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Running Head: Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Literacy: International Programs & Egyptian Experiences

The American University in Cairo

Graduate School of Education

Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Literacy: International Programs & Egyptian Experiences

A Capstone Submitted to

The Department of International & Comparative Education

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts in

International and Comparative Education

by Lojain Ibrahim

Under the supervision of Dr. Nagwa Mgahed

Read by Dr. Russanne Hozayin

2016

Dedication

**To illiterate mothers**

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thanks to Allah, the most Gracious and the most Merciful. Thanks to the One Lord who sent Jibril, the best of angels, to Muhammad, the best of mankind -peace and blessings be upon him-, with the best of all books; Quran, the book of guidance and light. The book in which the first word revealed was "Read."

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## Abstract

Research has demonstrated the importance of the early years in children's literacy skills development and shown how children who acquire some literacy skills before school entry are at more advantage in later conventional literacy acquisition than their peers who haven't. Moreover, several studies have examined the role parents have in their children's early literacy development and found the parental involvement factor to be of great significance. In response to such findings and to problems such as scarcity of data about early childhood education and parental involvement in children's early literacy development in the MENA region and Egypt in particular, this study has been designed with the purpose of initial in-depth examination of perceptions of Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic statuses (SES) when it comes to involvement in their children's early literacy development. The study used questionnaires as a tool that included both open-ended and close-ended questions to provide qualitative and quantitative data. Participants in the study were 22 parents of kindergartners, 12 mother from a high SES and 10 from a low SES (8 mothers and 2 fathers). The study examined five themes within both SES levels: KG standing in terms of enrollment rates and quality, parental awareness, parental willingness to participate in children's education and literacy development, parental capabilities, and parents' views on gender roles when it comes to involvement in children's educational development. Data findings were thematically analyzed and showed that: 1. Egyptian parents from high and low SES enrolled/want to enroll their children in kindergartens yet parents from low SES find public facility fees as barriers; as for quality, the study showed parents from high SES were more satisfied with the private facilities their children go to than parents from low SES whose children went to public kindergartens. 2. Parents from high and low SES had high awareness and willingness to participate in their children's early literacy development, yet parents from high SES had significantly higher capabilities than parents from low SES. 3. Parents from high and low SES faced the same reality where mothers were more involved in children's early literacy, yet parents from high SES were more aware of the importance of both parents (mothers and fathers) participating in children's education and literacy development.

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## Chapter 1: Background to the Problem

### Introduction

Acquiring literacy, both reading and writing, is best when children are taught and exposed to literacy-related experiences starting an early age. In his description of “the best and most natural readers of all,” E. B. Huey said that they are the ones who “grow into” reading and numerous studies show that those early readers continue to become capable ones (1908, cited by Teale, 1978, p.922). Early readers or children who “grow into” reading are not ones who face the world of print the day they enter school, but are rather those who were exposed to experiences with text and have already acquired basic literacy skills that enable them to read conventionally at a faster rate than their counterparts who do not interact with text until they enter school (Teale, 1978; Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). Recent research in the field of early childhood literacy introduced the term “emergent literacy,” which will be later extensively scrutinized and which is used to describe the importance of introducing children to print and basic reading and writing skills in the early ages (Dove, Neuharth-Pritchett, Wright, & Wallinga, 2015; Fleury et. al., 2014; Lonigan et. al., 2000; Reese, Cox, Harte, & McAnally, 2003; & Skibbe, Bindman, Hindman, Aram, & Morrison, 2013).

“Early” education in general refers to the age before children enter formal schooling, which is usually from 0 to 8, yet in some countries from 0 to 7 and 0 to 6. Looking closely, it is clear that these years in a child’s life for a large part are spent with parents or caregivers even if a child is enrolled in a day care or nursery, and later kindergarten. For children to gain literacy-related skills and experiences from an early age, their parents (as mentioned in some cases guardians or caregivers, but this paper will focus on the role of parents) who are their first teachers need to be involved and aware of both the importance of introducing their children to the world of print and literacy and are capable of doing so (Darling & Westberg, 2004; Dove et. al., 2015; Dunst et. al., 2012; Goodall et. al., 2011; Hampden-Thompson et. al., 2013; Hirschman, 1985; Newland et. al., 2011; & Wahl, 1988).



This paper highlights the important role of literacy and realizes that in the 21st century its role is not limited to great values and outcomes such as a child's inner growth and personal enrichment, yet it has become an indispensable skill for survival in the workforce and other life aspects. Anderson and colleagues (1985) stressed on that point by stating that "the world is moving into a technological-information age in which full participation in education, business, industry, and the professions requires increasing levels of literacy. What was a satisfactory level of literacy in 1950 probably will be marginal by the year 2000" (p.14).

Hence, in the next pages, this paper discusses extensively how children in the first place can "grow into" literacy by examining practical studies with significant outcomes. The main focus of the paper though is the element of parental involvement in early childhood literacy. This involvement could be through several means including joint-writing, other activities with children, and most importantly, reading to and with children because "shared book reading ... speaks of love, the importance of the family unit, and parental commitment to a child's future. Shared reading embraces goals of educational advancement, cultural uplift, and literate discourse" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.848). To summarize, the paper discusses effects of parental involvement on early childhood literacy, scrutinizes international programs that aimed to involve parents in their children's early literacy development, and then directly studies experiences from the Egyptian context. Reasons for choosing this topic in specific and focusing on the Egyptian case are discussed in the next section.

## Statement of Problem

The choice of focusing on understanding the area of parental involvement in early childhood literacy, with special focus on Egyptian experiences was based on several reasons that correspond to problems in the MENA region and the Egyptian community in particular; including:

1. Scarcity of information and research on early childhood education in the MENA region and Egypt: Krafft (2015) mentions how the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has a severe shortage when it comes to evidence, data, and studies that analyze effects of early childhood education and says that estimates that are currently available on the impacts of early childhood care and education in Egypt are mere simulations based on data from other countries with somewhat similar backgrounds such as India and Bolivia. “ECCE is under-researched throughout the MENA region; a recent meta-analysis examining the high-quality evidence on early childhood development used 56 different studies from 23 countries throughout the world, none of which came from the MENA region” (Krafft, 2015, p.127). Also, another benchmark extensive study by Engle and colleagues in 2011 in which they extensively reviewed key data and evidence on preschools around the world did not include one country from the MENA region due to data scarcity in the early childhood development area (Krafft, 2015). Hence, one of the targets of this paper is to provide data on the field of early childhood development, with a focus on early literacy and parental involvement patterns in Egypt.
2. Limited pre-school and kindergarten enrolment rates in Egypt: Considerable evidence show the importance of early childhood care and education through offering children pre-primary educational experiences in nurseries and kindergartens. When it comes to the MENA region, data show that “despite the fact that the region is middle-income, pre-primary enrolments in the MENA region more closely resemble those of Sub-Saharan Africa than other middle-income countries” (Krafft, 2015, p.128). According to the Egyptian Ministry of Education’s (MOE) National Strategic Plan 2014-2030 (MOE, 2014), in the year 2014 only 30% of children in Egypt were enrolled in kindergarten. Furthermore, a UNESCO report in 2006 mentioned that

around half of children enrolled in kindergartens are enrolled in the private sector, whether managed by private owners, NGOs, religious schools, or Al-Azhar system. Also, the Egyptian statistical yearbook (CAPMAS, 2014) shows that the number of children enrolled in kindergartens is especially low when it comes to the governmental sector. Egypt as a case will be later detailed, yet it is vital to mention here that while the government is giving priority to primary level of education in comparison to early childhood education, a World Bank report asserts that “failing to invest in ECD is costly, if not impossible, to compensate for later in life” (2010, p.3). Thus, one of this paper’s goals is to capitalize on the importance of the Egyptian government expanding on its efforts and allocating more of its expenditure to provide for affordable higher-enrolment high-quality early childhood programs and kindergartens.

3. Scarcity of information about involvement of Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels in children’s early childhood literacy development: One of the problems noticed and one main reason to choose this paper’s topic is the fact that there is very limited data and information on parental involvement patterns in children’s early literacy development in Egypt, both generally and with shedding light on different involvement patterns based on the families’ socioeconomic levels. When it comes to generally involving parents, a World Bank report (2002) mentions that “efforts to expand KG should be linked directly with parent participation in literacy programs, as many countries have demonstrated they enhance the lives of both parents and children, and increase the likelihood that children will go to, and stay in, school” (p.2). From here comes the need to understand how parental involvement generally affects children’s literacy development (as will be covered in the literature review) and Egyptian experiences around parental involvement in children’s early literacy experiences (as will be covered in the field work sections). When it comes to different socioeconomic levels, it is believed that children born in less wealthy families and those born to mothers who have received lower educational levels, fall behind their colleagues born in wealthier households to better educated parents and especially mothers (World Bank, 2010). In addition, the same

World Bank report (2010) mentions that links between socioeconomic level and children's development in different areas such as cognition, physical, and emotional developments, are "recorded at as early as 6 months of age in Egypt, 12 months in Brazil, 10 months in India, and 18 months in Bangladesh" (p.3). Furthermore, other than the gap existing between children born to parents from low socioeconomic levels and their peers who had basic literacy skills and cognitive and physical development at primary level school entry, children from low SES are also more likely to continue having less academic achievements and higher school drop out rates (World Bank, 2010). From this point, came the urge to delve into understanding parental involvement patterns from different socioeconomic levels in Egypt (as will be highlighted in the field work section).

### Research Questions

In response to the previously mentioned problems, the researcher detected the pressing need to discover information on parental involvement patterns in the Egyptian society and how different these patterns are among different socioeconomic levels. In order to answer this main question other questions needed to be tackled theoretically and by fieldwork. In order to understand how parents can be involved in children's early literacy some basic information about early literacy and parental involvement need to be examined to help in establishing the conceptual framework that would enable the examination of these issues in the Egyptian context. Hence, this research intends to answer the following questions:

1. What is emergent literacy? What are some of its benefits? And how to create an environment that encourages early childhood literacy?
2. To what extent does parental involvement affect emergent literacy acquisition? In what ways can parents become involved in developing their children's emergent literacy skills? What are barriers parents face that hinder their involvement with their children? How different are parental involvement patterns in lower socioeconomic classes? To what extent should both parent become involved in literacy activities?

3. What are international programs that encourage parental involvement in early childhood literacy?
4. To what extent are Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels involved in their children's early literacy development? How is preschool/KG standing in terms of enrollment rates and parents' views on their children's kindergartens' quality? To what extent are parents aware of the importance of their involvement to develop their children's early literacy skills? How willing are they to get involved in their children's early literacy development? How capable are they in developing their children's early literacy skills? And what are their views on parental involvement in early childhood literacy and education in general in terms of gender?

To answer these questions and to fill these gaps, it is vital to first understand how "early childhood" was recognized as an important milestone in children's development and with focus on literacy, as is covered in the coming background section.

## Background

The background section gives detailed backgrounds to two distinct yet interrelated themes that are both crucial for understanding the development of the knowledge we currently have about early childhood literacy. The first theme is about how early childhood education was ‘realized’ as a need for children and how international organizations, specifically UNESCO, began to assist member countries in the early childhood category and not only the compulsory primary stage. The second theme is about how studies of literacy, especially reading, emerged and how views on the ways children learn developed.

### **THEME 1: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS “REALIZING” EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Standing at a temporarily current end point in the twentieth century and being aware of global conventions, charters, acts, and declarations that stress on and strive for children’s rights to be educated, including children in their early childhood years, it seems clear that early childhood education is now regarded differently that it was during and before the 19th century. Going back to the origins of the motives behind creating pre-schools, nurseries, and day-cares, it is evident that they stemmed from three major needs, as Kamerman (2006) and Aidoo (2006) detail. First, mothers who were increasingly joining the workforce and labor market, mostly coming from low-income backgrounds, needed somewhere to leave their children. Second, organizations and charity institutions that cared for neglected, poor, differently-abled children, in addition to children of poor mothers who needed to work, were seeking to provide child-care services. Finally, pre-schools were also constructed to enrich the development of children who belonged to the middle class. Section one in the background scrutinizes how early childhood education came into “realization” as a “need” for children’s development even though it stemmed from other cultural and socio-economic factors, with the educational factor there yet not the core and driving motive.

In her account of the history of early childhood education, Sheila Kamerman (2006) reports that nurseries and kindergartens were established in several countries in Europe, North America,

China, and India starting the 19th century and they often used the same models of education: Froebel, Montessori, Pestalozzi, or missionary activities. She asserts how from early on, there was a clear differentiation between the distinct roles of daycares that provide care and preschools, nurseries, and kindergartens that provide educational services.

In the year 1939, the International Bureau of Education made the first survey that was targeted to Ministries of Education and concluded that the educational pre-primary period was swiftly developing in several countries and that both governments and private agencies (especially NGOs) were taking part in the field's growth (Kamerman, 2006). In addition, a UNESCO memorandum in the same year "acknowledged the need for child care facilities for the growing numbers of working mothers and stressed the value of preschool, which it stated, should be available to all children" (Kamerman, 2006, p.4).

Later, in 1946, a memorandum was submitted at a conference on early childhood education that was organized by the UNESCO, and the memo "stressed the importance of ECEC services and the inadequate supply even in the developed countries. It noted the diversity of programs both nationally and cross-nationally and their poor quality. And it emphasized the key roles of government and NGOs in developing the field, concluding with a strong recommendation for a more active role by UNESCO" (Kamerman, 2006, p.4).

After that, the second world war intervened and the next effort to collect a worldwide view of early childhood education was in 1961 when a survey was carried out and received responses from 65 countries. It is vital to note that of the total number of countries, only 25% of the responses came from developing countries, in addition to the fact that only two countries from Africa responded (Liberia and South Africa). When it came to Asian countries, only six countries responded (China, Iran, India, Japan, Korea, and Malaysia), with Malaysia responding that early childhood was not one of its educational priorities (Kamerman, 2006). This survey was an important milestone in the history of early childhood education, since it came with several findings, including (Kamerman, 2006):

- Primary compulsory education should be the first priority for all countries that did not yet achieve the goal of granting all children this right.
- Pre-primary education does not undermine the role of parents and family. Yet, pre-primary programs represent a pressing need by working mothers.
- Priority goes to children who are neglected or abused where there are limited spaces.
- Countries are learning from each other's experiences and are carrying out idea borrowing since certain early childhood initiatives have succeeded in some places and were being replicated.
- The early childhood programs are expensive in their establishments and operations.
- All countries have a shortage in qualified teachers.
- Pre-primary teachers have low-status and in almost half the countries their salaries are less than salaries of primary level teachers.
- Very limited research is done on early childhood education and its influence on children's educational and general developments.

In 1971-72, for the first time, the UNESCO allocated a part of the budget to pre-primary education, the budget amount mainly covered data collection, studies done by experts, seminars organization, in addition to encouraging the initiation of national projects in collaboration with the UNESCO (Kamerman, 2006). Few years later, a 1974 survey also by the UNESCO showed that pre-schools were looked at differently and the field of early childhood education was starting to become realized as a report of the survey concluded that early childhood education "begins at birth, varies with the age of the child and the social context, and includes children from birth to age 3 not just the 3 to school entry age" (Kamerman, 2006, p.7).

Another survey that was a benchmark in the history of early childhood education is the 1988 survey, in which the report was generated in 1991 and clearly defined early childhood care and education. The explicit definition said that the pre-primary programs are "intended to provide care and/or education for children from their birth until the ages of 6 or 7 years...[They] are organized by



government ministries or agencies concerned with the education, development, care, and welfare of children up to age 6 or 7 or by non-governmental organizations” (Kamerman, 2006, p.9).

Starting the 1990’s, there was a growing body of literature that supported the views on the need for early childhood education and how it later positively impacts children’s development and prepares them for school, such data that presented experiences from several countries was an encouragement to governments to invest in pre-primary programs (Aidoo, 2006). Even though there is a gap between developed and developing countries in the adoption and application of pre-school programs and even though, according to Aidoo (2006), statistics of a World Bank report in 2004 shows that in Africa 95% of young children do not have access to early education, care facilities, or free-preschools, some African countries have taken steps towards change. For example, Ghana in 2004 issued a new policy that adds two years of kindergarten (from age 4-5) into its system of compulsory education (Aidoo, 2006). Another step was that of Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia and Uganda who established ministries or institutions with children at the core of their responsibilities, unlike how these countries before included children of pre-primary age in ministries of social affairs or familial support (Aidoo, 2006).

Even though most countries worldwide started pre-primary education in response to children who suffered from poverty or abuse, or in response to mothers who needed to work, and even though in several policy documents prior to the 1990’s children’s care program were mostly placed under health or social affairs categories, there was a shift that stemmed from the “realization” of the importance of the early childhood years before school entry. This growth was globally displayed in the March 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) where the World Declaration on EFA asserted: “Learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education...The pre-conditions for education quality, equity and efficiency are set in the early childhood years, making attention to early childhood care and development essential to the achievement of basic education goals” (Aidoo, 2006, p.11). The “realization” of early childhood education as a field and in international organizations as well was based on several elements, one of

which is the research and work done that proved the importance of the early years, as discussed in the second theme that follows.

## **THEME 2: EVOLVEMENT OF VIEWS ON EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN LIGHT OF LEARNING THEORIES**

As international organization such as the UNESCO and the World Bank were taking steps in acknowledging the needs of children in the early years to receive educational attention and care, studies from several disciplines were not only at the same line witnessing growth and development, yet also leading these changes through providing evidences of how crucial early childhood education is. This second theme focuses on the evolvement of research in the component of early and emergent literacy in the field of early childhood development through displaying how views on early literacy witnessed growth through history.

During the 17th, 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, instruction to children in reading and writing was based on the premise that children can only understand complexities when they get divided or broken down into smaller parts or components; hence educators relied on teaching children one syllable words, then upgrade to two syllables, then three and so on (Flewitt, 2007). This view was supported by the behaviorism theory which was dominant at the time and as it “claimed to be able to control reading development through systematic reinforcement systems. By breaking down reading into narrow skills and by linking the learning of these skills to reinforcement systems, so children were supposed to acquire mastery of them” (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.4). In the late 19th century and with the growth of the psychology field with its interest in reading and education, “understandings of literacy became firmly rooted in cognitive approaches, which viewed ‘literacy’ as the perceptual ability to master sound-symbol relationships, and the notion of readiness to read” (Flewitt, 2007, p.99).

According to Mason and Sinha (1992), Gillen and Hall (2003), and Flewitt (2007), the concept of ‘reading readiness’ at a certain age was first introduced by Patrick in 1899. This term suggested that there was a specific appropriate age for children in which they should start receiving

reading instruction and begin to be taught how to decipher texts; Patrick thought of “cognitive development as a function of ripening and stated that ‘a child's powers, whether physical or mental, ripen in a certain rather definite order’ ...at the age of seven, there is a certain mental readiness for some things and an un-readiness for others” (Mason & Sinha, 1992, p.5). Later, in 1982, two psychologists from the United States started to explore the concept of reading readiness. They “claimed that reading readiness was closely linked to mental age and, more specifically that, it pays to postpone beginning reading until a child has attained a mental age of six years and six months” (Gillen and Hall, 2003, p. 4). This argument was later supported by another study conducted in 1937 and which concluded that “a mental age of seven seems to be the lowest at which a child can be expected to use phonics” (Gillen and Hall, 2003, p. 4).

As a result, in the first half of the 19th century it was assumed that children cannot be taught how to read before they enter first grade (Mason, 1980). Gillen and Hall (2003) discuss three other consequences of adopting the reading readiness idea. First, an entire industry emerged, promoting and selling reading readiness related materials and activities, most of which were non-print. Second, since the definition of the term ‘reading’ was very limited, this preserved the idea that reading is an associative activity. The third consequence was that the reading readiness concept made a clear differentiation between being a reader and being a non-reader, so it was either this or that with no in between stages. In conclusion and as a general result of behaviorism that was well adopted and the reading readiness notion, “for much of the twentieth century researchers seemed to have believed that there was simply no point in investigating or even considering very young children’s thinking about, understanding of and use of reading and writing; the possibility of this had been defined out of existence until they arrived in school and faced a teacher” (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.4)

Throughout the twentieth century learning was being largely depicted from a psychology perspective which viewed that ‘learning’ was built in the mind of the individual and that ‘literacy’ was about decoding and encoding skills, including phonic knowledge and awareness of letter-sound combinations (Mason & Sinha, 1992). Yet after World War II, a new notion, “functional literacy”

emerged and it led researchers to investigate the everyday uses of literacy (Flewitt, 2007; Gillen & Hall, 2003). The war increasingly demanded high-level skills, the lack of which showed that there were low literacy levels, and “the notion of functional literacy for the first time forced researchers to be interested in what literacy was for and what people did with it in their everyday lives. Almost for the first time researcher began to consider reading as something more than simply a decoding process and that it had a social element” (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.4).

In the wake of post World War II changes, several disciplines emerged, such as cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, and information and communication studies; “these disciplines consistently revealed that communication, especially written communication, was a complex, multilayered, and highly skilled process involving a reflective and strategic meaning-oriented approach to behavior” (Gillien & Hall, 2003, p.5). In year 1971, Frank Smith wrote a book called ‘Understanding Reading’ which was a collection of evidence and theoretical work, based on several disciplines, and which concluded that reading is not a mere decoding process, yet it includes complex strategic and cognitive behavior; “he also proposed that meaning does not sit in a text waiting to be decoded, but that readers interpreted meanings according to their experiences” (Flewitt, 2007, p. 100). Smith’s work had many supporters and on the other hand several opponents, yet, as Gillen and Hall (2003) detail, eventually his work affected early childhood literacy in a number of ways. First, his work meant that reading could not be viewed anymore as a mere associative activity, but rather a complex process that involves cognitive and strategic behavior. Second, it meant that the topic of “literacy” was very narrowly researched and that it needed to be scrutinized from several disciplines and not just psychology. Third, his conclusions meant that readers are the ones who assign meaning to print, both adults and children do that, drawing on the different natures of their experiences.

In the years that followed, several researchers from diverse fields and disciplines started to investigate literacy in early childhood with a focus on their own children. For example, Lass started with her child since she was born in 1982, Baghban with his child from birth until three years of age

in 1984, and in the first British case study, Payton studied her child across the fourth year of birth in 1984 (Gillen & Hall, 2003). All these researchers found that their children were paying attention to print and they concluded that literacy development does begin before school starts, and other researchers such as Clay, Hiebert, Harste and colleagues, and Sulzby at the same time were looking at wider ranges of children and reached the same conclusions (Gillen & Hall, 2003). These studies had large impacts:

A revolution was taking place that demanded a reevaluation of literacy as something that moved beyond any conventional ability to read and write. Rather than literacy development being something that began at the start of schooling after a bout of reading readiness exercises, it was becoming a much broader continuum that had its origins in very early childhood and drew its meaning from making sense rather than formal teaching (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.6).

In the years that followed, there was more recognition of children's role in interpreting literacy and that even the youngest of children paid attention to print and participated in their own ways. There was also the idea of how culture affects children and their learning, an idea developed by Vygotsky, whom even though died in 1934, his work, *Thought and Language*, started to have large impacts when it was translated into English in 1962 (and more after another translation in 1978) (Gillen, & Hall, 2003). The literature review below continues to detail the research that was done in the field of early literacy.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three sections that correspond to answering the first three research questions and sub questions.

### Section 1: Emergent literacy

The first section answers the first research question with its sub questions. Part one of the first section answers the first question of “What is emergent literacy?” though tackling essential concepts in early childhood literacy beginning with the definition of emergent literacy, moving on to detailing its domains and elements, and discussing how early literacy impacts learning on the long-run. Part two in section one answers the sub question of “How to create an environment that encourages early childhood literacy?” through detailing the work done by researchers on positive literacy environments.

## PART 1: INTRODUCING EMERGENT LITERACY

### Defining emergent literacy

The term emergent literacy is attributed to Clay in the year 1966, yet later the term was more investigated and discussed, mostly in English-speaking children, and specifically in the book by Teale and Sulzby in 1986 “*Emergent Literacy: Writing and Reading*” (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). Prior to children entering school, they develop skills that are essential for their later success in reading and word decoding abilities, these skills are acquired through the interaction with literary rich environments and include skills such as oral language acquisition, phonological processing abilities, and print knowledge (Dove et. al., 2015; Fleury et. al., 2014; Lonigan et. al., 2000; Reese et. al., 2003; & Skibbe et. al., 2013). In other words, “emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environments that support these developments (e.g., shared book reading),” the term also highlights “the importance of social interactions in literacy-rich

environments for pre readers and the advocacy for related social and educational policies”

(Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.849).

Emergent literacy is different that the reading readiness concept in the way it denotes that literacy is a developmental continuum with the origin early in a child’s life, instead of the all-or-none phenomenon which starts when children enter school (Lonigan et. al, 2000). The reading readiness approach, which preceded the emergent literacy approach and is still applied in several educational entities, focuses on the skills that children need to master prior to receiving formal reading instruction. This view creates a “boundary between the “pre-reading” behaviors of children, and the “real” reading that children are taught in educational settings. In contrast, an emergent literacy perspective views literacy-related behaviors occurring in the preschool period as legitimate and important aspects of literacy” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 848). What is also different about emergent literacy than several literacy perspectives is how it assumes that the development of reading, writing, and oral language skills takes place concurrently and interdependently from an early age, due to a child’s interaction with the environment and in line with the social context in which literacy is a basic element (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Acknowledging the social element and the surrounding environment’s role in shaping a child’s development and literacy related knowledge, the emergent literacy approach thus recognizes the individual differences of children and their later skills (Lonigan et. al., 2000; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

### Emergent literacy domains

Numerous studies scrutinize the skills that are needed for decoding print, or in other words, reading. Some of these studies were quantitative in nature and these studies mostly examined the relationship that exists between emergent literacy and acquiring conventional literacy (reading). Other studies are of a qualitative nature and look at how the behaviors of pre-school children develop in response to literacy-related materials and tasks. In their study, “Child Development and Emergent Literacy,” Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) looked at different studies from quantitative and qualitative evidences and came up with a model that divides emergent literacy into two

domains with each domain having several units and with each unit representing a skill that is necessary for decoding print. The authors referred to the two domains as “inside-out” and “outside-in” domains.

As for the inside-out domain, it is formed of units that are the skills needed for translating writing into sound, namely the decoding skill, these units include: knowledge of graphemes (letter-name knowledge), phonological awareness (detection of rhymes and manipulation of syllables), syntactic awareness (understanding grammatical rules), phoneme-grapheme correspondence (letter-sound knowledge and pseudo-word decoding), and emergent writing (phonetic spelling). Even though a child might have a requisite of these inside-out skills, he/she may still not be able to read a sentence successfully because reading depends also on outside-in skills. When it comes to outside-in skills they are the child’s understanding of the text’s context.

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) give an example of a child trying to read the sentence “She sent off to the very best seed house for five bushels of lupine seed” (p.854). A child might have the needed inside-out skills of knowing letters, sounds, the link between the letters and sounds, the correct grammar and punctuation; the elements that form a sentence. Yet that does not constitute successful reading because reading the sentence requires comprehension. What does this sentence mean? Who does “she” refer to? Why is she being sent away for seeds? Why are the five bushels needed? And what is lupine? The outside-in units, which include language (conceptual knowledge), narrative, conventions of print, and emergent reading, are needed to decode the context and make sense of it. “The child must bring to bear knowledge of the world, semantic knowledge, and knowledge of the written context in which this particular sentence occurred. A child who cannot translate a sequence of graphemes into sounds cannot understand a written sentence, but neither can a child who does not understand anything about the concepts and context in which the sentence occurs” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.854).

Inside-out skills require more explicit teaching than many children receive prior to school entry, specially children who come from a low-income background, these students and less likely



than their middle-class colleagues to be exposed to several materials and activities like using alphabet boards, playing rhyming games, or learning to print their names. In conclusion, both inside-out and outside-in skills are essential for successful reading and comprehension, the following section discusses the units or elements in each of these domains.

### Components of emergent literacy

As discussed above, one way to look at skills needed for print decoding is by dividing them into inside-out and outside-in skills, in addition to other factors as well. When it comes to inside-out skills they include:

1. *Knowledge of graphemes*: Decoding printed words in alphabetic writing systems requires the translation of print units to sound units, whereas writing requires the translation of sound units into print units. Hence, for basic reading and writing, these tasks require knowledge of letters' names (i.e. graphemes). A child who is beginning to learn how to read and still does not know that alphabetic letters, that means that he does not know to which sounds these letters relate (Chall, 1967). Some studies support the idea that knowing the alphabet at school entry level is one of the main indicators of both short and long term literacy success (Lonigan et. al, 2000), yet other studies that worked on intervention programs with children suggest that knowing the names of letters does not indicate large effects on reading acquisition (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Due to these findings it is generally concluded that while teaching the names of letter does increase surface knowledge of letters, it does not necessarily affect other primary literacy related processes, like for example being familiar with print (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Yet, while this is the case, several studies have shown how letter knowledge has significant effects on the acquisition of another inside-out literacy skill, such as phonological awareness and sensitivity (Davidson et. al., 2008; Lonigan, 2006; & Mason, 2007).
2. *Phonological awareness*: Phonological awareness is not an all-or-none phenomenon, it is believed to be an important emergent literacy skill, and it is "the ability to recognize and manipulate the individual sounds in speech and includes the awareness, whether implicit or

explicit, of syllables, rhymes and alliteration” (Nickel, 2011, p.15). In order to read successfully, children not only need to differentiate between print units (such as letter, words, and sentences), yet they also should be able to discriminate units of language (such as phonemes and propositions) (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). It is important to note that linguistic awareness is different from linguistic discrimination since the former is not just about differentiating units of language, yet it involves the having the awareness of how language is used and constructed, Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998) explain:

“A child might well be able to discriminate the difference between two words as evidenced by auditory evoked responses or by simply being able to respond appropriately to linguistic units incorporating these distinctions (e.g., "Show me the hat. Now touch the bat").

However, the same child might have no awareness that "hat" and "bat" are units of language called words that are constructed from units of sound that share two phonemes and differ on a third” (p.851).

That being said, it is vital to acknowledge that linguistic awareness contributes to reading skills’ acquisition. Children who acquire abilities such as detecting syllables, rhymes, and phonemes are faster to learn reading, “and this relation is present even after variability in reading skill due to intelligence, receptive vocabulary, memory skills, and social class is partialled out” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.852). Hence, children should be taught how speech is made of sound that could be broken into units, they should be given activities that increase their phonological awareness such as rhyming stories, and adults should seize teachable moments to pinpoint sound features (as an example “Your name starts with a /d/ sound”) (Nickel, 2011).

3. *Syntactic awareness*: According to Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) syntactic awareness is defined as repairing grammatical errors. It is vital to note how syntactic structures are differently represented in oral and written languages; while in oral language speakers might be redundant, less structured, and utter incomplete sentences while using slang expressions, on the other hand, writers,

who have the time to write, edit, and re-write, are less redundant, more structured and organized (Chomsky, 2008; Mason, 2007). Several studies have related reading storybooks to children to their better understanding of more complex syntactical structures; Meyer et. al. (1994) cite Chomsky's study in the year 1972 which found that recognition of children's books for early school-aged children (from ages 6-10) was closely related to them acquiring complex syntactic forms. In addition, other studies were able to increase the mean length of utterance of children whose ages range between 21 and 35 months through an experimental reading program (Meyer et. al., 1994). It is vital to note that several researches have suggested that semantics and syntactics are important in the later sequence of learning to read starting from when a child is reading to extract meanings instead of reading to sound single words (Mason, 1992; & Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

*4. Phoneme-grapheme correspondence:* Knowing the links between the sound and the given alphabet letters is viewed as one of the most advanced skills in emergent literacy and in turn as the beginner's level skill in the conventional literacy that a child needs to acquire. Phoneme-grapheme correspondence demands knowledge of individual letters sounds in addition to sounds of letter combinations. For example, the /f/ sound in the graphemes f, and ph. The skill is measured through asking a child "what sounds do these letters make?" and at an advanced level, it is measured through phonological decoding tasks, such as asking children to read pseudo words, which require the ability to blend individual phonemes. Several studies have shown that children who have higher phonological decoding skills are better in reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

*5. Emergent writing:* "Many adults have had the experience of seeing a young child scribble some indecipherable marks on paper and then ask an adult to read what it says. The child is indicating that he or she knows print has meaning without yet knowing how to write" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.853). Emergent writing basically is the skill of acting to write or learning how to write letters. Several studies such as those of Ferreiro & Teberosky in 1982, Harste, Woodward, & Burke in 1984, and Sulzby in 1986 have closely studied and described children's emergent writing and came up with similar conclusions (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). They have analyzed the pattern of

emergent writing where children usually start by writing in a pictographic way by using drawing and scribble-like shapes that has meaning only to them. They later start to use letters, numbers, and letter-like shapes that represent the things they are writing. During this phase, children may employ some symbols as standing for some words. This phase also is marked by how children's writing often characterizes the thing they are writing, Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998) give the example of how a child would write the word "bear" bigger than the word "duck" since bears are bigger than ducks. At the end of preschool, to several children letters start to represent different word's syllables, and starting from this stage, children finally come to use letters to stand for individual sounds in words. During this stage, children often write letters in an idiosyncratic way (for example by writing the first and last sounds in a word, as spelling "BK" for "bike"), this kind of writing is called "invented spelling" (Whitehurst & Lonigan,1998). Some studies infer that invented spelling is useful for knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondence and for phonological sensitivity as well (Whitehurst & Lonigan,1998).

As for outside-in skills, they are:

*6. Language: Vocabulary* is one of the most important language skills that children acquire at different points in the literacy acquisition process. In early stages of learning to read is through decoding letters into the corresponding sounds and linking these sounds to words that are meaningful language. Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998) give an example of a child learning to read the word "bats" by sounding out the letters: /b/ ... / e/ ... /t/ ... /s/. They mention how children frequently can get this far, to the point of sounding out all the letters correctly yet do not succeed in connecting the letters and saying the word. In this case a parent or a teacher could encourage the child to blend the letters' sounds together by reducing the gaps between the sounds of each latter, yet while adults understand this phonological pronunciation, children who are beginning to read can get this far and not realize that what they are saying is "bats" because to them they are isolated sounds of four letters. At times, a child can pause and take the next step and link the sounds of letters to utter a meaningful word, or with the help of an adult who sounds the letters "/b/ ./ e/ .t/t ./s/" then connects

them “bats! You read the word!” “In either case, one frequently sees the look of pleasure or relief on the child's face at this resolution, which makes sense of the letters and corresponding sounds” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.849). It is important to note here, since this skill is an outside-in one that reading is encouraged by knowing the meaning. If the child trying to sound out the letters “/b/ ... / e/ ... /t/ ... /s/” yet does not know what bats mean and has never seen one, the attempts of the adult trying to help are of no use since the child has no semantic representation of the word. Hence there is an essential link between language and reading in the indispensable factor of meaning extraction (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

7. *Narrative*: Understanding a written text's or a story's narrative is a skill needed for meaning extraction. Several researchers such as Snow, Dickenson, and Tabors have suggested that this skill could be facilitated by understanding the decontextualized language (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The term decontextualized language refers to language, like that usually used in written forms of communication, print, and stories, and which is used to deliver information to readers and audiences who only have limited background on what the speaker is talking about. On the other hand, contextualized languages uses depend on information, physical backgrounds, and contexts that are shared. Hence there is a large difference between oral language which is contextualized and relies on immediate feedback and written language which is decontextualized (Mason, 1990). Several studies have stressed on the importance of children experimenting and knowing decontextualized language through reading because that has direct influence on their later conventional literacy skills such as understanding story narratives, decoding, and even later producing print themselves (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). On the other hand, a study of language development and school achievement of black children from low economic backgrounds showed that they did not have previous experiences with decontextualized language and as a result the kind of literacy they bring with them to school are not parallel with how school and written texts treat and use language (Teale, 1981).

8. *Conventions of print*: Books are made up according to a set of conventions that do not require reading abilities to be understood. If we take English as an example, these conventions include how the direction of the text is from left to right, top to bottom, they also include how the sequence of print across pages progresses from front to back, the differentiation between the book's cover and pages, differentiation between pictures and print, realizing punctuation marks, and knowing that there are spaces between words and full stops at the end of every sentence. Knowing these conventions of print assist in learning how to read. A study that used Clay's "Concepts about Print Test" and tested students in first grade and later at the end of second grade, while controlling for differences in vocabulary awareness, found that knowledge of print conventions enhances children's reading comprehension and decoding abilities (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

9. *Emergent reading*: Recognizing environmental print materials and pretending to read are examples of emergent reading (Sulzby, 1985; Teale, 1978; & Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Before children are able to read conventionally, they can recognize labels, signs, and other environmental print materials. A study by Purcell-Gates (1996) assessed a factor which she called "intentionality" when she asked children what specific printed words on pages signify. If children indicated that they understand print's functions, as in they understand that the print is giving directions or telling a story, then that means they have a high print intentionality level. If, on the other hand, children do not indicate understanding that print is a symbol that has a corresponding meaning and perhaps only name the letters when they are asked what the word might signify, then that means they have low print intentionality levels. In conclusion "Purcell-Gates found that children's understanding of the functions of print (i.e., intentionality) was related to children's print concepts, understanding of the alphabetic principle, and concepts of writing (i.e., use of letter-like symbols)" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1988, p.852). Also, several qualitative studies tried to examine children's behaviors towards print when asked to read. Ferreiro & Teberosky in the year 1982 conducted a large-scale study to Argentinian children between the ages of four and six and described how children recognized the difference between "just letters" and "something to read" (mostly words from three

or more letters) (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1988). Moreover, Ferreiro & Teberosky noticed how “children pass through stages where they believe that print is a nonlinguistic representation of an object, for example, a picture or icon, to believing that print codes only parts of the linguistic stream (e.g., the nouns), to understanding that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the print and the language that results from reading” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.852).

In addition to inside-out and outside-in skills, there are other cognitive factors that are necessary for learning to read, these skills include:

*10. Phonological memory and rapid naming:* When it comes to the phonological memory, it is the capacity to remember orally presented non-words or series of digits of an increasing length, this ability is correlated with children’s vocabulary acquisition ratio (Wagner et. al., 1994). As for rapid naming, it is the the idea that the speed of naming digits, colors, letters, and objects as quick as possible aids in tapping these objects to the long-term memory. While both skills are directly connected to phonological sensitivity, studies assert that they are different processes (Wagner, et. al., 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

*11. Print motivation:* Print motivation stands for the amount of interest children have for reading and writing activities. It is argued that the attempts children make in order to extract meaning out of a text and understand it are encouraged by their their extent of interest in print. Many studies aimed at measuring children’s print motivation using different ways, such as parent reports of their children’s interests, parent reports of how frequently their children requested shared-reading, parents reports on the time their children spend in activities that are literacy-related, and finally by examining to what extent children are engaged during shared reading time. Evidences from these reports show that “early manifestations of print motivation are associated with emergent literacy skills and later reading achievement. A child who is interested in literacy is more likely to facilitate shared reading interactions, notice print in the environment, ask questions about the meaning of print, and spend more time reading once he or she is able” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p.854). Finally, it is important to acknowledge that “increasing the proportion of children who read widely

and with evident satisfaction ought to be as much a goal of reading instruction as increasing the number who are competent readers” (Anderson et. al., 1985, p.26).

### Some impacts of emergent literacy

Numerous studies show that children who acquire emergent literacy skills perform better in school as “there is strong continuity between the skills with which children enter school and their later academic performance” (Lonigan et. al., 2000, p.596), while the same researchers assert that children who experience difficulties when learning to read continue to encounter reading problems in the school years and the problems could extend to even adulthood. A study by Juel in 1988 suggested that 88% of children who are poor readers in grade 1 remain poor readers at fourth grade (Lonigan et. al., 2000). In addition, it is reported that children who enter school with limited literacy related skills are at higher risk of qualifying for the special education services (Lonigan et. al., 2000). Hence reading to children from early on before formal education and school entry is essential, and for that to happen, there needs to be what Teale called “positive reading environment” (Teale, 1978) which are essential factors extensively discussed in the section that follows.

## **PART 2: CREATING A POSITIVE READING ENVIRONMENT**

In order to supply children with a healthy environment that supports them and builds in them the love of reading, it is vital to know the elements of this environment. Teale (1978) discussed four factors of a positive environment that encourages early reading, these factors are:

### 1. Accessibility of print with its types:

The availability of print materials on different and wide ranges of topics and subjects is one of the primary factors of an environment that raises up an avid reader (Anderson et. al., 1985; Teale, 1978). This availability of materials gives children chances to “use and get used to” (Teale, 1978) written messages and print. In her study of pre-school readers, Durkin commented on how there was plenty of print material available for these children including storybooks, alphabet books (Ringler, 1968; Teale, 1978). Another study cited by Teale (1978) is that of King and Friesen in 1972 and in which the authors infer “Almost all the children had access to easy reading material in



the home. Some parents mentioned having extensive book collections for children” (p.925). Yet print material is not necessarily the books owned by family members or that found at home, a study by Clark in 1976 found that some families were used to taking their children to the local library very frequently where they made extensive uses of print materials for the purpose of reading (Teale, 1978). Several researchers such as Clark, Durkin, Gardner, Krippner, and Torrey, asserted that printed materials are not only books, yet they could be found in everyday print material a child encounters (Teale, 1978). The subject child in Krippner’s study was only eighteen months when he saw a medicine bottle and uttered said “V-I-C-K-S spells VICKS” (Teale, 1978, p.926), this child later became proficient at reading signs on the road. In Torrey’s study, his subject John read can labels and words that he saw on the television (Teale, 1978).

Teale (1978) makes two important conclusions when it comes to the print availability element. First is that print materials are not only stories or books, yet they extend to include cookbooks, maps, and TV shows and commercials. Second is that each child has his own interest, while the subject in Krippner’s study was interested in a physical medicine box, Torrey’s subject was more fascinated by TV shows, hence a positive reading environment should supply different kinds of print materials so the child will associate with what interests him/her and is more encouraged to attempt to read.

## 2. Reading is "done" in the environment

While stories, bottles, billboards, TV shows or commercials, and other print material are essential for reading, they will remain of little use unless the child knows the function print serves. “That is, the child must initially learn that print is meaningful, understanding the function of written language is greatly facilitated when the variety of printed materials is accompanied by interpretation” (Teale, 1978, p.926). In his account of how children develop meaning awareness, Frank Smith said:

I can think of only one way in which the first insight that print is meaningful might be achieved, and this is when a child is read to or observes print being responded to in a meaningful way. At

this point I am not referring to the reading of books or stories, but to the occasions when a child is told or hears “That sign says 'Stop’”, “That word is ‘boys;’”, “This is the jar for candies” or “There's the bus for downtown.” Television commercials can do the same for a child - they not only announce the product's name, desirability and uniqueness in spoken and written language, but even demonstrate the product at work (Teale, 1978, p.927).

In other words, it could be said that Smith implies how reading and showing responses to print in the environment is the basic means through which children understand and realize written language's functions. Teale (1978) discusses how reading is important not only for the purpose of understanding written language, yet also for sensitizing children to the nature of written language with its structure. Here, Teale (1978) discusses how written language is different from oral language and how written language is in isolation from a real life time and situation (situational context), hence oral language and written language use different ways in expression, vocabulary, syntax, and level of explicitness. Courtney Cazden discusses differences between the two modes of expression, oral and written languages, and makes the point that “eventually the child must go beyond his own words and speech patterns and become familiar with the language of books” (Teale, 1978, p.927).

Hence, by listening to stories being read to them, children can develop a sense of the composition, flow, and nature of written language, in addition, it provides a child with avenues of how to build a story with correct syntax and grammar which helps further in understanding what they are reading (National Reading Panel; 2000). This is why a positive reading environment strives to provide a child not only with different types of print materials, yet also aims to construct meaning and interpretation.

### 3. The environment facilitates contact with paper and pencil

Numerous studies focus on children who show interest in writing before being able to read and these studies assert that these preschoolers' interest in writing later leads to their interest in print and reading (Anderson et. al., 1985; Chomsky, 2008; & Teale, 1978). Anderson et. al. (1985) claim

that “reading begins in part in infants' scribbling and later attempts at writing” (p.929). Also Chomsky (2008) mentions that writing as a pre-reading skill is not a new idea and discusses how Montessori in 1912 has found this order to be natural for children and even taught children to read through word composition. In addition, Durkin (1978) suggested that “some pre-first graders are more interested in printing than in reading and, in fact, become readers through their efforts with printing and spelling” (p.176). To elaborate, in her extensive longitudinal study of early readers referred to them as “pencil and paper kids,” Durkin explains:

Almost without exception the starting point of curiosity about written language was an interest in scribbling and drawing. From this developed interest in copying objects and letters of the alphabet. When a child was able to copy letters - and not all of the children who had the interest developed the skill - his almost inevitable request was, “Show me my name” (Teale, 1978, p.928).

Several parents in many studies seem to agree that a child shows interest in his name, then starts copying and printing it, then does the same with names of parents, siblings, family members, and even pets; these studies were mostly long-term and they emphasize how preschoolers' interests in print and in reading are derived from their prior interest in printing, copying and writing (Teale, 1978). Also, in Torrey's study, her subject (who was previously mentioned; the pre-school child who read labels and words from TV shows and commercials) enjoyed and spent a lot of time writing numbers and words (Teale, 1978). Finally, an important way to view learning is that of Piaget when he said “children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves” (Chomsky, 2008, p.42), this is true of how many children begin the reading process and show interest in it after they themselves start printing, copying, writing, and getting familiar with print.

#### 4. Those in the environment should respond to what the child is trying to do

Teale (1978) argues that a positive environment that encourages reading is that where the child's needs are acknowledged and responded to, especially when attempting to read. It is vital to recognize that the child is the one who determines what he or she needs and with what amount,

which in other words could be termed as “individualized instruction.” Several authors such as Clark, Durkin, Gardner, King and Friesen, Krippner, Plessas and Oakes, and Sutton all discuss how when parents answered their children’s questions about words, letters, and readings, this had an effect on children developing and becoming early readers (Teale, 1978). Teale (1978) also mentions how Durkin found that parents of children who were early readers always answered the children’s questions and built an environment that encouraged the children to communicate, wonder, and ask about their curiosities and questions. Finally, “the studies of early readers demonstrate that a positive environment for learning to read is one in which a parent or sibling or other significant person in the child's life responds to the child's attempts to make sense of the printed word” (Teale, 1978, p.930).

## Section 2: Parental Involvement

The second section is also divided into parts each answering the second research question with its sub questions. Part one of section two answers the question of “To what extent does parental involvement affect emergent literacy acquisition?” through displaying theories that view parental involvement as an indispensable element for developing early childhood literacy. Part two answers the sub question of “In what ways can parents become involved in developing their children's emergent literacy skills?” through discussing reading, writing, and other activities as main methods in which parents can be involved in their children’s early literacy enhancement. Part three answers the sub question of “What are barriers parents face that hinders their involvement with their children?” by discussing the challenges that face parents and impede their involvement with their children. Part four answers the sub question of “How different are parental involvement patterns in lower socioeconomic classes?” through detailing a case study that compared involvement patterns of parents from different social and economic backgrounds and had substantial findings. The last part of section two, part five, answers the sub question “To what extent should both parent become involved in literacy activities?” and discusses gender issues related to parental involvement patterns.

## **PART 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Parental involvement could have different definitions based on several perspectives and also according to a child's age group. For the purposes of this research and when focusing on parental involvement in early childhood literacy, parental involvement signifies that: 1. Parents acknowledge that they are the ones primarily responsible for their children's early literacy development and reading success, and 2. That parents spend time participating in developing their children's literacy skills through literacy activities such as shared-book reading, writing, and other activities (Ladd et al., 2011). "Family and home environment are believed to have the largest influence on children, in particular at earlier ages as they represent the primary socializing influence" (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2013, p.248). Before discussing how parents can get involved with their children in developing their early and emergent literacy skills, it is first vital to understand theories about the influence of parents' and caregivers' interactions with children with regard to education. Carrying out literacy-related activities with children, such as shared-book reading, writing, and other activities is considered a social process that is built on communication since it involves a social relationship between parents and their children, teachers and their students, and in the case of reading the relationship also extends to involve the authors and their readers (Hindman et al., 2013). This social interaction affects the interaction with the print material itself (Morrow et al., 1990). "Because reading stories to children is a social activity, children almost never encounter simply an oral rendering of text. Rather, the author's words are augmented and shaped by the interpretation and social interaction of the adult reader and the child as they cooperatively negotiate and reconstruct meaning from the text" (Morrow et al., 1990, p.257). Several researchers have suggested that the interaction between the child and the adult is the key to effective literacy development. These beliefs were initially built on Vygotsky's views of child development, as he viewed children in the beginning of the reading phase as reliant on adults, yet moving towards independence due to interacting with the adults and modelling their actions (Gillen, & Hall, 2003; Morrow et al., 1990; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; & Teale 1981). Earlier, Vygotsky had detailed

how children develop cognitively through their social interactions (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990), and “from that perspective, the importance of read-aloud events is their social interactiveness, with the adult serving initially as mediator between text and child and providing the opportunity for both adult and child to make or take meaning from the text” (Morrow et. al., 1990, p.257). Literacy-related acts such as reading aloud to a children or writing with them give them models of how adult read, deal with print, and also provides children with the needed support and encouragement to start reading on their own. Vygotsky also viewed the child in the process of being read aloud to not as a mere listener, yet as an interactive knowledge constructor, who through negotiating meaning of text with an adult constructs meaning (Morrow et. al., 1990). Hence, Vygotsky’s views which regarded education as relying on a socio-cultural foundation at its core “delineated the contextual nature of learning and the importance of one’s family and culture” (Loving, 2010, p.24). These interactions that are supportive acts between an adult and a child, that challenge the child’s knowledge while being sensitive to his/her competences and needs, that encourage the child’s active role and participation in shaping the knowledge, and that offer guidance and assistance to develop the child’s cognitive and other abilities, are referred to as “scaffolding” (Aram & Levin, 2010; Loving, 2010; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990). As Loving (2010) states “scaffolding in the home environment may involve parents supporting their children by structuring a task or engaging in a discussion about it, so that the child is better able to complete the task” (p.24).

Vygotsky’s theory stressed on how the child interacts with the society, including the home environment, in a supportive way termed ‘scaffolding’ that treats the child as a knowledge constructor and not just a mere receiver and how that has a strong impact on a child’s development and educational discourse. Another theory looked at the matter of child development and learning from a different perspective yet reached similar conclusions in terms of how essential a child’s home environment is. In his ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner examined the relationships that exist between parental involvement and children’s educational development (Hampden-Thompson et. al., 2013; Loving, 2010). This theory, as Loving (2010) and Hampden-Thompson et.

al. (2013) discuss, stresses on the value of social interactions with people and institutions at different levels and suggests that children's growth and educational development occur within a context of systems that are interdependent and that interact both with each other and with the child as well; these systems are the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. When it comes to the microsystem, it is the closest level of individuals and institutions to the child and they include a child's family, friends, preschool or school, and mosque, church or religious house. Each of these entities has its own expectations and demands from the child. As for the mesosystem, it is how the connection and relationship between these different settings and individuals within them builds up and directly affects the child's development. So, an example of mesosystem would be the interaction between a child's family and the school, which in turn influences the child's development. It is vital to note that "the better the connections among the settings of the microsystem, the better the child can transition from one setting to another. For example, the more the attitudes and beliefs of the adults in the family system match those of the adults in the school system, the better the child can adapt in both settings" (Loving, 2010, p.25). When it comes to the exosystem, it is the individuals and institutions that indirectly influence children through their families and school. Finally, the macrosystem, which is the system most distant from the child, it is the set of practices that distinguish the other systems and the larger social contexts. Its effects on the child are indirect yet pervades through all levels of development.

The impacts of parents' involvement in a child's education and early literacy in specific are large, as Loving (2010) asserts:

A child's education starts at home, with the primary caregivers providing a healthy, loving environment and developmentally appropriate learning experiences and opportunities. The home environment exerts a powerful influence on the development of early literacy skills, well before a child enters formal schooling (p.25).

Since more than forty years ago, research increasingly has and is still investigating and acknowledging the importance of parental involvement in children's literacy (Loving, 2010).

Further examination and close scrutiny of the relationship that exists between parental involvement and children's early literacy development is vital. The current subsection discussed theoretical views that suggest learning is a social process and hence is greatly dependent on interaction and social relations, especially between parents and children and that especially generate positive results when parents scaffold and the child is treated as an active participant. The following subsection represents what happens when these theories are put in practice, it is an examination of previous practical studies of the relationship that exists between parents and children in light of early reading and emergent literacy skills acquisition.

## **PART 2: WAYS PARENTS CAN GET INVOLVED**

During the early years, parents have a crucial role in developing their children's literacy skills through reading aloud to them, encouraging them to write, print, or scribble, and through several other literacy-related activities (Darling & Westberg, 2004; Dove et. al., 2015; Dunst et. al., 2012; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Goodall et. al., 2011; Hampden-Thompson et. al., 2013; Hirschman, 1985; Newland et. al., 2011; The Center for the Study of Reading, 1985; & Wahl, 1988). This section is a step forward from the theoretical frameworks that built the base of believing parental involvement is crucial in children's literacy acquisition to the practical examination of what several authors found through their studies of interactions between parents and their children in different areas of growth that are necessary skills for learning to read and write. This subsection is divided into three parts, part 1 is about effects of parental involvement in reading to their children, part 2 discusses how encouraging children to write enhances their literacy skills, and part 3 details how other literacy-related activities can also be carried out in home environments by parents and can help children's early literacy skills to advance.



## Reading

### Parental involvement in reading and growth areas

“Children who experience early parent-child book reading are more likely to learn how to read earlier and with greater ease” (Newland, 2011, p.71). Also Edwards (1989) details how Bruner in 1975 has observed exchanges between parents and children and noted that when parents read to their children this represents the first model of literacy and how “the interaction with small children over home materials and storybooks is the medium through which notions about literacy are learned” (p.222). Several other studies assert that there is a direct relationship between parental involvement in reading to their children and children acquiring skills required for learning how to read such as general language development (Newland et. al., 2011), phonological awareness (Nickel, 2011; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998), growth in vocabulary (Hindman & Skibbe, 2014), familiarity with print (Hindman & Skibbe, 2014), print motivation (Edwards, 1989; Hirschman, 1985; McCormick, 1977; & Wahl, 1988), in addition to the relation between parental involvement and children’s long-term academic success (Newland et. al., 2011; Ninio, 1983; Vukelich, 1984; & Teale, 1981).

When it comes to language development, Newland (2011) asserted that “parent-child book reading has been directly related to children’s language and literacy development. Especially, parent-preschooler shared reading is linked to emergent literacy, language growth, and reading achievement” (p.71). As for effects of parental involvement on developing higher phonological awareness levels, Nickel (2011) mentioned how through reading to children from an early age; especially stories that rhyme and songs, this teaches them about sound features and shows them how speech is made of sound units that can be divided into parts. While for growth in vocabulary, several studies noted how when parents read stories and books to their children this fosters their vocabulary skills, especially when parents during reading time use the dialogic reading method, steer up conversations with their children, listen to their ideas, and help them use to new words they learned (Hindman & Skibbe, 2014). As for a skill like print familiarity, children through being read

aloud to by their parents learn that print has a meaning, that letters translate to sounds, and that print language is not the same as oral language, this leads children to have a background about features of written language (Teale, 1981).

Moving on to print motivation, it is basically as previously discussed: having interest in and enjoying reading. McCormick (1977) has noted how when mothers remember books from their own childhood and share them with their children with a sense of enjoyment, this reflects on the child and leads to him/her assigning a role to reading; “for what his mother enjoys doing with him, he quite naturally comes to enjoy and recognize as a valued activity” (McCormick, 1977, p.142). In addition, both Wahl (1988) and Edwards (1989) discuss how a house that is rich in books and literacy materials and in which parents themselves enjoy reading and read with their children, the children develop pleasant feelings when reading and regard it as an enjoyable activity. It is also worth noting that children who grow up enjoying reading, this to some extent makes their transition from home experiences to classroom settings more smooth. As Edwards (1989) notes “if a child comes from a reading family where books are a shared source of pleasure, he or she will have an understanding of the language of the literary world and respond to the use of books in a classroom as a natural expansion of pleasant home experiences” (p.222). In order to encourage children enjoy reading, Hirschman (1990) suggests buying books as gifts to children and taking them to frequent library visits, while Wahl (1988) noted how an act such as subscribing in a magazine will make children interested as they will enjoy receiving their own magazines and will anticipate.

When parents get involved in reading to and with their children, this not only develops their emergent literacy skills, yet several studies assert that it also impacts the children’s later school standing and academic achievement (Newland et. al., 2011; Ninio, 1983; Vukelich, 1984; & Teale, 1981). “Children who were read to in their preschool years are more prepared for formal reading instruction and are more successful in learning to read than are children who were not read to early in life” (Vukelich, 1984, p.472-473). In addition, Teale (1981) build on that hypothesis and

discusses how results from correctional studies and practical experiences show how reading to children enhances their early childhood literacy skills.

New Zealand study:

Discussing how parental involvement enhances children's early literacy skills and how that affects children's reading related knowledge at school entry level, one intriguing study to examine is one conducted by Phillips & McNaughton (1990) in New Zealand. The researchers aimed to examine the activity of book reading and their study group was made of 10 mainstream families from New Zealand where parents usually spent time reading to their children at home, and the children's ages ranged between 3 and 4 years old (6 boys and 4 girls). As a first data collection step, the researchers collected information for the duration of one month about how frequent parents read to their children, during which time of the day, the choices and types of books selected, in addition to other data about the participants. They found that these families frequently read to their children at home by using child-centered techniques where the child was an active participant during story time. In addition, they found that on average, the parents approximated that they owned about 450 books at home, 300 of them were children's books. Also, 9 of the 10 families mentioned that they regularly visited the library. Other information included the time parents spent reading and writing at home, which was 2.2 hours, and the time children spent taking part in activities that are print related (or observing activities that are print related) and which was 3.3 hours. After collecting this data, the researchers gave the families storybooks that were similar to what they read to their children, yet new ones unfamiliar to the children and they examined the interactions between the parents and children during reading time. The researchers observed that during reading both the parents and children initiated insertions and made comments on meaning of text most of the time, although at a less rate they also focused on illustrations and print conventions. Another observation was how parents at the beginning used to focus on making the meaning of the story clear to the children then they transitioned to attempting to make the children excited and encouraged them to participate in discussions and make comments. Later, the researchers tested the children giving

them a test called Letter and Word Identification subtest and another test Concepts about Print subtest created by Clay in 1979 (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990). The results of the tests showed that children developed literacy skills and they were able to identify on average 13 letters, 2 words, and 5 concepts. What the authors noted and found interesting was how the parents before the test has pre-expectations that the children would know on average 21 letters, 6 words, and 8 concepts. Phillips & McNaughton (1990) concluded that: 1. parental involvement through reading enhances children's emergent literacy skills, 2. high expectations from parents suggest how parents encourage their children for further achievements, 3. children from mainstream New Zealand families will have some literacy-related skills in addition to the knowledge of how to construct meanings from stories at school entry level.

Other reading activities:

The study from New Zealand showed substantial evidence of how parental involvement through reading stories to their children is important. There is no doubt that reading stories to children is important, especially in what Mavrogenes (1990) refers to as "The Lap Technique" as when a parent or a caregiver takes a child in his/her lap, providing a feeling of security and closeness, and making book reading special and pleasant. Yet it is vital to mention that shared-book reading is not the only reading activity that parents can do with their children. Numerous researchers have discussed the importance of daily reading activities such as reading signs on the road, package labels, looking up new words in a dictionary, making bookmarks, visiting the supermarket and reading products' types and information (Mavrogenes, 1990). Wahl (1988) also discusses how a parent can help the child in creating his/her own book, or writing notes of special dates, or keeping a diary. There are plenty of reading activities that parents can carry out with their children that would encourage the children to read and develop their emergent literacy skills.

## Writing

“A host of studies over the past two decades has demonstrated the predictive importance of writing skills for children’s later reading ability” (Skibbe et. al., 2013, p.387) since writing is a valuable activity that enables children to practice essential skills such as language and motor skills in a meaningful context and develop their emergent literacy skills (Bindman, 2014; Skibbe et. al., 2013). When children start to write, they need to first have constructed an idea, which brings together children’s prior background knowledge and acquired vocabulary. Furthermore, for children to write down letters and words they much have basic coding skills such as: relating letters to sounds, knowing which marks and letters to place on the page and in which order, deciding about what punctuation to use, reflecting on the meaning of what they are writing, and finally transforming sound units into print units (Bindman, 2014; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). As for motor skills, when children hold a pen and move it to write, they are practicing and enhancing their fine motor skills (Bindman, 2014).

### Parental involvement and writing development:

“A major factor in the development of early literacy skills, including writing, is social interactions with and observations of caregivers and other adults, especially parents” (Bindman, 2014, p.615). When it comes to writing, children learn basic and key ideas about its function and importance through interacting with both environmental print around them and with caregivers (Skibbe et. al., 2013). When it comes to the interaction with caregivers, children learn how to write when adults practice scaffolding through offering assistance and guidance to children while teaching them how to write; this view supports Vygotsky’s theoretical inferences and suggests that “parents should provide higher levels of writing support as children become more able to write independently” (Skibbe et. al., 2013, p.388).

Bindman (2014) discussed one of the earliest foundational studies that scrutinized the quality of how children wrote letters (for example, a letter to a relative or to a fictional character)

both with the assistance of mothers and without. Results showed that when mothers offered the children help and were involved in the letter-writing activity, children were encouraged to write letters longer in length, were better at spelling, and used more accurate writing conventions than when the mothers did not participate. Other studies that observed parental involvement in joint writing activities with their children at pre-school age show that when parents write with their children the children assemble better writing outputs and develop stronger letter knowledge, print concepts, and phonological awareness (Bindman, 2014).

Parental involvement in writing in different languages:

While most studies that examined parental involvement in writing activities and how that develops literacy skills were done with English speaking participants, Skibbe et. al (2013) assert that “across multiple languages and orthographies, children whose parents support them in learning about writing are at an advantage when learning to read in later grades” (p.389). Skibbe et. al (2013) mention how Lin et. al. in 2009 examined parental involvement in children’s writing in Hong Kong. The children were in pre-school and first grade and the study concluded that when mothers scaffold and offer support to children in writing activities, this has significant effects on children’s word reading abilities. Another study by Manolitsis et. al. in 2011 examined parental involvement in reading and writing activities with children’s later achievements in Greek (Aram et. al., 2013). The results showed that parental involvement in reading enhanced children’s vocabulary, while the involvement in writing developed children’s letter knowledge.

Another extensive study by Aram et. al. (2013) is a longitudinal one that aimed to assess the literacy development of children who speak Arabic from the period of preschool and until first grade in relation to the role of parental involvement (namely mothers shared-book reading and joint-writing activities). The participants were 88 Arabic speaking mothers and their children from Israel. The study showed that several factors correlated to children’s achievements in first grade, including: the family’s social and economic status, the children’s early acquired skills, in addition to

the literacy activities provided at the home environment. What was also significant is the researchers' conclusion:

Joint writing was found to contribute to children's literacy achievements in first grade beyond book reading. The study extends our knowledge on literacy acquisition in Arabic, highlighting the significance of early parent-child literacy activities as a predictor of Arabic-speaking children's literacy achievements in school (Aram et. al., 2013, p.1517)

### Writing activities:

As previously detailed, studies assert that writing activities could have significant results when parents get involved and offer support to their children (Bindman, 2014). There are different ways in which parents can take part in joint-writing with their children, for example, one study has examined and stressed on the importance of mothers working with their children through providing print materials, pronouncing the sounds while writing, and presenting directions about how to write letters (Skibbe et. al., 2013). Other studies suggested dictating letters to children, writing letters or invitations with them, and copying letters and words from the surrounding environment (Skibbe et. al., 2013). In addition to the previously mentioned exercises, the support of interacting in joint-writing could be done through several other activities as Mavrogenes (1990) discusses. This includes asking a child to tell a story and the parent can write it down so the child sees his/her words in print, then the parent and child can read the story together. Another activity could be drawing pictures with the child then writing descriptions below the pictures. A third parent-child joint-writing activity that is believed to have a very powerful effect is name writing. Plenty of studies show that "children's earliest explorations of writing tend to focus on their own name, which is particularly meaningful for them. In addition, children tend to learn the letters in their name sooner than other letters in the alphabet and are especially likely to write and identify the first letter in their first name" (Bindman et. al., 2014, p.616). Bindman et. al. (2014) discuss how Aram and Levin observed that children see, hear, and practice their own names in more frequency than

they do with any other words; hence parents could make use of children's interest in their names and turn it into a joint-writing activity and learning opportunity.

### **Other literacy-related activities**

In addition to parental involvement in shared-reading and joint-writing with their children, there are other literacy-related activities that can have a role in enhancing children's emergent literacy skills (Aram et. al., 2013; Dove et. al., 2015; Mavrogenes, 1990; Meyer et. al., 1994; The Center for the Study of Reading, 1985; & Wahl, 1988). Dove et. al. (2015) share the findings of Levy and colleagues who suggest that parents who apply literacy related activities and encourage their children to take part in them, this results in the development of children's literacy skills and reading abilities. In addition, in Durkin's study of children who were early readers, she found that parents were not only reading with children, yet they were involved in other literacy-related activities as well, Meyer (1944) comments on this "Durkin in her important work with children who were reading when they entered school, found that parents she questioned had read regularly to their children. She also found that those same parents had taught their children letter names and letter sounds. In addition, the parents had often provided chalkboards for their children to work on" (p.70). This is why research conducted on parental involvement and early childhood literacy attributes early readers' success in reading not only to parental involvement in shared-book reading and joint-writing activities, yet other literacy-related activities as well are an indispensable factor (Dove et. al., 2015; Mavrogenes, 1990).

Dove et. al. (2015) discuss the importance of activities such as drawing, singing, rhyming, and playing games in developing preschoolers' language abilities, print knowledge, print motivation, oral language, phonemic awareness and decoding abilities. Another activity is TV watching, while it is generally recommended to limit the time children watch television, parents can make use of beneficial and useful programs and shows (Mavrogenes, 1990; The Center for the Study of Reading, 1985; Wahl, 1988). Mavrogenes (1990) stresses on how parents should ask the



same kinds of questions they would ask their children if they were reading a book during television time, while the report by The Center for the Study of Reading (1985) asserts that children can benefit majorly from programs that have educational values, and Wahl (1988) mentions how TV watching can be viewed as a good habit if parents make sure the children are watching worthwhile programs and initiating discussions with their children. Discussions in general, whether through TV shows or book reading or at random events, are recommended since they help extend children's oral language and vocabulary which later impact literacy development (The Center for the Study of Reading, 1985; Wahl, 1988).

Other literacy-related activities that can be carried-out by parents to enhance children's literacy skills are discussed by Wahl (1988). For example, a daily activity such as cooking can be used where the parent can ask the child to help him/her read ingredients, in addition they recognize food names and brands together and may as well encounter learning new abbreviations which add to the child's oral language and vocabulary acquisition. Also, taking the children during running errands, a parent and a child will meet environmental print and signs such as names of restaurants, gas stations, and shops. Moreover, parents can encourage children to form the habit of going to the library from an early age, as Wahl (1988) mentions: "help your children develop the library habit by taking them to the library regularly. Young children enjoy having their own library cards and being able to check out the books they select" (p.229). Furthermore, zoo trips where children engage in new experiences, grocery shopping where children become active in writing and reading lists and discovering food labels, and even free play where children interact with other children and practice their oral language, are all activities that enhance children's literacy skills.

### **PART 3: BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Numerous studies show that most parents want and have the willingness to help their children and become involved in their general development and educational discourse (Dove et. al., 2015; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Loving, 2010; & Mavrogenes, 1990). Loving (2010) asserts that

“most parents are eager to become involved and are interested in helping their children improve academically” (p.29). In their study of parents with different routines and backgrounds and their review of previous literature accounts of Latino parents and parents from different ethnicities, Hoover-Dempsey and Sander’s discuss that while some ethnic groups might view the teachers as the main ones responsible of children’s educational development and responsible in involving them as parents, “parents across ethnic groups desire to be involved in their child’s classroom in different, non-universal ways through various roles, such as home tutor or audience member” (Dove et. al., 2015, p.176).

Even though research shows most parents have the desire to be active participants in their children’s lives and education, many of them face barriers that limit their involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Goodall et. al., 2011; Mavrogenes, 1990; & Newland et. al., 2011). One of the problems parents face is how they think they lack the competence to get involved in their children’s education, as Mavrogenes (1990) mentions ““research indicates that most parents are willing to help their children with their education, but do not know how to go about it and are afraid of interfering. Parents feel they could better help their children if teachers would tell them what to do” (p.4). Newland et. al. (2011) also highlight how parents’ perceptions of their competence is a determining factor of involvement and add other factors as well; “the ways that parents choose to become involved are dependent upon many factors, including the parents’ own knowledge and skills, demands on their time and energy, and requests for their involvement from children and teachers” (p.69). In addition, a study by Harris and Goodall in 2007 discovered that parents’ perceptions of their lack of skills was one of the greatest barriers that impeded their involvement (as 29% of their interviewees reported competence as a primary barrier (Goodall, 2011).

Goodall et. al (2011) scrutinize a study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2007 by Peters et. al. which surveyed 500 parents that were defined as a group that is nationally representative of the population. The survey aimed at understanding the barriers parents find as limiting their involvement with their children. The results showed that 24% of the interviewees reported that they

had no specific barrier, while 41% of the parents mentioned work commitments as the main barrier they faced. Goodall et. al (2011) mentioned another study by Russell and Granville in 2005 and that also linked barriers to parental involvement to parents' work commitments as the most common barrier reported by parents.

As for whether income is a factor that determines the amount of parental involvement Mavrogenes (1990) argues that while it is not a factor by itself, it was found that middle income parents usually are more involved in encouraging their children through literacy activities than low income parents. Other barriers as listed by Eccles & Harold (1996) are parents' limited time, little energy, limited economic resources, and uncertainty with how to help develop their children's literacy skills in addition to questioning their competences. Finally, it is vital to mention how in a study by Bayley in 2009, fathers linked their lack of involvement in their children's educational development to their work commitments, not being aware of the services provided for parental support, and their perception that this kind of involvement in children's development is the role of mothers (Goodall et. al., 2011, p.35).

#### **PART 4: LOWER-SES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PATTERNS**

One important finding common across several studies and observations of parental involvement in early childhood literacy and in children's education in general is that the involvement patterns of parents are affected by their socioeconomic levels (Dove et. al., 2015; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Edwards, 1989; Heath, 1982; & Mavrogenes, 1990). A study by Payne et. al. in 1994 assessed children who come from low-income families in the United States and they found that the home literacy environment was not rich as a home literacy environment of middle and high income families (Dove et. al., 2015). The same study, in addition to other studies as well, found that income does not relate to the frequency in which parents and children spent time reading together at home, hence a conclusion could be that "individual differences in families may be a better predictor of the influential activities affecting children's emergent literacy than overall socioeconomic status" (Dove et. al., 2015, p.175). As for parents' educational background, Eccles

& Harold (1996) assert that parents who are better educated are more involved with their children at home, and when it comes to family size, families with fewer numbers of children are more involved with the children at home.

When it comes to how issues of low-income affect families' involvement, some studies found that low-income parents feel less competent to help their children in their education and may not be aware of how to help their children enrich their learning experiences (Edwards, 1989; Mavrogenes, 1990). Other than not feeling competent, Edwards (1989) elaborates:

“Lower SES parents are not sufficiently aware of their impact on their child's reading. The few studies on parent-child book reading interactions in low-income families have shown that low SES parents seldom ask questions or elicit words from their children, do not view their young children as appropriate conversational partners, and do not tend to adjust their language to their child's level of understanding” (p.222).

Edwards (1989) discusses several studies, one of which is that of Ninio's in 1980 which discovered that mothers from lower socioeconomic statuses used less vocabulary, fewer names of objects, fewer action words, as well as fewer use of questions. While in comparison, mothers who were from middle SES elicited more speech and discussions from the children by asking more questions. Another study by Farron in 1982 found the same conclusion, that middle SES mothers were more successful in engaging their children in elaborate dialogues. A third study by Snow and Ninio in 1986 revealed that low-income black mothers did not modify their language to the actions of their children in comparison to black mothers who came from more advantages economic backgrounds, instead they found that the low-income black mothers tend to repeat their own speech. Moreover, a study by McConnick and Mason in 1986 found that parents from lower SES did not offer scaffolding and support to their children that would enable them acquire early literacy skills in comparison to parents who came from higher SES backgrounds.

Parents from lower socioeconomic levels may not be as aware as their higher socioeconomic level counterpart parents of how their support to their children in the early years is essential, may feel less competent, and as research shows they may truly be less competent, and whether these barriers are reasons or not, research shows that lower SES parents are less involved in their children's early literacy and education. As Dove et. al. (2015) assert:

Research has suggested social class and SES are related to parental involvement. For example, research on parental involvement with preschoolers' transition into kindergarten found parents who were receiving government financial aid were less likely to be involved with annual preschool meetings, monthly communication with preschool, or visits to a kindergarten classroom (p.176).

#### South-eastern United States Study:

One of the most extensive research carried out and tackling the issue of lower SES parents and their involvement patterns in early childhood literacy with their children at home and when they transition to school is that of Heath (1982). Heath studied shared story-reading interactions in three different communities in South-eastern United States: 1. Maintown; a mainstream, middle-class black and white mill community, 2. Roadville; a lower-SES white mill community, and 3. Trackton, a lower-SES black mill community of recent rural origins. When it comes to home interactions between parents and children in the Maintown community, Heath (1982) found that while reading to their children Maintown families ask them questions and try to involve them as active respondents and cooperative negotiators of what the story and text mean, in addition to linking the stories' meanings to real life. She noted how Maintown children "learn that written language may represent not only descriptions of real events, but decontextualized logical propositions, and the occurrence of this kind of information in print or in writing legitimates a response in which one brings to the interpretation of written text selected knowledge from the real world" (Heath, 1982, p.71). As for Roadville families, during shared story-reading time they would answer their

children's questions, yet Heath (1982) noticed that they do not link meanings from stories and books to other elements in their surrounding environment, she hence commented that:

“They do not encourage decontextualization; in fact, they proscribe it in their own stories about themselves and their requirements of stories from children. They do not themselves make analytic statements or assert universal truths, except those related to their religious faith. They lace their stories with synthetic (nonanalytic) statements which express, describe, and synthesize actual real-life materials. Things do not have to follow logically so long as they fit the past experience of individuals in the community” (p.71)

As a result, she noticed that children from the Roadville community usually look for specific story morals and expect stories to fit to their realities. Finally, when it comes to Trackton, Heath noticed the large gap between it and between both Maintown and Roadville. First of all, in Trackton, parents read to children on few occasions and not on a regular basis. Unlike their Maintown and Roadville peers, children in Trackton were involved in other kinds of social interactions other than shared book reading, such as being fed, held, and being celebrated for rendering acts and events they watch. While it was noted that parents in Trackton valued children's acquired abilities to use language, they were not part of pointing out names of items to children, they did not view children as conversational partners, and they rarely simplified their language when they talked to children. Heath (1982) mentioned an example of a mother from Trackton who rarely asked her child who was a preschooler questions (for example: what is this?) and did not interpret his self-initiated remarks and trials to label objects. Furthermore, Heath noted how the kind of questions children in Trackton heard at their homes was not similar to questions that school teachers asked which led to these children facing difficulties in trying to respond to their teachers' questions.

Parents' SES is believed to have a large impact on their involvement patterns in their children's education and it the children's early literacy development in specific. Yet, Mavrogenes (1990) quotes a report by the U.S. Department of Education that says “Parents are their children's

first and most influential teachers. What parents do to help their children learn is more important to academic success than how well-off the family is” (p.6). This is where interventions and parental involvement programs come in and try to have a role to spread awareness, teach and offer assistance to mainstream, yet specially to low SES parents, as discussed in the section that follows.

## **PART 5: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN LIGHT OF GENDER INEQUITIES**

Some studies discuss the importance of both parents taking part in reading to children and in generally participating in children’s early literacy development (Mendoza, 1985; Stafford, 1934). Yet from the review of literature above it is clear how in several of the studies mentioned the participants in parental involvement studies were mostly mothers not fathers. For example, all Ninio’s (1983) 20 subjects in her study are mothers, in Aram et. al.’s (2013) study of Arabic speaking children, all 88 subjects were mothers, in Bindman’s (2014) study, the subjects were 126 mothers and only 9 fathers, in Skibbe et. al.’s study (2013) the participants were 74 mothers and only 3 fathers, and finally in the study by Aram and Levin (2010) the participants were 119 mothers and 5 fathers and the authors noted that “both mothers and fathers were invited to participate, but 119 mothers and 5 fathers participated in the study. Hence, we refer to the caregivers as mothers” (p.222). Hence as Mendoza (1985) argues, “both parents, but particularly fathers, need to be encouraged to read to their children at home. The role model of a parent who enjoys reading is vital in motivating children to read” (p.523).

### **Section 3: International Programs to Involve Parents in Early Childhood Literacy**

The third section corresponds to the third research question by discussing international short-term and longer-term initiatives, programs, and workshops (mostly from the United States) that aimed to encourage parental involvement in early childhood literacy.

#### **SHORT-TERM INITIATIVES:**

As Sittig (1982) says “a house with a lot of books isn't nearly as valuable as a home where reading experiences are shared, books are read aloud, and parents participate with children in daily

tasks involving reading” (p.167). This section aims to answer RQ3: What are international programs that seek to involve parents in children’s early literacy? Some attempts to involve parents were through short-term pamphlets, flyers, and newsletters, while others were through intensive programs that aimed at teaching parents how to get involved with their children through shared-reading and other literacy-related activities.

One of the short-term initiatives is one that is funded by local donors and distributed at a local hospitals’ maternity division in Virginia. The hospital gives new mothers a plastic bag that has a packet about reading to children, a picture book of nursery rhymes, and a brochure that talks about the importance of a reading home environment, all that along with a note from the reading council that says:

“Dear Mother,

We hope that you will read this little book to your baby often. Your baby will love the sound of your voice and will learn to recognize the pictures in the book. When children enter school, they learn to read more easily if they have been read to at home and have had picture books to enjoy. We hope that your child will become a good reader and that this book will be the first of many books which you will read to your child.

The Newport News Reading Council, 41 Gatewood Road, Newport News, VA 23601”  
(Hirschman, 1985, p.491).

### **LONG-TERM PROGRAMS:**

Numerous parents are not familiar with the research done on emergent literacy and hence are not aware of the indispensable role they have in developing their children’s literacy skills in the early years (Enz, 1995). Yet, studies show that parents have great potentials and can be very influential and efficient first teachers to their children when they are made aware and offered with assistance through interventions and programs (Lautenschlager & Hertz, 1984). Furthermore, Quisenberry et. al (1977) mentioned how parents could be true “assets” (p.34) in enhancing their children’s reading abilities if they were assisted and showed how to do so. An important argument



is that workshops and programs, especially ones that work with parents in longer time frames, are more influential than short-term parent-conferences, open houses and short-term events (Enz, 1995). The coming subsections display several intensive programs with the same goal of involving parents in children's early literacy development.

#### Program EASE:

Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) designed and implemented a one year long intervention program called Early Access to Success in Education (Project EASE) in Midwestern the United States. This program's aim was to "increase the frequency and quality of language interactions through book-centered activities and to give parents information about and opportunities for engagement in their children's developing literacy abilities" (Jordan et. al., 2000, p.525). The program was implemented with 248 children in kindergarten, with 71 children in a control group and the remaining children (177) were given an intensive intervention that included sessions to educate parents, activities that brought together the children and their parents at school, and shared-book reading activities at home. The training sessions parents received were carried out for 5 months, one session each month. In these sessions, the trainer was a parent-educator, whom divided the content into monthly themes and provided the parents with a guide to take back home. The information parents received were about methods to expand children's vocabulary, develop their understanding of narratives, enhance their sound awareness and letter recognition skills, ways to help the children retell stories and comprehend expositions. To put the sessions' theories and lessons into practice, the program provided scripted parent-child home activities that reflected on each session's monthly theme. To measure the program's outcomes, the children were given both pre and post tests in addition to collecting from parents measures of home literacy support. Findings suggested that the children whose families were involved by taking part in the sessions and home-literacy activities made significant gains in terms of higher scores on vocabulary, story comprehension, and storytelling tests in comparison to the control group. Moreover, remarkable

gains were obtained by children who were low-achieving in language skills as shown in the pretest prior to the program's implementation. When it comes to parents who participated in the program, they generally displayed high levels of satisfaction with their involvement experiences and their children's gains. Finally, Jordan and colleagues (2000) conclude that the study proves that schools have an important role in involving and teaching parents of how to take part in supporting their children's literacy development in addition to the notable benefits in the area of language skills that children gain through structured enrichment programs that involve their parents.

#### Fast Start program:

Crosby et. al. (2015) discuss the Fast Start (FS) program which is a model designed by Padak and Rasinski to involve parents, caregivers, and also teachers in children's early literacy development. This program was built on several principles including the work of Kuhn and Stahl on elements of foundational fluency instruction, the work of several researchers on effective parental involvement programs, and on the work of Senechal and Young that discuss three ways of adult involvement when reading to children: 1. reading to children, 2. listening to children while they read, and 3. tutoring children to read. The core of the FS program is based on the belief that there are two basic elements needed skills for developing foundational literacy competencies, and these two skills are: word recognition and fluency. Some studies regard these two skills as essential core skills in addition to their importance for silent reading comprehension. In addition, a study of students who have difficulties in reading shows that a significant number of students above Grade 3 and who have problems in reading comprehension have problems in their word recognition and fluency skills.

The FS program is designed so that parents and children are required to master one poem or rhyme per day while being considerate to the child's age and needs. The daily lessons are for around 10-15 minutes per day in which a child and parent follow the model by Senechal and Young where as a first step the parent reads to the child fluently several times while the child listens and

the parent seeks to direct the child's vision and attention to the words. As a second step the child and parent read together the rhyme for two or three times with the parent still pointing to the words as they read and drawing the child's attention to the words on the page. In the third and final step, the parent asks the child to read the rhyme for two or three times, also while pointing to the words being read. Reading the same rhyme for multiple times allows the children to start developing fluency in addition to beginning to recognize the words in print. In addition, the poems which should be short in length gives the chance for the parent and child to read the poem in few minutes.

One thing that adds more benefits to the parent-child reading routines is when a "word play" is provided after reading the poems. There are two reasons behind this, the first reason is that children might memorize the the rhyme after few readings which could lead to them not concentrating enough on the printed words. The second and more vital reason is that word play in itself is very effective as Senechal and Young suggest in their investigation of practical studies that examined different kinds of parental involvement and children's literacy growth. Senechal and Young scrutinized studies that covered around 1200 participants and found that word play was "2 times more effective than having parents simply listen to their children read and 6 times more effective than when parents simply read to their children" (Crosby et. al., 2015, p.167). Based on these studies, the FS lessons should be concluded with some word play. For example, the parent and child can choose a word together from the poem they read, then write it on a piece of paper and they can use it in several ways: 1. they can try to use it in their speech in their usual talk in the days that follow or 2. they can brain storm words that rhyme (for example if they choose "sheep," they can write "sleep," "steep," "deep," etc.).

It is vital to mention that while the FS parent-child reading routines should be carried out daily, due to the challenges of time limitation and other barriers, it could be for fewer times in a week. However, it is indispensable that these routines are done for several consecutive weeks because this regular implementation of the FS routine produces better and larger gains of reading skills. Moreover, while FS has been usually implemented in school settings and in short-term time

frames, findings prove that the program has enhanced children's fluency and word recognition. In addition, when parents were involved they noted how positive their experiences with their children were. While most of the studies done were as previously mentioned were short-term and with few numbers of students, the study detailed below was a more longitudinal one and with more a considerable number of students.

Crosby et. al. (2015) decided to take the FS model one step further from the studies done by increasing the number of students receiving the program and the duration as well. Their study involved kindergarteners (264 children in 12 classes with 22 children in each class) and first graders (246 in 11 classes with 22 child in each class). As for the duration of the study, it was implemented on the course of three years. In the first year parents were invited to workshops at school that teach them how to implement the FS program at either mornings during the school day or at night with child-care provided. Parents were asked to implement the FS program for 29 weeks where they would read a poem with their child twice a week. In addition, the school sent them a poem along with an activity page each week and parents were asked to record their engagement with their children in weekly logs. In the second year, Crosby and colleagues (2015) sent out surveys to parents and with the children's teachers made some enhancements to the program in ways that made it easier for parents to document their involvement with their children. Also, special FS folders were purchased and given to every child. In the third year, the FS program continued.

As for the study's results, in the three years of the program's implementation, there was a high correlation between the parental involvement through the FS program and the students' reading development (measured by testing students' fluency and word recognition enhancement). As for parental involvement, in the first year parents did not exceed doing 22 lessons with their children, in the second year, the involvement increased as 39% of the parents were involved in around 31-50 lessons. When it comes to the third year it was significant how the parental involvement increased even more and rose to two thirds of the parents participating in a higher

range of lesson numbers. In conclusion, the researchers mention that they were able to maintain the program for three consecutive years due to its simplicity, time efficiency, easy implementation, and the extra benefit that its an enjoyable activity for the parents and their children.

### Parents as Partners in Reading: How Louisiana Mothers Sustained the program

One of the renowned programs implemented in rural southern Louisiana in the United States is the “Parents as Partners in Reading;” a program established by Edwards in response to the feedback she received from the principal, assistant principal, in addition to several K-2 teachers who complained their children will not be able to pass to the next grade levels due to their limited reading backgrounds and skills (Edwards, 1995). Edwards (1995) built a book-reading program with the aims of enhancing children’s reading skills and abilities involving parents. In addition, the researcher aimed to meet the expectations of both parents and the school. As for parents, they cared about their children’s achievement in literacy and about their children having fruitful school experiences. While the school’s expectations, other than the children’s reading success, were concerned with parents themselves to, 1. get involved by reading to their children and 2. become literate models themselves. The program was implemented through giving parents sessions and teaching them how to effectively share books with their children and the results were significant on both children’s reading abilities and parents’ increased involvement. After that the researcher wanted to maintain the program’s sustainability as she said: “all too often researchers enter the lines of their subjects, take what they want, and then leave. Once I left this rural southern Louisiana community, I wanted the subjects in my study to have something they could adopt and adapt to their own needs” (Edwards, 1995, p.559). This is why the researcher selected four parent leaders (two White and two Black mothers), who viewed themselves as responsible and supporters of their children’s education, and she introduced them to the concept of cooperative learning. The researcher noted that her choice of the mothers was built on the amount of their willingness to model the sessions about effective book-reading practices that they themselves received to other

parents that they themselves would recruit. Moreover, the researcher mentions how these parents had basic shared qualities such accepting both criticism and suggestions which the researcher mentioned she foresaw this would make them sensitive to their peer's opinions when they are put in the leaders' positions.

The four mothers (who will be henceforth in this subsection referred to as parent leaders) recruited a parents group comprised of 33 mothers and 3 fathers. The sessions the parent leaders adopted from the researcher were 28 sessions with each session lasting two hours. The sessions were divided into three phases, each phase lasting for around 8-9 weeks. The first phase was group discussions, where parents were divided into four groups, with each group having a parent leader as the group's head. In each group, the parents discussed and later modelled effective book-reading techniques and practices. These practices included how to draw a child's attention to books and how to make links between the books that you read to your child with their own lives and daily experiences. The second phase was practicing book-reading, in which each parent group practiced and applied the concepts that they learned. In addition, children were invited to this phase of sessions and each parent practiced with his/her own child while other parents watched. The final phase, group feedback, the parent leaders and parent group members gave each other feedback on what they learned and how to improve the book-reading sessions they received.

Several things were worth noting by Edwards, the initial designer of the program who noticed how the parents made changes to the both content and other logistical elements of her previously structured program to better suite their needs. First, Edwards' program did not include bringing children in the phase one (discussions; where parents were received coaching) and phase two (practicing book-reading; where her program applied peer modelling) since she thought parents would be shy or embarrassed in the beginning to model reading to their children in front of all parents, she wanted the parents to gain the confidence until they reach the third phase (feedback) where they could invite their children and read to them. Yet, the parent leaders had a different view,

they did not seem to find the parents shy and hence encouraged them to bring their children starting phase one. Second, Edward's program was strictly structured to go in line with the school's curriculum and content, as she believed this would result in more benefits if the parent-child interacts were parallel with the school's lessons and teachers' in-class activities. On the other hand, the parent leaders developed book-reading program was not fully in line with the content the children studied at school and did not correspond to specific lessons taught in class. Even though parents maintained sensitivity to the school's curriculum to some extent, they also enjoyed adding new material that they found enjoyable to read to them and to the children. Finally, while Edwards had her sessions done in the library as she thought it was the most suitable place to encourage a literacy-inspired atmosphere, while the parent leaders found the cafeteria as a more suitable place. Commenting on that, Edwards said "The parent leaders adapted the book-reading program to reflect the parent participants' culture and to empower them to use a book-reading style that met their needs and wants. They developed a culturally relevant model" (Edwards, 1995, p.560).

The results from this sustained experience of parental involvement on reading to children were of special significance:

1. Parents expressed their satisfaction from the program they received and highlighted how the supportive community had a great impact on building their confidence and encourage them read for their children. For example, one parent said: "I like the conversations and comradery I have with the parent leaders. I like their words of encouragement and support. I like the attitude that no one can fail and everyone can learn how to share books with children. That's comforting to me to hear my peers say such encouraging things" (Edwards, 1995, p.562).
2. Parents mentioned how they truly learned how to share books with their children, which is something they might have been not competent at. One parent explained: "I feel that if we know what to do and some we know tells us and shows us how to do it, it makes a world of difference. We know that it is important and we will more than likely did it...I really appreciate

the parent leaders' willingness to share with us the importance of sharing books with our children, and I appreciate the university leader [Edwards] showing them. If the university leader [Edwards] had not come to our little town, perhaps many of us still would not know how to share books with our children. She opened the parent leaders' eyes and now they have opened my eyes and other parents' eyes. At least now, when teachers ask us to read to our children, we will know what to do and how to do it. That's a relief" (Edwards, 1995, p.562).

3. One of the parent leaders became the local community's spokesman for literacy. In an editorial she wrote for the local newspaper under the title "How I Can Make a Difference" she said: "It is said that children imitate what they see, so it's up to us to show them that we, the parents, are effective teachers, in a way that provides our children with the best training possible to read. In essence, a way in which I can make a difference is by taking the time out to assure my daughter that reading is a fundamental part of our lives" (Edwards, 1995, p.561). This same parent leader was also later appointed as a kindergarten tutor for the 1990-91 school year by the school's principal.

#### Other Programs:

In addition to the previously detailed programs, it is vital to mention that there are numerous other programs and interventions that seek to involve parents in children's emergent literacy development. For example, Manley and Simon (1980) mention the how an awareness reading week program was initiated in Illinois, in the United States where the local newspaper announced the news in a lead article and schools in Illinois sent letters to families in the district that explained to parents that their children will be going back home with a log to record home literacy activities done throughout the week. Each night focused on a special literacy related area such as oral reading and poetry. At school the children would share in class what activities they did with their families at home. The results of the reading awareness week were positive and some of the parents' comments were: "this made our family aware of how little we read for pleasure," "the reading bug was caught



by our family and even spread to our babysitters,” and “having active children, this week allowed us to slow down and be together” (Manley and Simon, 1980, p.554). Another program was implemented in New Haven public schools, in Connecticut in the United States where the main goal was to “take reading into the homes and bring parents into the schools” (Criscuolo, 1982, p.345). At kindergarten registration in New Haven the parents received a booklet that has game ideas, activities, in addition to information on how to develop children’s reading skills (Criscuolo, 1982). In addition, the program included sessions called “Be My Guest” in which parents were invited in the mornings to come watch their children as they participated in reading programs and activities (Criscuolo, 1974). A totally different program took a special focus of involving mothers of children who are homeless and live in shelters in Ontario, Canada, and this program reached the result that literacy programs should not be implemented to children in isolation from their parents due to the large positive impact of parental involvement on children’s literacy development (Di Santo, 2012).

An article of significant addition is the work by Quisenberry and colleagues (1977) that provides annotated bibliographies of 36 programs that aimed at involving parents in developing literacy skills of their children, some to children in primary and elementary stages, yet several to children of this research’s interest in the early years. For example, they mention the program “My Mom Can Teach Reading Too!” by Cramer in 1971, which was implemented with children from grade 1 and who had limited early literacy skills. The program allowed mothers to participate in the classroom teaching for fifteen minutes in which they read to children. The program, which was of significant success, proved that mothers, when involved, can have a role in developing their children’s early reading abilities. Another example is Evangeline’s work in 1970 under the title: “A Child's First Reading Teacher: His Parents” and which tackles the issue of how the child’s first years and essential gradual steps towards later conventional reading success along with examples of programs that actively involve parents in the early literacy development process. A third example from the collection of studies by Quisenberry and colleagues (1977) is the work of Gordon in 1969

titled “Self Help Approach: Parents as Teachers” and which details a program in which parents supply their children with educational activities starting from infancy.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The practical part of the thesis is the fieldwork section which is divided into several subsections including a background of Egypt, the methodology, data description, data analysis, conclusion of findings, and finally implications of findings.

### **Background: The state of early childhood care and education in Egypt**

#### *General Background:*

Egypt is a middle income country that has a population of 91,250,000 citizens according to the latest update by the government’s CAPMAS website (CAPMAS, 2016). The Egyptian constitution capitalizes on every citizen’s right to receive education and mention under Article 19 that “Education is compulsory until the end of the secondary stage or its equivalent. The State shall provide free education in the various stages in the State's educational institutions according to the Law” (Egyptian Constitution, p.14). While early education is not in the compulsory basic educational provision, it is clear that the Egyptian government is aware of the importance of the early years as depicted in the educational pre-university strategic plan for 2014-2030 which states that: “Previous studies assure that students who joined pre-primary stages had higher cognitive capabilities in comparison to their peers who had not joined kindergarten stages” and states that the general aim in the coming years is to “increase access and quality of the kindergarten stage to insure providing high quart education that develops the children creativeness, knowledge, cognitive abilities, and physical abilities, in the 4-5 age range, especially in remote and poor areas” (p. 60).

The Egyptian educational system is comprised of 5 years of primary stage (grades 1-5) which are close to approaching universal enrolment and three years of preparatory stage (grades 6-8); the two stages are compulsory basic education levels where children enter at the age of six

(Krafft, 2015). This means that while early childhood education is generally from 0-8 years old, in the case of Egypt it could be said that it is from 0-6 since primary entry is at six years old (UNESCO, 2006). Following these stages, there is either the general secondary (which is the track leading to university) or the vocational track (both are grades 9-11) (Krafft, 2015). The students who choose the higher-education track have the choice to either enroll in institutes that are two years or four to five years university faculties and following university, some students enroll in graduate degrees for additional years (Krafft, 2015). In Egypt the public sector is the largest with around 88% of citizens enrolling in its facilities, while 5% of the citizens enroll in the private sector, and 7% enroll in religious school systems (Krafft, 2015).

When it comes to the system of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Egypt, Krafft (2015) details how it is comprised of kindergartens and nurseries. As for kindergartens, they should provide two years of pre-primary learning experiences to children from 4-6 years old, with both formal teachers, facilities and curricula that are under the authority of the Ministry of Education. Around 50% of the kindergartens available are run by the government, while the other 50% are divided among NGOs, religious groups, and private entities or individuals. Moving on to nurseries, they are basically designed to offer learning experiences and care for children under the age of four years old (usually from 2-4 years old (UNESCO, 2006)), yet while they provide the “care” part, they lack strong “education.” In addition, due to the limited numbers of kindergartens, it is estimated that around 40% of children in nursery lie in the 4-6 age range. Furthermore, nurseries in Egypt lie under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the public nurseries are estimated to be around one third, while the remaining two thirds are provided by either NGOs and the private sector. Also, while basic education is free of charge, parents are asked to pay for enrolling their children in public nurseries and kindergartens, which forms a barrier to parents from low-income backgrounds.

As discussed, there are not enough public kindergarten and nursery facilities (Krafft, 2015), the quality in the existing facilities is inconsistent (that is usually teacher-centered and focuses on care more than education (World Bank, 2005)), in addition to there is the cost factor that makes it hard for low-income families to enroll their children (Krafft, 2015). The following part discusses efforts of international organizations in targeting early childhood care and education in Egypt.

### *ECCE in Egypt in Light of International Organizations' Aid*

Despite the Egyptian government still facing challenges when it comes to ECCE enrolment rates, quality, community involvement, costs, and other factors, it has showed its commitment to addressing these issues through both public efforts and international organizations' assistance (World Bank, 2002). The role of international agencies in aiding Egypt in education has been large, examples of programs are the World Bank's and European Union's: 1. Education Enhancement Program for Basic Education (EEP), 2. the Secondary Education Enhancement Program (SEEP), and 3. the Higher Education Enhancement Program (HEEP) (World Bank, 2002).

A report by the World Bank (2005) discusses how the EEP project was composed to increase school access, quality of education, and improve management of education and seek to collect data as well. Yet, during its implementation, it was noticed that the insufficient provision of ECCE resulted in children having problems at school level entry. Hence, a new World Bank project concerned with ECCE started in Egypt, the bank had several rationales to get involved in ECCE development in Egypt. The reasons included: 1. the notion that the government showed strong commitments to reform the ECCE stage in addition to its willingness to offer resources, 2. the bank had already successful previous experiences in the education sector in Egypt, and 3. the bank's partnership with the World Food Program and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) whom were willing to allocate financial and technical support to an ECCE program in Egypt. As a result, the Early Childhood Education Enhancement Project (ECEEP) was formed with the objects of supporting "the Arab Republic of Egypt to increase access to early childhood

education of 4 and 5 year-old children, particularly the disadvantaged, and to equip KG classes with learning materials” (World Bank, 2014). Results of the project were judged as of substantial success and they included: 1. increase in access of students in kindergartens through building new public venues and renovating existing ones, 2. improving the quality of the programs through introducing a child-centered curriculum, offering teacher training programs, in addition to providing national-standards based educational materials, and 3. building the capacity of national departments of the Ministry of Interior (MOE) to implement certain KG standards and early childhood policies (World Bank, 2014).

In conclusion, even with projects that had large impacts such as the ECEEP, it is clear that there is still a lot of work to be done especially on the public level when it comes to enhancing equitable access levels, quality, and providing affordable programs especially to low-income families where mothers are need to work. Another need is to include the surrounding communities and parents in the education process (World Bank, 2005). A social assessment that surveyed families from several govern orates during the EEP project, showed that the families are aware of the importance of early childhood education, yet they need fees reduction in order to enroll their children (World Bank, 2005). The current paper seeks to delve into finding more about parents’ perceptions with focus on specifically literacy in terms of, parents’ awareness of the importance of literacy development in the early years, their willingness to participate, their capabilities, and finally their views on involvement patterns in terms of the parent’s gender.

### Research Design

The aim of this study is to discover involvement patterns of Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels in terms of KG standing (enrollment rates and parents’ satisfaction levels of the quality offered), parents’ awareness, willingness to participate, capabilities, and finally, parents’ involvement in terms of involvement in light of gender. These factors were chosen based on the review of literature. As in initial examination, it is important to see whether parents enrolled their

children in KG facilities or not and what do they think of the quality of the services their children are receiving. Also, as covered in the first section about emergent literacy, it is very clear that parents need to be aware of certain concepts such as the need to start reading from early on, because without the awareness of the importance of the positive outcomes of investing time with very young children, their early literacy development could be overlooked. Also, the literature in the parental involvement section provided that parents are always willing to participate in their children's literacy development, yet studies that assure that were mostly done with parents and children from western countries, hence willingness of Egyptian parents, which is a factor that will later affect the amount of their involvement, need to be surveyed. Third, one of the barriers several parents mentioned that hindered their involvement, as mentioned in part 3 in the section 2, is their limited capabilities, therefore there is a need to understand the capabilities of Egyptian parents to get involved in their children's early literacy development. Finally, when it comes to gender, the researcher has noticed how in most previous research done, the participants were mostly mothers and how mothers are usually the ones more involved with children while some studies highlight the importance of both parents' involvement. Hence, a final factor this study looks at is involvement patterns in terms of gender in Egypt. All five factors were examined in parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds and the study was designed as the following procedures section details.

### **RESEARCH APPROACH:**

To examine parental involvement patterns and listen to parents in depth, learn about their awareness levels, scrutinize how willing they are to participate with their children, attend to their reflections about their capabilities to get involved with their children, and understand their views about gender roles when it comes to involvement in children's early education in literacy, the researcher decided to use the mixed methods research design, relying more on the qualitative technique. The mixed methods research design as a procedure means that a researcher is mixing between both qualitative and quantitative methods and "the basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research

problem and question than either method by itself” (Creswell, 2012, p.535). The mixed method has several forms, this research used the embedded mixed method design which is used to collect qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously or sequentially with one of them playing a supportive role to the other; “the strength of this design is that it combines the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative data” (Creswell, 2012, p.545).

### **RESEARCH TOOL:**

The tool used for this research is a questionnaire that was based on an existing questionnaire constructed, conducted, and later published by Edwards (2004). The researcher added other sections to the questionnaire by Edwards to match the required objectives and made changes to suit the case in Egypt. The questionnaire included both open ended questions to analyze using the qualitative method and close ended questions to analyze using the quantitative method. The questionnaire (check appendix 2) was first constructed in English and circulated online using google forms to the high socioeconomic level sample. Simultaneously, the questionnaire was translated to Arabic (check appendix 3) and conducted with the participants belonging to the lower socioeconomic level using face to face interviews or phone calls.

### **SAMPLE:**

The sample consisted of 22 parents who have children from the age 4-6 (kindergarten level), 12 from the high socioeconomic level and 10 from the low socioeconomic level (check appendix 1). The sample was convenient which means that it was a “procedure in which the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied” (Creswell, 2012, p.619), also because the aim was to understand in depth perceptions and experiences of parents rather than collecting generalizable data. The middle socioeconomic level was skipped from the study due to the limited time frame, and choosing only two levels, the researcher chose to examine how different are the involvement patterns and views of the two most distant groups of Egyptian parents in terms of social and economic factors. The parents were selected by using purposive sampling since “in

qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. Thus, to best understand this phenomenon, the qualitative researcher purposefully or intentionally selects individuals and sites” (Creswell, 2012, p.206). This is the basic difference between random sampling which is used more if the researcher is applying quantitative methods and the purposive sampling, the case of this study where the researcher is using a qualitative tool (Creswell, 2012). The researcher reached the parents from high socioeconomic levels through contacting friends who took the questionnaire themselves and passed it to their friends, which is referred to as the snowballing technique (where a “researcher asks participants to identify others to become members of the sample”) (Creswell, 2012, p.146). As for the participants from the low socioeconomic levels, the researcher reached them through contacting a previous student the researcher used to teach in an NGO and whose parents were gatekeepers of a building in Cairo, and who helped in reaching four parents who are also gatekeepers in the neighborhood who had children from 4-6 years old. As for the other six parents they were recruited through contacting the researchers’ friends and asking if their gatekeepers or house workers (whether maids, drivers, etc.) have children between ages 4-6. The questionnaire, which was translated in Arabic (check appendix 3), was conducted with 6 parents face to face and 4 parents through the phone.

### Data Analysis

The findings are analyzed using thematic analysis in which data was divided into five themes: children’s preschool/KG standing, parental awareness, parental willingness levels, parental capabilities, and involvement patterns in light of gender. The first theme was chosen according to the problem stated earlier if preschools and kindergartens in Egypt in terms of enrollment numbers and quality. As for parental awareness, parental willingness, and parental capabilities, the questions of these themes were adopted from a previous questionnaire constructed and conducted by Patricia Edwards (2004), the researcher previously mentioned as the constructor of the Parents as Partners in Reading Program, and later published in her book “Children's literacy development: Making it



happen through school, family, and community involvement.” In addition to the close-ended questions of the adopted questionnaire, the researcher added open ended questions to understand in-depth parental views and perceptions on their awareness levels, willingness to develop their children’s literacy, and capability levels. As for the final theme that focused on parental involvement in light of gender, it was based on the researcher’s observation that numbers of mothers who participate in studies and workshops as shown through the literature are extremely larger than numbers of fathers despite studies arguing for the need of both parents’ involvement. Hence, the researcher chose to examine parents’ views on gender roles and equity issues when it comes to parental involvement in the Egyptian context. The nature of the thematic data collection technique allows for space to analyze details of participant’s perceptions and views (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which best serves the aim of the field work to gain preliminary initial data about Egyptian experiences.

#### Validation Strategy:

The research uses a questionnaire that has both qualitative open-ended questions and quantitative close ended questions. Several sections of the questionnaire are validated since they were constructed, conducted, and published by the renowned researcher Patricia Edwards (2004). The two other themes sought to collect initial data about specific Egyptian experiences in response to the problem statement and the researcher observation through the literature of the need to examine gender-related involvement patterns, which are validated through using a mixture of close-ended and open-ended questions to analyze data results qualitatively and calculate them quantitatively.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 1. Socioeconomic level division

The parents’ socioeconomic status (SES) was based on three factors: 1. The educational degree of the parent, 2. The occupation of the parent (mother or father), 3. The type of schooling the child will enroll at (since public schooling is free of charge while private schooling is for different ranges of monetary values).

**Parents from high socioeconomic status:**

- A. Educational degree: The question asked parents to specify their highest educational degree received and findings showed that 6 mothers received their bachelor degrees from international universities in Egypt (such as The American University in Cairo and the German University in Cairo, which are considered top universities in Egypt) in the fields of mass communication, psychology, business, and management. One mother received her bachelor's degree from the renowned Université of Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris in applied linguistics. Three mothers received their bachelor's degrees from public Egyptian universities (such as education and translation). Finally, the remaining two mothers are pursuing their master's degrees in education from a top international university in Cairo.
- B. Occupation/Spouse's occupation: Six of the mothers mentioned they are currently stay-at-home mothers, while the other six mothers work as: teacher assistant in an international school, English instructor at a university, teacher assistant, head of importation department in a company, a work-from-home mom, and an HR team manager. The spouses' occupations were: 4 of the fathers have their private businesses, 1 father is a petroleum engineer, 1 is a high rank officer, 1 is a screenwriter, 1 is the IT head in big company, 1 is the chair of the chemistry department in an international university, 1 is a university professor and previous consultant to a ministry in Kuwait, 1 is a sales director, and 1 is a development manager in a famous international company.
- C. Type of child's intended school: 8 of the mothers mentioned they plan to enroll their children at international schools. 1 mother mentioned she plans to enroll her child in a new-concept niche international school that uses personalized learning experiences, and which could be also counted as an international school. 1 parent plans to enroll her child in a private English school. 1 parent plans to home school and 1 parent mentioned she has not decided yet.

**Parents from low socioeconomic status:**

- A. Educational degree: 6 parents (4 mother and 2 fathers) received no education at all. 1 mother dropped out of school at the first secondary level, 2 parents continued the vocational education track and received diplomas in clothes making and business. 1 mother received a bachelor's degree from the faculty of social service.
- B. Occupation/Spouse's occupation: All the 8 mothers are stay-at-home mothers who do not intend to work and the 2 fathers are doormen. As for the fathers who are husbands of the 8 mothers, five of them work as doormen, one of them works as baker in a bakery shop, one works as a seller in a paltry-goods shop, and one works as a seller in an equipment shop. The wives of the two fathers do not work.
- C. Type of child's intended schooling: All ten parents plan to enroll their children in public schools.

**2. KG standing**

In response to data that reveal there is low enrolment rates in kindergarten levels and especially in public ones, and the data that questions the quality of public kindergarten services, this element (KG standing) was included in the questionnaire.

**Parents from high socioeconomic status:**

*Question 1: Is/was your child enrolled in a preschool/nursery?*

10 parents said their children were enrolled in a private preschool or nursery, while 2 parents did not enroll their children.

*Question 2: Does your child's preschool/nursery/KG school offer workshops and programs to parents? If yes, then what are these programs about?*

7 parents said their children's preschool does not offer any workshops to parents while 3 parents said their children's preschools offered. One parent said her child's preschool offered workshops about "positive discipline," another said her child's preschool offered workshops about both "positive discipline and sexual education," and the third parent mentioned her child's preschool offered workshops about "1. Dealing with your child, 2. How to deal with children when under stress, 3. Montessori sessions for mothers, 4. Child's health (including physical, mental, and psychological health), and 5. Literacy development (literacy learning opportunities are in every corner surrounding the child)."

*Question 3: Does your child's preschool/nursery/KG school offer programs or workshops to help/teach you how to read to your child?*

10 parents mentioned their children's preschools or kindergartens do not offer workshops that teach parents how to read to their children, while 2 parents mentioned their children's preschools or kindergartens do.

*Question 4: On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your child's preschool/nursery/KG school? (with one being lowest and 5 being highest)*

From the 10 parents who had their children enrolled in preschools/kindergartens, 3 rated their children's preschools/kindergarten as (5), while 5 rated their children's preschools/kindergarten as (4), and 2 rated their children's preschools/kindergarten as (3).

*Question 5: Please explain the reason(s) for the level of your satisfaction.*

The three parents who rated their children's preschools/kindergartens as (5) said their satisfaction level was based on how activities focused on character building and developing children's motor skills without using punishment methods and how the kindergarten taught more than one language. One of these mothers said "My son's skills have been improved noticeably since he joined preschool. I noticed social, emotional and senatorial skills improvements in addition to the progress

in the language (listening and speaking). [Also], his physical skills developed noticeably (gross motor and fine motor as well). What is also very important is the cognitive development; he is able to discriminate different heights, diameters and width. He is able to do several sorting and sequencing activities. In addition to all the above, he learned about the planets and the features of each of the planets.”

The five parents who rated their children’s preschools/kindergartens as (4) said their satisfaction level was based on how there was care of children’s hygiene, development through activities of different types including reading, playing, and singing rhymes. Yet the parents voiced few concerns such as “my only concern is that I don’t feel the whole staff members are certified” and “they need to add more fun activities.”

As for the two parents who rated their children’s preschools/kindergartens as (3), they said the reasons for their ratings were how their children’s preschools/kindergartens “follow the traditional way in teaching, they are not updating,” and the second parent said “no extra curricular activities are offered to the children help improve their literacy skills.”

**Parents from low socioeconomic status:**

*Question 1: Is/was your child enrolled in a preschool/nursery?*

8 of the 10 parents have enrolled their children in public kindergartens while two parents said they could not afford to enroll their children.

*Question 2: Does your child's preschool/nursery/KG school offer workshops and programs to parents? If yes, then what are these programs about?*

The 8 parents who enrolled their children in kindergartens said their children’s kindergartens do not offer any programs to parents.

*Question 3: Does your child's preschool/nursery/KG school offer programs or workshops to help/teach you how to read to your child?*

The 8 parents who enrolled their children in kindergartens said their children's kindergartens do not offer any programs to teach parents how to read to their children or any literacy-related programs.

*Question 4: On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your child's preschool/nursery/KG school? (with one being lowest and 5 being highest)*

1 of the 8 parents rated her child's kindergarten as good (4), 6 parents found their children's kindergartens to be in the middle (3), and 1 parent was not satisfied with her son's kindergarten (1).

*Question 5: Please explain the reason(s) for the level of your satisfaction.*

The parent who rated her child's kindergarten at (4) said it was because the kindergarten offered good educational level and Quran lessons. The parents who rated their children's kindergartens as (3) said their rating was because: on the positive side, the kindergarten provided care, are clean, and one mother added "they take children to the toilet." Yet, on the other hand, parents mentioned that they "have no materials or technological screens or tools," "provide care more than education," and two parents said they wish they could enroll their children in private kindergartens but cannot afford. As for the last parent who rated her child's kindergarten as (1) she said "my son's kindergarten does not allow him to take the books with him home, so I can't keep up with what he is taking at there. Also it offers no trips."

### **3. Awareness of the importance of early literacy development:**

The level of parental awareness was based on both their beliefs and how their beliefs translates to action in real life. This is built on the hypothesis that a parent who says he/she is "aware" of the importance of early literacy usually translates the beliefs into actions through involvement through different activities. Hence there were three questions that tested parents' theoretical awareness of the importance of literacy starting the early years: 1. In your opinion, to

what extent is reading to and with your child important and why? 2. When do you think is the right age to start reading to your child? 3. To what extent would you describe a supermarket visit or a trip to the zoo as an educational experience to your child? In addition, other questions focused on the practical involvement: 4. What are different educational activities you do with your child? 5. How regularly do you read to your child? (multiple-choice question). The following are findings from answers of parents in the two socioeconomic levels.

**Parents from high socioeconomic status:**

*Question 1. In your opinion, to what extent is reading to and with your child important and why?*

All 12 parents shared the same belief of the importance of reading to children and their reasons included: enhancing children's phonemic awareness, broadening their vocabulary, building their interest in reading and encouraging them to adopt it as a habit, bonding with children and discovering his/her new developments, and another mother mentioned how reading to children teaches them to be more expressive and attentive. One of the quotes by a mother said: "Reading is essential for children's development. I've been reading for my child ever since she was 4/5 months old. Today, I can see how it paid off, as she has become a book lover and enjoys our reading times whether during the day or at bedtime."

*Question 2. When do you think is the right age to start reading to your child?*

Two mothers said that ideally children should be read to before they are even born; while their mothers are pregnant with them. 4 mothers said parent should start reading to children when they are first born, as babies. One mother said when the child is 6 months (when he/she can concentrate on a book she mentioned), one said when the child is one year old, two said when the child is two years old, one said from three-four years, and one mother said she was not sure.

*Question 3. To what extent would you describe a supermarket visit or a trip to the zoo as an educational experience to your child?*

All 12 mothers mentioned how they see supermarket visits and daily activities as learning opportunities for their children, one mother added that it depends on how skilful the parents are in making children benefit from such visits. One parent said: “I very much believe that life is a learning journey...from the moment we wake up until we go to bed. Every single daily activity is somehow a learning experience.”

*Question 4. What are different educational activities you do with your child?*

All 12 mothers mentioned that they spend time in activities with their children, such as: reading, pointing at new items and teaching them new words, doodling, drawing, coloring, singing rhymes, playing with puzzles, building blocks and Legos, cooking, and dancing.

*Question 5. How regularly do you read to your child?*

This was a multiple choice question that asked parents to choose whether they read to children: Daily, or 4-6 times per week, or 1-3 times per week, or 0 (not at all). 7 parents (58.3%) mentioned they read daily to their children, 2 parents (16.7%) mentioned they read 4-6 times per week to their children, 2 parents (16.7%) read 1-3 times per week to their children, and 1 parent (8.3%) mentioned she does not read at all to her child as demonstrated in figure 1 below.

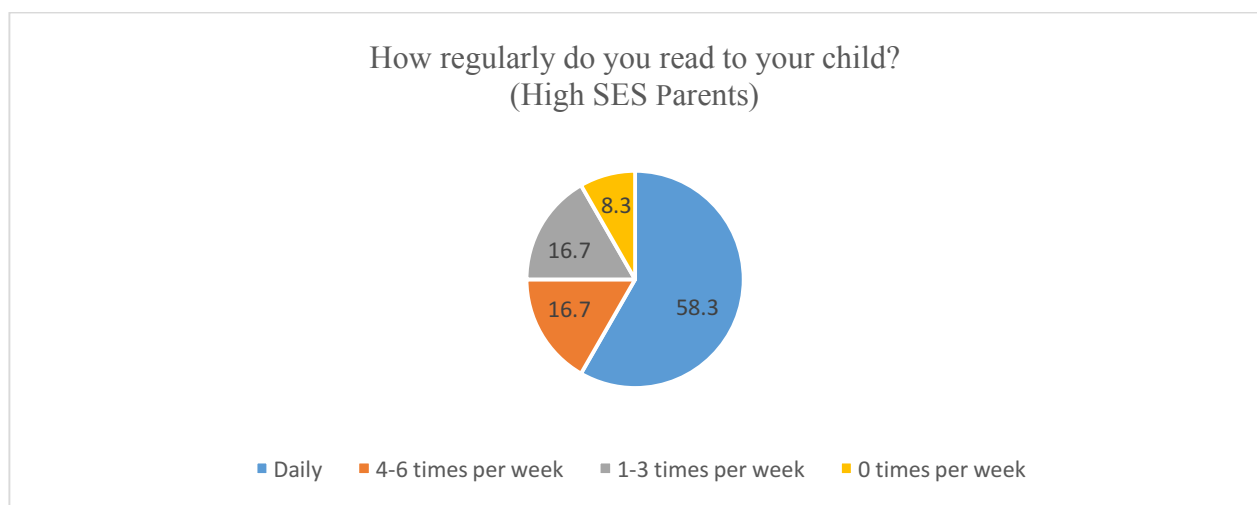


Figure 1



**Parents from low socioeconomic status:**

*Question 1. In your opinion, to what extent is reading to and with your child important and why?*

All 10 parents, those who could read and those who could not, agreed that reading to children is important. One of the parents who knew how to read mentioned that “any kind of activity the child engages in, enhances his abilities.” Yet, most of the parents replied by only saying “because reading is very important” when asked why and 3 parents mentioned “getting hired” as reasons for reading to children. One parent who did not know how to read said “of course reading to children is important, so they don't grow up like us not knowing anything and not even knowing how to read signs on the road.” Another parent who received no education said “reading is the most important thing in the world, it is a weapon in your hand.”

*Question 2. When do you think is the right age to start reading to your child? (In case participants did not read: When do you think is the right age children should be read to?)*

One non-reading parent said that the “earliest the best” when asked about the right age children should be read to. Three parents said when children are two years old, three parents said from 3-4, two parents said from 4 years old, and one parent said starting six years old (which is the school entry age).

*Question 3. To what extent would you describe a supermarket visit or a trip to the zoo as an educational experience to your child?*

Seven parents mentioned that supermarket and zoo visits could teach their children, they mentioned their children could learn “types of goods,” “types of food,” “point at goods and say their names,” and two parents mentioned their children learn when they see good in a supermarket or animals in the zoo and later see their pictures in books. Three parents made different comments, one of the mothers saying she does not take her child to the supermarket because she “makes trouble,” one parent said she thinks her child is “too young to benefit.” One mother said her child benefits when he recognizes pictures on goods and added “I don't necessarily go with him to the

supermarket, I sometimes leave him go by himself, he likes to work and get the grocery for the residents in the building.”

*Question 4. What are different educational activities you do with your child?*

The 10 parents mentioned they engage in different activities that teach their children. Only one of the educated parents mentioned she read to her child. All ten parents (including the two non-reading fathers) mentioned “drawing, coloring, and scribbling” as activities they do with their children. Three parents mentioned they watch cartoons with their children. The four parents who had full or some schooling mentioned they sing to their children the alphabets and numbers and scribble them on paper with their children. On the other hand one mother who never went to school said “I wish I could teach my child the alphabets and sing with her but I do not know how.”

*Question 5. How regularly do you read to your child?*

Two of the parents who received education (the one who received a B.A. and one of the mothers with the diplomas) mentioned that they read to their children 1-3 times per week. The other two mothers who could read mentioned they did not read at all to their children (0). Of course, the other six parents who did not receive education and do not know how to read also read to their children zero (0) times per week, as illustrated in figure 2 below.

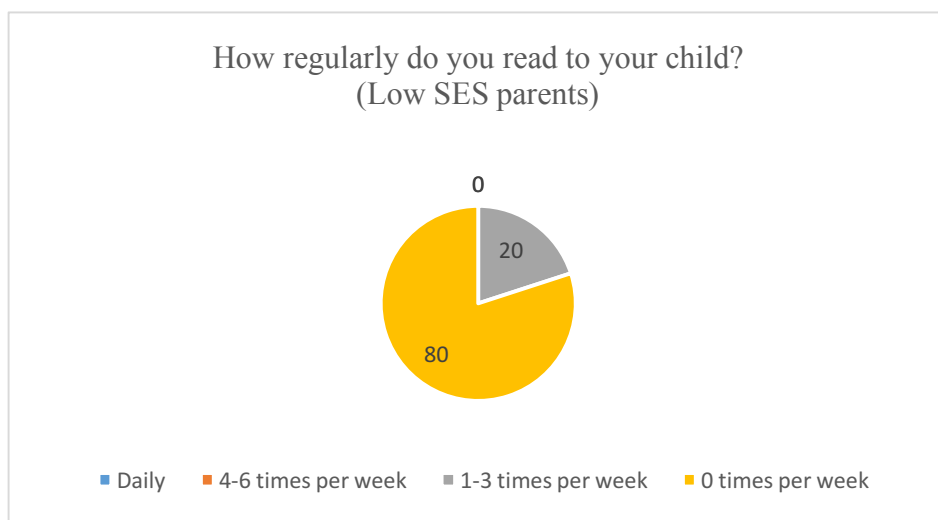


Figure 2

#### 4. Willingness to participate:

Parents' willingness to participate was based on asking them to what extent they would like to be involved in certain activities with their children. The questions were close-ended scale questions with options being: Definitely Not Willing, probably not willing, sure, not willing, and probably willing (With "sure" being the most indicative choice of willingness to participate and "definitely not willing" as the least). The following were the points to measure the parents' willingness to get involved in children's education and literacy development.

##### **Parents from high socioeconomic status:**

- A. Attend workshops to help me understand my child's individual style of learning: 10 mothers said "sure" while 2 mothers said "probably willing."
- B. Attend parent reading workshops: 8 mothers said "sure," 2 mothers said "probably willing," 1 mother said "probably not willing," and 1 mother said "not willing."
- C. Provide a suitable place for my child to rest, think, read, and play: 11 mothers said "sure" while 1 mother said "probably willing."
- D. Let child participate in community and pre-school reading programs: 9 mothers said "sure" while 3 mothers said "probably willing."
- E. Read aloud to child every day: 11 mothers said "sure" while 1 mother said "probably willing."
- F. Attend parent-teacher meetings and conferences regularly: 11 mothers said "sure" while 1 mother said "probably willing."
- G. Broaden child's background of experiences (for example: take child on field trips, vacations, public library...etc.): 11 mothers said "sure" while 1 mother said "probably willing."

- H. Buy books and other educational materials for child to use at home: 11 mothers said “sure” while 1 mother said “probably willing.”
- I. Find out about child’s reading progress: 10 mothers said “sure” while 2 mothers said “probably willing.”
- J. Spend time in joint-writing and drawing activities with my child: 9 mothers said “sure,” 2 mothers said “probably willing,” while 1 mother said “probably not willing.”
- K. Provide children with a collection of books selected with their interests in mind: 11 mothers said “sure” while 1 mother said “probably willing.”
- L. Provide my child with membership in public libraries: 6 mothers said “sure,” 5 mothers said “probably willing,” and 1 mother said “probably not willing.” In the comments section below this subsection of the questionnaire, two mothers mentioned that they don't find that public libraries in Egypt are of adequate standards and one of these mothers added “I prefer that my child chose the book that suits his interest more and read it at home.”
- M. Let my child read to me at home: 11 mothers said “sure” and 1 mother said “probably willing.”

**Parents from low socioeconomic status:**

- A. Attend workshops to help me understand my child’s individual style of learning: 4 parents (3 mothers and 1 father) said “sure,” with one of them (the mother with the B.A.) elaborating “such workshop will be beneficial not only for my child’s development, but for me as well.” The 6 other parents said “probably willing” depending on the convenience of the program when it comes to place and time and given that the program is for free.
- B. Attend parent reading workshops/literacy programs: In this element, “literacy programs” were added to see how willing parents to attend programs to teach them themselves how to read and write in addition to regular parent reading workshops. 5 parents (4 mothers and 1 father) said

“sure” they would love to join literacy programs and parent reading workshops, yet the father added “given that the time and place and suitable to my work conditions and the building residents agree he leaves the building for sometime to attend the classes). 3 parents (2 mothers and 1 father) said they are “probably willing,” two of them (1 mother and 1 father) mentioned that their willingness is also dependent on the convenience of place and time. Moreover the third of these three parents said “I am probably willing to attend the literacy workshops, I used to attend them before but had to drop out as before getting married I had to work and provide for my family. Now, going to these lessons depends on my husband agreeing I attend, I asked him before and he said he will teach me at home instead (he reads slightly), yet he comes home from work very late and has no time to teach me.” The last 2 parents (2 mothers) said they were “probably not willing,” with one of them (a non-reader) reasoning “I feel old for learning and attending workshops, I also have to care for my other infant daughter so attending classes will not be convenient for my case.”

- C. Provide a suitable place for my child to rest, think, read, and play. 7 parents said “sure” with three of them commenting that they have a problem of “limited space” given that these doormen live with their families in just one room at the ground floor of large residence buildings. The 3 other parents said “probably willing” also the three of them referring back to the limited space with one of them commenting, “what I can do is set a table for my child in the building’s garage area because our room is too small.”
- D. Let child participate in community and pre-school reading programs: 9 parents said “sure” and 1 parent said “probably willing.”
- E. Read aloud to child every day. 9 parents (3 who read and 6 non-readers) said sure, with one of them (a father) commenting “if I learn to read I will read not only to my child but to children around the neighborhood as well. If I have knowledge I have to pass it on.” 1 parent (who

reads) said she was “probably willing” to read to her child daily based on the amount of housework she has.

- F. Attend parent-teacher meetings and conferences regularly. All 10 parents said “sure” with one parent commenting “I have to know everything about my child’s development so if my child’s kindergarten asks for a meeting I will go for sure.”
- G. Broaden child’s background of experiences (for example: take child on field trips, vacations, public library...etc.): All 10 parents said they are “sure” willing to go with their children on field trips and vacations they can learn from, yet they all mentioned they cannot afford to do so. “We only go occasionally in national and Eid holidays” one parent said.
- H. Buy books and other educational materials for child to use at home: 8 parents said “sure” they are willing to buy the materials their children need at home, yet four of them expressed the concern of the materials’ prices, “I can only get my child blank copybooks and pens” one parent said. 2 parents said they were “probably not willing” to buy books and educational materials for their children, one of them said it was because her daughter still does not know how to read so she does not want to pay money in books. The other parents said “I am probably not willing to buy stories for my child, I do not where to get them. Instead I read stories in the house where I clean in one of the resident’s apartments and I go back and tell these stories to my children.”
- I. Find out about child’s reading progress: All 10 parents said “sure.”
- J. Spend time in joint-writing and drawing activities with my child: All 10 parents said “sure” and one mother added “may be my child will be an artist one day.”
- K. Provide children with a collection of books selected with their interests in mind: 8 parents said “sure” and one of them added “of course if I can afford to get my child books, I will let him choose. I let him choose his own clothes.” The other two parents, the same who were probably

not willing to buy books and educational materials for their children said they were “probably not willing” to get them books with their interests in mind.

- L. Provide my child with membership in public libraries: All 10 parents said “sure” in case the libraries were free of charge, one parent added “it also has to be close to where we live, but we don't have any public libraries here because we live in a poor neighborhood.”
- M. Let my child read to me at home: All 10 parents said “sure,” and one mother added “I already listen to my child describing pictures from books to me.”

### 5. Parents' Capabilities

This section was added because parents' awareness and willingness are not enough if parents are not capable of being involved in actively developing their children's literacy skills. Hence this section asked parents to rate their abilities in doing certain activities with their children. The questions were close-ended scale questions from 1 to 5; with 1 being incapable and 5 being very capable. The elements were:

- A. Reading to my child: 6 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 3 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), and 3 parents rated themselves as even less capable (3).
- B. Helping child understand words in stories: 6 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 4 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), and 2 parents rated themselves as even less capable (3).
- C. Listening to and talking about stories with my child: 7 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 4 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), and 1 parent rated herself as even less capable (3).
- D. Helping my child write a story: 3 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 3 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), 2 parents rated herself as even less capable (3), 1 parent

rated herself as only slightly capable (2), and 3 parents said they were incapable of writing stories with their children (1).

- E. Helping a child to identify words in different places (e.g. on cereal boxes or in dictionaries): 4 parents rated themselves as very capable (5) while the majority of 8 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4).
- F. Finding out about my child's reading progress: 6 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 3 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), and 3 parents rated themselves as even less capable (3).
- G. Teaching my child basics of how to use resources (dictionaries, atlas, etc.): 5 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 1 parent rated herself as a little less capable (4), 4 parents rated themselves as even less capable (3), 1 parent rated herself as slightly capable (2), and 1 parent said she was incapable (1).
- H. Providing books and magazines for the child to read: 7 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 3 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), and 2 parents rated themselves as even less capable (3).
- I. Showing a positive attitude toward reading: 8 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 3 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), and 1 mother rated herself as even less capable (3).
- J. Providing experience (such as visits to museums and other field trips): 7 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 3 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), 1 parents rated herself as even less capable (3), and 1 parent rated herself as only slightly capable (2).



K. Work on joint-writing and drawings activities with my child: 8 parents rated themselves as very capable (5), 2 parents rated themselves as a little less capable (4), 1 parents rated herself as even less capable (3), and 1 parent rated herself as only incapable (1).

After the close-ended questions there was a comments section where parents were asked: *How would you generally comment on your capabilities to help your child read?*

In answer to this question, four mothers said they saw themselves as very capable and two mothers said they were “good” and “ok.” On the other hand some mothers had different opinions, one mentioned that she wishes she could do better, another mentioned her capabilities need to improve, a third mentioned she was doing her best yet not sure if it was good enough for her child. One of the mothers commented saying “maybe if I learn I might be able to offer more” elaborating that when she tries to teach or explain something to her child and he does not understand it she gets stressed and stops.

#### **Parents from low socioeconomic status:**

Even though the elements from A until K were translated into Arabic and attempted to be asked to the participants from low SES, the researcher found that 6 of the parents could not read or write in the first place and that two of the four parents who know how to read did not read to their children before and read to them zero times a week. Hence, it was of no use to ask about their capabilities: reading to their child (A), helping child understand words in stories (B), helping child write a story (D), helping child identify words in different places (e.g. on cereal boxes or in dictionaries) (E), and teaching child basics of how to use resources (dictionaries, atlas, etc.) (G). As for point (K) “Work on joint-writing and drawings activities with my child” the eight parents do not know how to write but earlier expressed their interest in drawing and coloring activities with their children. When it comes to point (C) the researcher asked parents whether they can “listen and talk about stories with their children” and they all said they are very capable (5). Moving to point (F) all parents said they can “find about children’s progress” from talking to teachers and attending school

meetings (5=very capable). The researcher did not repeat asking about point (H) about providing books and magazines for children and point (J) about providing experience (such as visits to museums and other field trips) because parents in the willingness part already linked their willingness with their capability of affording to go on such events. Finally, when it comes to point (I), showing positive attitudes towards reading, all parents mentioned they were very capable (5) of encouraging their children to read, learn and continue their education.

The researcher, with parents from low SES, focused more on the open-ended question that asked: *How would you generally comment on your capabilities to help your child read?*

In answer to this question, the 6 non-reading parents reflected on how their illiteracy hinders their involvement and makes them incapable of reading to their children and being on track with their children's development in kindergarten. Two of these parents said all they can do is scribble with their children. One parent said "I can only help them memorize Quran that I learnt in the kottab, but I can't read or write so I am not involved in my child's development in kindergarten nor her siblings school development." Another mother said "I try to do what I can, if they ask for something I try as much as I can to get it me and their father, I want to see them become something." In addition, a father said "I will do anything to help my son become something not like myself. I will try to provide him with what he needs to continue and go to school." As for the four parents who could read one of them said "I know how to read but I never tried reading to my son, I never thought of the idea, so I don't know how capable I would be." Two of these mothers expressed how they know how to read yet are not capable of reading to their children because one of them finds it hard to grab her child's attention and thinks she does not want to respond to her, and the other expressed she could benefit from a workshop because she felt embarrassed when her son once corrected her. Finally, the mother with the B.A. said "I did not learn how to deal or help my child learn so I have a problem that I sometimes lose my temper, I need to listen to others' experiences and learn from workshops on how to deal with my son."

## 6. Views about involvement in terms of gender

This section aimed to discover whether Egyptian mothers or fathers are more involved in their children's literacy development and what are the parents' views on whether it is gender-related and why. The questions this section asked were open-ended and were: 1. Who spends more time engaging in educational activities with the child? 2. Do you think early childhood literacy development is the responsibility of one parent more than the other? If yes, then whom and why? 3. What do you think of the fact that in general mothers are more involved in children's literacy development than fathers?

### **Parents from high socioeconomic status:**

*Question 1. Who spends more time engaging in educational activities with the child?*

9 of the mothers mentioned that they are the ones who spend most of the time engaging in educational activities with the children, 2 mothers mentioned that their involvement was equal to that of their husbands, and 1 mother mentioned it was neither her nor the father but rather her child's kindergarten spent the largest chunk of time doing educational activities with her child.

*Question 2. Do you think early childhood literacy development is the responsibility of one parent more than the other? If yes, then whom and why?*

10 of the mothers believed that developing a child's early literacy development is the role of both parents, while two mothers mentioned that it was more of the mother's role (yet one of these two mothers stressed on how as a mother she needs to be supported by her partner in their children's development).

*Question 3. What do you think of the fact that in general mothers are more involved in children's literacy development than fathers?*

All 12 mothers agreed that mothers are more involved in children's literacy development, and some mentioned that mothers are generally more involved in other children's developmental aspects and not just literacy. Moreover, while two mothers in their comments excused the fathers for having busier work schedules, a mother mentioned that mothers being more involved is a "community inherited cultural idea" that is "so wrong." One mother also said "I think it is unfair for the mother solely to bear this huge responsibility. Fathers need to dedicate more time to their child's literacy development, as it will give the child a chance for an enriched learning experience from both the father and mother."

**Parents from low socioeconomic status:**

*Question 1. Who spends more time engaging in educational activities with the child?*

9 parents (7 mothers and 2 fathers) mentioned that the mother engages more in educational activities with the children. 1 mother mentioned that her husband engaged more in their children's school work because unlike her, he knew slightly how to read.

*Question 2. Do you think early childhood literacy development is the responsibility of one parent more than the other? If yes, then whom and why?*

9 parents (8 mothers and 1 father) mentioned that being involved in children's early literacy is "of course" the mother's duty more than it is a father's duty. The 8 mothers' common reason was that the father had to work and provide for the family while the mother stayed at home to care for the children. One mother said "I stay with the children while my husband works, but he shares in his children's upbringing as well, at least on his day off from work he spends time with them." The father in the previously mentioned 9 parents segment said: "mothers should be more involved with their children in general because the father is always busy working, I won't stay here with the girls

and let their mother go work, it's my job to work while she cares for the children." 1 father, on the other hand, mentioned that fathers should be more responsible than mothers, yet when asked "why" he thought so he said "because the father should be the one to go to the school for meetings, the mother should stay at home, and the father also should be the one to look for teachers to give his children private classes." This father later expressed how he pays for his older child in grade one 80 pounds for private classes, which he found as a burden.

*Question 3. What do you think of the fact that in general mothers are more involved in children's literacy development than fathers?*

The ten parents agreed that this is the case, that mothers are generally more involved. One mother said "it is the mother's duty to do everything for her child." Another mother said, "mothers generally care more about their children's future." A third mother, one of the mothers who could read and had a diploma, said "we as mothers have no chance to work, the father is the one who works and consequently the mother stays at home and cares for children."

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This section analyses the responses of Egyptian parents through comparing views of parents from high and low socioeconomic levels in light of the literature review.

### **1. KG STANDING:**

From the findings listed above it is clear that enrolment rates in preschools/kindergartens are high in both socioeconomic classes (around 83% in high SES and 80% in low SES). Yet, while in the higher socioeconomic class the two parents who had not enrolled their children in preschools/kindergartens did that based on their own preferences, while the two parents in the low SES who had not enrolled their children wanted to yet could not afford. Hence Krafft's (2015) argument that cost could be an entry barrier to several parents is true. It is vital here to mention also

that parents from low SES who took the questionnaire all lived in Cairo and are not considered the “poorest” in comparison to the large populations who live in slum areas and remote cities.

Data showed that public kindergartens in which the participants’ children were enrolled do not offer any workshops to parents; whether general ones that teach them basic skills to get involved or specific skills to enhance their children’s early literacy development. On the other hand, parents of children from high SES had an advantage of their children’s preschools/kindergarten’s offering different kinds of workshops, some general about children’s development and health, and others specific to literacy development and how parents can directly get involved in developing their children’s literacy skills. While parents from the two socioeconomic levels need to be offered workshops in general and targeting specifically literacy, the researcher believes parents from low SES, especially those who are illiterate need these workshops even more. The reason is that parents from high SES can search the internet, read researches probably in at least two languages (notice how the participants from high SES level are Egyptian Arabs who took the questionnaire in English, and how one received her degree from Paris), can have access to more information and probably have high research skills (since all received B.A. degrees and several are working on their master’s degrees). Yet, in contrast, parents from low SES especially those who do not read will not have these advantages and hence are in more need of the direct assistance from their children’s preschools/kindergartens because as preciously noted by Lautenschlager & Hertz (1984) and by Quisenberry et. al (1977) parents could be true assets in developing their children’s literacy when they receive workshops and programs that teach them how to do so.

A final factor to analyze in the KG standing section is the quality offered by public and private schools, as shows through the parents’ comments in the open ended question. The answers of parents from high and low SES show the gap that exists between quality offered in public preschools/kindergartens in comparison to private ones. Parents from high SES and who enrolled their children in private preschools/kindergartens mentioned elements such as “cognitive

development,” “emotional development,” “physical development and motor skills,” and “care for children’s hygiene” as positive aspects in their children’s preschools/kindergartens. While parents from low SES mentioned “good education,” “Quran lessons,” “cleanliness,” and “taking the children to the toilet” as positive aspects in their children’s preschools/kindergartens. Here it appears that parents from high SES mention more core educational aspects as positive elements in their children’s preschools/kindergartens as opposed to positive elements expressed by parents from low SES that revolved more around providing “care” which was previously discussed as expressed in the 2015 World Bank report that stated how Egyptian public preschool and kindergarten facilities are usually more teacher-centered and focus on care more than education.

## **2. AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT:**

Answers to the first question that asked parents of their opinions about the extent to which reading to and with their children is important and why show that parents from high SES and low SES are both aware of the importance of early literacy development, yet based on different reasons and backgrounds. All 12 parents from high SES said reading to children is important and in their reasoning they were very specific in highlighting why reading to their children is essential, it shows as the reasons included “enhancing children’s phonemic awareness,” “broadening their vocabulary,” and “building their interest in reading” which are all valid very specific reasons mentioned by famous authors such as Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998). In contrast, all 10 parents from low SES who all believed reading to children is important, when asked why, mentioned very broad answers such as “getting hired,” “any kind of activity the child engages in, enhances his abilities,” in addition to several parents reflecting on themselves saying that they want better lives for their children and they saw reading as a means for a better life. Hence, as the 2005 World Bank report mentioned, even poor families are aware of the importance of early childhood education in general. Yet, while the awareness of parents from high SES stem from “knowing” how reading enhanced their children’s early literacy skills, the awareness of parents from low SES stems from despising “not knowing” how to read or write themselves, wanting better better futures for their

sons and daughters, and viewing education as a means for bringing jobs and uplifting socioeconomic levels.

Moving on to “awareness put in action” as whether parents reflect their awareness of the importance of reading to their children in doing so, answers from questions four and five show that generally parents from high SES are more involved in reading to their children while parents from both SES engage in activities with their children. Question 4 that asked about the different educational activities parents engage in and showed how parents from both SES levels take part in singing, drawing, and playing with children. It is true that parents from high SES levels mentioned more types of enriching activities such as Legos, puzzles, building blocks, and singing rhymes. Yet, even parents who did not read or write from low SES mentioned they seek to get involved with their children as much as they could through drawing, coloring, and scribbling. Hence, both socioeconomic levels are involved in terms of activities, with high SES parental involvement in activities being more enriching. As for question five, as previously demonstrated in graphs (A and B), it is clear how parents from high SES read to their children significantly more than parents from low SES. This is close to Heath’s (1982) study which previously detailed how parents from Trackton read to their children on few occasions while parents from close richer neighborhoods in Maintown and Roadville read more frequently to their children. Yet, despite the similarity, the Egyptian context is very different because while American Trackton parents knew how to read, 6 of the 10 low SES parents did not have basic literacy skills themselves.

### **3. WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE:**

The literature supported the notion that parents want to be involved in their children’s education (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Goodall et. al., 2011; Mavrogenes, 1990; & Newland et. al., 2011). This section looked at Egyptians’ levels of willingness to be involved in their children’s literacy and general educational development and found that to a large extent willingness levels of parents from high and low socioeconomic levels are similar. Yet, there is one important point to



note. Willingness patterns of parents from high SES were highly influenced by their own will, for example how two parents were less willing to provide their children with memberships to public libraries because they believed public libraries were not of suitable adequate levels. While willingness patterns of parents from low SES levels were driven by their ability to finance some activities and elements. For example, all the 10 parents said they were “sure” willing to provide their children with public library memberships “if” they were free of charge. Also, many parents from low SES said their willingness to provide their children with books and materials and take them to trips (such as zoo or museums) depended on their financial state and as mentioned one mother even said she read stories at the house she works as a maid and later tells them to her daughter. This example reflects back on the positive reading environment Teale (1978) had discussed; as argued a positive environment should have availability of print materials and books. Hence, from the previous example and answers of high and low SES parents concerning the point of willingness to provide books and other educational materials at home, it is clear how high SES homes in Egypt are at more advantage in providing more positive literacy environments for their children. This finding is similar to the study previously mentioned by Payne et. al. in 1994 and which also found how low-income families in the United States had less literacy-rich environments than their middle income and high income counterparts (Dove et. al., 2015).

#### **4. CAPABILITIES OF PARENTS**

This section shows the clear large gap between the capabilities of parents from high SES and parents from low SES. Without going into the details of each element that aimed to test parents' perceptions of their capabilities, this mere fact depicts the gap: all parents from high SES can get involved with their children through reading and writing activities, while 60% of parents from low SES do not even know how to read or write themselves and 20% of the remaining 40% of parents from low SES who know how to read and write never tried to read or write with their children and hence could not rate the levels of their involvement capabilities.

In the open ended question that asked parents “How would you generally comment on your capabilities to help your child read?” parents from high SES mentioned barriers to their capabilities such as not knowing if what she was doing was good enough for her child and stress felt when trying to explain concepts. On the other hand, some illiterate parents from low SES mentioned that they were incapable of being involved except through scribbling and drawing and parents who knew how to read mentioned they were not sure of how capable they are or expressed problems such as not knowing how to engage the child. While the literature discussed the importance of carrying out different activities such as singing, playing, drawing, and scribbling (Meyer, 1944; The Center for the Study of Reading, 1985; Wahl, 1988; Mavrogenes, 1990; Aram et. al., 2013; Dove et. al., 2015), the literature highlighted the value of joint-writing activities (Bindman, 2014 and Skibbe et. al., 2013), and stressed on how reading to children is the most important activity to enhance children’s early literacy skills and development (Newland et. al., 2011; Ninio, 1983; Vukelich, 1984; Teale, 1981). This is why parents’ capabilities are very important to look at and later tackle; for the large impacts they could have on children’s literacy development.

Tackling problems such as parents’ capabilities is very important because it affects parents’ involvement in their children’s literacy and general educational development as discussed in literature by Mavrogenes (1990) and Newland et. al. (2011). The literature also referred to the significant study mentioned by Goodall (2011) and which discussed how a survey found that 29% of parents found their limited capabilities as barriers to getting involved with their children’s educational development. Perhaps this shows in the awareness analysis that preceded, while 100% of parents from low SES were aware of the importance of reading to their children, only 20% of them did and not on a regular basis. Reasons were that 60% of them could not read. Yet, problems faced by parents from high SES remain easier to tackle through workshops (perhaps some could be short-term ones), while parents from low SES need long-term workshops and literacy programs that teach them themselves first in order to later teach their children (and in the willingness section that

preceded 50% of the parents mentioned they would “sure” join literacy programs given convenience in terms of money, place and time).

## **5. VIEWS ABOUT INVOLVEMENT IN TERMS OF GENDER**

This section was formed in response to the literature proving that it is important for both parents to be involved in enhancing their children’s early literacy as discussed by Stafford (1934) and Mendoza (1985). The current study found that in both parents from high SES and parents from low SES the rates of mothers’ involvement in engaging with children in educational activities were significantly higher than men’s. In high SES, 75% of parents said they were more involved as mothers, while 90% of the parents from low SES mentioned mothers in their cases were more involved. Yet, the striking difference between the two socioeconomic levels were their views on gender roles and how the responsibility of developing children’s education and literacy should be divided among mothers and fathers. While 83.3% of mothers in high SES believed children’s literacy development is the responsibility of both parents, 90% of parents in low SES believed it was “of course” the role of mothers. Understanding the reasons could be by viewing the comments of parents from low SES who reasoned their belief on the notion that men are the ones who work to support the family and women in turn stay at home. On the other hand, women from high SES mentioned comments such as the culture unjustly assuming the role of children’s development to mothers, how unfair it is for the mother solely to bear the responsibility of developing children’s literacy and educational skills, and how fathers need to spend more time enhancing their children’s literacy. Two conclusions arise from these results, the first is that as Mendoza (1985) had suggested, fathers in particular need to be encouraged and directly invited to participate in their children’s literacy development. The second conclusion is that mothers themselves (especially those from low SES) need to be aware of the importance of their husbands’ encouraging their children to enjoy reading and to have a role in developing their literacy skills.

## Conclusion of study

The study aimed at answering the following research question with its sub questions:

To what extent are Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels involved in their children's early literacy development? How is preschool/KG standing in terms of enrollment and quality? To what extent are they aware of the importance of their involvement to develop their children's early literacy skills? How willing are they to get involved in their children's early literacy development? How capable are they in developing their children's early literacy skills? And what are their views on parental involvement in early childhood literacy and education in general in terms of gender?

As the findings showed and was discussed in the discussion section, the Egyptian parents from high and low socioeconomic levels who participated in the study had high rates of children enrollment in preschools/kindergartens yet it was clear that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds find the enrollment fees to be barriers hindering their choice of enrolling their children in preprimary education. In addition, from the parents' comments on the reasons behind their satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels from their children's preschools/kindergartens, it was clear that there is an existing large gap in the quality of public and private preschools/kindergartens.

Both socioeconomic levels had high awareness levels of the importance of reading starting the early years yet based on different kinds of awareness as argued in the discussions section. Also, while both parents from high and low SES had high willingness to get involved in enhancing their children's literacy development, the study showed the huge gap that exists between capabilities of parents from high SES that were relatively high and parents from low SES who mostly lacked basic literacy skills themselves.

As for the parental involvement in terms of gender, even though the realities of high and low SES families are the same; where mothers are more involved, parents from high SES were more aware of the importance of involving fathers in early literacy and children's general educational development while parents from low SES mostly viewed the mother as the one responsible for

children's educational development while the father's role was defined by them in terms of work and financing the house.

In conclusion, and going back to the main question of "To what extent are Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels involved in their children's early literacy development?" the study found that despite both parents' from high and low SES awareness and willingness to be involved in developing their children's early literacy, parents from high SES were more involved with their children due to several factors including their more well-rounded capabilities.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

### Conclusion

This paper was built in response to the problems stated in the beginning; scarcity of data about early education and especially early literacy development in the MENA region and Egypt (Krafft, 2015), limited preschool and kindergarten enrollment rates in Egypt (MOE; 2014; CAPMAS, 2014), and scarcity of information about involvement patterns of Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels in their children's early literacy development (Krafft, 2015). In response to these questions, the research questions were formed and aimed at discovering three areas through a review of literature to aid the study and fieldwork construction and implementation when examining Egyptian experiences. The first area was about early childhood education, there was a need to first understand the kinds of literacy skills children can gain in the early years and which later translate into conventional reading. Work done by researchers such as Teale (1981), Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998), Lonigan et. al. (2000), Skibbe et. al. (2013), Fluery et. al. (2014), Dove et. al. (2015), and others as previously mentioned demonstrated the importance of engaging children with print, directly teaching them literacy skills through different methods, and creating a positive literacy environment for children starting the early years. This section was important because it showed the importance of parents being aware of how essential literacy development is in the early years, which was one of the elements later examined through the questionnaire.

After understanding concepts of emergent literacy, it was vital to understand the second area which consisted of theoretical frameworks about parental involvement in addition to practical ways parents can get involved as detailed by authors such as Hindman et. al. (2013), Morrow et. al. (1990), Aram and Levin (2010), Newland et. al. (2011), Goodall et. al. (2011), Ninio (1983), Philips & McNaughton (1990), and others. This section was particularly important for knowing what the literature says about the significance of parents' willingness to participate and how their capabilities are important factors that define the on-ground level of participation in different kinds of activities and later using that to reflect on the Egyptian experiences.

The third area that was important to discover before setting on doing the study is the different programs that exist and that seek to directly involve parents' in their children's early literacy development as detailed by Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000), Crosby et. al. (2015), Edwards (1995), Quisenberry et. al. (1977), and others. This section was vital to include for three reasons; the first reason was to generally learn about international experiences that involve parents, the second reason is to compare whether in Egypt there were similar programs (as parents later asked in the questionnaire whether their children's preschools/kindergartens offer programs for parents), and finally because to question whether these programs could be implemented in the Egyptian context (as will be later discussed more in the limitations and recommendations section). Hence, the paper delved into these three areas that were essential backgrounds that aided in conducting the study in the Egyptian context and analyzing the data findings. Finally, the study filled several gaps and reached important findings as previously discussed, yet it had some limitations discussed below.

### Limitations & Recommendations

This research has four main limitations that were due to time frame, type of research design and other factors. The first limitation is the small number of participants (Total 22; 12 from high SES and 10 from low SES). This study aimed at discovering preliminary in-depth data to understand the core of Egyptian experiences and involvement patterns in children's early literacy development, which required open ended questions and qualitative method analysis. Even though the questionnaire included close-ended questions which generated data to be analyzed quantitatively, the core of the research was the qualitative in-depth information that focus on views, perceptions, and experiences of Egyptian parents from different socioeconomic levels rather than collecting large in number generalizable data. Hence, due to the kind of research design, in addition to the limited time frame, the questionnaire included few numbers of participants in order to allow for larger space to the in-depth open-ended questions to analyze qualitatively.

The second limitation is the use of only one tool; the questionnaire. This was due to the little time frame of this research, yet it would have been an addition to add more tools such as focus groups. What was intriguing is that one of the parents of the high SES who took the online questionnaire wrote in the comments section at the end "I would like to be part of a focus group." Hence, one of the recommendations for future research is to use more tools to hear more from parents from different socioeconomic levels, whether focus groups, interviews, observations, or other tools.

The third limitation is that the participants in this study all live in the same city (Cairo), which is not necessarily representative of the remaining 27 cities especially in the field of early childhood education which is very under-researched. Hence, for further research, it is advisable to look at parental involvement patterns in other governorates in addition to remote areas beside Cairo.

The fourth limitation is also related to the sample's demographics and it is how this research only covers two extremes of parents' from "high" socioeconomic levels and parents from "low" socioeconomic levels. This was due to the limited time of the research and for further research, it is

important to look at parental involvement patterns in the middle class and it would also be an addition to hear experiences of impoverished parents who live in slum areas and parents who do not plan to enroll their children in any kind of schooling.

Hence, recommendations for further research include avoiding the past three limitations through including more numbers of participants, using more tools that combine both qualitative and quantitative data, and reaching parents from different governorates and more socioeconomic levels. In addition, a final recommendation would be adopting one of the programs as reviewed in the literature and testing parent's willingness to participate and implement the program at home with their children and their capabilities would affect the levels of their involvements. For example, a program such as Fast Start (FS) had in significant results in terms of children's early literacy development and consumed only 15 minutes daily from parents (not counting the workshop in the beginning that taught them how to implement the program) and represented a mix of educational and fun type of involvement. Therefore, it would be interesting to practically test Egyptian parents' awareness, willingness to participate, capabilities, and also participation in light of parents' gender through practically involving them in a program; whether FS or something like Parents as Partners in Reading which also had significant and long-term results when it was expanded upon and continued by the parents' community.



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Appendix 1: Sample Distribution

<b>Parent Participants</b>			
	<b>High SES</b>	<b>Low SES</b>	
<b>Female</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Male</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>

## Appendix 2: English questionnaire

### Demographics

1. Are you Egyptian? Yes/No
2. Who is filling this questionnaire?
  - a. Mother
  - b. Father
  - c. Both parents
  - d. Guardian
  - e. Other (please specify)
3. What is your highest educational degree? (Please mention both the faculty and university)
4. What is your occupation?
5. What is your spouse's occupation?
6. How many children do you have? (Please mention their ages)
7. What type of school is your child enrolled at (or that you are intending to enroll your preschooler at?)
  - a. International
  - b. Private English
  - c. Governmental
  - d. I plan to home school
  - e. Other (please specify)

### Section 1: Preschool/KG standing

1. Is/was your child enrolled in a preschool/nursery?
2. Does your child's preschool/nursery/KG school offer workshops and programs to parents? If yes, then what are these programs about?



3. Does your child's preschool/nursery/KG school offer programs or workshops to help/teach you how to read to your child?
4. On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your child's preschool/nursery/KG school with 1 being unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied?
5. Please explain the reason(s) for the level of your satisfaction level.

Section 2: Parental Awareness Levels

1. In your opinion, to what extent is reading to and with your child important and why?
2. When do you think is the right age to start reading to your child?
3. What are different educational activities you do with your child?
4. To what extent would you describe a supermarket visit or a trip to the zoo as an educational experience to your child?
5. How regularly do you read to your child?
  - a. Daily
  - b. 4-6 times per week
  - c. 1-3 times per week
  - d. 0 times per week

Section 3: Parental Willingness in Participation

How willing are you as a parent to do each of the following:

Activities	Definitely Not Willing	Probably Not Willing	Sure	Not Willing	Probably Willing
Attend workshops to help me understand					

my child's individual style of learning					
Attend parent reading workshops					
Provide a suitable place for my child to rest, think, read, and play					
Let child participate in community and pre-school reading programs					
Read aloud to child every day					
Attend parent-teacher meetings and conferences regularly					
Broaden child's background of experiences (for example: take child on field trips, vacations, public library...etc.)					
Buy books and other educational materials for child to use at home					
Find out about child's reading progress					
Spend time in joint-writing and drawing activities with my child					
Provide children with a collection of books selected with their interests in mind					
Provide my child with membership in public libraries					
Let my child read to me at home					

Comments:

Section 4: Parents' Capabilities:

How capable do you feel in carrying out each of these activities with your child?

1. Reading to my child

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

2. Helping child understand words in stories

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

3. Listening to and talking about stories with my child

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

4. Talking about the main idea in a story or book

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

5. Helping my child write a story

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

6. Helping a child to identify words in different places (e.g. on cereal boxes or in dictionaries)

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

7. Finding out about my child's reading progress

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

8. Teaching my child basics of how to use resources (dictionaries, atlas, etc.)

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

9. Providing books and magazines for the child to read

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

10. Showing a positive attitude toward reading

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

11. Providing experience (such as visits to museums and other field trips)

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

12. Work on joint-writing and drawings activities with my child

(Incapable)      1            2            3            4            5            (Very Capable)

13. How would you generally comment on your capabilities to help your child read?

14. What are barriers that hinder your involvement with your child?

15. What are barriers that hinder your spouse's involvement with your child?

Section 5: Parental involvement patterns in light of gender

1. Who spends more time engaging in educational activities with the child?

- a. Mother
- b. Father
- c. Both
- d. Other (please specify)

2. Do you think early childhood literacy development is the responsibility of one parent more than the other? If yes, then whom and why?

3. What do you think of the fact that in general mothers are more involved in children's literacy development than fathers?

Comments:

Appendix 3: Arabic questionnaire

التركيبة السكانية:

١. هل انت مصري؟ نعم/لا

٢. من الذي يملأ هذا الاستطلاع؟

- أم

- أب

- كلا الوالدين

- ولي أمر

- آخر (رجاء التحديد)

٣. ما هي أعلى درجة علمية حصلت عليها؟ (رجاء ذكر الكلية والجامعة)

٤. ما هي وظيفتك؟

٥. ما هي وظيفة زوجك/زوجتك؟

٦. كم عدد الأطفال لديك؟ (رجاء ذكر أعمارهم)

٧. ما نوع المدرسة التي يذهب/سوف يذهب إليها طفلك؟

- دولي

- خاص انجليزي

- خاص عربي

- حكومي

- أنوي أن أعلم طفلي تعليم منزلي

- آخر (يرجي التحديد)

الجزء الأول: حول رياض الأطفال

١. هل أدخلت طفلك حضانة/رياض أطفال؟ نعم/لا
٢. هل توفر حضانة/روضة الأطفال التي يذهب إليها طفلك أي أنشطة أو برامج للوالدين؟ إذا كانت الاجابة بنعم، فما هي هذه البرامج وما هي موضوعاتها؟
٣. هل توفر حضانة/روضة الأطفال التي يذهب إليها طفلك برامج أو ورش عمل تعلمك كيفية القراءة لطفلك؟ نعم/لا
٤. علي نطاق من ١ إلي ٥، ما مدي رضائك عن الحضانة/روضة الأطفال التي يذهب إليها طفلك (١ تساوي غير راضي تماما و ٥ تساري راضي جدا)
٥. يرجى شرح أسباب مدي رضائك/عدم رضائك عن مستوي الحضانة/روضة الأطفال التي يذهب إليها طفلك.

الجزء الثاني: مستوي وعي الوالدين

١. في رأيك، إلي أي مدي القراءة لطفلك أو القراءة معه مهمة، ولماذا؟
٢. في رأيك، ما هو السن المناسب لبدء القراءة لطفلك؟
٣. ما هي الأنشطة التعليمية المختلفة التي تفعلها مع طفلك؟
٤. إلي أي مدي تصف زيارة إلي السوبرماركت أو رحلة إلي حديقة الحيوان كتجربة تعليمية لطفلك؟
٥. ما مدي قراءتك لطفلك؟
  - يوميا
  - من ٤ إلي ٦ مرات في الاسبوع
  - من مرة إلي ٣ مرات في الاسبوع
  - ٠ (لا أقرأ لطفلي)

الجزء الثالث: رغبة الوالدين في المشاركة

ما مدي استعدادك كوالد/والدة أن تفعل كل مما يلي:

الأنشطة	بالتأكيد لست علي استعداد	ربما لست علي استعداد	بالتأكيد	لست علي استعداد	ربما علي استعداد
حضور ورش عمل تساعدني علي فهم اسلوب طفلي الخاص للتعلم					
حضور ورش عمل لتعليم الوالدين طرق القراءة لأطفالهم					
توفير مكان مناسب لطفلي للراحة و التفكير و القراءة و اللعب					
أدع طفلي يشارك في برامج مجتمعية للقراءة					
القراءة لطفلي كل يوم					
حضور اجتماعات و مؤتمرات الآباء مع المعلمين					
توسيع خلفية طفلي من خلال الخبرات و الرحلات (مثل: رحلات ميدانية، اجازات، زيارات لمكتبة...الخ)					
شراء الكتب و المواد التعليمية للطفل كي يستخدمها في المنزل					
التعرف علي تقدم طفلي في القراءة					
قضاء الوقت في أنشطة مشتركة للكتابة و الرسم مع طفلي					
توفير لطفلي مجموعة من الكتب المختارة مع أخذ رغبته و اهتماماته في الاعتبار					
توفير لطفلي عضوية في مكتبة عامة					

					قضاء وقت في الاستماع لطفلي و هو يقرأ لي
--	--	--	--	--	---

تعليقات:

الجزء الرابع: قدرات الوالدين

١. القراءة لطفلي

(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٢. مساعدة طفلي علي فهم الكلمات في القصص
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٣. الاستماع و التحدث مع طفلي عن القصص
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٤. مناقشة الفكرة الرئيسية في قصة أو كتاب
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٥. مساعدة طفلي في كتابة قصة
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٦. مساعدة طفلي علي تحديد الكلمات في أماكن مختلفة (مثلا علي علبة طعام أو في قاموس)
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٧. معرفة مستوي تقدم طفلي في القراءة
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٨. تعليم طفلي أساسيات كيفية استخدام الموارد (مثل القواميس، أطلس، الخ)
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						٩. توفير الكتب و المجالات لطفلي للقراءة
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						١٠. إظهار توجه و سلوك إيجابي تجاه القراءة
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						١١. توفير خبرات مثل زيارات إلي متاحف أو أماكن تعليمية
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)
						١٢. العمل علي الأنشطة المشتركة في الكتابة و الرسم مع طفلي
(غير قادر)	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	(قادر جداً)

١٣. كيف تصف قدراتك علي مساعدة طفلك في القراءة؟



١٤. ما هي العوائق التي تحول بين مشاركتك مع طفلك؟

١٥. ما هي العوائق التي تحول دون مشاركة زوجك/زوجتك مع طفلك؟

الجزء الخامس: أنماط المشاركة في ضوء جنس الوالدين

١. من يقضي وقت أكثر في الانخراط في الأنشطة التعليمية مع الطفل؟

- الأم

- الأب

- كلاهما

- آخر (يرجى التحديد)

٢. هل تعتقد أن تطوير مهارات القراءة والكتابة في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة هي مسؤولية أحد الوالدين أكثر من الآخر؟ إذا كانت

الاجابة بنعم، فمن المسؤول بشكل أكبر ولماذا؟

٣. ما رأيك في حقيقة أن الأمهات أكثر انخراطا من الآباء في تطوير مهارات التعليم لأطفالهم؟

تعليقات:

Appendix 4: IRB Approval

CASE #2015-2016-121



To: Lojain Ibrahim  
Cc: Dena Riad & Salma Serry  
From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB  
Date: March 18 , 2016  
Re: Approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "Parental Involvement and Early Childhood Literacy: International Programs and Egyptian Experiences" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" heading. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Amr Salama. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Atta Gebril".

Dr. Atta Gebril  
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo  
2046 HUSS Building  
T: 02-26151919  
Email: [agebril@aucegypt.edu](mailto:agebril@aucegypt.edu)

Institutional Review Board  
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Appendix 5: CAPMAS Approval

جمهورية مصر العربية



الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء

قرار رئيس الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء  
بالتفويض

رقم ( ٢٤١٩ ) لسنة ٢٠١٦

في شأن قيام الباحثة / لجين تامر إبراهيم أحمد إبراهيم - المسجلة لدرجة الماجستير بكلية الدراسات العليا في التربية / الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة - بإجراء دراسة ميدانية بعنوان : ( تدخل الوالدين في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة ) .  
رئيس الجهاز

- بعد الإطلاع على القرار الجمهوري رقم ( ٢٩١٥ ) لسنة ١٩٦٤ بشأن إنشاء وتنظيم الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء .
- وعلى قرار رئيس الجهاز رقم ( ٢٣١ ) لسنة ١٩٦٨ في شأن إجراء الإحصاءات والتعدادات والاستفتاءات والاستقصاءات .
- وعلى قرار رئيس الجهاز رقم ( ١٣١٤ ) لسنة ٢٠٠٧ بشأن التفويض في بعض الاختصاصات .
- وعلى كتاب كلية الدراسات العليا في التربية / الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة - السوارد للجهاز في ٢٠١٦/٣/١٣

قرر

مادة ١: تقوم الباحثة / لجين تامر إبراهيم أحمد إبراهيم - المسجلة لدرجة الماجستير بكلية الدراسات العليا في التربية / الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة - بإجراء الدراسة الميدانية المشار إليها علنية .

مادة ٢: تجرى الدراسة على عينة حجمها (٣٦) ستة وثلاثون مفردة موزعة كالتالي:

- (٣٠) مفردة من الآباء والأمهات لأطفال من طبقات اجتماعية مختلفة .
- (٣) مفردات من السادة الناشرين لكتب الأطفال بدور النشر .
- (٣) مفردات من السادة الخبراء في الطفولة المبكرة بجامعة (القاهرة - الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة) .

وذلك بمحافظة القاهرة .  
مادة ٣: تجمع البيانات اللازمة لهذه الدراسة بموجب الاستمارات المعدة لذلك والمعتمدة كل صفحة منها بخاتم الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء وبياناتهما كالآتي:  
الاستمارة الأولى : خاصة بمقابلة الناشرين وعدد صفحاتها صفحة واحدة .  
الاستمارة الثانية : خاصة بمقابلة الآباء والأمهات وعدد صفحاتها صفحة واحدة .  
الاستمارة الثانية: خاصة بمقابلة الخبراء في مجال محو الأمية في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة وعدد صفحاتها صفحة واحدة .

مادة ٤: تقوم دور النشر المستهدفة وتحت إشراف إدارة الأمن بكل منها (بالنسبة لعينة الناشرين) وكذا تقوم جامعة ( القاهرة والجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة ) وتحت إشراف السادة أمناء عموم تلك الجامعات بتسيير إجراء هذه الدراسة الميدانية - مع مراعاة الضوابط الخاصة بتقييم درجة سرية البيانات والمعلومات المتداوله مسبقاً بمعرفة كل جهة طبقاً لما جاء بخطة الأمن بها .

مادة ٥: يراعى موافقة مفردات العينة - مع مراعاة سرية البيانات الفردية طبقاً لاحكام القانون رقم ٣٥ لسنة ١٩٦٠ والمعدل بالقانون رقم ٢٨ لسنة ١٩٨٢ وعدم استخدام البيانات التي يتم جمعها لأغراض أخرى غير أغراض هذه الدراسة .

مادة ٦: يجري العمل الميداني خلال ثلاثة أشهر من تاريخ صدور هذا القرار .

مادة ٧: يوافق الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء بنسخة من النتائج النهائية لهذه الدراسة .

مادة ٨: يلتزم الباحثة / لجين تامر إبراهيم أحمد إبراهيم بإبلاغ مديرية الأمن بمحافظة القاهرة بصورة من هذا القرار وقبل البدء في التنفيذ مرفقاً بها بيانات القائمين بالدراسة (الاسم - الرقم القومي - تاريخ بدء وانتهاء تنفيذ الدراسة بالمحافظة) .

مادة ٩: ينفذ هذا القرار من تاريخ صدوره  
صدر في: ٢٠١٦ / ٣ / ١٦

محمد معدوح محمد  
مدير الإدارة العامة للأمن

