's basic functions are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, further classified as oral language for listening and speaking and written language for reading and writing. Oral language, the most common language activity for children, includes experiences as a speaker or listener, understanding shared information, and organizing and delivering content using a variety of vocabulary (Yun & Han, 2021). These experiences play an important role in improving children's communication skills and promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development (Amorsen & Wilson, 2020; Jalongo, 2013; Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Oral language is acquired naturally from a young age, so explicit teaching and learning are often inactively pursued. However, scholars have emphasized that intentional teaching is necessary to provide diverse experiences and enable children's active participation in oral language (Amorsen & Wilson, 2020; Kultti, 2013).

Conversely, written language is considered a learned and developed domain with planned and systematic support, unlike oral language (Söderbergh, 1986). However, from infancy, children are exposed to written language daily by observing their parents or teachers reading, acquiring information through various media such as picture books, and showing an interest in environmental print such as name tags and signs. Furthermore, they see characters as tools for recording their emotions or thoughts without regard for time or space, allowing them to practice basic writing skills. As a result, educational support for developing written language in contexts related to children's play and daily life is increasingly important (Mielonen &

Paterson, 2009).

In summary, early childhood is a critical period where oral and written language development is amplified (Morrow, 2012). Oral language abilities interact with written language development and play an essential role in literacy development (Sulzby & Teale, 1985). Language development occurs quickly, bringing qualitative changes as age increases (Lee & Kim, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to provide balanced, continuous, and meaningful language experiences in both oral and written language according to age, allowing children and teachers or children themselves to actively communicate and experience a language rich environment (Bond & Wasik, 2009). To this end, Cash et al. (2015) emphasized that the level of teachers' knowledge about early year language education is positively related to the improvement of children's language skills. That is, knowledge of language education content impacts teaching practices, such as specific teaching methods and classroom organization. Therefore, it is critical to distinguish and understand the current level of perception among teachers of oral and written language. However, few comprehensive studies have examined early childhood language education teaching methods in terms of both oral and written language, necessitating a thorough examination.

This study examines teachers' perceptions of early childhood language education teaching methods, focusing on oral and written language aspects. This study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of the importance they think to the sub-components of early childhood language teaching methods. This study aims to provide the foundational data needed to propose directions for early childhood language education and develop specific teaching methods. Furthermore, by analyzing differences in teacher perceptions based on the age of the children, this study hopes to identify areas for improvement in language education and provide implications for strategies needed in future teacher education. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on early childhood oral and written language teaching methods?
2. What age-related differences exist in teachers' perceptions of early childhood language teaching methods?
- 2-1. What are the age-related differences in teachers' perceptions toward oral language teaching methods?

2-2. What are the age-related differences in teachers' perceptions of written language teaching methods?

Method

Research Participants

This study included 188 kindergarten and daycare teachers who taught children aged 3, 4, and 5 years. Table 1 shows the general background of the participants.

Table 1. *General background of participants (N=188)*

	Category	N(%)
Age	Under 25	37(19.7)
	25 and over, under 30	61(32.4)
	30 and over, under 35 years old	46(24.5)
	35 and over	44(23.4)
Education	Vocational college graduate	27(14.4)
	Bachelor's degree	89(47.3)
	Master's degree or higher	72(38.3)
Experience	Less than 3 years	37(19.7)
	3 to less than 5 years	46(19.2)
	5 to less than 10 years	70(37.2)
	10 years or more	45(23.9)
Age group of the class responsible for	3 years old	45(23.9)
	4 years old	58(30.9)
	5 years old	85(45.2)

Questionnaire and Procedure

After reviewing related prior studies, we developed items for a teacher questionnaire based on oral and written language teaching methods to better understand kindergarten teachers'

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Table 2. *Items and Reliability by Sub-Area of the Research Tool*

Sub-Area	Item Number and Content	Cronbach's α
Oral Language Teaching Methods	O1. The teacher models attentive listening to others.	.881
	O2. Supports children's listening practice through various methods and materials (e.g., listening to and attempting to identify sounds, following verbal instructions).	.878
	O3. Supports experiences of appreciating various genres of literature (fairy tales, songs, poetry).	.877
	O4. Enhances children's listening experiences through play (e.g., message relay games, riddle games).	.879
	O5. The teacher models appropriate speaking according to time and situation.	.881
	O6. Provides listening experiences related to real life (e.g., listening to news).	.874
	O7. Supports children's speaking practice through various methods and materials (e.g., sharing stories on weekends, conducting interviews).	.878
	O8. Enhances children's speaking experiences through play (e.g., becoming a character in a picture, recording wordless picture books).	.877
Written Language Teaching Methods	W1. Supports children's reading practice through various methods and materials (e.g., reading practice with letter cards, finding words beginning with the same syllable).	.873
	W2. Supports experiences of reading and writing various types of text (fairy tales, poetry, signs, advertisements, letters) together (e.g., appreciating picture books, creating stories from picture books, changing advertisement slogans, writing letters to characters).	.871
	W3. Arrange the classroom environment to encourage interest in easily accessible letters around them (e.g., name tags, weatherboards).	.874
	W4. Enhances children's reading experiences through play (e.g., riddle games, word substitution games).	.873
	W5. Supports children's writing practice through various methods (e.g., copying letters, correcting spelling, and dictation).	.878
	W6. Support children in experiencing writing as a means of expressing their thoughts and feelings (e.g., transcribing children's words, engaging in free writing activities).	.870
	W7. Enhances writing experiences through integrated activities based on picture books (e.g., creating backstories, writing letters to characters).	.872
	W8. Supports recognition of the sound and shape of letters through teacher modeling and play (e.g., making consonant and vowel books, emphasizing the relationship between letters and sounds during writing modeling).	.869
Overall		.882

perceptions of early childhood language education methods. This entailed reviewing the current national language education curriculum, the revised Nuri curriculum for 2019 (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019), and previous studies on kindergarten language education (Kim & Kim, 2016; Park, Kim, & Park, 2013; Park, Lee, & Jeon, 2012; Seo & Byun, 2021) before developing a preliminary questionnaire through researcher consultation. The content's validity was confirmed through written reviews by five university professors specializing in early childhood language education and three kindergarten teachers with at least five years of field experience. Based on expert feedback, items with overlapping meanings were removed, and adjustments were made to ensure a clearer meaning, resulting in the final questionnaire. The final questionnaire included eight items on oral language teaching methods and eight items on written language teaching methods, totaling 16 items with responses on a Likert 5-point scale. Table 2 shows the research tool's subareas and reliability.

The questionnaire was designed using an online Google survey, and the response time was about 15 minutes. This survey's data collection period lasted from May 24 to June 2, 2023, and it targeted 220 teachers in charge of classes for children aged three to five. After explaining the study's purpose and content, those who agreed received a link to the Google questionnaire. After excluding respondents who missed responses or responded insincerely, 188 responses were selected for analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS 26.0. To examine differences in teachers' perceptions of oral and written language teaching methods, as well as differences in perceptions among teachers based on class age group, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Scheffé post hoc analyzes were used.

Results

Teachers' Perceptions of Early Childhood Language Teaching Methods

Table 3 summarizes the results from the analysis of teachers' perceptions of early childhood oral and written language teaching methods. Overall, oral language teaching methods were considered more important than written ones. When examining the details of oral language teaching methods, "The teacher models speaking appropriately according to time and situation" and "The teacher models attentive listening to others" were deemed the most important, indicating a focus on the attitude of speaking and listening, as well as the pragmatic aspects of language components. Examining the specifics of written language teaching methods, "Arranging the classroom environment to encourage interest in letters easily accessible around children" and "Enhancing children's reading experiences through play" were deemed the most important, emphasizing experiencing literacy naturally as a key educational method. On the contrary, support for children's writing practice was ranked as the least important, with an average importance rating of 3.65.

Table 3. *Teachers' Perceptions of Early Childhood Language Education Methods*

Sub-contents of Oral Language Teaching Methods	<i>M(SD)</i>	Sub-contents of the Written Language Teaching Methods	<i>M(SD)</i>
O1	4.87(.356)	W1	4.09(.813)
O2	4.61(.607)	W2	4.35(.817)
O3	4.78(.485)	W3	4.73(.541)
O4	4.74(.508)	W4	4.58(.628)
O5	4.89(.309)	W5	3.65(1.101)
O6	4.46(.712)	W6	4.39(.755)
O7	4.73(.553)	W7	4.10(.945)
O8	4.63(.576)	W8	4.10(.954)

*Refer to p.5 Table 2 for each sub-content

Teachers' perceptions of early childhood language education teaching methods by age group

Teachers' perceptions of early childhood oral language teaching methods

Table 4 shows the results of teachers' perceptions of early childhood oral language teaching methods based on age. The perceived importance of "The teacher models speaking appropriately according to time and situation" was highest among teachers of 3-year-olds, followed by 5-year-olds and 4-year-olds, though the differences were not statistically significant. The perceived importance of "The teacher models attentive listening to others" was highest among 3-year-old teachers, followed by 4-year-old and 5-year-old teachers, though the differences were not statistically significant. In general, teachers' appropriate modeling of speaking and listening is regarded as an important teaching method, and there are some variations in perception of other teaching methods that should be supported based on age.

Table 4. *Teachers' Perceptions of Early Childhood Oral Language Teaching Methods*

Sub-content	M(SD)	Age group of the class responsible for		
		3 years old (n=45)	4 years old (n=58)	5 years old (n=85)
O1	4.87(.356)	4.89(.318)	4.88(.378)	4.85(.362)
O2	4.61(.607)	4.45(.661)	4.62(.671)	4.64(.531)
O3	4.78(.485)	4.73(.580)	4.79(.450)	4.80(.458)
O4	4.74(.508)	4.80(.405)	4.72(.555)	4.72(.526)
O5	4.89(.309)	4.91(.288)	4.88(.329)	4.89(.310)
O6	4.46(.712)	4.31(.821)	4.41(.773)	4.58(.585)
O7	4.73(.553)	4.62(.684)	4.83(.381)	4.72(.569)
O8	4.63(.576)	4.69(.557)	4.71(.530)	4.54(.609)

*Refer to p.5 Table 2 for each sub-content

Teachers' perceptions of early childhood written language teaching methods

Table 5 shows the results of teachers' perceptions of early childhood written language

teaching methods based on age. The perceived importance of “Arranging the classroom environment to encourage interest in easily accessible letters around children” was highest among teachers of 4-year-olds, followed by 5-year-olds and 3-year-olds, though the differences were not statistically significant. The perceived importance of “Enhancing children’s reading experiences through play” was highest among 4-year-old teachers, followed by 5-year-olds and 3-year-olds, but the differences were not statistically significant.

The item “Supporting experiences of reading and writing various types of text together” showed a statistically significant difference in perceived importance by age group ($F=3.736$, $p<.05$). to a post-hoc analysis, teachers of 4-year-olds ($M=4.47$, $SD=.681$) perceived their importance more than those of 3-year-olds ($M=4.07$, $SD=1.095$). The item “Helping children experience writing as a means of expressing their thoughts and feelings” showed a significant difference in perceived importance by age group ($F=3.098$, $p<.05$). Post-hoc analysis revealed that teachers of 5-year-olds ($M=4.52$, $SD=.590$) valued it more than those of 3-year-olds ($M=4.18$, $SD=.960$). The item “Enhancing writing experiences through integrated activities based on picture books” showed a statistically significant difference in perceived importance by age group ($F=3.261$, $p<.05$). Teachers of 5-year-olds ($M=4.24$, $SD=.781$) rated its importance higher than those of 3-year-olds ($M=2.80$, $SD=1.140$).

Table 5. *Teachers' Perceptions of Early Childhood Written Language Teaching Methods*

Sub-content	<i>M(SD)</i>	Age group of the class responsible for			<i>F</i>	Post hoc analysis Scheffé
		3 years old ^a (n=45)	4 years old ^b (n=58)	5 years old ^c (n=85)		
W1	4.09(.813)	3.91(.900)	4.10(.831)	4.18(.743)	1.590	-
W2	4.35(.817)	4.07(1.095)	4.47(.681)	4.42(.697)	3.736*	a < b
W3	4.73(.541)	4.69(.633)	4.79(.450)	4.72(.548)	0.539	-
W4	4.58(.628)	4.44(.785)	4.66(.515)	4.60(.602)	1.514	-
W5	3.65(1.101)	3.49(1.236)	3.79(1.056)	3.65(1.055)	0.971	-
W6	4.39(.755)	4.18(.960)	4.36(.765)	4.52(.590)	3.098*	a < c
W7	4.10(.945)	2.80(1.140)	4.14(.963)	4.24(.781)	3.261*	a < c
W8	4.10(.954)	4.13(.968)	4.05(.999)	4.11(.926)	0.100	-

* $p < .05$

*Refer to p.5 Table 2 for each sub-content

Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to identify directions and improve practical early childhood language education teaching methods by investigating teachers' perceptions of oral and written language education methods for young children. The findings centered on the research questions are as follows.

First, when examining early childhood language education teaching methods as divided into oral and written language teaching methods, teachers showed oral language teaching methods higher in importance. This is consistent with the general belief that oral language development is a critical competency to achieve in early childhood and serves as the foundation for later written language development (Otto, 2019). This general perspective is consistent with the results of previous studies (Youn, 2007), in which teachers implemented a language curriculum centered on oral language in early childhood education settings. However, because oral and written language development interacts rather than developing sequentially (where written language develops after oral language), a balanced perception of both oral and written language is required (Kim, 2012).

Teachers recognized the importance of modeling appropriate speaking and listening skills based on time and situation in oral language teaching methods. They use modeling as an effective teaching method in oral language education, such as appropriate and rich vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, posture, and attitude, which is consistent with Oh (2010), who found that teachers prefer indirect and informal teaching methods over direct instruction. They also understood the importance of speaking and listening in specific times, situations, and contexts. This is consistent with research (Peterson, McIntyre, & Forsyth, 2016) that emphasizes pragmatics in supporting meaningful contexts for oral language in early childhood language education, where children must grasp situational meanings and use language appropriately within the context. Various contexts and learning experiences in language affect learning the language itself and influence how to interact and communicate (Otto, 2019). Thus, exposure to diversity through teacher modeling is expected to play an important role in children's flexible language acquisition and learning. In particular, play can broaden experiences of freely speaking and listening in various contexts (Buell, Han, Blamey, & Vukelich, 2010; Scull, Paatsch, & Raban, 2013; Strauss & Bipath, 2020; Zigler & Bishop-

Josef, 2009), implying that teacher education should actively use play in oral language education and teacher modeling.

Regarding written language teaching methods, teachers realized the importance of creating an environment that encourages children's interest in letters and allows them to experience reading through play naturally. This is consistent with previous research results that teachers believe providing children various literacy experience based on everyday life is important. Because direct coaching and feedback provided by teachers, who are the architects of the literacy environment, affect the improvement of classroom literacy environments (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Morrow, 2012), support such as institutional scholarships and coaching related to the teacher's classroom context is required to create a rich literacy environment that can support child language development. It is also necessary to recognize that teachers and children are both agents in the creation of literacy environments, and to co-create them.

Meanwhile, the perceived importance of specific methods to support children's writing practice was the lowest, indicating that teachers place less emphasis on direct teaching method on writing. This study is consistent with that of Bingham et al. (2018), who showed the lowest result of support for writing in early childhood language education. Based on teachers' low perception of writing practice, there is a need for teacher support for writing strategies that are age-appropriate and can promote children's development. However, the fact that reading and writing in written language develop in tandem and are inextricably linked to oral language (Sulzby & Teale, 1985), implying the need for assistance in understanding the importance of writing and teaching strategies.

Second, comparing teachers' perceptions of early childhood language education teaching methods by age group revealed disparities between oral and written language teaching methods. Although there were no statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of oral language teaching methods based on age group, an important trend was observed. Teachers of all age groups emphasized modeling speaking appropriately according to the situation and attentively listening to others. Language development in early childhood is facilitated by meaningful interactions at home or in educational settings (McGee & Richgels, 2000), emphasizing the importance of teacher linguistic modeling. Experiencing appropriate speaking and listening based on time and situation allows children to naturally develop

positive attitudes and skills toward listening and speaking and the ability to communicate bidirectionally within relationships, facilitating the formation of positive relationships.

The importance of oral language teaching methods varied by age group. For 3-year-olds, it was deemed important to support listening experiences through play in addition to modeling speaking and listening. Listening, the first language skill to develop and required for developing other language skills (Bay & Seker, 2020), shows high teacher awareness of supporting listening development in relatively young 3-year-old children. For 4-year-olds, using various methods and materials to support speaking practice was deemed important, whereas for 5-year-olds, promoting experiences of appreciating various literary works was considered necessary. It is important to provide and support diverse speaking experiences that reflect the characteristics of 4-year-olds who can fluently use expressive language to organize and structure their experiences and thoughts (Noh & Lee, 1995). Based on various picture books (Aram, Fine & Ziv, 2013; Price, Bradley, & Smith, 2012), children not only expand their interests and curiosity about the world around them but also develop natural listening and speaking skills. This can be viewed as appropriate support during the 5-year-old period, when children begin to broaden their interest in their surroundings in meaningful contexts as a method of oral language learning. In summary, when it comes to oral language teaching methods in early childhood, teachers believe it is important to provide appropriate direction and support based on the developmental stage of the children's age.

A comparison of teachers' perceptions of written language teaching methods by age group showed statistically significant differences. The tendency of 4-year-old teachers to value supporting experiences of reading and writing various texts more than for 3-year-olds can be explained by considering the developmental characteristics of 4-year-olds, who show significant interest and development in reading and writing written language. Teachers of 5-year-olds rated writing experiences as significantly more important and writing support through integrated experiences based on picture books. This tendency to support writing experiences as a means of two-way communication in meaningful contexts can reflect the emergent literacy perspective, which emphasizes supporting children's natural interest, enthusiasm, and actions toward literacy that occur naturally during development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Compared to other ages, the results may reflect the reality of education in Korea, where preschool teachers, particularly those of 5-year-olds, are especially burdened

with teaching reading and writing. While national standards for early childhood language curriculum for reading and writing are proposed to match the levels at which children are interested and engaged (Ministry of Education, 2019), the level of reading and writing education expected by parents or directors for 5-year-old children in the educational field is high, causing many teachers to encounter confusion and difficulty (Park et al., 2013). Therefore, for more stable literacy education, the standards for reading, writing, and literacy education in early childhood must be clearly presented in the national language curriculum, and teacher education should be adequately supported.

This study reaffirmed teachers' strong support for emerging literacy education, which promotes language development through experiences with oral and written language as a means of communication in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, this study is significant because it explores educational support directions appropriate for age-specific development by examining the language teaching methods deemed important based on the age of the children being taught. However, one limitation of this study is that it only examined teachers' perceptions of early childhood language teaching methods through survey. Therefore, follow-up studies should explore more specific and effective language education support directions using qualitative research methods such as educational observations and interviews, allowing for a more in-depth examination of teachers' perceptions of early childhood language teaching methods.

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