

WRITTEN LEARNING AND MATERNAL EDUCATION

A aprendizagem da escrita e a escolaridade materna

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to investigate the children writing and the relationship with the level of maternal education. **Methods:** the children's mothers were interviewed with a view to ascertaining their level of education, and other cultural aspects. Then, writing the children were assessed according to the Observation Guide for Spelling Zorzi (1998), composed of dictated words, sentences and texts, as well as textual productions, using the narrative genre, from pre-established themes. We evaluated 30 children, all enrolled in third grade of elementary education at a public school in Recife. The data were tabulated in a spreadsheet statistical analysis software SPSS. **Result:** it was observed that 20% of children have not yet reached the level of development of alphabetic writing, which is an important aspect, considering that in the third grade, kids should be consolidating functional reading and writing. Significant correlations were found between maternal education and the acquisition of the narrative scheme of stories, as well as between maternal education and reading habits of mothers. An analysis of spelling errors revealed that children were committing the same types of errors have already been observed in other populations, only with a higher frequency. Children who produced more structured narratives that were made more errors in spelling, which proves that the spelling error is inherent in the acquisition process of writing and does not preclude the production of texts. **Conclusion:** the learning of writing is influenced by social factors such as maternal education. These aspects need to be considered in the evaluation and diagnosis of speech therapy, as well as in educational practices offered by the school.

KEYWORDS: Child Language; Language Development; Communication; Child; Family Relations

■ INTRODUCTION

Language is considered the first form of socialization of children, since its construction is mainly related to social exchanges. When adults nominate objects, establishing partnerships and relationships to the child, they are helping to build more complex and sophisticated ways of conceiving reality. With this interaction the child is instructed to discriminate the essential and not the important and, gradually

will become able to perform this task alone, trying to understand reality¹⁻³.

Just as it is for the acquisition of oral language, the child's home environment is fundamentally important for the acquisition of writing, since it may provide an interaction with existing forms of writing, even informally. It is important for children to find opportunity to engage in reading and writing activities at home to understand its functionality and social relevance. The increased frequency of reading can also help the child overcome difficulties in terms of spelling, as the systematic contact with the words will facilitate the apprehension of the conventional form of spells them²⁻⁴.

Citing pycogenetic studies of Emilia Ferreiro and colleagues, the study describes the construction stages of the system, i.e. the phases covered by the child to reach the conception of alphabetic writing². In an initial phase, called pre-phonetic writing or

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pre-syllabic written, the child begins to differentiate writing from drawing and continues performing successive progressions, quantitative and qualitative, using letters, but without establishing a sound relationship. In a second step, called phonetic stage, the child begins to establish the relationship between sounds and letters. This stage is divided into three sub-phases: syllabic, syllabic-alphabetic and alphabetic, because the child initially tends to establish the relationship of sound with the syllable, and then establish the relationship of sound with the letter, which would mark the domain of the principle of phonological representation and the start of alphabetic writing². When reaching this stage, the child tends to believe that writing is a perfect transcription of orality, but will be faced with new obstacles to move forward in the field of spelling aspects of writing. Among the obstacles, there is the non-always transparent nature of the relationship between sounds and letters in Portuguese, which will justify the common misspellings in this period.

In a study of 514 children from first to fourth grade of elementary school, it was observed that the “spelling errors” committed by children had a certain logic that allowed their explanation and classification into ten categories or types of spelling changes, which were in order of greater frequency: Possibilities of multiple representations; support with speech; Omission of letters; Binding or unconventional separation of words; Confusion regarding endings *am* and *ão*; Generalization of rules; Replacing deaf and voiced phonemes; Addition of letters; Similar letters; Inversion of letters; others⁵. These errors are part of the natural process of acquiring the written language, because such errors would not be imperfect copies made by children, but rather attempts to spell the words on their views on writing. Only with continuous and progressive learning, the student overcome the main spelling difficulties and will advance both in writing and the process of reading and recognizing words^{5,6}. This learning involves aspects related to the characteristics of each language, to apprentice himself and sociocultural condition^{7,8}.

Other studies⁴ showed that the progression of the abilities of texts production is also associated with increasing age. Analyzing the textual productions of children, there were different levels of developing the narrative schema of stories, with around eight years children should be able to perform complete stories with elaborate narrative structure and a conventional final⁹. However, age cannot be taken in isolation, because the ability to produce texts, as well as the whole process of learning are also related to the experiences and opportunities

that children have, both in school and in the home environment⁴.

Authors¹⁰ who analyzed the sociolinguistic perspective to explain the alphabetization process usually defend that literacy depends on cultural, economic and technological characteristics, and mentioning that this concept can be translated by the expression: *functional literacy* also endorsed by the United Nations for Education (UNESCO. From this perspective, some studies have shown that many children appropriated from writing language, through contact with different text genres and interactions with literate adults, even before being literate conventionally¹⁰. That is, the earlier the child engages socially with the world of writing, the more benefits she/he will get. Corroborating these ideas, the mother figure exerts influence, particularly privileged, in the development of written language of the child as it is with whom the child usually spends more time and receives care and attention. It is worth noting that this “maternal influence” may be relativized when the child is cared for by another person and in this case worth the “caregiver influence”¹¹.

In a study on a classroom composed of 36 students with learning difficulties, their socio-economic profile was characterized, obtaining as a result that the parents, in most cases, had little education, with a significant incidence of fathers and mothers who could not read or write. Regarding the profession, fathers and mothers worked in low-paid activities, or were unemployed. These results pointed to the importance of family history and the sociocultural context for learning¹¹. Another frequently reported aspect is the fact that children of poor socioeconomic strata have a line away from the standard Portuguese “taught” in school, which has generated a historical process of prejudice and stigmatization, with serious repercussions on written language learning^{1, 11, 12}.

Faced with the above, the motivation for this work came from the search for understanding about how the level of maternal education can affect the development of children’s written language. Thus, it was taken as hypothesis that maternal education could significantly influence the learning of reading and writing for their children. It is known that the child’s experience with functional reading and writing depends not only on their school experiences, but also on the stimuli it receives in the home environment. The aim of this study was therefore analyzing the relationship between maternal education and the writing performance.

METHODS

This is an observational, descriptive and transversal study. 30 children in the 3rd year of elementary school and their mothers participated in the research. All children were enrolled in a public school in the city of Recife and were randomly chosen. Children who presented complaints, diagnosis or symptoms of disorders of oral or written language, neurological, hearing or visually associated problems were excluded from the study.

An interview with the children's mothers was performed in pre-scheduled time in a room provided by the school aiming at ascertaining their level of education, and other aspects according to the script shown in Figure 1.

Subsequently, children's writing was assessed following the Roteiro de Observação Ortográfica of Zorzi⁵, which can be seen in Figure 2. Writing Evaluations of Children were performed simultaneously in the classroom. Data collection occurred in the period between November and December 2009.

Date of interview: _____ / _____ / _____

Name of the interviewee: _____

Child's name: _____

Birthdate: _____ / _____ / _____

Place of Birth: _____

Age when began studying: _____

- 1) How many people live in the home with the child? _____
- 2) What is level of relatedness of these people with the child? _____
- 3) How many family members work? _____
- 4) What is the family income? _____
- 5) Who cares for the child at home - most of the time? (caregiver)
Mother, Father, Relative, Neighbor, Other. Who?? _____
- 6) Mother's or Caregiver's education level:
 - a) Did not attend the school (illiterate)
 - b) Complete elementar education level I
 - c) Incomplete elementar education level I. Grade _____
 - d) Complete elementary education I
 - e) Incomplete elementar education level II. Grade _____
 - f) Complete high school
 - g) Incomplete high school. Grade _____
- 7) Mother's or Caregiver's place of birth? _____
- 8) What is the child's pathological history?
- 9) Does the child have storybooks, if Yes how many? Yes () _____ No () _____
- 10) What is the Family Reading habit?
Reads much () Reads a little () rarely reads ()
- 11) How does the child participate in the reading habits of the family?

Figure 1 – Interview

EVALUATION OF FIRST AND SECOND GRADES**DICTATIONS****Instructions:**

1. Applying a different type of dictation a day
2. Before applying the dictation, read the material so that the children know about what they will write.
3. Words should be read in a natural way, i.e. the way they are pronounced during conversations. Do not force artificial pronunciation of the word, i.e. not producing the word the way it is written when it is different from the way you speak.
4. Give no clue to the students about how the words should be written. The aim is to check how the child by himself/herself believed to be the way to write the words presented.

A. Words dictation

hunter	explanation	do
cart	assaulted	present
pillow	caretaker	barbecue
cement	neighbor	dry
chin	bruise	stain
gelatin	brick	tray
sunflower	newspaper	will eat
bought	will travel	spoke
dropped	hot	war
tank	hose	blood
burn	pasta	combine

B. Phrases Dictation

1. Why do you cry when cutting onions?
2. The cook could not work quiet.
3. Grandma Esther gave advice: she did not want anyone to suffer.
4. My grandmother, my mother's mother, was taller and thinner.
5. Someday, Clarice woke up feeling almost losing a tooth.
6. Sometimes I am afraid of witch and ghost.
7. So, why noises scare me?
8. This puppy is very friendly. But I need a big dog.
9. Who get to blow out the the candles with a single puff will have a piece of cake.
10. Why are you in blue pajamas?

C. Texts dictations

One day, the moon appeared in the sky, skinny and thin.

City kids began to ask:

What has happened?

Raul said:

It was the wind that tore a piece of it.

Peter spoke:

– Not at all. It grew up in reverse!

Everyone had to give a guess!

Ze Rodolfo said:

– I think that's spell witch with her broom or the mage with his scissors.

Cristina asked:

– Does the moon is sad? It was so chubby, plump, round even. Does the poor moon lost weight of sadness?

(Source: "The mystery of the Moon" - Sonia Junqueira-Publisher Attica.)

Writings

1. Request each student take at least two readings.
2. Suggested topics:
 - Myself.
 - The lost boy.
 - I wanted a dog, but my father always said that could not ...

Figure 2 – Guide for spell observation (Zorzi, 1998)

For data analysis categories were created to describe the levels of maternal education. As for the writing analysis, it was initially checked if all children were already in alphabetical writing followed by those who already had alphabetic script; analyzes of **spelling errors** were performed in accordance with the criteria of Zorzi⁵ and the **narrative scheme** of textual productions based on the categories described by Rego⁹.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research of the Science Center of the Federal University of Pernambuco, with the record 269/09 without restrictions. Mothers, responsible for children, signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF), agreeing to participate in the interview and allowing the child's participation in the study. The ICF contained all information relating to the research, including a presentation of the objectives and form of data collection; it was sent along with the invitation to the interview with the mothers or caregivers.

Data were tabulated in a spreadsheet for statistical analysis using SPSS, version 13.0, which made possible the development of descriptive and correlation analysis, the latter being effected by the Pearson's R correlation test at 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$).

■ RESULTS

Initially, data obtained from interviews with the mothers followed by data on writing of children and then the results obtained from the intersection of written to the interview data will be presented.

Regarding the results of the interview, it is important to note that of the 30 mothers who authorized the research by signing the consent form, only 23 attended on the day and time scheduled.

Whereas only 23 mothers attended the interview, it was not possible to collect information on the script shown in Figure 1. Accordingly, among the 23 mothers who responded to the interview, only one said to be illiterate, four reported having the elementary school (complete or incomplete), thirteen had elementary school level II (complete or incomplete) and five had high school (complete or incomplete) education.

Also, from the questionnaires (N = 23), it was observed that regarding the reading habits of families, most mothers said the family rarely read (11), three reported that the family read little and one stated that the family did not have the reading habit. Differently, eight mothers reported that the family used to read a lot.

To analyze the evolution of children's writing, initially it was sought to see whether all the children had alphabetic writing. To achieve the alphabetic conception, the child needs to have mastery of the principle of phonological representation, establishing sound values to the letters. Thus, it is necessary the scope of such levels for spelling and other aspects of textuality being analyzed.

In the present study, six children had written in pre-phonetic stage and were excluded from analyses of orthography and textual production.

Thus, despite being enrolled in the 3rd year of elementary school, these children had not even reached the stage of alphabetic writing, as can be observed in **Figures 3 and 4**.

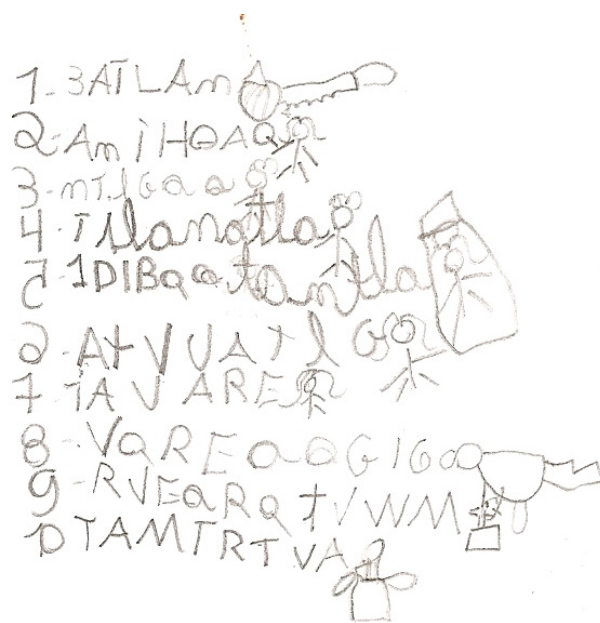


Figure 3 - Writing classified as pre-phonetic development level 1 of a student of 3rd year of elementary school in a public school. Recife, 2009.

O m E N I N O
P E R D I D O
A B M D E L A
H I V R O R
S T C D G
maria)

Figure 4 - Writing classified as pre-phonetic development level 2 of student of 3rd year of elementary school in a public school. Recife, 2009.

Importantly, the title “the lost boy” that appears in **Figure 4**, was written on the blackboard for children to develop their production and in the case of **Figure 3**, the child was in the production of sentence dictation.

Table 1 shows the classification of the level of writing development of children depending on the maternal education.

From data intersection, maternal education is correlated to the development of writing, although five of the six mothers of children who were not yet literate have not responded this information, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Note the fact that most of the mothers of children who had alphabetic writing had incomplete elementary education II (Table 1).

In order to check for the influence of maternal education on the reading habits of the family, a correlation analysis between these variables was performed (Table 2).

Analyzing the data obtained at the intersection, it was observed that as maternal education increases the reading habits also improve, being statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Once six children who have not had a phonetic writing had been excluded, only the analysis of textual production and spelling were performed, presented below, considering the productions of 24 children.

Regarding the textual production (text narrative quality), 4.17 % (1) of the children were in category I of narrative scheme; 41.67 % (10) were in category II, 37.5 % (9) were in class III and 16.7 % (4) were in category IV.

It was also observed that as maternal education progresses, the children’s productions tend to be more elaborate, with statistically significant correlation ($p = 0.000$ ** with $p < 0.01$) (Table 3).

Table 1 - Relationship between the mothers’ education and the writing skill of students of the 3rd year of elementary education in a public school, Recife, 2009

Mother’s education	Levels of writing development					Total	p-value correlation
	Pre-Phonetics 1	Pre-Phonetics 2	Phonetics 1	Phonetics 2	Alphabetic phonetics		
Not answered	2	3	1	-	1	7	
illiterate	-	-	-	-	1	1	
Elem educ I inc	-	-	-	-	3	3	
Elem educ I compl	-	-	-	-	1	1	
Elem educ II inc	-	-	-	1	8	9	
Elem educ II compl	-	-	-	-	4	4	
High school inc.	-	1	-	-	-	1	
High compl	-	-	-	1	3	4	
Total	2	4	1	2	21	30	0.002**

** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ – r Pearson

Table 2 - Relationship between mothers' education and the reading habits of the families of students of the 3rd year of elementary education in a public school. Recife 2009

Mothers' education	Reading habit				Total	p-value correlation
	Do not read	Rarely read	Read a little	Read much		
Not answered	-	-	-	-	7	
illiterate	1	-	-	-	1	
Elem educ I inc	-	1	-	2	3	
Elem educ I compl	-	1	-	-	1	
Elem educ II inc	-	6	1	2	9	
Elem educ II compl	-	1	1	2	4	
High school inc.	-	-	-	1	1	
High compl	-	2	1	1	4	
Total	1	11	3	8	30	0.000**

**p < 0.01 *p < 0.05 – r Pearson

Table 3 - Relationship between mothers' education and the narrative scheme of the stories of students of the 3rd year of elementary education in a public school. Recife, 2009.

Mothers' education	Narrative scheme				Total	p-value correlation
	Category I	Category II	Category III	Category IV		
Not answered	-	1	-	-	1	
illiterate	-	1	-	-	1	
Elem educ I inc	-	1	2	-	3	
Elem educ I compl	-	-	1	-	1	
Elem educ II inc	-	4	3	2	9	
Elem educ II compl	-	2	2	-	4	
High school inc.	1	-	-	-	1	
High compl	-	1	1	2	4	
Total	1	10	9	4	24	0.000**

**p < 0.01 *p < 0.05 – r Pearson

Regarding the occurrence of misspellings, the most frequent errors in the population studied were multiple representations, support in orality, omission of letters and joint and improper separation (Figure 5).

These data were also crossed with the level of maternal education. Figure 6 shows the results for the intersection of the level of maternal education with

the frequency of spelling errors, overall computed. It can be observed that the highest frequency of errors (F = 747) is revealed in children whose mothers had elementary school II, which is expected in a way, because these same children were in a more developed phase of writing that enabled the spell checking, as shown in the description of Table 1.

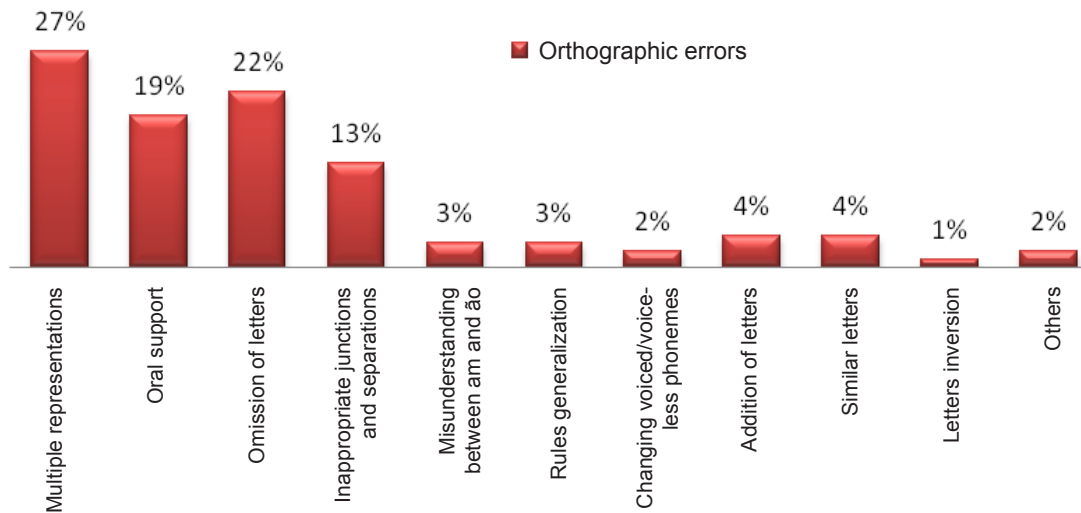


Figure 5 - Percentage of misspellings of students of the 3rd year of elementary education in a public school. Recife, 2009 (N = 24).

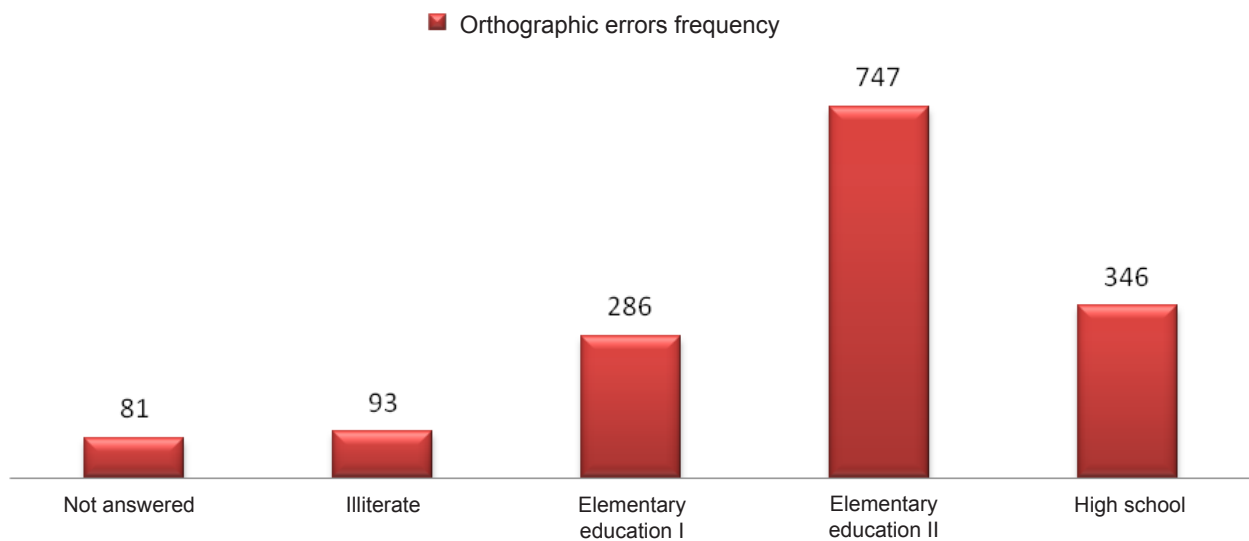


Figure 6 - Relationship between mothers' education and the number of spelling errors made by students of the 3rd year of elementary education in a public school. Recife (N = 24).

DISCUSSION

Attain a knowledge of writing allows the child to understand some of the fundamental relationships between letters and sounds that define the alphabetic nature writing^{7,13-16}.

Given the results obtained in this study, 76 % of children had built the so-called hypothesis of alphabetic writing, but there are also children at lower levels. This result is troubling, since even children not having overcome the orthographic issues should have already overcome the initial stages of writing development at this grade^{2,15,16}.

With regard to the spelling mistakes observed in children who were in the levels of development

of phonetic writing, most errors were of the multiple representations (27 %), then there is the omission of letters (22 %) and the changes caused by support in orality (19 %), which are changes expected in this phase of education. In a study on 514 children from first to fourth grade of elementary education at a private school in São Paulo, such spelling changes were the most frequent in students who were attending the second grade, multiple representations (12.6%), support of orality (4.6%) and omission of letters (2.4%)⁵. However, the fact that the percentages found in this study are much higher calls attention. One should take into account that the study quoted above was conducted in another region of the country and with children studying

at private school; however, there are important social and cultural differences between the two populations.

Most children in this study produced texts classified in category II described by Rego⁹. The progression of the skills of textual production is associated with increasing age, but this age designation varies depending on the experiences and opportunities that the child has or has had, both in school and in the family environment¹⁷. When considering the issue of age alone, the population in this study had lower performance than expected for their age and grade. Studies claim that eight-year-old children should be able to draw productions, considering the narrative genre, with all components such as: introduction of characters, problem-situation, resolution and an end connected with the whole text⁴. That is, children of the research should be in this category, but it was not the observed with greater frequency, which was (category IV) observed in only 17 % of production.

Then, it is understood that previous experiences of children with stories are crucial for them to succeed in the field of narrative structure present in this textual genre⁴. From the questionnaire, it was observed that most mothers revealed having habit of rarely reading, and 38 % mothers revealed not having books at home, which can be interpreted as being indicative of the research that children have not had a previous significant experience with storytelling.

Regarding mothers' education, most studied up to elementary school level II incomplete, i.e. not completing from 4th to 8th grades (old classification); only 17 % reported having reached the high school.

It was also observed that the majority (76 %) of children was in their levels by four and five in the development of writing as already mentioned above, and out of this total 39% had mothers who did not finish elementary school II. Studies claim that storytelling is a rich experience for vocabulary development, this type of reading contains contextual clues that help decipher the meaning of unknown words¹⁸. However, other studies show that such experiences are not common to all children in the home environment. There are children who have contact with texts every day, both at school and at home; and children whose contact is restricted to school⁴.

With regard to the correlation of maternal education and reading habits of the family, also statistically significance ($p < 0.01$) was found; it was observed that the higher the mother's educational level, the higher the reading habits of families. A study showed that parents of students who were with learning difficulties, mostly had little schooling,

with a significant incidence of fathers and mothers who could not read or write (few parents completed the 8th grade of elementary school)¹¹.

The relationship of maternal schooling with the misspelled presented by children suggests that there is not a direct relationship between the level of maternal education and the presence of spelling difficulties for children. It is interesting, however, to emphasize that children who had more orthographic mistakes were in more developed stages of writing, the error being a consequence of the act of using the writing itself, which should be considered normal to process. However, the spelling should not be disregarded. A study claims that for children overcome the difficulties of spelling issues, they need to understand the relationship between sounds and letters, i.e. dominate the formal system of written words, then going to perform more complex analyses of language, among other strategies⁵. That is, this process is related to comprehension, the domain of the formal system and the experience of reading words, making associations of letters with sounds, besides morphosyntactic and semantic associations¹⁵.

It was also observed that the higher the mother's education level the greater the skill the child has to produce and narrate stories, and the correlation of these variables is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Studies reveal that this skill displayed by children depends on the experiences of the family environment and the routine the child participates and its development is gradually being influenced by various factors such as age, education and social interactions in several ways⁴.

In the literature, it is expected that eight-year-old children elaborate productions with all components, 41.6 % of productions showed only the introduction of scene and characters and an action that outlines a problem situation, categorizing them in Category II. This classification is expected in children from five to seven years of age, suggesting that the children of the research, who are public school students, should already be able to produce more elaborate texts^{4,9}.

■ CONCLUSION

In general, it was observed that the learning of writing in its more specific aspects, such as the development of the narrative scheme, is influenced by social factors such as maternal education. These aspects need to be considered in the evaluation and specific diagnosis by speech therapists, as well as in educational practices offered by the academic institution.

RESUMO

Objetivo: investigar a escrita de crianças e a relação com o grau de instrução materno. **Métodos:** as mães das crianças responderam a uma entrevista com a finalidade de conhecer seu nível de escolaridade, além de outros aspectos socioculturais. Em seguida, a escrita das crianças foi avaliada segundo o Roteiro de Observação Ortográfica de Zorzi (1998), composto por ditados de palavras, frases e textos, assim como produções textuais, utilizando-se o gênero narrativo, a partir de temas pré-estabelecidos. Foram avaliadas 30 crianças, todas matriculadas no 3º ano do ensino fundamental de uma escola municipal da cidade do Recife. Os dados foram tabulados em uma planilha do software de análise estatística SPSS. **Resultado:** observou-se que 20% das crianças ainda não atingiram o nível alfabético do desenvolvimento da escrita, o que é um aspecto importante, considerando que no 3º ano as crianças já devem estar consolidando a leitura e escrita funcionais. Foram observadas correlações significantes entre a escolaridade materna e a aquisição do esquema narrativo de histórias, assim como entre a escolaridade materna e os hábitos de leitura das mães. Uma análise dos erros ortográficos revelou que as crianças cometiam os mesmos tipos de erros já observados em outras populações, apenas com uma frequência maior. Crianças que produziram as narrativas mais estruturadas foram as que cometeram mais erros ortográficos, o que comprova que o erro ortográfico é inerente ao processo de aquisição da escrita e não constitui obstáculo à produção textual. **Conclusão:** a aprendizagem da escrita sofre influência de fatores sociais, como a escolaridade materna. Tais aspectos necessitam ser considerados na avaliação e diagnóstico fonoaudiológico, assim como nas práticas educativas oferecidas pela instituição escolar.

DESCRITORES: Linguagem Infantil; Desenvolvimento da Linguagem; Comunicação; Criança; Relações Familiares

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