

Research Article

Investigating Multiple Dimensions of Children's Literacy Interests in Learning English

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ABSTRACT

Investigating factors associated with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) children's successful acquisition of early literacy skills plays a substantial role in their later reading achievement. To this end, this study examined the relationship between children's literacy interest in English language learning and factors that may affect this significant research topic (family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations). To this aim, we used a sequential mixed-methods design for this study. We administered four questionnaires to 105 parents, followed by observations of nine classes and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 15 EFL children aged 3 to 5. The results indicated a strong relationship between family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and children's literacy interests. However, parents' educational expectations were not correlated with children's literacy interest in English language learning. The findings of this study imply that teachers should consider the literacy interest factors which contribute to children's English learning.



Introduction

Valuing EFL children's early literacy in English is paramount in society as the acquisition of such literacy requires factors such as environmental characteristics, which include family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations as children's interest in an activity is vital in children's school achievement (Inoue et al., 2018; Roberts & Rochester, 2021). Children's early emergent literacy skills, such as letter knowledge, and their later reading skills and achievement in elementary school are closely intertwined (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002), and children's early reading skills and their academic achievement in school (Dale et al., 2022) are also correlated. Additionally, role models such as parents, teachers, or caregivers shape children's learning attitudes because children tend to follow them, particularly during learning (Yeo et al., 2014). Moreover, research has significantly highlighted the role of parents as children's first educators and literacy agents in what literacy skills they may teach their children (e.g., Martini & Sénéchal, 2012). Therefore, home literacy environment (HLE) is vital during the preschool years in fostering children's reading development. Literacy environment includes all the literacy interactions and resources in the home environments that will scaffold child's literacy learning such as shared reading and parental attitudes (Niklas, 2013). Inoue et al. (2018) also refer to HLE as parental activities like reading books together to enhance a child's literacy abilities, leading to a greater understanding of phonology, letters, and vocabulary. Therefore, more literacy-related shared parent-child activities lead to higher early reading achievements (Jung, 2016). For instance, children can become competent in

reading aloud through parent-child interaction on shared screen time (Davidson et al., 2020). Factors associated with children's successful acquisition of early literacy skills is significant for supporting early literacy in their later reading achievement. Therefore, this study delves into factors such as preschool children's family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations contributing to children's literacy interest in English language learning. This study diverges from the previous studies in that it investigates Iranian bilingual children whose L1 is Persian, and such a study has rarely been conducted in Iran and with Iranian bilingual students.

Literature Review

Children's Literacy Interest and Family Literacy Activities

Research on supporting children's interest in choosing activities in the classroom to develop their literacy has received considerable attention. However, literature still lacks a precise consensus on defining the concept of child literacy interest in the field. This study adopted Baroody and Dobbs-Oates' (2011) definition of child literacy interest as the level of enjoyment and frequency associated with children's involvement in literacy-related activities. Research suggests that parents have the advantage of daily interaction with their children, and the teaching elements lead to specific literacy outcomes (Martini & Sénéchal, 2012). Therefore, home literacy activities and parents' involvement with their children's literacy-related activities, whether they are informal (e.g., reading to or in front of children) or formal (e.g., pointing to words during shared reading) (Martini & Sénéchal, 2012) are positively linked to children's interest levels in literacy and result in better

literacy skills (see Hume et al., 2015). Lonigan and Shanahan (2010), argue that early literacy activities and engagement, and a rich learning environment can enhance the development of these skills later on.

Roberts and Rochester (2021) conducted a study in the US to provide training for adult caregivers to engage in particular literacy activities with their young children. The training encompassed a series of five, two-hour workshops to support families of different ethnicities and backgrounds (e.g., Caucasian, American Indian) in improving their literacy learning regularly, and engaging in routines with their preschool-aged children. Findings indicated that the training had effects on the parents' increased literacy interactions at home, particularly in the areas of read-aloud and writing opportunities.

Moreover, home literacy practices predicted receptive language development and letter knowledge was predicted by children's interest in English language learning. In a Canadian study, Inoue et al. (2018) investigated the developmental association between HLE, which included parent teaching, shared book reading, and emergent literacy skills, consisting of phonological awareness, letter knowledge, vocabulary, and rapid naming speed in kindergarten. The purpose was to measure reading accuracy and fluency in first-graders and reading comprehension in second and third-graders. Result revealed that parental reading and vocabulary predicted the children's letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and rapid naming speed through shared book reading after family socioeconomic status was controlled.

Moreover, the impact of HLE and parent-child activities on first-language development is well documented, but limited studies

investigated how it affects the acquisition of a second (or foreign) language (see Chow et al., 2010). Therefore, given the fact that family literacy training improves children's literacy in multiple ways, such as letter knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, rapid naming speed, and reading self-concept, this study, however, aims to unfold the relationship between children's literacy interest and their family literacy activities in an EFL context. Given our purpose, we conducted this study in Iran, which has one official language (Persian) spoken throughout the country. However, there are different linguistic groups (Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Fars). This diversity makes many of the children bilingual or multilingual. On account of the significance of children's L1, studies have investigated this rising issue, particularly in Iran. For instance, Farangi and Naami (2024) investigated bilingual and multilingual children and the effects of L1 literacy and its effects on learning L2 or L3. Results revealed that both groups performed well on the tests. Moreover, a rich linguistic background, such as the home environment, was highlighted in L2 learning (also see Zheng et al., 2023). Another study conducted in Iran examined the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' L1 literacy resources and their L2 literacy. They also revealed a positive correlation between the two. Mozafarnejad and Mazandarani (2016) also investigated the correlation between children's English literacy and the HLE and parental environment. They also revealed a positive and significant correlation between the two.

Children's Literacy Interest and Parents' Reading Beliefs

Parents maintain that their children's literacy and language development depend on parental reading beliefs (Weigel et al., 2005).

Studies have investigated the role of parents' beliefs on children's literacy acquisition (Cottone, 2012; Şimşek Çetin, 2015; Yeo et al., 2014). Parental literacy beliefs play a significant role in children's acquiring reading and writing skills and in supporting their children's literacy development, which is more inclined to provide their children with many learning opportunities to engage in literacy-related activities (Weigel et al., 2005).

Investigating the associations between parental reading beliefs and children's interests, Yeo et al. (2014) examined the relationship between home literacy activity, defined as parents' reading beliefs and home literacy practices, and children's reading skills and reading interests. Thus, 193 children and their parents participated in their study. Children were 6 years old from 14 preschools in Singapore. Data were collected through questionnaires and a battery of standardized literacy tests. Findings indicated a strong relationship between the HLE (parents' reading beliefs) and children's reading interest, and a moderate association emerged between HLE and children's reading competence. In other words, authors hold that those parents' beliefs about the importance of reading and promoting children's reading habits significantly impact the literacy opportunities they provide for their children. They also found that their parents' beliefs and the HLE influence children's literacy skills and learning. This result is consistent with Martini and Sénéchal (2012), who suggested parents' certain beliefs about reading can be linked to their children's interests.

Studies indicate that parents' expectations and beliefs in their child's academic and reading abilities are associated with improved reading achievements (e.g., Jeynes, 2022; Yang et al., 2023). Conversely, a literature

review suggests that the impact of parental beliefs may not always be direct. Aunola et al. (2002) revealed that parental beliefs regarding their children's overall academic ability were predictive of the children's behavior focused on tasks, which in turn was predictive of improved reading skills. This indicates that although not directly influencing achievement, parental beliefs may have affected children's task-focused behavior, which may be linked to better academic results. This aligns with Lai et al. (2024), who investigated the influence of parental beliefs and the HLE on Chinese kindergarteners' English literacy and language skills. 86 Chinese kindergarten children participated in their study, covering English phonological awareness, receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, Chinese receptive vocabulary, and nonverbal intelligence. Parents were also asked to complete a questionnaire about family demographics, HLE, and parental beliefs concerning the importance of early English literacy skills. Parental beliefs were found to indirectly influence children's English receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, and phonological awareness. Informal language exposure mediated this influence for vocabulary and formal literacy activity for phonological awareness. These findings highlight the crucial role of parents in home literacy activities and suggest that parental beliefs could effectively promote early language and literacy skills in EFL children.

Furthermore, Şimşek Çetin (2015) delved into the association between preschoolers' literacy, print awareness and mothers' reading beliefs. 203 preschoolers and their mothers in Turkey participated in the study. Results indicated no significant association between the factors. Furthermore, findings revealed that only age differed significantly regarding

children's print knowledge, and other factors such as gender and school type did not differ significantly. Therefore, this study intends to uncover whether the correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' reading beliefs applies to Iranian bilingual children.

Children's Literacy Interest and Parents' Educational Expectation

Parents' educational expectations fall into two components: School achievement, which is defined as how well a child does in school, and school attainment, which includes how far the child goes to a school – a high school, a two-year college, and a four-year college (Baroody & Dobbs-Oates, 2011). Parents' educational expectations might help children improve their literacy interests as far as a dyadic parent-child relationship is concerned. Studies have focused on parents' moderating roles like their expectations and children's literacy development (e.g., Helmerhorst et al., 2021; Junge et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018; Luo & Gao, 2021).

Highlighting the parental role in facilitating children's learning science, Junge et al. (2021) examined the relationship between the home learning environment and children's early science knowledge. The participants were 257 parents and children. Data analysis indicated that i) children learning science was related to parental involvement, ii) parental science interest was related to the frequency of the activities, and iii) children's knowledge of science was in a relationship with structural family characteristics and parental interest in science in that parents played a pivotal role in facilitating children's science knowledge.

Additionally, Luo and Gao (2021) recruited 1,363 Chinese preschoolers to investigate family socioeconomic status and self-regulated learning to demystify the

relationship between parental educational expectations and home-based involvement. Findings indicated that there was a higher level of home-based involvement among single-child parents than among multi-child parents and the structural equation modeling analyses show that there was a connection between Chinese parental educational expectation, home-involvement, and young children's self-regulation.

However, Liu et al. (2018) measured the relationship between parents' educational expectations, family's socioeconomic status, and home literacy development using 140 three-year-old kindergarten Chinese children, who were assessed on nonverbal IQ phonological awareness, vocabulary, and word reading. A questionnaire was administered to measure parents' educational level, income, the frequency of engaging in different home literacy-related activities with their child, and the educational expectation of their child's reading/schooling performance. The findings indicated a positive correlation between phonological awareness and literacy development, and the effect of vocabulary on phonological awareness contributed to the effect of home literacy on word reading. However, the relationship between HLE (e.g., parents' expectations) and reading in Chinese was not correlated.

To this end, Matvichuk (2015) investigated how parents' expectations and behavior and HLE affect their children's reading interest and revealed that even though parents' behavior and HLE were both related to child literacy interest, parents' expectations did not correlate with child literacy interest. Baroody and Dobbs-Oates (2011) mentioned that there is no connection between parents' expectations for their child's level of education and their child's interest in literacy.

Analyzing the above studies shows that there are mixed findings regarding parental educational expectations, parental home involvement, and children's literacy interests. Therefore, this study aims to unfold the relationship between parental educational expectations and EFL children's literacy interests.

The Present Study

Early childhood schooling in Iran is required to set the stage for the research study. The national Document of Educational Fundamental Transformations (2011) indicates children start formal education at the age of five, and the expansion of knowledge, the national language, culture, and identity are on the education chart. English reading and writing skills are considered compulsory courses both at school and university levels with various amounts of education.

Students begin English in middle school at the age of 12. English is not introduced to students at primary school because policymakers strongly believe that students should learn more about their national language and culture than a foreign language such as English. When students reach the age of 12, they are provided with English classes for a maximum of three hours a week in state schools. Early childhood EFL instruction is held at private daycares or kindergartens, and they provide education services from the age of 3 to 6. The reason for the early start of learning English is that parents think that learning English for their children in early childhood before they finish high school opens a window of opportunity for their children either to find a better job position or to support them to study and live abroad in future.

English language classrooms usually hold two or three weekly sessions, generally 30 to 45 minutes. English classes usually consist of English storytelling, songs, conversations, playing different games, painting, and crafting activities related to English concepts through a Total Physical Response approach. Children review the previously learned items through these activities and learn new concepts by using these practices during the class. It is noted that Persian and English have a different alphabetic system: the former is Avestan, and the latter is Roman. The English language is also taught in nursery schools, as more than 75% of people in Iran live in urban areas, and one-third of them can afford the additional cost of learning English in nursery schools.

Research Questions

1. Is there any relationship between EFL children's literacy interests and activities and their family literacy ones?
2. Is there any relationship between EFL children's literacy interests, their parents' reading beliefs, and their parents' educational expectations?
3. What components in family literacy activities predict EFL children's literacy interests?
4. What components in parents' reading beliefs predict EFL children's literacy interests?

Method

This study used a sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the relationship between children's literacy interest in English language learning and their family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations. In the quantitative phase, we used four questionnaires to collect data from 105 parents and their children from two daycare centers and three English

institutions. A mixed-methods design was used to solidify the findings (Creswell, 2014) in that this study involved collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data. Further, the qualitative phase was conducted as a follow-up to quantitative results to help explain

the quantitative results. In this explanatory follow-up, we interviewed 15 children and observed children in nine classes for 12 sessions to understand children's engagement in the class activities.

Table 1

Participants' demographic information

Variables		N	%
Parents	Male	21	20.00
	Female	84	80.00
Parents' age	20-30	44	41.90
	31-40	50	47.62
	41-50	11	10.48
Parent's level of education	High School Diploma	9	8.57
	Bachelor degree	67	63.81
	Master degree	29	27.62
Children's age	3 years	24	22.86
	4 years	50	47.62
	5 years	31	29.52
Children	Male	55	52.38
	Female	50	47.62

Participants

105 children and their parents from two daycares and three English institutions out of several daycare centers and institutions participated in this study. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information. The children (52.38%) were boys and (47.62%) were girls, and their ages ranged from (22.86%) 3 years old, (47.62%) 4 years old to (29.52%) 5 years old. Parents (80%) were female and male (20%), and their ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old (41.90%), 31-40 years old (47.62%), and 41-50 (10.48%). In terms of their educational background, they had high school diplomas (8.57%), BA (63.81%), and MA (27.62%). They reported that they were moderately aware of the English language, which could support their children's English home literacy.

Procedure

We first screened out daycare centres and English institutions in the study area in Tehran in terms of the population so that they have enough learners to serve the study's purpose. Through a simple random sampling, the researchers from Persian and TESOL in the field followed the following stages. First, they approached several directors of the intended daycares and English institutions and explained the study's nature and purpose to them. Principals from two daycares and three English institutions consented to participate in this study.

Children were approximately at similar Persian and English literacy levels separately based on the internal daycare Persian and English language standards as they have three different literacy levels (1, 2, and 3) in Persian

(level 2) and English (level 1) which both mainly focus on pictorial alphabets, lexicons, two-word nouns, and phrases. English language training is provided in a few daycare centers in affluent socioeconomic city areas in Tehran, and parents are charged more if they want to put their children in this kind of bilingual daycare center. However, English language literacy is not compulsory in any daycare centers in Iran.

Then, the directors agreed to talk to teachers and parents and asked for their opinion on cooperating in this study, and they asked the researchers to inform them of the result. Finally, the teachers invited all parents and children who concurred to participate in this study. After signing the informed consent forms (BERA, 2011) and assuring the participants of the ethics and confidentiality issues, the researchers explained the contents of the questionnaires to the parents. Questionnaires were translated into Persian and back-translated into English by the second researcher and were checked by a professional translator and the other co-researchers. Then, participants completed four questionnaires at home and returned them to the researchers. More specifically, the questionnaires included information on family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations.

To strengthen the questionnaires' findings, the second researcher observed nine classes and invited 15 children after a few days to participate in a semi-structured interview. These participants were chosen for this phase given their quantitative responses, consent, and willingness to further partake in the study. The purpose of the classroom observation and semi-structured interviews was to monitor the children closely, provide more information and cross-check children's beliefs regarding

their responses. As a non-participant observer, the second researcher supplied information about students' literacy interests through their engagement in class activities (e.g., Creswell, 2014). The hard copy questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and in-person observations probed into the gap between children's literacy interest and their family literacy activities at home, their parents' reading beliefs, and their parents' educational expectations. The activities used in the daycare centers were at the children's literacy level.

Instruments

The instruments, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observations, are unpacked below. Before administering the questionnaire, the contents were assessed by two literacy experts and the researchers to determine the alignment of the appropriateness of Iranian children's and families' cultural contexts. Then, the items of each questionnaire were adapted based on the assessment and pilot-tested before administration. Further information regarding each instrument is provided below.

Parents' Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI)

The PRBI is a 30-item inventory adapted by Yeo et al. (2014) and in this questionnaire, the researchers used a tool including a 4-point Likert-typed scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree) to measure parents' attitudes towards the materials parents used for assisting their children in developing their literacy skills. The adapted PRBI with 30 items for this study had a Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha = .82$). Cronbach's alpha for the seven subscales was as follows: Verbal participation ($\alpha = .66$), affect ($\alpha = .73$), knowledge ($\alpha = .63$). Efficacy 1 (parental role in general) ($\alpha = .63$), efficacy 2 (parental role before school) ($\alpha = .81$), reading instruction (α

= .95), environmental input ($\alpha = .63$). Efficacy 1 ($\alpha = .63$) with 4 items and environmental input ($\alpha = .63$) with 2 items indicated the lowest Cronbach's alphas score, which shows the moderate amount of association among the set of items, which is satisfactory due to its number of items. Cronbach alpha of around ($\alpha = .65$) is satisfactory (Larsen-Hall, 2010) for four or five items, and indicates the moderate association among a set of items (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2004).

Family Literacy Activity Inventory (FLAI)

The FLAI is a 17-item inventory adapted from Yeo et al.'s (2014) study. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-typed scale with responses ranging from "never-not done this at all," "seldom-about once a month," "sometimes-about 2 to 3 items a month," to "often-4 or more times a month." An example item that measures the frequency of parental literacy-related practices is "I take my child to the library or bookstore". The Cronbach's alpha for FLAI in the sample of this study was ($\alpha = .84$). Cronbach's alpha indices for the 4 subscales of the FLA were as follows: parents engaging child in reading and writing ($\alpha = .66$), parents modelling reading and writing ($\alpha = .80$), going to the bookstore ($\alpha = .65$), and going to the library ($\alpha = .79$) (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2004).

Parents Reporting Child Interests

Parents completed a short questionnaire, which included demographic information and questions about children's literacy interests adapted from (Baroody & Diamond, 2013) with eight items having a Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .92$). Parents reported child interest with a Cronbach alpha of ($\alpha = .92$) indicated the highest Cronbach's alpha score, which demonstrated the high homogeneity among its items (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2004). Parent-reported child interest (eight items on the

caregiver questionnaires) asked caregivers about their child's interest in literacy activities (i.e., reading, writing, and letters). Five of these items measured children's frequency of participation in literacy activities (e.g., How often does your child attempt to write words) and three items asked parents to assess their child's level of enjoyment in literacy activities (e.g., how much does your child enjoy being read to). Items were rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1-4 in the data analysis (hardly ever/not at all = 1 to almost every day/a lot = 4), and the final scores of the parent-report child literacy were averaged for all eight items.

Parents Reported Their Educational Expectations

Parents' educational expectations questionnaire included children's achievement and attainment. It was adapted from Baroody and Dobbs-Oates (2011). It had 2 items in which parents reported their expectations of their child's educational attainment (highest level of education) and achievement (average grade at school). One item asked parents how many years of school they expected their child to complete (attainment), and its items were rated on a six-point scale from less than ninth grade to beyond college. The other item asked parents to circle the average grade they expected their child to receive in elementary school (achievement), which started from A+ to D+, and the reliability was high enough ($\alpha = .73$).

Observation

The second researcher did the non-participant observation of children's classrooms along with a direct and in-depth study of the context, helping researchers to collect more objective data about what is occurring in the classroom (Bell & Waters, 2014). The observation of the classes was done based on a checklist adapted from

Baroody and Diamond's (2013) child-report measures. The observation checklist includes statements regarding the children's engagement in literacy-related activities such as playing letter games, looking at books, and asking about them.

Interview

We employed semi-structured interviews to uncover rich descriptive data on the children's experiences. Moreover, an interview is a valuable data collection method because it creates a holistic picture, informs the interviewers of the detailed view of informants, and empowers the interviewees to use their voices about their opinions and emotions (Berg, 2007). This method proved to be valuable for this study due to the age of the participants; they are three to five-year-old children whose opinions can be manipulated, and adults usually like to speak instead of them, but researchers were careful to only report on the children's opinions by using interviews as a method of data collection.

We prepared interview questions after reviewing educational literature concerned with conducting interviews while considering the objectives of these interviews and questions. Twenty preliminary questions were asked. Then, these questions were presented to the panel of experts in the field to ensure reliability, validity, credibility, and trustworthiness and to assess their relation to the research objectives and the interviews. Some questions were deleted. In addition, some were edited and organized according to the research objectives. During the study period, some questions were corrected or deleted, ending with 10 questions. The questions covered children's enjoyment and frequency of literacy-related activities.

The interview was conducted in their mother tongue, which was Persian assisting in

the researchers' understanding of their responses translated into English noted earlier. Children answered the questions independently without any outside or parental suggestions. The researchers conducting the interview used a questionnaire and a recording set. They used the Easy voice recorder application installed on their cell phones. Then, they sat opposite the interviewed child in the presence of their teacher, as they loved their teachers, and their presence motivated the children to answer our interview questions. They introduced themselves, explained that they would take some of the children's time to obtain accurate and subjective data, and asked them if they were willing to answer some questions. We pointed out that the interview data were a major source of information and that they would be included in the data sources.

The researchers also informed the participants that they recorded the session and obtained their approval. They clarified that they wanted the children's opinion with no outside suggestions and that they were not being tested. The researchers then started the interview by giving the participants enough time to answer without interruptions. They interfered at times to clarify the vague information. Interviews were recorded in three sessions and took an average of 20 to 25 minutes for each child.

Data Analysis

To respond to the first two research questions in the study concerned with the relationship between parental reading belief, family literacy activity, and parents' educational expectations of children's literacy interest, quantitative data from four questionnaires were analysed through statistical methods with SPSS 23. Due to the

non-parametric nature of the parents' educational expectations, Kendall's Tau-b was conducted to examine the relationship between independent variables and dependent ones.

The third and fourth research questions dealt with how the components in parents' reading beliefs and family literacy activities predicted EFL children's literacy interest. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using measures of parental reading beliefs and family literacy activities to determine which components contributed to the literacy interest of the children. For the regression model, a child's age and parent's level of education were entered first in the model to control the potential effect of these demographic variables on children's literacy interests. In the second step of the analysis, the family literacy activity and then the parents' reading beliefs were entered into the regression model.

The following steps were taken to analyse the interviews and observations through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which helps analyse the data inductively (e.g., Creswell, 2014). Step 1 included organizing and preparing the data for analysis by transcribing the interviews in Persian and translating the responses into English. A certified translator checked the translation for accuracy purposes, an observational checklist

was used, and the data was sorted and arranged into different types according to the different sources of information. Step 2 involved re-reading through all the data and getting a general sense of it. Step 3 involved starting to write the initial codes followed by thematizing the codes and reporting them. In step 4, the researchers put the themes in narratives. The last step involved interpreting the data based on personal experience and previous literature (Creswell, 2014). Pseudonyms were used to analyze the data and secure confidentiality.

Results

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of all the questionnaire factors including children's literacy interest, family literacy activity, parental engagement in children's reading and writing, parents' modelling reading and writing, going to the bookstore, going to the library, parents' reading beliefs, verbal participation, affect, knowledge, efficacy 1 (parental role in general), efficacy 2 (parental role before school), reading instruction, environmental input, were normally distributed except for parents' educational expectations since they were not rated on a ratio scale and were not normally distributed.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics regarding the variables of children's literacy interest, family literacy activities and parents' reading beliefs

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Children literacy interest	105	2.87	0.83
Family literacy activities	105	2.57	0.53
Parent engaging child in reading and writing	105	2.87	0.53
Parent Modeling reading and writing	105	2.90	0.68
Going to the bookstore	105	2.85	0.55
Going to the library	105	1.67	0.94

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Parents reading beliefs	105	2.52	0.36
Verbal participation	105	2.87	0.53
Affect	105	2.86	0.61
Knowledge	105	2.62	0.47
Efficacy1	105	3.14	0.46
Efficacy2	105	2.17	0.90
Reading instruction	105	1.88	0.55
Environmental input	105	2.09	0.73

First research question: *Is there any relationship between EFL children's literacy interests and activities and their family literacy ones?*

Concerning the first research question, Table 3 indicates that there was a weak correlation between children's literacy interests and activities and family literacy activities ($r = .31$). Children's literacy interest and activity were

correlated weakly with a parent engaging the child in reading and writing ($r = .26$). It was weakly related to going to the bookstore ($r = .22$) and was very weakly linked to going to the library ($r = .16$). Among the variables of family literacy activities, parents engaging the child in reading and writing with the correlation of ($r = .26$) indicated the highest correlation with children's literacy interest and activity.

Table 3

Correlation between children’s literacy interest, parents’ literacy activities, their parents’ reading

Variables	Children literacy interest	parental expectations (attainment)	parental expectations (achievement)	Family literacy activities	Parent engaging child in reading and writing	Parent Modeling reading and writing	Going to the bookstore	Going to the library	Parents reading beliefs	Verbal participation	Affect	Knowledge	Efficacy1	Efficacy2	Reading instruction	Environmental input
Children literacy interest	-															
Parental expectations (attainment)	.068	-														
Parental expectations (achievement)	.021	-.045	-													
Family literacy activities	.311**	-.039	-.100	-												
Parent engaging child in reading and writing	.269**	-.001	.016	.360**	-											
Parent Modeling reading and writing	.066	-.063	-.046	.686**	.138	-										
Going to the bookstore	.221**	-.024	-.030	.462**	.024	.420**	-									
Going to the library	.168*	-.016	-.128	.687**	.555**	.594**	.168*	-								
Parents reading beliefs	.259**	.030	.008	.452**	.493**	.245**	.232**	.371**	-							
Verbal participation	.269**	-.001	.016	.360**	1.000**	.138	.024	.555**	.493**	-						
Affect	.018	-.033	-.042	.505**	.484**	.590**	.114	.828**	.256**	.484**	-					
Knowledge	.241**	-.082	-.083	.772**	.183	.735**	.479**	.635**	.336**	.183	.511**	-				
Efficacy1	.103	.222**	.039	.060	.127	-.017	.117	-.041	.206**	.127	-.079	.080	-			
Efficacy2	.139	-.018	-.023	.088	.068	-.056	.116	-.063	.521**	.068	-.127	-.031	-.039	-		
Reading instruction	.159*	-.044	.012	.060	.117	-.083	.094	-.054	.543**	.117	-.132	-.018	.070	.808**	-	
Environmental input	.111	.050	.041	.187*	.245**	.003	.080	.105	.526**	.245**	.050	.071	.038	.402**	.421**	-

beliefs and parents’ educational expectations

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

The result of the interviews and observations also supports the parents’ report of their children's literacy interest and activity questionnaire which indicated that children

were interested in learning English. They were passionate and engaged in the classes that were observed and, in the interviews, they constantly stated that they were interested in attending the English class so they could dance

and sing English songs and get involved with other English-related activities. For instance, to answer the interview question, "What is your favourite English-related activity inside and outside the classroom?" Nader answered, "I really like it when my mommy and daddy read me stories before I go to sleep." Araz said: "I liked it very much when we sing the English songs. It is hard for me to memorize them but I like them very much." Mehrnaz answered: "I always like to play with English letters with my mom. My mom and I color the English letters together." Abolfazl said: "I like to make the English letters with play dough. It is hard for me to do it but my teacher helps me learn how to do it. I like it very much."

It can be understood from Nader, Araz, Mehrnaz, and Abolfazl's responses to the question regarding their favourite English-related activity that they were all enthusiastic and positive toward learning and engaging in different English-related activities. Even though Araz and Abolfazl found singing English songs and making English letters with play dough rather difficult, they would not give up doing them or stop enjoying them. Instead, they continued doing and enjoying them to a great extent as well. It is well implied from these answers that parents were indeed accurate in their responses regarding their children's literacy interests.

Second research question: *Is there any relationship between EFL children's literacy interests, their parents' reading beliefs, and their parents' educational expectations?*

Regarding the second research question, Table 3 shows that there was a weak correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' reading belief ($r = .25$). EFL children's literacy interest was weakly related to verbal participation ($r = .26$). It was moderately associated with knowledge ($r = .24$)

but was weakly related to reading instruction ($r = .15$). Among the variables in parents' reading belief, verbal participation with ($r = .26$) indicated the highest correlation with children's literacy interest in English language learning. There was no significant correlation between EFL children's literacy interests and parents' educational expectations (attainment and achievement). The correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' educational expectations (attainment) is ($r = .68$) and the correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' educational expectations (achievement) is ($r = .21$).

The result of the interviews and observations supports the parents' report of their EFL children's literacy interest questionnaire. EFL children were very much interested in learning English. As mentioned above, EFL children were passionate about learning English which was obvious through their engagement in English-related activities in the class and their direct statement through interviews. For example, to answer the question focusing on how often they play English letter games. Aida answered: "I play English letter games all the time" To answer the question of whether they enjoy writing English letters and words, Abtin said:

I really like it when my teacher writes my name on the board. I always ask her to write my name and my mom's name on the board in English. Then, I write them in my notebook. When I go home, I show it to my mom and dad. They like it too.

Aida and Abtin's responses to the question regarding their interest in playing English letter games indicate that children find it funny and entertaining to spend time in the English class and play with English letters. To the point that Abtin used this opportunity to engage with his

parents through this activity and he felt good about himself because his parents liked his work. Therefore, he was motivated to do it more and more and learn it as much as possible. Hence, these answers show that the parents' report on their EFL children's literacy interest was reliable and correct. The results of the interviews and observations indicated that children were passionate about learning English regardless of their parent's expectations.

Children stated through interviews that they liked their English class which was proved to be true through the observations of the class; children were active and energetic in the English class and they always looked forward to attending the English class. Therefore, the results of the qualitative data of the study revealed that parents' report of their children's literacy interest was accurate and children were indeed interested in learning the English language. For instance, to answer the question of whether they like learning English letter names. Havash answered:

I really want to learn the letter names so I can read the books on my own. I like it very much

when my mom reads me the books but they work and they are always tired so I want to learn the letters because I want to read the books before I go to sleep.

Havash's answer to the question regarding his passion for learning the English letters indicates how much he is interested in learning the letters so he would be able to become an independent reader who can read different books regardless of his parent's interest in reading it for him. His answer also corroborates the parents' report of their EFL children's literacy interest who claimed that their children were indeed passionate about learning English.

Regarding parents' educational expectations, Table 4 reveals there is no significant correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' educational expectations (attainment and achievement). The correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' educational expectations (attainment) is ($r = .068$) and the correlation between EFL children's literacy interest and parents' educational expectations (achievement) is ($r = .021$).

Table 4

Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for specific components in family literacy activities and parents' reading beliefs that predict children's reading interest

Step	Predictor variable	Beta	R ²	ΔR ²	F change
1	Child age and parent's level of education		.034	.034	1.787
	Child age	.170			
	Parent's level of education	.065			
2	Family literacy activities		.569	.536	30.479**
	Parent engaging child in reading and writing	.651**			
	Parent Modeling reading and writing	-.939**			
	Going to the bookstore	.795**			
	Going to the library	.588**			
3	Parents reading belief		.656	.087	3.870**
	Verbal participation	.287			
	Affect	.297**			

Step	Predictor variable	Beta	R ²	ΔR ²	F change
	Knowledge	.778 ^{**}			
	Efficacy1	-.150			
	Efficacy2	.202			
	Reading instruction	-.036			
	Environmental input	-.044			

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Third research question: *What components in family literacy activities predict EFL children's literacy interests?*

To find out which components in family literacy activities predict EFL children's literacy interest, our third research question, hierarchical multiple regression analysis in Table 4 indicates that the child's age, parent's education level, family literacy activities, and parents' reading beliefs were all significant predictors of children's reading interest, accounting for a total variance of 53.6. Going to the bookstore, parents engaging the child in reading and writing, and going to the library were also significant positive predictors of the child's literacy interest, with a significant Beta value of ($\beta = .79, p < .01$; $\beta = .65, p < .01$; $\beta = .58, p < .01$, respectively).

Fourth research question: *What components in parents' reading beliefs predict EFL children's literacy interests?*

Concerning our fourth research question, Table 4 also indicates the components that EFL children's literacy interest in family literacy activities can predict. The results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that the child's age, parents' education level, family literacy activities, and parents' reading beliefs were all significant predictors of EFL children's reading interest, accounting for a total variance $\Delta R^2 = 53.6$. Among the parents' reading belief variables, the best predictor of children's literacy interest

is knowledge with a Beta of ($\beta = .77, p < .01$). The effect was a significant positive predictor of the child's literacy interest, with a significant Beta value of ($\beta = .29, p < .01$).

Children's interviews

One hundred and three children answered positively to the question, "Do you enjoy listening to your teacher and parents when they read English stories for you?" Except for two children, who said stories were boring for them, the rest liked listening to the stories very much. They emphasized that they always asked their parents and teachers to read for them. Although children stated that memorizing and learning English songs, and letters, and making the shape of the English letter by using playdough were somehow hard for them, they enjoyed learning and doing them anyway. Children's favourite things to do in the English class appeared to be dancing to English songs, making up stories and acting it in front of the class, and pointing with their fingers to the things that their teacher asked them; for example, when the teacher asked them in English to show her the board or chair. They all liked it very much when their teacher spoke in English even if it was hard for them to understand what she was talking about.

The majority of the children stated that they asked their teacher and parents to play with English letters with them for example colouring the letters and singing the songs with

them so they would enjoy doing them even more. Children also stated that they always asked their parents to get them new storybooks whenever they went to the bookstore or library because they loved listening to the new story every night. For example, Atena expressed that telling stories is her thing even if she is not in the class so when the teacher asked them to do that in the classroom and gave them opportunities to act out those stories in front of the class, it felt like heaven for her. Or, Saman said that it is interesting for him to go to the board and point to the objects that the teacher asked him to. He liked it a lot because he found the task to be very entertaining.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on preschool children's interest in literacy-related activities. It supports previous studies that found family literacy activities and parents' reading beliefs had a positive and significant association with preschool children's literacy interests. However, the result also indicated that there was no correlation between parents' educational expectations and children's literacy interests in the context of Iran. Parents' perception of their children's literacy interest was unrelated to how far they expect their children to go to school and what grade their children get.

The first research question included whether there would be a relationship between EFL children's literacy interest and family literacy activities is affirmative. Regarding family literacy activities, results indicated a strong relationship between parents' engaging the child in reading and writing. However, it is moderately correlated with going to the bookstore and less likely related to going to the

library. The findings of this study are consistent with prior research findings by Inoue et al. (2018), Roberts and Rochester (2021), Silinkas et al. (2012), and Yeo et al. (2014), who found similar results regarding the positive relationship between family literacy activities and children literacy interest and outcome in the contexts that differ from this study, such as Singapore, Turkey, the USA, Canada, and Finland. Our results align with those of Martini and Sénéchal (2012) and Hume et al. (2015), who found a positive link between children's level of interest in literacy and home literacy activity.

However, there are some inconsistencies in the correlation between family literacy activities and children's literacy interest in this study, as it was also revealed that children's literacy interest was moderately related to going to the bookstore and less strongly related to going to the library. The findings of the study conducted by Yeo et al. (2014) suggested that it is not particularly helpful for parents simply to bring their children to the library or the bookstore or even to model reading at home. Direct engagement of the child in reading activities seems to be required to facilitate reading skills and interest in children. Yet, in the context of Iran, going to the bookstore and library made children more interested in literacy activities in this study. Children mentioned during the interviews that they liked it very much when they went to the bookstore and library with their parents because they knew they were very excited that their parents would read those new stories to them. Maybe children were excited about the number of English children's books the library had in Iran.

This study illuminates that parents' engaging children in reading and writing is strongly related to children's literacy interest in

the English language, which was also shown in the study conducted by Inoue et al. (2018), during which they discovered that parents' shared book reading and teaching has a positive and mediating effect on children's literacy. However, there are some differences in the context of their study and the current study. Their participants were first, second, and third graders, but 3 to 5-year-old children participated in the current study. Another difference is that Inoue et al.'s (2018) study was conducted in a context where English is the participants' L1. However, the current study was conducted in Iran, where Persian is the participants' L1, and therefore, nobody outside the class speaks English as a foreign language. In Yeo et al.'s (2014) study, the participants lived in Singapore, where English is the language of education, and people have their native language, but they speak English in the educational setting.

The answer to the second research question of whether there would be any relationships between EFL children's literacy interest, their parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations is affirmative. The study showed a strong relationship between children's literacy interests and parents' reading beliefs. Children's literacy interest was strongly related to verbal participation and moderately related to knowledge. It was also less strongly associated with reading instruction. The result of the study is consistent with the previous research by Cottone (2012), and Yeo et al. (2014), who found similar results regarding the positive relationship between parents' reading beliefs and children's literacy interest and outcome. In other words, the more parents realize the importance of their children's literacy activities, the more they tend to provide their children with opportunities that

contribute noticeably to their learning success in literacy activities. They believe they play a vital role in helping their children become more interested in literacy and eventually perform better at literacy activities.

However, the study conducted by Şimşek Çetin (2015) revealed no significant relationship between mothers' reading beliefs and children's literacy and print awareness. In his study, only the age factor contributed to the children's emergent literacy, and other factors, including gender and mother's reading belief, had nothing to do with children's literacy outcome. It was also revealed in Cottone's (2012) study that mothers' level of education is associated with their reading beliefs, so it is possible that in Şimşek Çetin's (2015) study, the level of mother's education is also necessary to be considered to get more detailed and accurate results about the effect of parent's reading belief and children's literacy outcome and interest.

Moreover, there was no significant correlation between children's literacy interests and parents' educational expectations (attainment and achievement). This is in line with Matvichuk (2015) who revealed that even though parents' behavior and HLE were both related to child literacy interest, parents' expectations did not correlate with child literacy interest. The finding of this study is also partially consistent with Baroodi and Dobbs-Oates' (2011) study in which they did not find a relationship between parental expectations about the attainment of their children at school but they found a correlation between parents' educational expectations about the achievement of their children and their literacy interest.

However, the result of this study, which showed no relationship between parents' educational expectations and their children's

literacy interests, goes against all these studies, which might be because of the context of Iran. Due to the shortage of suitable jobs for educated people, parents sometimes lower their expectations regarding their children's academic performances (Irwin & Elley, 2013). According to their own experiences, education does not play an essential role in children's future successful lives anymore. Hence, parents prefer their children to enjoy their education journey with the least stress as they believe life is not worth struggling to receive education (Shimomura et al., 2007).

To answer the third research question, parents' modelling of reading and writing is the highest predictor of children's literacy interest among family literacy activity variables. Going to the bookstore, parents' engaging children in reading and writing, and going to the library were also significant positive predictors of the children's literacy interest. The finding is consistent with the study conducted by Junge et al. (2021) and Luo and Gao (2021), maintaining that parental literacy involvement improves children's literacy development and parents have enough time for their only child at home to provide literacy support. However, they run short of time to support if they have multiple children.

Nonetheless, the current study's finding is inconsistent with Helmerhorst et al. (2021) and Liu et al. (2018), emphasizing that children's literacy development is not necessarily aligned with their parental home involvement. However, there is a correlation between phonological awareness and learning words, improving reading and improving language receptive performance. The reason for these inconsistencies is already explained above. Children mentioned during the interviews that they liked it very much when they went to the bookstore and library with

their parents because those places were full of colorful books, and each time they went to the bookstore or library, they knew that a new story was waiting for them. They were excited that their parents would read those new stories to them. Maybe it can explain the difference in the context of Iran.

To answer the fourth research question, among the parents' reading belief variables, knowledge is the highest predictor of children's literacy interest. The effect was also a significant positive predictor of the child's literacy interest. The current study's findings were congruent with the result of the study conducted by Yeo et al. (2014) in that it was revealed in their study that affect plays an important role in children's reading motivation. The reason is that parents show affection and interest when they read to their children. Therefore, their children reported indicating stronger emergent literacy skills.

Conclusion and Implications

This study extends the research on the influence of family literacy activities and their parents' reading beliefs on children's literacy interest in EFL learning. The study revealed a positive relationship between family literacy activities and parents' reading beliefs with children's literacy interest in English language learning. However, no correlation was found between parental educational expectations and children's English literacy interests. Regarding family literacy activities, children's literacy interest in English language learning was most strongly correlated with a parent who engages a child in reading and writing. It was moderately related to going to the bookstore but less strongly linked to the library. Regarding parents' reading beliefs, children's literacy interest in English language learning was strongly related to verbal participation. It

was moderately associated with knowledge but was less strongly related to reading instruction. Moreover, knowledge was the highest predictor of children's literacy interest among the parents' reading belief variables. The effect was a significant positive predictor of the child's literacy interest.

Regarding the practical importance, this study informs educators and literacy program designers to focus more on the role and impact of parents on their children's literacy interest in English language learning. For example, parents can be encouraged to engage more in their children's reading and writing in English. Moreover, through verbal participation, parents can make the experience of reading an English book or playing an audio English for their children more profitable and enjoyable. Children's English book writers should consider parental home literacy activities so that enough space should be provided in the book so that parents can play an important contributing role in assisting both their children and a teacher in contributing to their children's English literacy development. The context and culture help children English book writers to import parental reading beliefs so that parents would agree on the taught contents in the class. Therefore, parents are more interested in home English literacy involvement, facilitating their children's literacy development.

The current study had some limitations. One limitation was that although many factors were involved in children's English literacy interests, this study only focused on family literacy activities, parents' reading beliefs, and parents' educational expectations. We acknowledge that many other factors can potentially be associated with children's English literacy interests. All these differences in this study and prior studies indicate that the

results of the current study should be approached with caution as it only applies in foreign language contexts such as Iran among early childhood English language learners. Future studies need to investigate other variables related to children's literacy interest in English language learning, such as parental English language literacy and classroom environment.

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