

Enhancement of Reading Skills of Preschool Children through Parental Involvement in Family Literacy Program

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ABSTRACT

Families are the first teachers of students, and they remain essential to the learning skill throughout their child's school period. Family literacy means educative support of literacy towards parents and siblings. Family literacy has become an important topic for international educational discourse. Recognizing the pivotal role parents play in shaping early learning experiences, this paper presents the findings of family literacy reading program conducted in Pakistan on 15 families, each comprising at least one parent and preschool-aged children. Experimental research was conducted which involved two weeks' intervention during which parents received structured training in reading skills across three subjects English literacy, Urdu literacy, and Mathematics-related numeracy. Intervention was given in terms of family literacy reading program which was culturally relevant and applicable within the home environment. Pretest and posttest as part of reading intervention were developed and administered to assess modifications in parents' attitudes and practices associated with reading, as well as to observe literacy engagement of their children. Comparison between pre and posttest was made, and paired sample t-test results confirmed a statistically significant difference between scores of pre & post-interventions which indicated significant positive change in reading skills thus proving family literacy reading program. This research recommended the development and administration of diverse types of family literacy programs at local and broader levels to improve the foundational learning of children contributing to foster lifelong learning cultures within communities.

Keywords: Family Literacy, Reading Program, Preschool children, Parents, Family Literacy Reading Program

INTRODUCTION

It is notoriously difficult to define the term 'family literacy' however, family literacy is used to define the importance and collection of education plans for parents and their children. Parents are the equal partner of children's learning process. Early education is the foundation of learning and development of a child. Family literacy focuses on the direct involvement of family members in the learning of children. Family literacy has a positive impact on literacy growth of children at home and in school as well (Qarooni, 2022). Starting from birth, children learn from the environment at every moment of their life. From pre-birth to eight-year period is very important in child development. During this period the personality of the child is being developed. High quality early childhood programs are usually accepted all over the world that are effective at improving the quality of health, education, and human development for societies (Nutbrown et al., 2017). The process of personality development is a triangular

process that includes home, society, and school. Parents are responsible not only to play a role in the development of the child but also to create harmony between home, society, and school. Parents are required to build up positive inclination among the children by taking a keen interest in their personality. Parents can improve their children and themselves by getting involve in children's reading activities (Hamilton, 2013).

The wide range of perspectives of home literacy environment indicated that family literacy stages affect children's progress in strengthening linguistic skills as well as writing and reading skills. Some parents give a strong basis to their children. Language and learning skills are provided at home. Different types of material are available at home. Printing material and different models are used to enhance reading, writing and Math skills. These parents are aware of the basic needs of pre-school children. These children are successful in every field of life. Illiterate parents are not aware of the needs and skills of their child to develop. These children struggle hard their whole life. (Grant, Golden & Wilson, 2014). The research which explores the significance of parental involvement involves home and parents' equal players of children' learning. This aspect is emphasized by 'The UNESCO' institute for long-life learning (UIL, 2017). This institute takes initiatives to improve family literacy and learning. UNESCO's work in family literacy program is a holistic approach. UIL aims to improve the basic skills of children reading, writing and numeracy skills at home. UIL also tries to promote development of children, learning environment, literacy skill improvement and community member engagement. So, there is a need to explore the phenomenon of family literacy from different perspectives. It is needed that parents understand the child's literacy development needs in their home environment in a particular way. Different activities need to be launched in different ways (Creswell, 2018).

Family literacy programs focus on interactive literacy activities and skills between parents and their children. Family literacy program is a type of education that highlights the importance of reading, writing and arithmetic activities at home and making it a family activity (Edelman, 2021). Parents play an important role in the learning of pre-school children. Family members manage to educate the child in an informal way, but it is necessary to organize this process of training in a non-formal way. The role of family literacy is very important for improvement in literacy skills of pre-school children. Reading, writing, and arithmetic skills are the basic skills of pre-school children. These skills are important. Keeping in view, this study explored the "Enhancement of Reading Skills of Preschool Children through Parental Involvement in family literacy program". This study will be significant for families to understand the importance of family literacy and parental involvement in literacy activities of their children. This study indicates the importance of parents' active participation in literacy activities, not relying wholly on the school or teachers. So, this study will provide important information to schools to emphasize the active participation of parents in reading, writing, and learning skills of students in parent teacher meetings. Teachers also emphasize in regular arrangement of parent teacher meetings on the importance of parents' role in literacy activities of students. Parents are the first teachers of their children. In this way, the relationship between children and parents will also be promoted through the findings of the study, community awareness and the importance of parental involvement will be emphasized.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of family literacy started in 1980 (Tett, 2000). Family literacy emphasizes that the family is a unit. It is very important to make an agreement with literacy of both children and parents together because of the great correlation between the two. One leading theme in family literacy is that parent literacy has a significant effect on children's inspiration to acquire, grow,

and use literacy. Thus, parents help children to obtain literacy and to guide their children in learning. The family literacy program aims to overcome the barriers between parents and children facing in learning together. Auerbach (1995) suggested a conceptual framework. In this program, family literacy was divided into three philosophical approaches, intervention/prevention, multiple literacies, and social change. Darling in (1993) used the approach of intervention or prevention. The basic purpose of this approach was to observe the parents' behavior and literacy activities at home. Teale (1995) offered a similar program. The program included children from minorities and children from financially weak parents. The curriculum for this program includes English literacy, parental education skills and attitudes. All these curricula help children to succeed in school. Barton (1994) worked on multiple literacies, the second largest approach of family literacy. This program is based on sociocultural, anthropological, and sociolinguistic studies. Literacy is not the name of a single skill. Multiple Literacy is the name of a set of different types of skills. The main purpose of this research is to enable people to have multiple literacies. Examples of multiple literacies are Math's literacy, technology literacy and media literacy.

The third approach to family literacy includes critical literacy and social change theory. The main purpose of this approach is to connect families as well as school and society. Paulo Freire and Henri Giroux (1987, 88) worked on this approach. This program works on social inequality in family literacy. It introduces the concept of social change and critical thinking to children and parents. This program is designed for the average family. It helps in the holistic development of children. Swain and Cara (2014) describe a study of family literacy in England and emphasize the result of family literacy on the home literacy setting. It was a fieldwork program that was run from September 2013 to December 2014. The program covers 27 schools and includes 5- to 7-year-old children and their parents. This is a mixed method study. This includes observations of the family literacy session, 118 parents pre & post-tests in the form of quantitative survey, a qualitative based pre and post-test through telephonic interviews with 24 parents. In this research the home literacy environment focuses on four areas: family resources, parents learning behavior and attitudes, parental opinions and understanding, parent's child interaction and reading practices. This family literacy program is about reading activities. Interaction between parents and children is very important. Parents' involvement with children in reading activities is important for both children and parents.

It is usually acknowledged that family involvement is very important in student success. Those Students whose parents are involved in home literacy maintain higher levels of academic achievement. A study conducted by Nutbrown et al. (2017) indicated the importance of family and family literacy. They indicated that family members play an important role in family literacy. The most important role is that of parents. Parents have played an important role in children's literacy for centuries. For this, it is necessary to teach preschool children basic education and ethics at home. For this, parents must be familiar with these skills. Parents are role models for children. In family literacy, parents' performance as well as other family members, such as caregivers, siblings, and grandparents and on the community, environment affects the child development. In one similar study by Heydon and Du (2019) the importance of family literacy is indicated in a way that they emphasized that children's interpersonal relations, social relationship, values, feelings, and attitudes are possible because of literacy. The family literacy program plays an important role in achieving these goals. Today's children are getting away from their parents and such skills. The solution to all this is family literacy. If children are given attention at home, the relationship between parents and children becomes stronger. They suggested that children should be engaged in activities that involve parents and other family members. Children should also be involved in household chores.

Family Literacy Programs for Pre-school Children in Different Countries

There are several family literacy programs initiated at local and government levels in different countries.

Family Literacy Program in Pakistan. Work has been done on parent's literacy and preschool children in Pakistan. Hussain, who is a professor at Bahawalpur University, worked on this topic. In 2009, he worked on teaching activities for preschool children. Preschool children are 3-5 years old. Children of this age have more learning ability. Therefore, these children should be taught ethics, social and communication skills (Millora, 2023).

A national level workshop was held at AIOU in 2019. This workshop was organized with the support of UNESCO institute for Lifelong learning (UIL). In this, orientation was given regarding intergenerational skills, family literacy and life-long learning. This aspect is emphasized by 'The UNESCO' institute for long-life learning (UIL, 2017). This institute takes initiatives to improve family literacy and learning. UNESCO's work in family literacy program is a holistic approach. UIL aims to improve the basic skills of child reading, writing and numeracy skills at home. UIL also tries to promote development of children, learning environment, literacy skill improvement and community member engagement. So, there is a need to explore the phenomenon of family literacy from different perspectives. It is needed that parents understand the child's literacy development needs and develop the home environment in a particular way. Different activities need to be launched in different ways. National literacy program (NLP) The NLP is a combined literacy Program which mostly targets out of school children, young people and adult women and is presently being applied across the whole nation. NCHD has also applied different activities and programs to combine the ALP and to endorse lifelong learning activities. The main objective of this program is to highlight the importance of education among parents and children. In 2005, the literacy rate in Pakistan was 65%. The reason was poverty. Due to this program the literacy rate increases and parents started sending their children to school (National Literacy Resource Centre, 2023).

Family Literacy in Namibia. After gained independence, Namibia paid special attention to education. It linked education with religious and moral values, based on foreign apartheid laws. Namibian Ministry of Education established out to offer "Education for all". Access, quality, and equity were central to achieving this theme. To achieve this theme, the family literacy program was established. Before applying for the family literacy program, a study was conducted in 13 regions. Principals, teachers, parents, and children were included in this study. The purpose of this study was to gain awareness about the family literacy program. Reading, writing, singing, counting, and playing activities were incorporated into the family literacy program (Kasokonya & Kutondokua, 2015). First a training program was set up. Parents and children were part of this program. So that parents can become aware of preschool children's education.

Family literacy in South Africa. Most children in Africa did not have books at home if parents should buy books, few books were in African languages. The ECE development agency start work on preschool children. Training was given to teachers for preschool children. Made a no and low-cost material for preschool children. Books in Africans language was designed to fill the shortage of books. The program was launched for preschool children in different regions of Africa. Various NGOs worked in this program. This preschool program is running successfully (Purcell-Gates, 2000). A program regarding "Let's make books" was also started. Its aim was to provide books to parents and preschool children.

Family literacy in Kenya. In Kenya, “Let’s Make Books” was presented at the University of Swaziland in 2005 at the International Reading Association Conference. A Kenyan professor also attended the conference. In 2007, a Kenyan professor visited South Africa. Saw the program started regarding preschool children. It was decided to start this type of program in Kenya. The books were arranged in their mother-tongue. Various activities were designed in mother-tongue. The aim of the program was to strengthen the relationship between parents and children (Hayden, & Sanders, 2005).

Family literacy in Malta. Many schools are working in Malta with the help of Hilti family literacy club. With the help of this club, a family literacy program was started in Malta. Initially this program started in 6 schools. Pilot testing of this program was done from 2002 to 2004. After this success, 2700 families were involved with this family literacy program in 2005. 224 centers of Hilti club are working on family literacy program. This family literacy program is very popular in Malta. Needy families benefited from this program in many ways (Spiteri, & Camilleri, 2019).

Family literacy in Germany. The family literacy project was launched in Hamburg, Germany. This program was later made into a national level program. In this family literacy program, special attention was given to preschool children. Families who had migrated were made part of this program. Parents and children were included in the activities together.

Family literacy in New Zealand. New Zealand’s education system is built on very strong foundations. Much work has been done on adult literacy. Manukua Family Literacy Project (MFLP) a model was developed through the family literacy program. In this program, preschool children and their parents were engaged in various activities. In it, a program was arranged regarding reading and numeracy. After the success of this program, many NGOs started work.

Family literacy in Turkey. The Mother Child Education Program (MOCEP) was launched at the national level in Turkey. Emphasis was placed on mother-based education. The mother was involved in the teaching process of her preschool children. This program also improved literacy. The education system of Turkey improved a lot because of this program. Special attention was given to the cognitive development of children.

Family literacy in America. The United States, through the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), a comprehensive family literacy was launched in America. Many programs were started on this platform. Preschool children’s program was also organized. Activities were done for children and parents together. Separate centers were established for preschool children and parents. Various activities were started for preschool children in these centers.

Usually, 3 to 5-year-old children are called pre-school children. At this age, all kinds of development of children are taking place. Children’s mental, physical, language development, moral and social development. Therefore, it is important to consider the needs of preschool children (Qarooni, 2022). It is the duty of the parents to fulfill all the needs of the children. Children should be made aware of the basic concepts of reading, writing and numerical skills. Be able to recognize Urdu and English alphabets and play with sound. Parents join children in reading and writing activities. Give preschool children work in different groups to improve their communication skills. Preschool children have a high learning capacity. It is important to organize the education and training of preschool children considering their needs. Children should be educated in sports so that children’s mental development is accompanied by physical development. Work on the moral values of preschool children is very important. Parents should work on lifelong learning of preschool children through various activities (Justice, 2006).

Objective and Hypothesis

Here is the description of the objective and hypotheses investigated:

- To find out the effect of family literacy program on modification of parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children.

H0: There is no significant effect of family literacy program on modification of parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children.

H1: Family literacy program develops positive attitudes towards improving reading skills of pre-school children.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used quantitative research design in which quasi experiment (one group pre-test and posttest) design was employed.

Population and sample of the study

Population comprised on parents of Rawalakot Pakistan, and sample of 15 families along with their preschool children of age (3-5) years was selected purposively.

Research Tools

Research tools comprised on "Pre and posttest for Parent and Children based upon Family literacy program.

1. Pre- and post-tests for parents and children. To achieve these objectives, pre and posttest were developed which were based upon the content of family literacy program. There were 15 questions in pre and posttest on the reading activities. In the first step the pre-test was taken from parents. Then, in the treatment phase, parents along with their preschool children were given training in reading skills through "family literacy reading program" for 15 days. Then the posttest was taken and both pre and post-test results were compared.

Variables

Reading Literacy. This was operationalized in terms of students' reading in English, Urdu and Mathematics subjects.

Family Literacy Reading Program. Family literacy reading program comprised on three subject areas English, Urdu, and Mathematics reading. Children and parents were taught this content daily for two hours for 2 weeks daily. Printed material in the form of handouts were given to parents for home reading tasks. The following syllabus was included in the family literacy reading program:

Subjects	Family Literacy Program Syllabus
Urdu	حروف تہجی کی ترتیب سے پڑھائی، پوری اور آدھی شکلیں اور ان کی آوازیں، مختلف اشکال کی آوازیں اور ان کے ابتدائی حرف کی حروف تہجی کے ساتھ مماثلت
English	A-Z alphabets reading with phonics and sequence, reading of matching of shapes with alphabets and reading.
Mathematics	1-20 counting reading, 1-10 reading in number from, shapes counting, matching numbers with columns Identification and reading of missing numbers.

Validity of Tool

Content validity of the pre and posttest was sought by seeking opinions of 5 experts of the field and then it was calculated which was .86*.

Data Analysis

Paired Sample t-test was executed to evaluate the effect of the family literacy program on reading skills of pre-school children.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of modification of parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	17.0	15	3.07	0.79
Posttest	34.73	15	2.60	0.67

Above table 1 indicates descriptive statistics of parents' attitudes towards enhancement of reading skills of pre-school children before and after participation in the family literacy reading program.

Specifically, the mean score of pre-tests (17.0) is less than mean score of posttests (34.73) which indicates that parents got improvement in their attitudes regarding implementation of reading skills for their pre-school children at home. This substantial increase advocates that the family literacy interjection successfully improved not only understanding of parents but also their commitment to support reading literacy development of children in home settings. Thus, the change in mean scores highlights that there were significant amounts of awareness and practical strategies gained by parents in a two-week training program to engage early literacy learning of children more actively.

In addition to the improvement in average scores, the std. deviation score of pre-tests (3.071) is greater than std. deviation score of posttests (2.604). This reduction in variability suggests that parents got improvement in their attitudes, and they became more consistent after the training, regarding implementation of reading skills for their pre-school children at home.

The data in this table shows a substantial positive shift in parental attitudes, as demonstrated by the rise in the mean score and change in std scores from the pretest to the posttest which supports the intervention's effectiveness. This table indicates adoption of more uniform positive attitudes and practices among parents lead towards positive significant improvements.

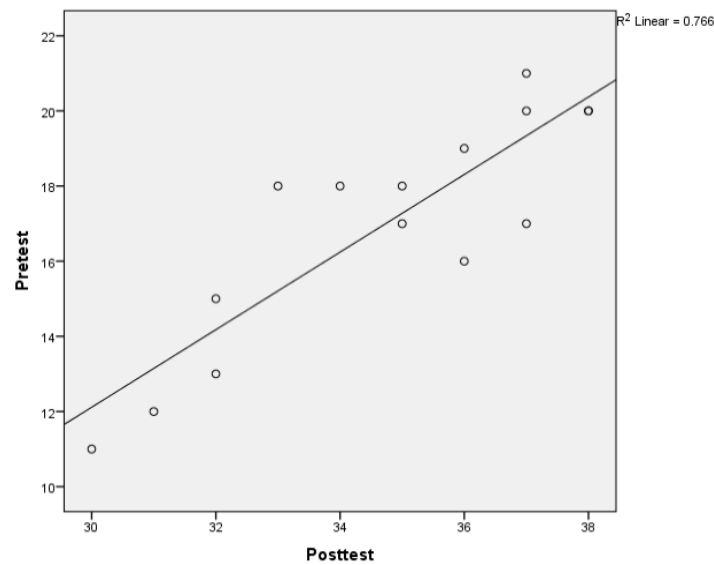


Figure 1: *Parent's data samples statistics*

Above figure 1 indicates significant improvement between pre-and posttests regarding parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children. Overall, the descriptive statistics greatly recommend that reading literacy program not only improved the overall quality of parental attitudes but also helped standardize knowledge and practices related to supporting children's reading skills at home.

Table 2

Modification of parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	P-value
Pretest– Posttest	-17.73	1.48	0.38	-46.205	0.00

Table 2 reveals that there is significant difference between pre and posttest results (p-value $0.00 < 0.05$). So, it is concluded that parents got improvement in their attitudes regarding implementation of reading skills for their pre-school children at home. So, H^1 is accepted that there is a significant positive effect of family literacy program on modification of parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children. The following is the

description and interpretation of t-test: Eta Squared = $\frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N-1)}$

As t refers to t statistics shown in the table labeled Paired Samples Test, N refers to number of responses provided in the table labeled Paired Samples Statistics.

$$\text{Eta Squared} = \frac{(-46.205)^2}{(-46.205)^2 + (15-1)}$$

$$\text{Eta Squared} = \frac{2,134.9}{2,134.9 + 14}$$

$$\text{Eta Squared} = 0.99$$

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the effect of the family literacy program on modification of parent's attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children, the results showed a significant increase in the marks of parents Before ($M = 17$, $SD = 3.07$) to After ($M = 34.73$, $SD = 2.6$), $t = -46.206$ (greater than 1.96), $p = .000$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in the test score was 17.733 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -18.557 to -16.910. The eta square statistics (.99) indicate a large effect size.

According to table 2 it indicates as proposed guidelines by Cohen 1988, pp, 284 – 7, for interpreting the value of Eta square are: .01 = small effect, .06 = moderate effect, .7 = large effect. As per given the values of 0.99, we can conclude that there was a large effect of family literacy program on modification of parent's attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children, with a substantial difference in the test scores obtained before and after the intervention.

These tables indicate the following findings:

- Descriptive analysis of pre and posttest the mean score of the pre-test (17.0) is less than mean score of the posttest (34.73) which indicates that parents got improvement in their attitudes regarding implementation of reading skills for their pre-school children at home (Table 1). The findings of this study also imply that parents are the shared contributors of the learning of their children. That's why the involvement of parents can be ensured through literacy workshops, providing training to parents on the activities of the school, seeking support from parents by devising home-literacy plans, tailoring parents' literacy initiatives and arranging regular parent teacher meetings etc.
- The std. deviation score of the pre-test (3.071) is greater than std. deviation score of the posttest (2.604) which indicates that parents got improvement in their attitudes regarding implementation of reading skills for their pre-school children at home (Table 2). Thus, the change in Std. scores highlights that there were significant amounts of awareness and practical strategies gained by parents in a two-week training program to engage early literacy learning of children more actively.
- In t-test result H^1 is accepted that there is significant positive effect of family literacy program on modification of parents' attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children (Table 2). Thus, there was a large effect of family literacy program on modification of parent's attitudes towards improvement of reading skills of pre-school children, with a substantial difference in the Test scores obtained before and after the intervention

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The transformative potential role of family literacy reading program is indicated by the findings of this research which demands to foster basic literacy skills in early childhood development initiatives particularly in under resourced areas. Measurable improvements were indicated in the two-weeks family literacy reading program in subjects of English Urdu and mathematics, which resulted in potential improvements children's reading capabilities. The demonstration of markable improvements in these subjects indicated that parents are extensively involved and caring to improve the literacy skills of their children at early stages. The findings of this study also indicated the potential role of the parents to foster a culture of learning at home. The family literacy reading program has positive effects and parents modified their attitudes regarding the importance of family literacy. Parents worked together with children in all activities. Thus, based upon the compelling evidence from the results of the study alternative hypothesis was accepted.

The intervention was brief, but it led towards a compelling indication and measurable gains that a structured family literacy program can have meaningful results on students' literacy engagement activities at home. The findings of this study also indicated the critical role of parents' training needs which indicated convincing evidence of significant improvement in parents' attitude when provided training. The success of the program demonstrated the significant at first which families can play particularly in the improvement of early childhood literacy experiences of students at home. The implications of findings of this study go beyond the immediate participants of this study as the generalization of results is towards the parents generally at home supporting the preschoolers in literacy acquisition activities. Parents are effective facilitators of literacy at home because they can provide guided support to their students and basic subjects which are necessary for language arts. There is also evidence from the results of the study that parents training also complimented their formal education in devising and implementing reading literacy activities which nurtured closer parent child bonds through shared learning experiences in the home settings. Therefore, the study validates the importance of contextualizing literacy programs in the localized framework of societies and families to make literacy more context specific and task specific.

An interesting aspect associated with the finding of this study was that multilingual subjects were included in the literacy program of this study which indicated the relevance of the program with the multilingual society of Pakistan much necessary and a potential element to contribute to effectiveness and relevance with the lived realities and environments of participants of this study. Subsequently, the inclusion of language arts and mathematics was quite relevant with the multilingual society of participants in which children were exposed more at home environment more than their schools. The implications of the findings of this study suggest that if such programs are implemented at larger level, then parents-focused interventions can be planned but implemented at national level by following the same model of this study. Accordingly, tailoring the program content with the local setting at home and society is significantly effective. This calls for a collective effort of the policymakers and the educational experts to develop interventions which not only encourage a reconceptualization of the school's role but also the inclusion of some programs in which there are interactive sessions with parents and schools have established parents' corners for their training and feedback.

A key conclusion which is drawn from this research is a significant attitudinal shift among parents regarding engaging their preschool children and the value of learning at home. Parents who participated in the study constituted those who were previously not confident about the home literacy practices to improve the reading skills of their children. They were also not aware of how to tackle the reading literacy activities of their children. Thus, they modified their attitude, and the evidence is the t-test scores which indicated mutual engagement of parents with their kids to promote literacy skills to transform well-structured and short-term literacy intervention. The findings of this study recommend establishing inclusive spaces that engage parents and students in literacy activities not only at school but at home, thereby reinforcing educational consistency and efficiency. This also implies bridging the gap between home and school learning environment through regular parental support and interactive training sessions.

In conclusion, we can say that parental empowerment through literacy education is a more important and significant element which can be utilized to foster initial learning among preschoolers. Findings of this study confines not only on reading aspect but also implies the importance of cultivating a more literate and engaged family culture which promotes foundational skills among children through parents.

- It is recommended that reading programs may be arranged for parents through non-formal education. Moreover, the importance of family literacy as well as involvement of preschool children in reading activities may be enhanced by formal schools, i.e., parents' teacher meeting events or any other awareness campaigns etc.
- The findings of this study also move forward towards establishing a more holistic approach in which parents, teachers, and the community members are included in establishing a sustainable learning culture which is implementable not only in schools but also in homes.
- This recommends adopting continued research, exploration and establishment of expanded programs, devising and implementing student focused parent integrated strategies to scale up the efforts to promote literacy skills of students at a larger level. This also recommends the transformation potential role of family reading literacy support to preschoolers particularly in limited resources settings in Pakistan.
- Tailoring the program content with the local setting at home and society is significantly effective. This calls for a collective effort of the policymakers and the educational experts to develop interventions which not only encourage a reconceptualization of the school's role but also the inclusion of some programs in which there are interactive sessions with parents and schools have established parents' corners for their training and feedback
- Future research may be conducted on a large scale. Studies may explore the importance of family literacy with other literacy skills, i.e., the writing skills of children etc.
- Family literacy programs may be explored that should be organized at school level for preschool children. Researchers may explore the family literacy program for school going children.
- Family literacy programs that can involve parents, children as well as the community may be explored. Future research may be conducted on the content for preschool children's activities.

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