

The Relations between Parental Support of Learning, Parental Attributes and Development of Self-Regulated Learning Skills in Young Children

Abstract

This study investigated the relations between maternal supportive and contingent behaviours during mother-child problem-solving and children's self-regulation of learning (SRL). The purpose of this study was to explore multiple dimensions of maternal support and their relations with specific SRL skills in young children both concurrently and longitudinally. Children's and mothers' demographic and general characteristics were also taken into account (children's age and gender, maternal education, maternal self-efficacy and parenting style and children's temperament).

Two pilot studies were conducted to test the appropriateness of the measures. The main study was conducted two times with a six-month interval between the two phases. The participants were thirty-five preschool children with their mothers. The children's age ranged from 54 to 72 months old. Children were first asked to solve Visual-spatial and Language tasks independently and then with their mothers. The structured observation method was used to record children's SRL skills, performance and maternal supportive behaviours during problem-solving, through a micro-analytic approach. Children's Cognitive-Metacognitive skills, Emotional-Motivational skills and Autonomy skills were coded during the child-alone problem-solving. A structured observation form was employed to record different maternal behaviours that support the child during joint problem-solving, including aspects of Cognitive-Metacognitive support, Emotional-Motivational support and Autonomy support. Maternal Contingency was also taken into account to assess the extent to which the mother provided support to the child according to the level of his/her understanding of the child's need. The relations between the maternal supportive behaviours, children's SRL skills and cognitive performance were tested both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, from Time 1 to Time 2, to explore whether early maternal supportive behaviours contribute to children's later SRL skills and cognitive performance.

The results highlighted two aspects of maternal support that significantly predicted children's SRL skills and cognitive performance. At Time 1, maternal Autonomy support and Contingency were the most important maternal dimensions that predicted different aspects of children's SRL skills. At Time 2 maternal Autonomy support had a more prominent role in predicting children's Cognitive-Metacognitive, Emotional-Motivational and Autonomy skills. The same maternal practices emanated in the short-term longitudinal analysis but only for the Visual-spatial domain. Children's age was in some cases an important predictor of children's SRL skills. Mediation analyses pointed out that children's Cognitive and Metacognitive skills mediated the effect of these two maternal dimensions on children's cognitive performance.

The present study contributes to methodological, theoretical, and practical issues. Few studies have investigated the relations in question both longitudinally and at a micro-level. This study highlights the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach when examining the role of maternal behaviours in children's learning also considering other dimensions, such as the nature of the task at hand. The study extends our understanding of the relationships between children's SRL skills and parenting behaviours that are activated early in children's learning career. Such findings could be taken into account by interventions that focus on fostering children's learning skills and promoting positive parent-child interactions and effective teaching methods both for parents and teachers.

Supervising Committee (three-member)

Dermitzaki Irimi, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly
(Supervisor)

Bonoti Fotini, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly

Nisiotou Ioulia, Department of Special Education, University of Thessaly