



## HOW READY ARE FAMILIES TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WAITING FOR US IN THE FUTURE?

Halil KAMIŞLI

Dr., Final International University, Faculty of Education, Northern Cyprus TR-10 Mersin, Turkey

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6715-431X>

[halil.kamisli@final.edu.tr](mailto:halil.kamisli@final.edu.tr)

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### Abstract

The importance of the family factor in the process of providing the child with literacy skills has been demonstrated by many studies. From this point of view, family literacy level emerges as an important factor in developing the literacy skills desired to be given to the child. This importance has increased even more due to the Corona (COVIT-19) virus pandemic, which is experienced all over the world. Because of the fact that educational institutions, including primary education level, have switched to distance education, the time period spent by students with families has increased. According to education experts education system will not be the same after the pandemic. If distance education is made permanent, how ready are families? It is important to take steps towards determining this situation and eliminating possible deficiencies. In addition to the duties of educators and those responsible for education to solve the current problems, there are also preparatory tasks for the expected educational models in the future. If these tendencies are not done correctly and preventions are not taken, great problems may arise in terms of education. In this study, the aim is to determine the family literacy levels of the students' parents who are enrolled in the primary school 1st grade level and to determine how ready they are for this process. This study was designed as a survey model that aims to evaluate family literacy skills in terms of various variables. The study group of the research consists of 460 parents who have children enrolled in the primary education institutions of the first year in the 2019-2020 academic years. Family Literacy Scale was used as data collection tool. In data analysis process, the t-test and ANOVA tests were used. In line with the research, the family literacy levels of the participants were found to be medium.

**Keywords:** Family literacy, distance education, early childhood, corona.

### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, which begins with the birth of the individual and continues until the age of 8, is one of the critical periods in development (Bredekamp, 2015; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Experiences in this period make great contributions to the development of the individual. Significant foundations of social, emotional, psychomotor and language skills acquired during adulthood are laid in this period (Bredekamp, 2015). The studies carried out in this field date back to Plato and Aristotle. After 1900, important information about early childhood was obtained through observational studies of theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, who are prominent in the field. Literacy skill is one of the skills to be developed this period, and the knowledge and experiences gained during this period lay the groundwork for being a good literate (Altinkaynak & Akman, 2016).

### Literacy Skills in Early Childhood

Literacy (UNESCO, 2004), which is defined as the ability to read and write, containing a set of skills and knowledge, by understanding a simple statement about one's daily life, is a process that begins with the birth of the individual (Kahraman, 2013). Children who interact with their environment from birth gain much of their literacy experience before starting school (Cunningham & Moore, 1995). The child's experiences about literacy before starting school are explained in the literature with the concept of "emergent literacy". Emergent literacy is defined as "progressive development of literacy skills in preschool period with the effect of printed reading aids in the child's family and social environment". At the beginning of this process the child cannot distinguish between the surrounding items. All objects around the child have the same meaning for him. After end of this process, the child begins to recognize the literacy documents. In the second stage children begin to imitate adults in reading and writing. They pretend to read the written documents by imitating adults. In the following days, children start to discover some rules of reading by observing adult family members reading books and newspapers. In this process, children start to develop pseudo reading by discovering that the eye is



moving from right to left and from top to bottom while reading and the pages of books and newspapers are turned from left to right during the natural observation process. In the following days, children start to establish a relationship between the language of speech and written language by observing the family members while they are reading. Thus, they begin to discover that what has been written can be said and what has been said can also be written. In the last stage the parents support the child consciously for reading and they do reading studies together (Cunningham et al., 1995; Roe, Smith & Burns, 2011).

### **The Importance of Family in Literacy Skills**

As seen in the emergent literacy development stages, the child's interest in reading and writing and the first literacy experiences begin in the family (Turan & Akoğlu, 2014; Connor & Craig, 2006). The literacy journey that starts in the home environment where the individual was born in to continues throughout his/her life by being affected by the developmental factors of the child and by the environment in which s/he is located. It is stated that children growing up in environments equipped with rich literacy stimulants in the preschool period have successfully transitioned from the early literacy process to the traditional literacy process (Justice and Ezell, 2004). Additionally, in the studies carried out in this field, the importance of family was emphasized in the process of gaining the child's literacy skills. This supports that what child receives from his family has an impact on his future school success. Many studies have also shown that reading books to children (Justice, 2006; Powell, Diamond, Burchinal & Koehler, 2010; Sim & Berthelsen, 2014) and reading together from an early age (Güneş, 2018; Niklas & Schneider, 2015; Hindman, Skibbe, & Foster, 2014) have positive effects on children's language and developing literacy skills (Çoşkun & Deniz, 2019; Picq et al., 2014). Indeed, the child is affected in the environment in which he lives from the moment s/he was born, and that the socioeconomic and cultural environment is closely related to his readiness to read was proven (Temel, Aksoy & Kurtulmuş, 2015; Oktay, 2010).

In the aforementioned studies, the importance of the family in early childhood is emphasized and it was mentioned as an important factor in school success. In other words, family prepares the child for school life. In school life, teachers are responsible for developing the lack of pre-skills that students bring from home, and there is a chance for the deficiencies in the family environment to be corrected at school for the skills that should be gained in early childhood. While the family is solely responsible for education until the child starts school, it shares this responsibility with the educational institutions when child starts school. In summary, family and educational institutions share the educational responsibility of the child who is in school. However, the phenomenon of 'shared responsibility' between family and school may be different in some situations such as "homeschooling". The primary responsibility in the "homeschooling education" practice is on family (Barratt-Peacock, 2003; Harding & Farrell, 2003) and the "homeschooling" has become more common in countries such as Canada, England, Germany, Israel, Belgium, France and Denmark recently (Kunzman & Gaither 2013; Neuman & Guterman 2013; Ray 2011; Blok & Karsten 2011; Basham, Merrifield & Hepburn, 2007; Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Collom, 2005). In order to better understand the concept of homeschooling, some definitions are given below.

### **Homeschooling**

Waggoner (2005) defines the concept of homeschooling as "a method of education that has been used by parents for hundreds of years to train children at home for the transfer of traditional values and characteristics that keep the family institution to the next generations". According to the USA official records, homeschooling practice is defined as "educating school-age children at home instead of school" (Basham et al., 2007). Petrie (1995) defines homeschooling as "educating children in their own homes by their parents or private teachers who they hire".

In numerous academic studies, the reasons for choosing the home education system of the families were investigated. Poor learning conditions, bad climate in schools, and lack of safety are the most obvious reasons for homeschooling (Guterman & Neuman 2017; Redford, Battle, & Bielick 2016; Neuman & Aviram, 2015; Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).



"Homeschooling" that is a common practice in various countries is not a very common practice in Turkey. However, when considering the reasons of these countries' practices, it may be said for future there is a potential in Turkey. As stated in the current study, supported by academic studies, family is an important factor in child's literacy skills, even if they continue their education in school. Considering "homeschooling" application, the importance of parents' literacy is even more important in cases where child's education takes place at home. This effect of the family on the child's literacy skills has taken place in the literature as the concept of family literacy.

### **What is Family Literacy?**

The term "family literacy" was described by Denny Taylor (1983) as a process where family members learn together how to become literate, increase literacy. Ontario Literacy Coalition (2010) defines family literacy as;

The development and use of literacy skills in a family's daily life, including how families use literacy in their everyday tasks; help their children develop literacy skills; get involved in their children's education; and use literacy to maintain relationships with each other and with their communities (cited in McCarty, 2017).

The concept of family literacy that is used in the early years was a broad concept that included the subjects needed for families to be healthier, more cultured and happier, such as budget, health, cleaning and care, language learning, child psychology, and communication. In later years, the concept of family literacy became a concept that includes family-child literacy and read-write activities. Family literacy includes families' own literacy experiences and studies that will help their children's reading and writing experiences (Power, 1992). As can be understood from the definitions, family literacy refers to the set of activities of preparing children for the literacy process and supporting the development of their skills in this process by their family.

The importance of the family factor in the process of providing the child with literacy skills has been demonstrated by many studies (Hindman, Skibbe, & Foster, 2014; Sim & Berthelsen, 2014). From this point of view, family literacy level emerges as an important factor in developing the literacy skills desired to be given to the child. This importance has increased even more due to the Corona (COVIT-19) virus pandemic, which is experienced all over the world. Because all educational institutions, including primary education level, have switched to distance education and the time period spent by students with families has increased. In this period, distance education was chosen as a popular choice to meet educational needs (Özonur, Yanpar-Yelken & Sancar-Tokmak, 2018). Education experts have expressed that education will not be the same after the pandemic. If distance education process is made permanent, how much are the families ready for it? It is important to take steps towards determining this situation and eliminating possible deficiencies. In addition to the duties of educators and those responsible for education to solve the current problems, there are also preparatory tasks for the expected educational models in the future. If these tendencies are not done correctly and preventions are not taken on time, great problems may arise in terms of education. Accordingly, within the scope of the present study, it was aimed to determine the family literacy levels of the students' parents who are enrolled in the primary school 1st grade level and to determine how ready they are for this process. The main research problem of this research was "What are the literacy levels of families and how do gender, income, employment and education levels affect this level?"

## **METHOD**

### **Research Model**

This study was designed as a survey model that aims to evaluate family literacy skills in terms of various variables.



### Participants

The study group of the research consists of 460 parents who have children enrolled in the primary education institutions of the first year in the 2019-2020 academic years. The characteristics of the working group are given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics about working group characteristics

Characteristics	F	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Woman	231	50.22
Man	229	49.78
<b>Total</b>	460	100.0
<b>Employment status</b>		
Yes	235	51.08
No	225	48.91
<b>Total</b>	460	100.0
<b>Education status</b>		
Primary school	153	33.26
High school	152	33.04
University graduate	155	33.69
<b>Total</b>	460	100.0
<b>Income status</b>		
Lower (500 \$ or less)	156	33.91
Medium (501 \$ and 7000 \$)	153	33.26
Upper (7001 \$ and above)	151	32.82
<b>Total</b>	460	100.0

### Data Collection Tool

In the research, Family Literacy Scale developed by Kılıç, Doğan and Özden (2017) was used. The 5-point Likert-type scale consists of 32 items, while the lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 32, while the highest score is 160. The explanatory factor analysis results showed that the scale is composed of three factors: parental literacy (16), child literacy (12), and early literacy (4). The reliability coefficient for the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .89$ . Within the scope of this study, the reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .87.

### Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, as the first step, the measures of central tendency were examined to determine whether the obtained data had a normal distribution. It was determined that the mean, mode and median values of the variables were close to each other, and the skewness and kurtosis coefficients (-.527 and -.989) were within the normal distribution range. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients between +1 and -1 are a positive indicator for normal distribution. The normality test for literacy scores is given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Normality test for literacy scores

	Kolmogorov Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Test statistics	df	P	Test statistics	df	P
Literacy Level	.371	460	.120	.769	460	.099

\*p<.05

When we look at Table 2, it is seen that the scores of literacy levels obtained within the scope of the research showed a normal distribution (Kolmogorov Smirnov (p = .121) and Shapiro-Wilk (p = .099).



After the determination of the normal distribution, it was decided to use the t-test, ANOVA tests and post-hoc, which are among the parametric tests to compare two and more independent groups.

## RESULTS

In this section, the findings of the research are tabulated. Table 3 shows the mean scores of the literacy levels of the study group.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics regarding the average of literacy level

	n	Min.	Mean	Max.	Std.Dev.
<b>FLL</b>	460	55.35	87.06	142.03	18.28

**FLL:** Family Literacy Level

The average score of the participants regarding the literacy level was found to be Mean = 87.06 considering that the maximum score that can be obtained from the scale is 160, it can be said that the scores obtained are at a medium level. The t-test results related to the differentiation of literacy levels by gender are given in Table 4.

**Table 4.** T-test results regarding gender

Grup	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	t	P
<b>Woman</b>	231	101.28	13.22	3.31	.000*
<b>Man</b>	229	72.842	12.03		

\*p < .001

As seen in Table 4, the scale scores of the participants' literacy levels differ according to gender (p = .000). This differentiation shows that the literacy levels of female participants are significantly higher than the male participants. The t-test results related to the differentiation status of literacy levels according to the employment status are given in Table 5.

**Table 5.** T-test results regarding employment status

Grup	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	t	p
<b>Employed</b>	235	76.13	12.42	2.75	.000*
<b>Unemployed</b>	225	97.99	12.98		

\*p < .001

The scale scores of the participants' literacy levels differ according to their employment status (p = .000). This differentiation shows that the literacy levels of the unemployed participants are significantly higher than the employed participants. ANOVA results regarding the differentiation levels of literacy levels according to the education level are given in Table 6.

**Table 6.** ANOVA results for educational situations

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Post-hoc Dif.
<b>Between groups</b>	48912.122	2	24456.061	112.044	.000*	2-1
<b>Within groups</b>	98877.107	458	215.888			
<b>Total</b>	147789.229	460				2-3

\*p < .001

The scale scores of the participants' literacy levels differ according to their educational status (p = .000). Post-hoc test was carried out to determine from which variables this differentiation was originated. It was determined that the secondary school graduate participants (2) ( $\bar{x}=105.4 \pm 13.61$ ) had significantly higher literacy levels than primary (1) ( $\bar{x}=77.74 \pm 12.45$ ) and university graduates (3) ( $\bar{x}=78.04 \pm 12.51$ ). ANOVA results regarding the differentiation status of literacy levels according to income status are given in Table 7.

**Table 7.** ANOVA results for income situations

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Post-hoc Dif.
Between groups	47872.821	2	23936.411	113.754	.000	2-1
Within groups	95321.446	458	208.125			
<b>Total</b>	<b>143194.267</b>	<b>460</b>				<b>2-3</b>

\*p &lt; .001

The scale scores of the participants' literacy levels differ according to their income status ( $p = 0.00$ ). Post-hoc test was carried out to determine from which variables this differentiation was originated. It was determined that the participants with medium income (2) ( $\bar{x}=103.4 \pm 13.42$ ) had significantly higher literacy levels than those with low (1) ( $\bar{x}=78.73 \pm 12.59$ ) and high income (3) ( $\bar{x}=79.05 \pm 12.77$ ).

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained within are discussed within the scope of the families' level of readiness for future education models (distance, home education, etc.) and the factors affecting these preparation levels.

### Families' Level of Readiness for Future Education Models

The family literacy levels of the participants were found to be medium in this research. Considering the new educational models that may occur in the future, family factor and its contribution will be more valuable in the development of children's literacy skills. In this period, when the task for families increases, the level of family literacy may not be sufficient in order to carry out the process properly. This is due to the fact that it has been demonstrated with the studies that family support in developing literacy skills in early childhood has great contributions in the development of these skills in children. Reading, writing and language activities organized by families in home environment contribute to the development of children's stronger literacy and language skills (Coşkun & Deniz, 2019; Picq et al., 2014; Weigel & Martin, 2007).

The fact that the persons responsible for education carry out studies to increase the literacy levels of the families will contribute to the improvement of the situation achieved within the scope of the current study. This idea was supported in studies in this field, family literacy programs were developed and their effects were investigated (Wilson, 2017; Morrow, 2015; Niklas & Schneider, 2015; Wasik & Van Horn, 2012; Barratt-Pugh & Allen, 2011). These programs were aimed at helping parents to support their children's literacy skills. It was concluded that the family literacy programs put into practice are very effective and positively affect the child's literacy skills and intra-family communication (Al-Maadadi1, Ihmeideh, Al-Falasi, Coughlin & Al-Thani, 2017). There are family education programs in Turkey and the effect of these education programs on literacy skills and attitudes of children was investigated (Çoşkun & Deniz, 2019; Kılıç, 2018; Altınkaynak & Akman, 2016). The increase in the number of these kinds of programs is considered necessary for families in Turkey to be able to contribute to the education of their children. Steps should be taken before it is late since the problems will grow in the future.

### Factors Affecting Family Literacy Level

As a result of the research, it was concluded that the literacy levels of female participants are higher than the male participants. This result is thought to stem from the family structure. While men dealt with hunting and gathering in nomadic societies, women were responsible for housework and child education. With the developing societies, women have started to work, but their responsibility for the development and education of children has not changed. In summary, the fact that mothers were primarily responsible for the education and development of the child affected the result obtained. There are not only similar situations in Turkey but also in the world. Studies have shown that mothers have more effects on child education (Nixon, 2012; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Saracaloğlu, Bozkurt, Serin, 2003). In addition, it was revealed in studies that the majority of the participants in family literacy education are women (McCharty, 2017).



It was determined that the literacy levels of the unemployed participants were higher than that of the employed. In addition, the literacy levels of secondary school graduates are higher than primary and university graduates. Literacy levels of middle income participants are higher than low and high income participants. It is an expected result that the non-working participants have higher literacy levels than the working participants. Because parents at home have a chance to spend more time with their children and are more interested in their education.

The secondary school graduates' higher level of literacy compared to primary and university graduates is seen as an unexpected result. In addition, the middle-income participants' higher level of literacy compared to the low- and high-income participants is another unexpected result. When the scale used within the scope of the research is taken into consideration, the criterion that the items are measuring is the time parents spend to contributing their children's literacy skills. It is estimated that high-income families share the education responsibility of their children with both private schools and private teachers that reduce the time they allocate to this process. Likewise, the time higher education graduate families allocate to their families is shorter because they mostly work. This situation is thought to be the reason for the result obtained in this research. It is thought that low income and primary school graduate families are the other reasons of this result due to their livelihood anxiety and their inability to support their children academically. It is possible to overcome these deficiencies through family education programs (Burgoyne, Gardner, Whiteley, Snowling, & Hulme, 2018; Doyle & Zhang, 2011).

Within the scope of this research, family literacy levels, which have a positive effect on children's literacy skills, have been investigated. Due to the pandemic that the whole world has experienced, education has been adapted and responsibility of families for the education of their children has increased. After the pandemic, it becomes important to determine if and how families are ready for this process if the current education system is permanent. This factor makes the current study important. Literacy levels of the families participating in the study were found to be medium.

It is concluded that families need training in order to contribute to their adaptation of the education system to be established in the future. Thanks to these trainings, families will be able to spend more quality time with their children and will contribute positively to their literacy skills. In the studies carried out in this field, the accuracy of this argument has been demonstrated (Lonigan & Gibson, 2018; Parpuç & Dinç, 2017; Bayraktar & Temel, 2014; Yazıcı & Kandır, 2014; Peterson, 2012; Puranik, Phillips, Martini & Senechal, 2012; Eva, Lau & Nirmala, 2011; Schmit, Simpson & Friend, 2011). There will always be families working and not spending too much time with their child. It is possible to find a solution of this problem by training the responsible persons of education of children about the family literacy education.

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