Gebruik van en ervaringen met digitale prentenboeken in de kinderopvang
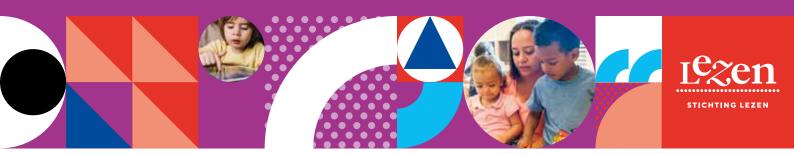
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Summary

Background and research design

Considerable attention is paid to children's language development within the childcare sector in the Netherlands. For instance, children often have stories read aloud to them from (paper) picture books. A number of years ago, the possibility of having digital books read aloud was added to this. Despite the positive effects of digital picture books on the language proficiency of young children, such picture books do not appear to be used much in the childcare sector. At the request of The National Library of the Netherlands (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) and the Dutch Reading Foundation (Stichting Lezen), Erasmus University carried out research into the frequency of their use and way in which digital picture books are being used at present in the childcare sector.

This research was based on five themes:
1. **The aim of using digital picture books**: for instance, are they mainly used to stimulate language development or also to create moments of rest, or to introduce children to technology?
2. **Characteristics of implementation**: for instance, are they used mainly in groups, in one-to-one situations or for individual activities?
3. **Preconditions**: for instance, is suitable equipment available to play digital picture books?
4. Experience of childcare workers: for instance, how do they assess the use of digital picture books compared to paper picture books?
5. **Promoting home use**: for instance, are parents actively stimulated to make use of digital picture books?

The research consisted of a combination of a questionnaire, distributed to a national sample of childcare facilities (and filled in by 301 respondents), and 10 in-depth interviews (in groups). Childcare workers and facility managers were involved in both the questionnaire and the interviews.

Outcomes

Sixty percent of the facilities do not make use of digital picture books. Those facilities that do make use of digital picture books mainly make use of animated picture books. Most facilities still do not have much experience with offering digital picture books.

Theme 1: Aim of using digital picture books

It appeared from the questionnaire that digital picture books are used mainly to stimulate language development and pleasure of reading, as a support for paper picture books and to create moments of rest. Various reasons for this were stated in the interviews: digital picture books provide an additional language offering, they make it possible to repeat the language offering and they provide visual support. They also make it easy to draw children's attention, which is an advantage for children who are easily distracted. Most childcare centres that make use of digital picture books still use paper picture books more frequently. They are wary of providing too much 'screen time', have more experience with paper picture books or encounter practical limitations (for instance, they have little access to digital picture books). It appears from the questionnaire that digital picture books are offered, in particular, to children from the age of two years.

Theme 2: Characteristics of implementation

It appears from the questionnaire that the majority of childcare centres that make use of digital picture books do not make frequent use of them. However, one quarter do so daily or on a number of days each week. It appears from the interviews that this is due to limited experience with digital picture books, the difficulty of finding good books and the need to limit exposure to digital devices. Digital picture books are mainly used during educative moments and moments of rest. This often happens during group activities and only to a limited extent in one-to-one settings (the childcare worker and child) or as an individual children's activity. For this reason, they are usually not used for specific groups of children (for instance, children with a language deficit). Almost all childcare workers stated that interaction takes place with the children when digital picture books are offered. This occurs relatively often afterwards.

Theme 3: Preconditions

The results of the questionnaire show that a tablet is used at more than half of these facilities for playing digital picture books. Some facilities also use a laptop or digital board. The majority of respondents were satisfied with the way the devices function. Most facilities have a subscription with a provider of digital picture books and often make use of YouTube. The facilities with a subscription mainly make use of Bereslim or Voorleeshoek. It appears from the questionnaire that having a subscription results in a favourable experience of the availability of digital picture books: at facilities without a subscription, childcare workers have difficulty finding suitable picture books of sufficient technical and content quality. Facilities with a subscription do not have a problem in this regard. Childcare workers can easily find suitable picture books, there is an adequate offering and furthermore the offering is of good quality. It emerges from the interviews that the experienced differences in availability appear to result in differences in the use of digital picture books. At facilities without a subscription, their limited availability is an obstacle to their use.

Theme 4: Experience of childcare workers

It appears from the questionnaire that the involvement of children, while watching digital picture books, is at least as high as their involvement while reading from paper picture books. This is mainly due to the attractiveness of the screen. This ensures that children are less easily distracted. However, two thirds of the childcare workers stated that they have (much) less interaction with children than when they look at paper picture books. The childcare workers interviewed stated that it feels unnatural to pause a digital picture book to talk about the story. The childcare workers are overwhelmingly positive or very positive about digital picture books, as appears from the questionnaire. Nevertheless, they almost all stated that they have a preference for offering paper picture books.

Theme 5: Promoting home use

The questionnaire shows that communication with parents about digital picture books takes place in approximately half of the facilities that use them. They mention, for instance, which digital picture book they have looked at with the children as part of their daily feedback. This communication may also consist of the transfer of information. This often relates to information about providers of digital picture books or places where parents can find information, such as the library. However, facilities are not always sure what information they can use and have a need for support. The use of digital

picture books is stimulated considerably less often than the use of paper picture books. The latter occurs at almost all sites.

Relationships between variables

As a final step, we carried out research into the relationship between a number of variables amongst the childcare workers who work with digital picture books. We found the following correlations:

- Participation in training focused on working with digital picture books coincided with more interaction while watching digital picture books and with more stimulation of home use.
- A better assessment of the childcare workers' own digital skills often coincided with more frequent use and of greater ease experienced in using digital picture books.
- Having a subscription to providers such as Bereslim or Voorleeshoek coincided with a better assessment of the availability of, the variation in and the technical and content quality of digital printed books.

If the aim is to promote the use of digital picture books in the childcare sector, we expect that it will therefore be beneficial to support childcare workers in their use of digital picture books (and, more generally, of digital resources) and to invest in the availability of qualitatively good materials. Since it was only possible in this study to consider correlations and not effects, further research is necessary in this regard.

Conclusion and recommendations

The use of digital picture books is limited to some of the childcare facilities and the facilities that have made use of them still have relatively little experience in this area. Digital picture books, however, are regarded as a meaningful supplement to paper picture books and as a good way of providing additional support to the children's language development. This is partly due to the visual support that they provide. This assists language learning and ensures that children's attention is held. The attraction of digital picture books also results in a preference for certain methods of presentation. They are sooner used in a large group. There are also challenges. In particular, it is difficult for facilities that do not have a subscription to providers, such as Bereslim or Voorleeshoek, to find suitable and qualitatively good digital picture books, which is an obstacle to their use. In addition, many facilities still find it difficult to provide parents with good information on digital picture books. The recommendations that emerge from the research relate to the use of digital picture books in one-to-one situations and in small groups, in particular for children at risk of a language deficit, to stimulating the use of subscriptions, to support of facilities with regard to the provision of information to parents and to training in working with digital picture books and supporting the digital skills of childcare workers.