



DOWNSTATE  
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

# Occupational Therapists' Competency in Early Literacy Development

Bethany Israelov, OTS, Michaela Kloos, OTS, Nava Neugroschl, OTS, & Alina Yakubov, OTS  
Advisor: Dr. T'Shura Brown, OTD, OTR/L, BCCS, CLA  
SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

## Abstract

**Purpose:** This research explored OTs' perception of their role and confidence in addressing early literacy development in children ages birth-5 years.

**Methods:** This survey was distributed to OTs who have worked with children ages birth-5 within the last ten years. A mixed methods design of quantitative and qualitative research was used.

**Results:** Data from the survey demonstrated a lack of knowledge among OTs of all components of EL. It also demonstrated a fragmented understanding of OTs in their role in EL development.

**Discussion:** This research suggested an inadequacy in academic curricula to convey the full extent of the components of EL and OTs' role in addressing those components. It also indicated a potential gap in OTs' ability to effectively communicate their role in the promotion of EL development. **Conclusion:** These findings implicate a need for improved education and training on the scope of occupational therapy's role in promoting EL development.

## Introduction

Many of the preliminary factors and elements of early literacy (EL) development are areas that occupational therapists (OTs) already address, such as executive functioning skills, fine motor skills, educating caregivers, and adapting clients' environments. However, the existing body of literature reveals that OTs primarily address these skills when treating various other disabilities and deficits, not concerning developing EL. Instead, OTs' contribution to EL development is typically limited to pre-writing and writing skills.

## Results

Results of the study showed that majority of OTs felt moderately to very confident in all areas except in academic preparedness (Figure 1). Results also showed a lack of knowledge amongst OTs of the components of EL (Figure 2), an inconsistent understanding of their role in EL development (Figure 3) and inadequacy of academic curricula to convey the full extent of the components of EL. Furthermore, results showed a wide spectrum of the ways OTs engage in EL development. (Figure 3)

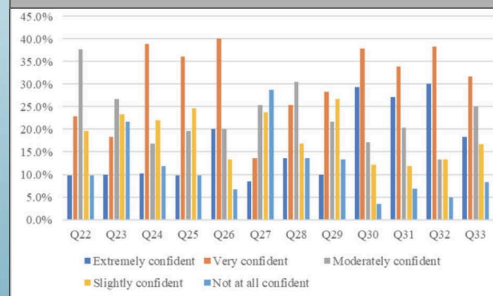
## Methodology

A mixed-methods survey was created based on a systematic review of the literature relating to early literacy development in children ages birth to 5 and occupational therapy practice. This survey was digitally distributed via email and social media. Survey participants included 81 licensed and registered occupational therapists who currently or previously have worked with children ages 0-5 in the last 10 years. This included participants of varying ethnicities and education statuses.

## Discussion and Conclusion

These findings demonstrate gaps in OTs' knowledge of various components of early literacy, as well as their role in developing early literacy. These findings indicate a need for improved education and training on the components of EL, evidence-based practices, and the scope of occupational therapy practice in promoting EL development. By addressing the gaps in knowledge and confidence which OTs display in developing EL, we can empower OTs to provide more comprehensive and effective services.

**Figure 1**  
Likert Scale Confidence Questions Responses: Q22-Q23



**Figure 3**  
Q34 Regarding EL development with children birth-5 years of age, in your opinion, what is an occupational therapist's role in developing early literacy?

- "I utilize a whole child approach during treatment using sensory integration and strengthening exercises"
- "Facilitating auditory and visual awareness"
- "Strong collaboration with other disciplines"
- "Coaching parents on practices to promote executive functioning skills"
- "It is not our primary scope but we can support the development of foundational skills related to early literacy."
- "Incorporating descriptive language within sessions, working on upper extremity motor control and coordination, grasp, bilateral integration, visual-spatial/perceptual skills and problem-solving."
- "Providing play/environment that facilitates early literacy."
- "Facilitating sustained attention and focus"

**Figure 2**  
Q14 Correct answers: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, symbolic representation, print concepts, inventive spelling, and oral language and communication skills

