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# Beliefs of parents of preschool children about literacy: facilitative and conventional approaches

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## ABSTRACT

In the present study, we investigated the grouping of Greek parents of preschool children according to their beliefs about literacy by using a mixed-method approach. The sample included 147 parents of preschool children attending the 13 public kindergartens in the town of Pyrgos, in Greece. The participants completed a paper survey and 20 of them participated in semi-structured interviews, as well. The results revealed that parents could be categorized into two groups according to their beliefs about literacy: *Facilitative* and *Conventional*. Facilitative parents have a more holistic orientation, concerning literacy acquisition, while Conventional parents have a more skills-based orientation. The findings give an insight into parents' beliefs about literacy and emphasize the importance of the congruence between home and school literacy. Implications and limitations are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Literacy development; parents' beliefs; parents' literacy practices; facilitative and conventional parents; preschool children

## Introduction

Family involvement is crucial to student success and it is the number one predictor of early literacy success and future academic achievement. Students whose parents remain involved seem to maintain higher levels of academic achievement (DeBaryshe and Binder 1994; Senechal and LeFevre 2002; Weigel, Martin, and Bennett 2006).

Research findings highlight the relationship between parents' literacy beliefs and home literacy environments as parental beliefs are the beginning point for all experiences children and parents have together (Evans et al. 2004; Kardasi 2014; Sigel and McGillicuddy-De Lisi 2002; Sonnenschein et al. 1997). Parents' beliefs are related to established and socially constructed conceptions regarding literacy and the way someone becomes literate (Weigel, Martin, and Bennett 2006). They are seen as influential to child development not necessarily directly, but mostly through the actions parents undertake following their beliefs in a specific child-rearing area (Boomstra et al. 2013).

In general, findings show that some parents may be in favor of the idea that it is mainly their responsibility to actively take part in and promote their children's literacy development, while other parents claim that this responsibility primarily belongs to the teachers. According to their beliefs, parents exhibit a variety of literacy practices (Mullis et al. 2012). These literacy practices can be *formal* during which the focus is on the print

itself (e.g. learning letters, words) and *informal* during which the focus is on the meaning conveyed by print (e.g. shared reading, discussions) (Senechal and LeFevre 2002).

In Greece, the field of family literacy beliefs has not received enough attention and Greece has not adopted a particular policy of enhancing literacy of preschool children and their families in order to reduce the rate of subsequent school failure. In this research, we investigate the grouping of Greek parents according to their beliefs about literacy. The current research will cover the relevant research gap and will help us to understand families' cultural models that will serve as the foundations for competent collaborations between early childhood educators and families and the design of family literacy programs.

## Literature review

Previous important approaches have shown that parents' beliefs about literacy are a major factor in determining what literacy experiences take place in the home and have later consequences for children's literacy success. Based on the results of these surveys, parents seem to be divided into two categories: (a) those that follow the *autonomous-cognitive* model of literacy development, and (b) those that follow the *socio-cultural* model. Parents of the first group place greater emphasis on code-based activities, adopting the *bottom-up* approach (e.g. letter-word knowledge, phonological awareness). On the other hand, parents of the second group view the language in a more holistic way, attach great importance to understanding and practice a variety of literacy practices by adopting the *top-down* approach (e.g. reading books, discussions).

According to the results of the 2011 'Progress in International Reading Literacy Study' (PIRLS), the factors that are relevant to parents' beliefs and practices at home are the educational and socioeconomic level of the parents, the parent-child relationship, and the natural environment of the home and learning materials (Mullis et al. 2012). Parents with a higher educational and socioeconomic level usually provide more opportunities for children to engage with the written language. They read more often to the children, and ask more open-ended questions that promote critical thinking. They discuss more with the children and use longer utterances and a greater word quantity and variety when compared to the speech of parents with less educational and socioeconomic advantage (Hart and Risley 1995; Landry and Smith 2007). In addition, these parents are more confident in their own ability to help their children succeed in school and often have more academic expectations for them (Bandura et al. 1996).

On the other hand, parents with a lower educational and socioeconomic level usually have limited opportunities and resources to invest in a rich home learning environment and are less willing to engage in literacy activities with their children because they are focused on survival issues (Lareau 2003). They read less often to their children, give them less explanations for the written word, discuss less with them, make less effort to involve them in various activities or games, and are less responsive to their children's emotional needs. They are also, less confident to help their children succeed in school compared to parents with a higher educational and socioeconomic level (Whitehurst and Lonigan 1998).

In all surveys concerning parental beliefs about literacy (indicatively: Evans et al. 2004; Sigel and McGillicuddy-De Lisi 2002; Sonnenschein et al. 1997), parents' grouping was

done taking into account the results obtained from various materials which record parents' beliefs about literacy. Subsequently, we present some indicative surveys that have used, among other tools, the 'Parent Reading Belief Inventory' (PRBI) as in our research.

Particularly, in their relevant study, DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) tested a causal model of the relation between maternal beliefs about reading to preschoolers, home literacy practices, and child outcomes. The researchers distributed two questionnaires (PRBI, Family Survey) to 155 Afro-American and Euroamerican parents of children aged 2–5 years old, of low financial status, and found a strong connection between reading beliefs and practices. Mothers who scored higher on a beliefs scale (PRBI) reported that they read to their children often, owned many books, and established reading practices at an early age. These parents were engaged in higher-quality observed interaction with their children, stimulating language skills through frequent questions and verbal feedback. They also provided frequent modeling opportunities and reported their children to be more actively interested in books. In contrast, children of parents who had low scores may find themselves at a double disadvantage. First, there is a low correspondence between home and school beliefs. Second, parents who hold less facilitative beliefs also engage in less stimulating home instruction.

Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2006) examined mothers' beliefs about literacy development, the association of those beliefs with other aspects of the home literacy environment, and connections between parental literacy beliefs and preschool aged children's literacy development. Data were collected from 79 mothers and their children through PRBI and others measures. Two profiles of parental literacy beliefs emerged: 'Facilitative' and 'Conventional'. Mothers with facilitative beliefs had a more active role in their children's literacy development and consequently, their children displayed more advanced print awareness and more interest in reading. Mothers with conventional beliefs expressed the belief that schools are responsible for teaching children and consequently, they were less likely to believe that it is their role to teach children at home before school.

Bingham (2007) also examined the relation among mothers' literacy-related beliefs, the home literacy environment, the quality of mother–child book-reading interactions, and children's development of early literacy skills. In the study, 60 mothers and their 4-year-old children participated. To assess mothers' literacy beliefs, the researcher developed a questionnaire based on the items of PRBI and on others questionnaires, as well. According to the results, mothers' literacy beliefs were positively related to the quality of home literacy environments and the instructional and affective quality of joint book-reading interactions. Moreover, the quality of children's home literacy environments and mother–child book-reading interactions was related to children's development of early literacy skills.

## **Objectives of research**

The aim of the present research was to investigate the grouping of Greek parents, according to their beliefs about literacy and the way someone becomes literate. Understanding parents' beliefs about literacy and the factors that are relevant, we can help parents to better promote literacy in a home environment, by designing effective family literacy interventions.

## Research design and sample

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the research sought to examine the grouping of parents upon their beliefs about literacy. The basic design of the mixed-method, followed in our survey, was the explanatory sequential mixed-method design, which comprises two phases. In the first phase, the researcher collects and analyzes the quantitative data and in the second phase follows the collection of the qualitative data which functions to interpret in-depth, the findings of the quantitative data (Creswell 2014).

The research conducted in the 13 public kindergartens of the city of Pyrgos, an urban area of Western Greece, and parents of preschool children participated. The aim of the phase 1 was to investigate parent's literacy beliefs grouping, through the completion of the PRBI and the aim of the phase 2 was the confirmation of the groups of parents that emerged from the phase 1, through semi-structured interviews. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher received approval from both the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and the kindergarten supervisors, who were informed of the purpose and the procedure of the research in order to arrange group meetings in school with the parents.

In phase 1, during face-to-face meetings, parents were informed by the researcher about the purpose of the research and given the option of withdrawal at any time without consequence. Then they signed their consent and filed the PRBI. In case the parents could not attend the face-to-face survey sessions, the kindergarten teachers would give the survey to be filled in at home, accompanied by a document with all the relevant to the research information. The parents returned the survey in a sealed envelope, handed it to the teachers and they delivered them to the researcher.

In this phase, the sample consisted of 147 parents of preschool children aged 5 years old – attending the 13 public kindergartens in the town of Pyrgos. 89.8% of the sample were mothers and 10.2% fathers. Regarding their marital status, the highest percentage of parents (92.5%) was married and had 2 children (56.6%). 52.4% of the parents had a girl attending t kindergarten and 44.9% a boy. As far as the age of parents is concerned, most of the fathers were 41 plus (53.1%), while the mothers were between 36 and 40 years old (38.1%). On the educational level of the parents, the highest percentage in both cases was at least high school graduates (45.9% fathers and 47.9% mothers).

In phase 2, the sample consisted of 20 mothers, which was sufficient enough to reach saturation. Taking into account the results of the first phase, according to which parents are divided into two categories, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with a random sample of ten mothers of each group of parents, in order to see to what extent these two groups are confirmed. After the first 6 to 7 interviews, no significant differences were found in the beliefs of the parents, which could indicate to us the expansion of the sample.

## Data collection

In phase 1, data collected through the PRBI (DeBaryshe and Binder 1994), which was translated and adapted to the Greek context (Tsirmpa, Stellakis, and Lavidas 2019), having permission from the creators. DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) designed this

instrument to assess attitudes about what and how children learn from reading as well as parents' beliefs about their role as teachers of their children. Forty two items are organized in 7 subscales and parents indicate the extent to which they endorse each item on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). The names and content of the scales are as follows: (1) *Teaching Efficacy* (items 1–9): views on parents' role as teachers of school-related skills, (2) *Positive Affect* (items 10–20): positive affect associated with reading, (3) *Verbal Participation* (items 20–27): the value placed on children's active verbal participation when reading, (4) *Reading Instruction* (items 28–31): the appropriateness of direct reading instruction, (5) *Knowledge Base* (items 32–36): whether children acquire moral orientations or practical knowledge from books, (6) *Resources* (items 37–40): whether limited resources are an obstacle to reading, (7) *Environmental Input* (items 41–42): the malleability of language development.

In phase 2, and for the confirmation of the two categories of parents that emerged from phase 1, we used semi-structured interviews which are appropriate to get a detailed picture of a person's beliefs about a subject (Smith 1990). The interviews were individual, and the interview questions were constructed based on the purpose of the research. They were conducted at schools, approximately a month after the survey completion, and at a time arranged by the mothers. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 min and all of them were audio-taped for later transcription and coding.

### **Data analysis strategy**

To identify parents' groups with scores of PRBI from the first phase, we used cluster analysis (Sharma 1996). The cluster analysis could identify groups or clusters with the low and high variance within and among groups respectively. So, observations in each group are similar to each other, and observations of one group should be different from the observations of other groups (Sharma 1996). The discriminant variables that were utilized were the scores of four factors of PRBI according to the adaptation to Greek context (Tsirmpa, Stellakis, and Lavidas 2019). Similarly, previous research (Weigel, Martin, and Bennett 2006) has utilized the factors of PRBI, as discriminant variables to identify parents' groups. The four factors were: F1: *Knowledge Base* (whether children acquire moral orientations or practical knowledge from books), F2: *Resources* (whether limited resources are an obstacle to reading), F3: *Reading Instruction* (the appropriateness of direct reading instruction) and F4: *Teaching Efficacy* (views on parents' role as teachers of school-related skills).

For the cluster analysis we used the R software environment (R CoreTeam 2018) and the package (collections of functions) NbClust (Charrad et al. 2014). To determine the number of clusters we used indices (KL, CH, DB, Silhouette, Ratkowsky, McClain, SDindex) that performed best in simulations studies (Charrad et al. 2014). To group observations into clusters we used nonhierarchical clustering technique and particularly *kmeans* since the number of clusters determined with previous indices (Charrad et al. 2014; Sharma 1996).

The analysis of qualitative data was carried out through content analysis and it was indisputably interpretive (Bryman 2016; Miles and Huberman 1994). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and then they were read and read to get a sense of the whole, i.e. to gain a general understanding of what the participants were talking about.

The next step was to divide the text into smaller parts, namely, into meaning units, and then condense these meaning units further but retaining the core meaning. After that, condensed meaning units were labeled by codes and then these codes were grouped into categories. According to the study’s aim, categories went further and created themes (Figure 1) (Bryman 2016; Creswell 2014; Erlingsson and Brysiewicz 2017; Miles and Huberman 1994).

## Results

### Results from quantitative data

The indices used to identify groups revealed that the dominant number of groups was two: *Conventional* parents who consist the majority of the sample ( $N = 96$ ) and *Facilitative* parents ( $N = 51$ ). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the four discrimination variables of PRBI, for the two groups.

In particular, it is observed that the mean value for the factor F1: *Knowledge Base* (e.g. ‘Children learn new words, colors, names, etc. from books’) and F3: *Reading Instruction* (e.g. ‘When we read, I have my child point out different letters or numbers that are printed in the book’) is higher in the Facilitative parent group than in the Conventional one, which means that Facilitative parents believe that children gain more knowledge through reading books and parents get involved more to the reading procedure through several relevant practices.

Higher levels of abstraction- Interpretation	Theme	<i>Language development before primary school</i>
↑	Category	<i>Oral language development</i>
	Code	<i>Communication skills</i>
	Condensed meaning units	<i>to communicate correctly, to speak in correct sentences, to talk properly</i>
Lower levels of abstraction- Text	Meaning unit	<i>In oral speech, I think they should be able to communicate properly and satisfactorily with their teacher, with their friends, that is what we are looking for, a child to be able to speak in correct sentences, to talk properly ...</i>

**Figure 1.** Example of analysis leading to higher levels of abstraction (Adapted from ‘A hands-on guide to doing content analysis’, Erlingsson and Brysiewicz 2017).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of four discrimination variables between two clusters ( $N = 147$ ).

	Facilitative ( $N1 = 51$ )				Conventional ( $N2 = 96$ )			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
F1 (+)	2.80	3.93	<b>3.54</b>	.25	2.41	3.87	<b>3.11</b>	.27
F2(-)	1.00	2.29	<b>1.36</b>	.27	1.00	2.57	<b>1.86</b>	.39
F3(+)	2.67	3.90	<b>3.31</b>	.32	2.17	3.50	<b>2.84</b>	.33
F4(-)	1.00	2.50	<b>1.67</b>	.44	1.50	3.22	<b>2.26</b>	.34

In contrast, for factors F2: *Resources* (e.g. ‘Even if I would like to, I’m just too busy and too tired to read to my child’) and F4: *Teaching Efficacy* (e.g. ‘Schools are responsible for teaching children, not parents’), the mean value is higher in the Conventional parent group, which means that these parents cite barriers to reading with the child and in addition, those parents believe they don’t play a significant role as their children’s teachers. Therefore, these parents have more conventional beliefs about literacy and believe that the school is primarily responsible for teaching children. On the other hand, facilitative parents exhibit more supportive attitudes toward literacy, believe that they play an important role in children’s education, and therefore have a more active role in enhancing children’s literacy. They are involved in more and different literacy practices and understand that the mastering of literacy skills comes through a variety of daily activities.

Comparing the two groups of parents, it is found that Facilitative parents have a statistically significantly higher level of education than Conventional ones  $\chi^2(2) = 6.853, p = 0.033$ . This difference (11,5%) is mainly based on the Postgraduate/Ph.D. level.

### **Results from qualitative data**

The interviews with 10 mothers of each group confirmed the grouping of parents into 2 groups as differences among their beliefs were revealed. Three open-ended questions were used to assess parental beliefs about literacy (Appendix). Mothers were asked about the role of early childhood education, the level of language development before children enter primary school, and the strategies of learning to read.

#### **What parents believe about the role of early childhood education**

All parents in both groups seem to agree that kindergarten primarily helps to the socialization of the child and the development of good behavior. However, facilitative parents seem to understand more the importance of early childhood education in the overall development of the child and the smooth transition to primary school, as well. These parents believe that kindergarten is one of the key stages of a child’s education and contributes significantly to the personal, social, emotional and linguistic development of the infant.

On the other hand, most of the mothers of the conventional group do not seem to know precisely the role of kindergarten in literacy development and how this is achieved in preschool education, indicating:

C6: Er ... to do a little preparation for the letters, I don’t know whether it is allowed before they go to primary school, how far this can get. [...] Rather than play and draw all day ...



In addition, parents from this group state that the school is primarily responsible for educating children, citing:

C4: ... I believe that the teacher should set some limits with kids ... because later, many times, ... they do not listen to their parents ...

C6: ... otherwise the teacher can impose it or their mum, because I think here children have a different behaviour than at home

***What parents believe that is important for their preschool-aged children to learn about in regards to language development, before attending primary school***

Concerning oral language, we found out that facilitative parents understand the importance of oral language to language development and refer more extensively to both dimensions of oral language, both in receptive and expressive language. Especially, Mother F2 mentioned that oral language is the basis for the written language, stating:

First of all I think that the basis is the oral language, that is, this is where she will start from and then move on to writing. Well ... to express what she wants, ... [...] To communicate, to understand, to perceive, what else? When she is with a group of kids and is in a conversation to wait for her turn, ...

On the other hand, the group of conventional parents hardly express themselves in the development of specific skills of oral language. Only one mother (C4) believes that it is important for the children at this age to be able to tell a story because this will continue later in primary school. Another mother (C6) believes that it is important for the children to express themselves in the kindest and most mature way they can.

Concerning written language, all parents refer primarily to the production of written language. The common belief, but to a different degree, is that children should be familiar with the letters and numbers in kindergarten and be able to recognize and write some of them because this will help them to primary school.

However, we found out that facilitative mothers referred more to additional skills that the child must have acquired in relation to written language and before entering primary school. These skills are related to fine motor skills, visual perception and eye-hand coordination. For example, mother F3 said:

I think it's useful to gradually be able to do some of these pre-writing activities as well, some basic things, to be able to hold the pencil properly and be able to make it, it won't be letters necessarily, but to make this effort, that is, to have learned to hold the pencil properly and begin this first process, up to this point, not more ... I don't think she has to know how to write words, but to have gained that first touch, to be more familiar with it.

Similarly, mother F1 noted:

... in writing I think he has to know how letters are written, he has to understand how a small letter or a number is written each time etc ... and that he has to write it in between the lines as well ...

In addition, only one mother who belongs to this group refers to the communicative nature of the written language and to how important is for the child to understand that the written language conveys a message, saying: *To write her name, to realize that writing has a specific purpose, that it is done for some reason ...* (F2).

As opposed to this, conventional mothers refer mostly to the knowledge of some letters and numbers because they believe that is an essential prerequisite for the children's transition to primary school.

However, it is also important for some parents of both groups that the child can write his name, which is a key element of his identity. Especially, mother C8 stated: *I believe, the most important thing is to know how to write his name ...*

### **How children learn to read**

This question was difficult to be responded, especially from the conventional mothers. Some parents had never thought about strategies for reading, and this question put them in the process of thinking. However, we found out that facilitative parents see reading in a more holistic way, through a variety of daily activities and mainly adopting a *top-down* approach (e.g. reading books, discussions, storytelling, environmental print, phonological awareness, spelling). They also find it very important that parents must function as a reading model and collaborate with the school. For example, Mother F2, stated:

What can help the kid? I think stimulation can. I think it starts with the oral speech and then goes to the writing. The more writing stimulus a child gets in their everyday life, that is, to see a picture with the responding word, picture-word, I think, play a very important role, to recognize each letter, through their everyday activities, from signs on the streets, from vehicle registration plate - number plates, from letters sent home, from posters, to know why there is writing, and slowly over time, I think the kid will learn from us, because we act as models, the sounds of each letter. And later this is how our language is, they will begin to spell and conquer oral and written language. I think this is how it is done.

Another, Mother F3, explained that it is very important for the child to have the motivation to read: *... also the desire to read, to be motivated and to sit there for quite some time and perhaps with a little bit of help, definitely with a little bit of help, he will be able to understand and conquer it ...*

On the other hand, it was very difficult for conventional mothers to answer about the strategies for reading. Several clarifications were needed, but nevertheless, their answers were sparse and they always answered with doubt. For example, Mother C5 responded:

Basically I don't know because ... I've asked whether or not I should help the child learn the alphabet because we learned it differently in our old days. I've learned that things have changed a lot now. I avoid helping him with reading so as not to confuse him because I don't know how the teacher at school will teach it.

In addition, these parents do not seem to be particularly aware of the importance of reading books to their child, referring to it very little, and appear to be primarily focused on the *bottom-up* approach, performing activities such as letter-word copying and spelling. For example, Mother C4 said: *... to get the words, to connect them, to spell them, to do read the reading with the child, to show every word and read it ... this, I don't know anything else*

## **Discussion**

The findings from this study correspond to previous research approaches about parents' beliefs about literacy. The aim of our research was to investigate the grouping of Greek

parents according to their beliefs about literacy. Based on cluster analysis, parents could be categorized into two groups according to their beliefs about literacy which determine parents' literacy practices (Tsirmpa, Stellakis, and Lavidas 2019). One group has more facilitative beliefs about literacy and get involved in various literacy practices, which are in congruence with school literacy practices, while the second group has more conventional beliefs, is involved in more skills-based practices and believes that school is primarily responsible for teaching children (Evans et al. 2004; Lynch et al. 2006; Weigel, Martin, and Bennett 2006).

These different parents' beliefs about literacy seem to relate mainly with the educational level of parents. Facilitative parents were found to have a statistically significant higher educational level than the conventional ones, especially at the postgraduate level. They believe that they play an important role in children's education and get involved in a variety of activities with the children. They provide a stimulating home literacy environment and see literacy development in a more holistic way, by engaging in more informal, *top-down* activities (e.g. reading books, discussions) (Melesanaki 2014; Sonnenschein et al. 1997; Weigel, Martin, and Bennett 2006).

These parents attach great importance to reading books with children. They believe that reading helps children become better speakers and listeners, develop their imagination and acquire a variety of knowledge. They read almost daily with their children, mainly adopting dialogic reading because they believe that this helps children to expand their perception. They ask open-ended questions, explain vocabulary, provide information and develop children's language ability (Rowe 2008).

They function as a reading model for children, as they themselves read daily for personal pleasure so that their children are more interested in reading and often pretend to read (VanSteensel 2006). They provide a rich environment with books, supporting the common-sense view that children who have more books in the home will read more. In this way, parents give children the opportunity to spontaneously engage with a book and thus develop a greater interest in books (Marjanovic-Umec, Hacin, and Feconja 2019).

On the other hand, conventional parents believe that school is primarily responsible for teaching children and view literacy development as a result of code-based activities and evolved mainly in bottom-up activities (e.g. letter knowledge, use of workbooks) (Evans et al. 2004; Sonnenschein et al. 1997). They seem to recognize neither the importance of oral language nor the important role of reading in enhancing literacy. They do not seem to realize the importance of expanded vocabulary for effective communication and the fact that oral language is the foundation for written language. They do not read often to children, citing various barriers, such as lack of time, or lack of interest from the child. They do not read either and play a role model for their children, and their children are consequently less interested in reading. When they read with their children, they follow the linear reading, responding mainly to child's questions (Baker and Scher 2002; DeBaryshe, Binder, and Buell 2000; Kardasi 2014; Landry and Smith 2007; Lynch et al. 2006).

## Implications and limitations

This study provides some important insight into parent's literacy beliefs which shape the practices and behaviors they exhibit. Children from different family backgrounds have

different experiences and this affects their transition to school literacy and their progress at school. For a child to succeed in school there needs to be congruence between school and family so what it means reading in one means reading to the other (Taylor 1983).

Changing parental beliefs may have positive impacts on how they promote literacy in the home environment, so it is very important to open lines of communication with families. Parents need to be made aware of the importance of preschool age to literacy development and of the significant contribution the family can make in the learning process. By educating parents on how they can best promote children's literacy development in the home environment, will help children to succeed in school. Therefore, it is necessary for school and family to come together and develop effective communication patterns. Teachers, with respect to parent's literacy beliefs, must help parents to see what counts to literacy development and provide them with strategies to help children's literacy development. On the other hand, parents must become knowledgeable about school-based literacy and adopt strategies that will help their children.

In addition, making the results of this study available for kindergarten teachers could be helpful in an effort to diminish preconceptions concerning children who come from non-privileged backgrounds and have the same reserves of knowledge and experience. Kindergarten has a key role in mitigating these inequalities and preventing school failure, because it can, from a very early age, bring the child into contact with the written word.

Moreover, this study has implications for those who design family literacy programs to teach parents how to improve children's literacy development and empower them to be partners in literacy. Interventions must be tailored to meet the specific needs of each family and it is valuable to demonstrate literacy practices that are not difficult or cost-prohibitive for families, as not all parents have the same educational and socioeconomic level.

As literacy development begins very early and all the experiences children amass, beginning at birth, affect their success in literacy, parent literacy training could be more widely implemented in conjunction with prenatal care and treatment. Additional services during a mother's pregnancy may help parents to introduce literacy to their newborns.

A limitation of this research is that the convenience sample was native Greek parents, so in future research, it would be interesting to see how these data apply to other families, such immigrant or families with children with special needs. In addition, as the majority of participants are mothers, we cannot have enough evidence for fathers' beliefs about literacy, so in future research, we could address a larger percentage of fathers. Observations of literacy practices at home would also give more details of what really happens at home. And certainly, as this study was conducted via a survey where volunteer participants reported their perceptions, the response biases should also be considered (Lavidas and Gialamas 2019).

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### **Availability of data and material**

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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## **APPENDIX**

### ***Interview questions***

- (1) What do you think is the role of early childhood education? What is the role of early childhood education in literacy development?
- (2) What do you think is important for a child to know, concerning language, before starting primary school? What about oral language? What about written language?
- (3) How do you think children learn to read? Do you think that school is primarily responsible for teaching children to learn to read? How do you help your child to learn to read? Do you read to your child? When? How frequent? Do you ask your child questions when you read? What kind of questions? Could you tell me some examples?