### **Family Literacy Practices and their Contribution to Emergent Literacy Skills during COVID-19 Pandemic**

Running head: Family literacy and emergent literacy skills

Joana Cruzac\*, Maria Mackaaijbc, Helena Bilimóriaac & Daniela Gandrac

a Instituto de Educação e Psicologia, Universidade Lusíada, Porto, Portugal;

b Câmara Municipal Loulé, Loulé, Portugal;

c Centro de Investigação em Psicologia para o Desenvolvimento (CIPD)

\*corresponding author: [joanacruz@por.ulusiada.pt](mailto:joanacruz@por.ulusiada.pt)

Full postal address:

Universidade Lusíada Norte

Rua de Moçambique, Nº 21 e Nº 71, 4100-346, Aldoar, Porto, Portugal

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Abstract

To develop emergent literacy skills, preschool children need to be supported by adults in a rich and stimulating environment. During the first lockdown due to the SARS-CoV2 virus, there were several social, family, technological, and individual barriers to promote family literacy and emergent literacy. In the present study, we aimed to provide insight on the relationship between family literacy practices and emergent literacy skills among preschool children after the first confinement due to COVID-19 pandemic. This study included 102 participants, which consisted of parents (90.2% mothers) and one preschool child per parent. Results showed evidence of a higher frequency of training and teaching activities than family literacy playful activities. There were statistically significant differences in emergent skills, according to the frequency of family playful activities and family training and teaching activities. Results suggest that different family literacy practices are significantly correlated to all the emergent literacy skills evaluated.

Keywords: family practices; family literacy; emergent literacy; lockdown; preschool

**Introduction**

**Emergent Literacy Skills**

Emergent literacy skills have a crucial role in the development of reading skills and in ensuring a smooth transition to formal reading. Preschool years are critical to developing these emergent literacy skills (Pullen & Justice, 2003). Child performance in these skills is associated with later reading achievement. Nevertheless, children considered “at-risk” for reading acquisition aren´t a homogeneous group; conversely, they reveal heterogeneous profiles of emergent literacy skills (Cabell et al., 2011).

Emergent literacy is a wide construct that comprises conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge about reading and writing, as well as oral language and metalinguistic skills (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2001). The development of oral language allows the acquisition of language to communicate, learn, and think. It integrates several domains of language, namely semantic development (Sim-Sim et al., 2008). Preschool children´s performance on vocabulary (semantic) tasks accounts for a significant amount of the variance in reading ability in late elementary grades (Catts et al., 2001). Thus, children with difficulties in vocabulary knowledge are more likely to reveal literacy problems (Pullen & Justice, 2003).

Metalinguistic skills are oral language competencies, although they are usually studied as a unique set of skills because they contribute to reading and writing (Becker & Sylvan, 2021; Eccles et al., 2021). One of the most studied metalinguistic skills is phonologic awareness, which is described as the ability to reflect on phonological segments of spoken words. It consists of analyzing and manipulating parts of sounds of different sizes, such as the syllables and phonemes that comprise words. Several tasks assess these specific emergent literacy skills, such as classification tasks, where children must classify words represented by pictures according to syllabic or phonemic criteria (Sim-Sim et al., 2008; Sim-Sim, 2004). Several studies have shown that phonological awareness is related to the development of reading skills acquisition (Becker & Sylvan, 2021; Edwards & Taub, 2016). Children that show more ability in syllabic and phonemic tasks also learn to read more easily (Eccles et al., 2021). This association has been found consistently, even when controlling for factors such as age and nonverbal IQ (Landerl et al., 2019). Moreover, training in phonological awareness improves reading performance (Suggate, 2016).

In addition to oral language development and phonological awareness, conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge about reading and writing are related to reading achievement (Bayraktar, 2018; Rababah, 2017). Conceptual knowledge includes skills such as: i) understanding print carries meaning; ii) being aware of environmental print; iii) being able to handle books properly; iv) understanding the directionality of print; v) being familiar with major book elements (cover, title, author); and, vi) knowing letters of the alphabet (Lefebvre et al., 2011; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2001). Procedural knowledge includes children’s knowledge about the mechanics of reading and writing, including alphabet knowledge and letter-name and letter-sound correspondence (Albuquerque & Martins, 2021; Justice & Ezell, 2001). Studies highlight that an understanding of print concepts predicts future reading success (Reese et al., 2010). Moreover, children´s interaction with environmental print is necessary for reading attainment (Neumann, 2018). Finally, letter knowledge, as a demonstration of the acquisition of the alphabetic principle, is a robust predictor of later reading achievement (Pullen & Justice, 2003).

**Emergent Literacy and Family Practices**

To develop the emergent literacy skills essential to reading development, preschool children must be supported by adults, in their regular environment, in a rich and stimulating context (Viana et al., 2019). Adults encourage children to acquire skills and serve as models (Bayraktar, 2018). Some behaviors are, however, more effective, namely: i) adults reading books to children and interacting with them about knowledge of written language, while sharing books (to know how a book is held, how pages are turned; to distinguish the beginning and the end of a book /page), responding to questions about book-related topics; ii) introducing different written materials (books, magazines, comics, newspapers, tickets, invitations, food menus, recipes and so on); preparing shopping lists with children; taking children to the library or bookstore (Cruz, 2011; Rvachew et al., 2017).

Children build concepts, attitudes, and skills through literacy-based interactions with adults from an early age. This requires the active participation of adults in adult-child interactions that are cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically appropriate for the child´s age (Cruz, 2011). Literature typically agrees that there is a heterogeneous family of literacy practices and activities. Some are more frequent and common, such as reading stories and name writing; while others are less prevalent, such as legend reading, label reading, letter reading (Mata, 2010; Pacheco, 2012). This differentiation in family literacy activities also translates into different conceptions of a parent´s role in supporting the literacy development of their children (Pacheco, 2012). More effective practices for leading children to literacy knowledge include; i) reading and sharing stories; and ii) involving children in reading and writing activities that are integrated with daily routines or leisure and playful activities. When activities are centered on the training and teaching of letters and words, without a functional and contextualized situation, children reveal less knowledge about reading and writing conventions (Cruz, 2011; Viana et al., 2019).

Number of books are considered an important indicator of the richness of the literacy environment (Foorman *et al*., 2002; Mata, 2006; Pezoa et al., 2019; Sénéchal, 2006; Stephenson et al., 2008). Mata (2004) found in a Portuguese study that children who had more infant literature books at home were the ones with more complex conceptions about writing language. Research shows that the number of books children possess is an indicator of the richness of the literacy environment, which means that when children’s have more books in home, its higher the possibility of interactions with print (Foorman *et al*., 2002; Pezoa et al., 2019; Mata, 2006).

Family practices are diverse and research shows that it can be influenced by social economic status (SES). This indicator can be assessed through different variables, such as parents' education, parents’ profession and family income (Baker et al., 2001; Karther, 2002; Mata, 2006; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Several studies suggest that low SES families tend to perform more structured activities with their children, related to formal reading and writing, such as letter teaching (Baker et al., 2001). Karther (2002) added that mothers with low parents’ education value the exploration of books with children, although the interactions tend not to be rich and usually are characterized by a reduced parental involvement and a higher frequency of teaching activities.

**Emergent Literacy During COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the first lockdown due to the SARS-CoV2 virus, which causes the disease COVID-19, many researchers questioned how confinement would influence the development of children, particularly on the achievement of learning skills and on mental health and well-being (Lee, 2020). As in many other countries, there was a national lockdown in Portugal starting in March 2020 (Abuhammad, 2020). This measure meant that schools were closed and the overall recommendation was to stay home. Children continued the ongoing school level via online synchronous and asynchronous classes with their teachers, supported by television broadcasted lectures promoted by the government. This measure was no able to reach all pupils and, for some, was delivered after a delay (Morgado et al., 2021).

The challenges of the pandemic were especially demanding for two months in Portugal (March to May), after which, despite being eased, were not eliminated and most of the preschool children stayed at home from March until September. Families were supported by giving children and parents access to distance learning materials and techniques via the internet, although there were several social, family, technological, and individual barriers to these strategies, as well as heterogeneousness in the follow-up of families and children (Abuhammad, 2020). For preschool children, previous studies point to positive effects of a home-learning environment on skill development, with the home learning environment serving as a predictor of early abilities and competencies in later elementary school (Niklas & Scheider, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to understand which family literacy practices were used more frequently in the home environment and how they contributed to emergent literacy development.

### **Research Aims and Expectations/The Present Study**

In the present study, we aimed to provide insight on the relationship between family literacy practices and emergent literacy skills among preschool children, after the first confinement due to COVID -19 pandemic. Specifically, the first objective of this study was to describe family literacy practices and emergent literacy skills after the first confinement and to analyze the influence of the frequency of family literacy practices in emergent literacy skills. Second, we investigated the contribution of family literacy practices to emergent literacy skills.

These objectives led to two research questions. The first research question addressed whether the frequency of family literacy practices made a difference in children’s emergent literacy skills. We expected higher results in emergent literacy skills when there was a higher frequency of activities in families, such as been shown in other studies and countries (Cruz, 2011; Evans et al., 2000; Ihmeideh & Al.Maadadi, 2020; Niklas & Scheineider, 2017). The second research question addresses whether family literacy practices studied contributed to emergent literacy skills. We expected that family literacy activities with preschoolers would influence vocabulary, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, print awareness, and emergent writing (Cruz, 2011; Farry-Thorn et al., 2020; Turan & Akoglu, 2014).

**Method**

**Participants**

This study included 102 participants, which consisted of parents and one preschool child per parent. Children (93.2% Portuguese, 3.9% Brazilian and 2.9% Chinese) were attending 3 state-funded preschools in the north and center of Portugal (43.7% female, mean age = 4.83 years, SD = .42).

Parents were recruited to participate in this study and describe their family literacy practices. Ninety-two mothers (90.2%) and ten parents (9.8%) participated in the study. All of the parents reported mothers’ and fathers’ highest level of education. Regarding maternal education, 21.8% reported that they did not complete high school, 33.7% reported graduating from high school and 44.5% reported having a three-year degree or higher. Concerning fathers’ education 38.2% didn’t complete high school, 37.3% graduated from high school and 24.5% reported having a three-year degree or higher.

**Measures**

***Child Emergent Literacy***

Vocabulary. In this task, 33 images are presented and the child is asked to name what they see (e.g. “This is a cow”). The answers have different scores according to the correction structure of the task, with a maximum of 65 correct items. Some items are scored with 0 points (when the answer is wrong), one point (when the child express a word related to the semantic field of the image) or two points (when the child gives the target word right or a similar word). This verbal naming test is included in a battery of oral language assessment tasks (Sim-Sim, 2004). The alpha Cronbach for current study was .80.

Phonological awareness: beginning sounds. This task measures children’s phonological awareness skills and requires children to orally identify the same beginning syllabic sounds of words. In each item, there are presented four images and the examiner spokes aloud the name of the words corresponding to the images. Children have to indicate the two words that begin with the same syllabic sounds (e.g. “bota”/”bola” – “boot”/ “ball”). This test, with a total of 14 items, is included in a battery of phonological awareness assessment tasks (Silva, 2003). The alpha Cronbach for current study was .83.

Phonological awareness: rhyming skills. This task also measures children’s phonological awareness skills and requires children to identify words orally, spoken aloud by the examiner, with the same syllabic ending sounds. In each item, is presented a target image and the corresponding spoken aloud word. Children are invited to find another word that has the same syllabic ending sound in a group of four images and corresponding spoken aloud words (“gato”/”rato” – “cat”/”rat”). This task, with a total of 4 items, is included in a linguistic assessment test (Viana, 2004). The alpha Cronbach for current study was .79.

Print awareness. This task measured print identification, concepts of print, and concepts of words. This contained 28 items. Children had to identify in different vignettes the correct answer (eg. “point to the image of a word” or “point to the first letter of the word”). This task, with a total of 28 items, is included in a written language assessment test (Teixeira, 1993). The alpha Cronbach for current study was .85.

Alphabet knowledge. The test administrator asked children to name the 23 upper-case letters of the alphabet presented in random order. The alpha Cronbach for current study was .87.

Early writing (adapted from Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1984). Children were asked to write five words (“gato, gata, gatinho, cavalo, formiga”) and a sentence (“O gato come o rato”). After their attempted writing, responses were scored using the correct phoneme-grapheme correspondences, in a total of 40 correct phoneme-grapheme correspondences. The alpha Cronbach for current study was .90.

**Family Literacy Practices**

We adapted the “Reading Habits with the Child” questionnaire (Mata & Pacheco, 2009). Specifically, we used the dimension of “Playful Activities” that described moments of leisure or free time around reading and writing. This dimension includes activities related to literacy functionality (Mata & Pacheco, 2009), namely reading activities through different supports of written language, such as books, legends of movies or tv programs, magazines, newspapers, poetry (e.g. “Do you usually read stories with or to your child?”) and doesn’t include paper and pencil activities. In this dimension, shared book reading appears as the most common playful activity that families engage in (Grolig, 2020).

The dimension of “Training and Teaching Activities”, refers to specific activities of teaching written language and code-related activities, namely teaching to read or write letters, words, sentences and familiar names (e.g. “Do you usually teach your children to write letters?”). The items of the questionnaire are closed-ended, and parents have to position themselves on a 5-point Likert scale, according to the frequency in which these activities occur (1 – *never*; 5 – *Always*). We found a Cronbach’s Alpha of .791 for the dimension of “Playful Activities” (9 items) and of .887 for “Training and Teaching Activities” dimension (7 items).

We also asked parents about the number of children’s books that they have at home.

**Background Variables**

Demographic information was obtained including gender, age, school grade, and parents’ education.

**Procedures**

Formal authorizations were collected for the assessment procedures. Parents’ responses to the family literacy practices questionnaire were assessed in October 2020, at the beginning of the school year (2020/2021), and they were asked to report their answers to the previous 6 months. The assessment of children was organized with educators in a day and time that would not compromise students’ daily routines. Three trained psychologists performed the assessment. Each evaluation was conducted in a separated room, outside the classroom and had a duration of 40 minutes per children, approximately. Anonymity was guaranteed. Data collection occurred between November and December 2020. The study was conducted per the ethical recommendations of the Psychology for Positive Development Research Center, and was integrated with a larger investigation project to implement emergent literacy skills from a response to intervention approach. The assessment described integrated a universal screening developed to identify children at-risk and to develop a whole-classroom intervention and a small group intervention in the schools, within the RtI framework.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS v26. First, we performed descriptive analyses to characterize family literacy practices and emergent literacy skills. Independent t-tests were used to answer the first research question. To do so, we recoded the “Playful Activities” and “Training and Teaching Activities” into dichotomic variables according to the 50 percentiles for each variable. With this recodification, we compared groups with the higher and lower frequencies of family literacy activities.

Multiple regressions were used to analyze the influence of the family literacy practices in the emergent and language skills. Previously, correlation analysis were performed to evaluate the relation between the outcomes and predictors variables. Those who were not significantly correlated were excluded from the regression models. Seven regression models, with family literacy practices scores, as predictors and emergent and language skills as outcome variables, were performed.A stepwise approach was chosen due to the exploratory nature of the study (Field, 2009).

All assumptions for regression analyses were done. An analysis of standard residuals was performed, and this indicated that there were no outliers. Analyses of standard residuals confirmed that the data contained no outliers. Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern in any of the models tested (Tolerance values from .671 to 1.00; VIF ranged from 1.00 to 1.49). The data also met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson values = 1.33, 1.79, 1.60, 1.35, 2.12, 1.59). The histograms of standardized residuals indicated that the data contained approximately normally distributed errors, confirmed with the normal P-P plots of standardized residuals, and the scatterplots of standardized residuals showed that the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity.

**Results**

The first aim of the study was to characterize family literacy practices and emergent literacy skills, and to investigate the influence of the frequency of family literacy practices on emergent literacy skills. Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for all measures.

Table 1 around here

Table 1 shows that the average number of books was 26 (*SD* = 22.75), suggesting a wide dispersion of results. The standard deviations were lower for family playful activities and training teaching activities, suggesting less variation in the frequency in which these activities are undertaken with children. The table also revealed a higher frequency of training and teaching activities, when comparing the mean to the maximum score of the family literacy practices’ variables.

Regarding emergent literacy skills, the results show that children scored lower in phonemic awareness (beginning sounds and rhyming skills) than in knowledge about print (conventional concepts and letter recognition) at the beginning of the school year. Although many children knew an average of six letters, most had lower scores in early writing (*M*= 1.34; *SD* = 2.87). Vocabulary is a skill in which children presented a mean suitable performance (*M*= 40.32; *SD* = 9.63).

After recoding family literacy activities, independent samples t-tests were performed (Table 2). Results showed that there were statistically significant differences in vocabulary, phonological awareness (beginning sounds and rhyming skills), print awareness, and letter knowledge according to the frequency of family playful activities (*p* < .05). No significant differences were observed between the frequency of family playful activities and early writing (*p* > .05).

Table 2 around here

Results presented in Table 3 show that there were statistically significant differences in print awareness and letter knowledge due to the frequency of family training and teaching activities (*p* < .05). No differences were found between family training and teaching activities and vocabulary, phonological awareness (beginning sounds and rhyming skills), and early writing (*p* >.05).

Table 3 around here

Concerning the last research question, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the relation between the dependent and independent variables. The independent variables considered were mother’s and father’s education, number of books in home, playful activities performed at home and training and teaching activities.

Table 4 around here

Mother’s and father’s education were significantly correlated between them (*r* = .587, *p* < .001). We also find a positive and significant correlation between the number of books in home and mothers’ education them (*r* = .315, *p* < .001) and the number of books and father’s education (*r* = .388, *p* < .001). However, there were no significant correlations between mother’s and father’s education and the dependent variables regarding emergent literacy skills (*p* > .05). For this reason, theses variables weren´t included in the regression models. Number of books were also significantly correlated to playful activities performed at home (*r* = .220, *p* < .05), but wasn’t correlated to any of the emergent literacy skills (*p* > .05). This variable was also excluded from the regression models.

Seven multiple regression models confirmed that various family literacy practices significantly predicted all the emergent literacy skills, although the explained variance was low across the different models (ranging from .04% to 19%), as shown in table 5.

Table 5 around here

An inspection of the individual predictors revealed that family training and teaching practices were the most relevant predictors of rhyming skills (β = .231, *p* < .01), print awareness (β = .260, *p* < .01), letter knowledge (β = .452, *p* < .01) and early writing (β = .275, *p* < .01). Moreover, family playful activities was the most robust predictor of vocabulary (β = .235, *p* < .01) and beginning sounds (β = .280, *p* < .01). Letter knowledge was the skill with the highest percentage of variance explained by the predictor variables (20%).

**Discussion**

This study aimed to characterize family literacy practices and emergent literacy skills and to analyze the connections of the frequency of family literacy practices on emergent literacy skills.

Descriptive statistics showed that our participants scored higher than expected in vocabulary for five-year-old in Portugal (Sim-Sim, 2004). Letter knowledge and print awareness were the emergent literacy skills with the best scores (comparing the mean to the possible maximum), which is probably related to the higher frequency of family training and teaching activities found in the study (Cruz, 2011; Farry-Thorn et al., 2020; Turan & Akoglu, 2014). Phonological awareness, which was assessed by beginning sounds and rhyming skills, was the skill with the lowest scores. Phillips et al. (2008) found evidence that deliberate and methodical stimulation may be needed to successfully develop higher phonological awareness skills, and one possibility is that parents from the present study did not know how to stimulate this ability. Although the children's starting point before confinement was not known, the results are in line with studies that highlight the need for explicit training to promote phonological awareness skills (Phillips et al., 2008; Cruz, 2011; Farry-Thorn et al., 2020; Turan & Akoglu, 2014).

Descriptive statistics highlight that the participants had an average of 26 books, although there was a wide variation (*SD*=22.75). Stephenson et al. (2008) reported that families usually have between 100 and 200 children’s books at home. However, this study was conducted in Canada, while the data for the present study were collected in Portugal. Therefore, there appears to be a notable difference between these two “developed” countries regarding the home literacy environment and practices. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that it’s not only the number of books that is relevant to the promotion of children literacy skills but also the quality of the interactions between the child and their parents during activities around the book and shared book reading (Cruz, 2011; Cruz et al., 2012; Kassow, 2006). Regularly, the number of books at home is related to family’ SES. The correlations results suggest that in our study, the number of books is related to parent’s education, that is also an indicator of family’ SES (Baker et al., 2001; Karther, 2002; Mata, 2006; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). The results suggest that higher the parents’ education, higher the number of books at home, although these results don’t explain what kind of interactions and exploration are done with the books and the preschool children (Karther, 2002).

This study also found a higher frequency of training and teaching activities than family playful activities. In the *Literacy in Portugal Country Report* (Elinet, 2016), it was stated that only 34.9% of pupils were often engaged in literacy activities with their family, which suggests that the lockdown allowed parents to feel more comfortable and confident to practice with their children, working with pre-existing formal materials. These results may reflect parent’s personal experiences when they were children, as well as their practices with their parents (Cruz, 2011). However, current Portuguese guidelines for preschool children reinforce the relevance of playful activities at home as the best way to promote positive attitudes and literacy skills regarding emergent literacy (Mata & Pedro, 2021; Silva et al., 2016). These results point to the need to work with families to demystify formal and playful activities and to promote family literacy strategies that can be used to stimulate and involve children the emergent literacy.

We found statistically significant differences in most of the emergent literacy skills as a function of the frequency of family playful activities: vocabulary, beginning sounds, rhyming skills, print awareness, and letter knowledge. These findings support those of Saracho & Spodek (2006) and suggest that playful activities are a fun and enjoyable way to promote emergent literacy skills in the family environment, and that will be important to develop the literacy skills necessary for formal reading instruction. On the other hand, no relation was found between the frequency of playful activities and early writing, which could be related to the fact this type of skill is more dependent on formal literacy interactions (Sénéchal, 2006; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Another possible explanation for these findings could be related to a floor effect, because most of the children had a 0 score in this task. Although the measures are suitable for children this age and used in other studies as word dictation tasks (Albuquerque & Martins, 2021; Albuquerque & martins, 2019; Sim-Sim, 2004), in Portugal there is evidence that preschool practices focused more on oral language than on the relationship between written language and oral language (Kassow, 2006; Silva et al., 2016).

This study also found statistically significant differences in print awareness and letter knowledge based on the frequency of family training and teaching activities. As suggested by Sénéchal & LeFevre (2002), print awareness and letter knowledge are strongly linked to family training and teaching activities. Indeed, family training and teaching activities have traditionally been focused on letter knowledge, print awareness, and conventions, so it is acceptable that only print awareness and letter knowledge may found statistically significant differences related to family training and teaching activities. These results are congruent with the performance of the participants, as well as with the higher frequency of family activities in this study.

Regarding the second research question, we found that different family literacy practices significantly predicted all the emergent literacy skills, although the explained variance was low in the different models (ranged .04% to 19%).

The results showed that family playful activities were the most robust predictor of vocabulary and beginning sounds. Many studies link dialogic reading practices to a variety of positive outcomes for children’s reading comprehension and vocabulary learning (Caglar-Ryeng et al., 2020). Shared book reading is the most common playful activity that families engage in, and has been connected to several positive outcomes for children (Grolig, 2020), such as increased vocabulary knowledge (Montag et al., 2015), better comprehension of new stories (Clarke et al., 2010), and improved print knowledge (Piasta et al., 2012). This kind of practice may have acquired an even more important role during confinement given that children were unable to attend kindergarten and, therefore, were exposed to fewer reading and writing experiences.

The results of regression analyses also found that family training and teaching activities are the most robust predictor of rhyming skills, print awareness, letter knowledge, and early writing. These code-related skills seem to need explicit, deliberate, and systematic training (Albuquerque & Martins, 2021; Bayraktar, 2018) in the different contexts in which children are integrated (Hofslundsengen et al., 2019).

Finally, letter knowledge was the skill with the highest percentage of variance explained by the predictor variables. This implies families felt most confident practicing this skill this skill with their children. It can be assumed that investing in this skill may be the best option for families with fewer resources (time included) as there is substantial evidence that letter-name knowledge is an important predictor of early reading achievement (Bishop, 2003; Kirby et al., 2003; Parrila et al., 2004; Schatschneider et al., 2004).

Some limitations of this study should also be highlighted. The children and parents weren´t randomly sampled from schools, instead they were selected on a convenience basis. Therefore, the generalization of results should be made with caution. The sample was mainly comprised of mothers, which may impair the results of analysis. This overrepresentation of female participants was also found in other studies (Farry-Thorn et al., 2020; Stephenson et al., 2008; Turan & Akoglu, 2014). Another limitation is related to timing of the study. We can´t assure that the family literacy practices and the emergent literacy skills can be directly related to the Covid-19 lockdown. The study doesn’t have data that describe the situation before Covid-19 started, although the study describes parent’s perceptions about family literacy practices that occur during COVID-19 pandemic and emergent literacy skills were evaluated when schools reopen. This characterization of emergent literacy skills and family literacy practices may allow educators and psychologists to adapt the strategies used to foster home-family interactions and promote children’s development.

**Conclusions**

With this study we aimed to contribute to the current understanding of family practices and the way they contributed to emergent skills development, namely in a pandemic context. Activities related to the promotion of emerging literacy at home have always been an essential complement to the reading and writing experiences that children have in kindergarten (Caglar-Ryeng et al., 2020; Hofslundsengen et al., 2019). However, in the situation of the widespread lockdown experienced by families, it became even more important for parents to follow the skills training by carrying out playful, pleasurable activities between parents and children around reading and writing to counterbalance the deficit of interaction that the children had during this period.

Overall, the results of the present study suggest that families engaged in a higher frequency of activities related to training and teaching. Although these activities are important for promoting various emergent literacy skills, caution should be discussed with the parents because they can anticipate formal teaching without stimulating the foundational skills so children can understand them. For example, many children can be proficient in letter knowledge and print awareness, but may not yet have acquired the alphabetic principle and may not understand the relationship between written language and oral language. The quality of these family-child interactions must also be considered, as this will be closely linked to the positive impact on the development of emerging literacy (Cruz et al., 2012; Kassow, 2006).

In sum, now more than ever, there is a need for open communication with parents to discuss how to promote emergent literacy skills. Digital communication can facilitate these synergies, as families are willing to receive, share, and stimulate their children. Today, with easy access to the internet and digital platforms, it will make sense to provide families with interactive games, digital books, media (audio, video), or even e-learning training. Further research should invest in the evaluation of parental training concerning family literacy practices in different modalities, such as face-to-face versus distance sessions.

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# **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.