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INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF HOME LITERACY PRACTICES IN A MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT ON GRADE ONE STUDENTS' EARLY READING ACQUISITION IN ARABIC IN NORTH LEBANON

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Investigating the Influence of Home Literacy Practices in a Multilingual Environment on Grade One Students' Early Reading Acquisition in Arabic in North Lebanon.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the influence of home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon governorate on grade one students' early reading acquisition in Arabic in different language contexts. Three different language contexts were identified where either Arabic, English or French was the dominant language used by parents to communicate with their children. The study also aimed to examine if home literacy practices and early Arabic reading proficiency differ across contexts with different language use profiles. Data was collected from three private schools that have the same tuition fees and same curriculum, but where a different language of instruction is adopted. The data collection tools were a questionnaire about language use and home literacy practices administered to parents and early Arabic reading assessments for grade one students. The results reveal that students from an Arabic dominant environment scored higher than their colleagues on all the early Arabic reading assessments.The results also revealed that parents, in the three different language use environments, were engaged with their children in the same kind of literacy activities but there were differences in how commonly these practices were engaged in by parents in the different language-oriented communities. The results also showed that there was a strong correlation between the direct teaching of letters and early Arabic reading skills in the Arabic and French dominant environments, but the correlation was stronger in the Arabic context. However, there was no significant correlation between literacy practices and early Arabic reading assessment in the English dominant environment. The results of the current study can encourage the teachers of the Arabic language to design workshops for parents about the importance of being involved in home literacy practices with their children and how it can enhance their children's early Arabic reading skills. Moreover, curriculum specialists can design reading activities that align with the literacy practices the students are engaged in with their parents at home which can create a strong connection between home and school. These can also open the door for more research about the correlation between home literacy practices and

Arabic early literacy skills in different Lebanese contexts as wells as different multilingual Arab countries, especially given that there is very research that is addressing this topic.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

The ability to read is vital to functioning effectively in a literate society for today's life-style as reading is a vital skill since most of what we need to know to manage our life successfully is written down (Foged and Hammock, 2018). Reading is also the foundation for other subject matter curricula in the primary school where children who fail to learn to read in the lower elementary classes cannot develop proper writing skills or become self-guided learners in other subject areas (Cvelich & Gove , 2011). Hence, developing reading skills in the first years of primary school is crucial to everyday and academic success and this needs to be assessed carefully. Key early reading skills are letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Roe, Smith and Burns, 2011).

Many studies have investigated the factors that affect children's reading acquisition and how they might lead to reading failure or reading success (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002; Marschark, & Harris, 1996; Morgan, & Fuchs, 2007). The methodologies of teaching reading adopted by the teacher, the reader's motivation, the socio-economic status of the reader's family, the reader's level of intelligence, and the family literacy practices have all a great influence on the reader's early literacy acquisition (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001). The last factor has a particularly important impact on the reader's early literacy skills

because the learning process starts from birth and children's knowledge and skills are shaped through their adaptation to their environment and the experiences they go through within that environment. This makes early interactions with parents the most important pillar that launches children's educational life in their early years and is the context of their first encounter with home literacy (Boyle, 2014).

Home Literacy Environment has been defined as "an umbrella concept that encapsulates all the possible facets of literacy experiences that children engage in with their parents interactively" (Zhang, 2017, p.71). Home literacy practices are of two broad types. The first is the formal literacy activities adapted at home such as communicating the concept of letters and practicing reading, and writing of words. The second is the informal literacy activities that expose children to print incidentally through activities such as shared book reading and visits to the library (Georgiou, Manolitsis, and Tzirati, 2013).

Studies have concluded that children who engaged in frequent home literacy experiences became better readers than those who did not have similar experiences (Chen et al 2010, Korat & Haglili 2007, Leseman & de Jong 1998, Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony 2000, Manolitsis, Georgiou & Parrila 2011, Senechal 2006, & Silinskas et al. 2010). These studies investigated the influence of home literacy practices on early reading acquisition in different socio-economic backgrounds. There is evidence that children from low socio-economic status (SES) families experience literacy activities at home that lead to lower levels of school literacy achievements compared to children from middle and high SES families (Aram & Levin, 2002; Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2011; Serpell, Baker, & Sonnenschein, 2005) . Gee (2004) points out that there are variations in the literacy practices

of different communities with different sociocultural/socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, he discusses research that shows how children in African American communities often lag behind their peers in reading in the early years, and suggests that this lag is due to differences in the kinds of literacy practices carried out at home.

In the case of literacy in Arabic, an added factor is diglossia, the use of two varieties of the same language in different social contexts throughout a speech community. Diglossia seems to play an important role in affecting children's reading acquisition (Haeri, 2009). The influence of the linguistic distance between standard (Fosha) and vernacular Arabic on early literacy is significant. Schools attempt to use simplified Modern Standard Arabic to make the Arabic literacy easier to learn by young students (Mohd, 1997). However, what seems objectively and linguistically "simple" by curriculum designers is not perceived as such by students because the vernacular Arabic is used most of the time in their environment as the main language for various dialogues. Elementary students, who attend schools that follow the Lebanese curriculum, are exposed to Modern Standard Arabic for only one or two hours per day (a total of 8 hours per week) and they rarely have the opportunity to use it in their daily life. Hence, the place of the Modern Standard Arabic is unclear for the students, and it is not a language the use of which is central for participation in everyday social life (Haeri, 2009).

In addition to Arabic diglossia, multilingualism is another feature of the linguistic environment in Lebanon, it is in some other Arab countries as well. Researchers who study multilingual communities around the world have defined multilingualism as a common human condition that makes it possible for an individual to function, at some level, in more

than two languages (Cenoz, 2013). From the perspective of these researchers, a multilingual individual is not necessarily an individual with native competency in many languages. The individual can possess very high levels of proficiency in many languages in the written and the oral modes, or he/she can display varying proficiencies in comprehension and/or speaking skills depending on the immediate area of experience in which he/she is called upon to use these different languages. In Lebanon, different communities use different languages and may have different literacy practices. There are, however, few studies that look into the variability of home literacy practices in communities with different multilingual profiles and how these practices impact the acquisition of early literacy. This study examines whether there are differences early Arabic reading achievement across differ language environments in Lebanon, whether there are differences in literacy practices across communities with these different linguistic profiles, and whether there are correlations between home literacy practices and early Arabic reading acquisition.

Statement of the problem

The purpose of the current study is to investigate if the Arabic literacy practices differ among contexts where family members are using different languages to communicate with each other or engage in different literacy practices at home in Lebanon. Often, however, there is a dominant language used more frequently than others at home. In a multilingual country like Lebanon where language and cultural practices are interconnected the relationships between language use, home literacy practices and early reading acquisition in Arabiv would be interesting to investigate. Therefore, one purpose for this study is to compare early Arabic reading proficiency of grade one students across different language

contexts. The study also documents the home literacy practices of Lebanesne families in middle SES households in North Lebanon and compares these practices across multilingual communities with different dominant languages – i.e. Arabic, English and French. The study also aims to identify the relationship between the frequency of home literacy practices in middle SES households and grade one students' early reading acquisition in Arabic across multilingual environments in North Lebanon governorate.

Research Questions

The research questions examined in the current study are:

1. Does grade one students' early Arabic reading proficiency differ across different language contexts where the dominant language is Arabic, English, or French in middle SES communities in North Lebanon?

2. Do home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate differ in kind and frequency across contexts with different language use profiles where the dominant language is Arabic, English, or French?

3. Does the frequency of home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate correlate with early Arabic reading achievement of grade one students and does this relationship differ across language contexts where the dominant language is Arabic, English, or French?

Significance

The results of the current study can inform schools, parents and curriculum designers on the relationship between home literacy practices and children's reading achievement in Arabic. This can encourage school administrators and teachers to organize workshops to inform parents on the importance of being involved with their children in home literacy activities especially that reading is the foundation for other subject curricula in the primary school and where children who fail to acquire the reading skills in the lower elementary classes cannot develop proper writing skills or become self-guided learners in other subject areas (Cvelich & Gove , 2011). Knowing more about home literacy practices can inform instruction where teachers can develop reading activities which are more consistent with and build on the variety of home literacy practices that their students engage in outside of a formal school context. Moreover, any effect of variation in home literacy practices across multilingual environments could raise questions about a new area of research that has not been explored in the literature and can encourage investigation into literacy practices in different communities within and outside Lebanon. Furthermore, the current study will examine whether early reading achievement varies by language context in Lebanon. This can inform the design of different learning environments across contexts that would be sensitive to the different needs of students. Moreover, this could encourage more research on early Arabic reading acquisition, the contextual factors that influence achievement and the challenges faced by teachers and parents while teaching their students and children how to read in Arabic.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In an attempt to provide the needed background to motivate the research questions of this study, this chapter will survey four major areas of the literature: research on early reading acquisition, with a focus on reading in Arabic; the nature and frequency of family literacy practices; the relationship between home literacy practices and early reading acquisition; and multilingualism in Lebanon.

Researching early reading acquisition

This section introduces what is involved in reading acquisition, the main models of reading acquisition, the distinctive characteristics of the Arabic language particularly relevant to reading acquisition in this language, what research has been done about reading acquisition in Arabic, and the factors that influence reading acquisition.

In order to understand reading acquisition, it is important to explain reading as an act on its own. Reading can be conceptualized as consisting of two aspects: the reading process and the reading product. According to Roe, Smith and Burns (2012), the process of reading brings together sensory, learning, perceptual, sequential, and associative skills, which result in the reading product. Investing in the necessary skills that make up the process of reading enhances the product, which results in the proper understanding of what is being communicated through the reading. Thorndike (1973) defined reading as thinking guided by print while Shankweiler (1979) defined reading as the translation of written elements into

oral language. Combining the definitions together constituted the starting point for different educational researchers. For example, Perfetti (1984) believes that for a reader to attain advanced comprehension processes, he/she must have advanced decoding skills, meaning that decoding is not the only skill that has to be developed but is an important starting point. The process of reading is based on an interaction between thought and language, where "the writer encodes thought as language, and the reader decodes language to thought" (Carell, 1988, p.4). According to the American National Reading Panel (2000), reading is composed of five essential components that are interrelated and work in concert to extract the essence of reading, which is gaining meaning from text. These critical components of reading include (a) Letter Knowledge, (b) phonological/phonemic awareness, (c) vocabulary, (d) fluency, and (e) comprehension.

Gove and Cyelich (2011) produce a similar list of skills upon which reading acquisition skills are based - letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension – and explain what is involved in each case. First, **Letter Knowledge** is defined as the reader's ability to link letters and their sounds. This skill can be assessed either by presenting the reader with a list of letters and asking him/her to pronounce the letter (name it), by having the reader identify the letter from a collection or symbols, letters, and numbers, or by having the reader categorize and organize the letters according to the way they are written either uppercase or lowercase (Torgesen, 1998). If the latter is done successfully, then this means that the reader is able to grasp the concept of reading by going up gradually from letters to words in addition to deconstructing the words back into letters and the sounds they are associated with.

Second, the deconstruction of words into sounds and the ability to manipulate these sounds is called **phonemic awareness** (Snow, 1998). Phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation are two activities that help children acquire phonemic awareness. Phoneme blending is when children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes and then combine the phonemes to form a word. One way to assess phoneme blending is by asking the student to guess what word the mentioned sounds make. Phonemic segmentation is an activity that requires a child to break up a spoken word into its separate phonemes where the reader has to know what sounds he/she heard in a given word (Armbruster, 2003).

Third, **decoding** is defined as the process of translating print into speech by rapidly matching a letter or combination of letters (graphemes) to their sounds (phonemes) and recognizing the patterns that make syllables and words. The Test of Oral Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE) is mostly used by researchers to assess a reader's decoding skills. The TOWRE requires the child to read aloud, as quickly and accurately as possible, a list of real words ranked according to difficulty. The score is the number of words read correctly in 45 seconds and is a combined measure of fluency and accuracy of decontextualized word reading (Rydland, Aukrust, & Fulland, 2012).

Fourth, in its initial stages, **reading fluency** is the product of the initial development of accuracy and the subsequent development of automaticity underlying sublexical processes, lexical processes, and their integration in single-word reading and connected text. These include perceptual, phonological, orthographic, and morphological processes at the letter, letter-pattern, and word levels, as well as semantic and syntactic processes at the word level and connected-text level. After it is fully developed, reading fluency refers to a level of

accuracy and rate where decoding is relatively effortless; where oral reading is smooth and accurate with correct prosody; and where attention can be allocated to comprehension (Wolf & Cohen, 2001). An assessment of this skill could be done through timed assessments of correct words communicated per minute (Fuchs et al., 2001).

Fifth, **reading comprehension** is an important skill to acquire, where the reader can understand what he/she is reading. The most common reading comprehension assessment involves asking a child to read a passage of text that is leveled appropriately for the child, and then asking some explicit, detailed questions about the content of the text (often these are called Informal Reading Inventories) (American Institutes for Research, 2019). There are some variations in reading comprehension assessments, however. For example, instead of explicit questions about facts directly presented in the text, the child could be asked to answer inferential questions about information which was implied by the text, or the child's comprehension might be tested by his or her ability to retell the story in the child's own words or to summarize the main idea or the moral of the story.

The last skill contributing to reading acquisition is **vocabulary** where the reader must know words (in both oral and written form) and their meaning. One way to assess vocabulary is to ask the reader to define the word or by checking if the reader can use a word properly in context, or recognize and discern the definition in context.

In the current study, the researcher will be interested in investigating the influence of home literacy practices on grade one students' letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and fluency in Arabic because according to previous studies that will be

discussed in later section, family literacy practices have a great influence on each of these four skills.

Reading Acquisition Models

Different models are reviewed here in an attempt to explain the process of reading acquisition. This literature review covers three of these models, which will be presented in chronological order: The Frith model, the Chall model, and the Ehri model (all discussed in Tracey, and Morrow, 2017). All three models are stage-based, hence their differences lie in the skills used to complete certain stages during the reading process and the order followed by the reader in order to complete the reading process. The researcher focused on these three models because they are viewed as being representative and most widely recognized (Tracy & Morrow, 2017).

     Frith's model suggested that children proceed through three stages before becoming proficient readers. The first stage is the logographic one where the reader has to remember words by features such as first letter or word length (graphic cues). To assess the first stage, the reader has to recognize 20 words. The second stage is called alphabetic which involves increased awareness of grapheme-phoneme correspondences. The third stage is the orthographic one where the reader will instantly recognize regular and irregular words visually; that is called automatic word recognition. Each of these stages is characterized by greater speed and accuracy. The emergence of each stage facilitates the emergence of the next stage and allows the novice reader to discover new strategies to learn to read.

Chall's model of reading acquisition has six stages. Stage 0 is called the Prereading stage which starts from birth to 5 or 6 years. It is about accumulating knowledge about print and books from the surrounding literate environment. In stage one which is the initial reading or decoding stage (5 to 7 years), the reader learns the associations between graphemes and phonemes. In stage two which is called Ungluing from Print (7 to 9 years) the reader will start to detach from print, overcome reliance on letter-to-sound correspondences, and develop a sight vocabulary. In stage three named Reading to Learn (9 to 14 years), the reader will start developing automatic word recognition, allowing him/her to focus on comprehension. Stage four is called Multiple View Points (14 to 18 years) where the reader learns to deal with more than one point of view. Finally, stage five, Construction and Reconstruction (18 years and after) is about gaining knowledge as a result of advanced reasoning skills.

Ehri's model suggested that children learn to read gradually, starting in preschool and progressing to reading print independently and fluently. In the early stages, children come to learn that phonemes correspond to letters. Later they read with more speed, allowing them to coordinate reading with comprehension. Ehri (1992) revised her previous stage model of reading acquisition to correspond to her visual-phonological hypothesis of word reading. In the first stage, visual cue (logographic) reading, children read words by rote by memorizing connections between meanings and salient visual cues in or around words. For example, the Golden Arches might be their cue for the word McDonald's. During the second stage, phonetic cue reading, children use their rudimentary knowledge about the letter-sound system to form partial connections between spellings and pronunciations. In the final stage, cipher sight word reading, children form complete connections between phonemes and their corresponding

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graphemes because of the phonemic segmentation and phonological recoding skills they have developed. Cipher readers are able to read similarly spelled words quickly. This skill distinguishes them from phonetic cue readers who sound out every letter they see in a word. Cipher readers also remember letter sequences in words better than phonetic cue readers who depend entirely on the letters phonetic equivalents.

In conclusion, the three models of reading acquisition discussed above suggest that there are two main approaches that readers use in order to advance in reading (the dual route theory). The first one being the lexical route, and the second one being the spelling-to-sound translation route. Meaning that in order to read the word and fully understand it, the reader either accesses it from the stored lexicon or unpacks its spelling-to-sound correspondences. According to the lexical route, every word a reader has learned is represented in a mental database of words with its pronunciations. When the reader visually recognizes an already learned word (as a whole), he/she will be able to retrieve the information about its pronunciation. The internal lexicon encompasses every learned word, even exception words like "Yacht" and "Pint" that do not follow letter-to-sound rules. However, this route does not enable reading of nonwords or new words not previously encountered; for that spelling-to-sound correspondences need to be unpacked. Spelling-to- sound translation route is based on identifying the word's parts (phonemes and graphemes) and applying knowledge of how these parts are associated with each other. This route allows the correct reading of nonwords as well as regular words that follow spelling-sound rules, but not exception words.

The current study will be guided by Chall's model of reading acquisition because the stages presented by Chall, especially at the Prereading stage, describe clearly and

operationally the child's pre reading behaviors. The child at stage zero, or what is called the Prereading stage, is accumulating knowledge about print and books from the surrounding literate environment which includes the home literacy practices. At the initial reading stage, the child starts making connections between graphemes and phonemes which is similar to parents direct teaching of letter names and sounds. Also, at this stage, the child will gain some sight vocabularies that usually are the result of shared book reading. Moreover, the specificities of the Arabic language will be taken into consideration.

The Distinctive characteristics of the Arabic Language

The Arabic language consists of 28 letters and each letter has three to four forms in which they are written, depending on the position of the letter in the word. According to Arafat and Koran (2013), the orthography is also characterized by letter diads and triads which are similar, yet they differ according to the number and location of dots (e.g., ب ت). The writing system of the Arabic language is mostly consonantal, even though the diacritics (الضمة، الفتحة،والكسرة) are present in the vowelized orthography. For beginners, Arabic texts are always vowelized so that they would form a connection between the orthographic representation of the word and its phonological representation (e.g., أَكَلَ الوَلَدُ التُّفَاحَةَ.). The Arabic script has also numerous diacritics, including i'jam (إِعْجَام, ʾIʿjām), consonant pointing, and tashkil (تَشْكِيل, tashkīl), supplementary diacritics. The latter include the ḥarakāt (حَرَكَات) vowel marks. The iʿjām ⟨إِعْجَام⟩ (sometimes also called nuqaṭ) are the diacritic points that distinguish various consonants that have the same form (rasm), such as ⟨ب⟩ /b/, ⟨ت⟩ /t/, ⟨ث⟩ /θ/, ⟨ن⟩ /n/, and ⟨ج⟩ /j/. Typically iʿjām are not considered diacritics but part of the letter.

The main purpose of tashkīl (and ḥarakāt) is to provide a phonetic guide or a phonetic aid; i.e. show the correct pronunciation. It serves the same purpose as furigana (also called "ruby") in Japanese or pinyin or zhuyin in Mandarin Chinese for children who are learning to read or foreign learners.

Moreover, Arabic is a diglossic language where two alternatives of Arabic are used for socially different functions: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used for reading, writing, and formal speech functions (e.g., religious discourses, news shows), and Spoken Arabic Vernacular (SAV) is used for everyday conversation at home, in the neighborhood and even in the classrooms (Saiegh-Haddad, 2003). Native speakers of Arabic first learn to read in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a language distinct from the language they grow up speaking.

The linguistic differences between the Modern Standard Arabic and the Vernacular Arabic affect the acquisition of basic reading processes in Modern Standard Arabic (Saeigh-Haddad, 2003). In her study about the linguistic distance and initial reading acquisition, Saeigh-Haddad (2003) examined phonemic awareness and pseudoword decoding in kindergarten and first grade Arabic native children. Because native speakers of Arabic first learn to read in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a language structurally distinct from the local form of the language they grow up speaking, it was hypothesized that the linguistic differences between the two varieties (the diglossic variables) would interfere with the acquisition of basic reading processes in MSA. Two diglossic variables were examined: phoneme and word syllabic structure. The children's phoneme isolation and pseudoword decoding skills were tested. The results showed that both diglossic variables interfered with

the children's performance of both tasks in both grades. The findings support the role of

linguistic distance in the acquisition of basic reading processes in a diglossic context.

Factors that influence reading acquisition

Different factors influence early reading acquisition among children. This includes the

nature of the language, neurological, cognitive, intelligence, emotional, physical, and

environmental factors (see Jennings, 2006 for an overview). The extent to which the

language orthography is consistent can influence reading acquisition. Different

orthographies represent spoken language in different ways. An important aspect that differs

across orthographies is how consistently letters map onto sounds. In relatively consistent

orthographies, such as those of Serbo-Croatian, Italian, and German, letters or letter groups

map relatively consistently onto sounds. Conversely, in a relatively inconsistent

orthography, such as English orthography, the relation between letters and sounds is often

equivocal: Some letters or letter clusters can be pronounced in more than one way, and some

sounds can be spelled in more than one way (Ziegler, Stone, & Jacobs, 1997). For instance,

in his book *Reading in the Brain*, Stanislas Dehaene concluded that English is a particularly

opaque language with a lot of complex phoneme-grapheme correspondences and

irregularities where he found that it took one or two additional years of schooling before an

English child reaches the reading level of a French child (Daharnr, 2009).

When we consider neurological or cognitive factors, we take into account the way in which

an individual's brain operates during the process of learning to read. For example, a dyslexic

child acquires reading abilities with extreme difficulty. Genetic differences influencing brain

circuitry make learning to read a struggle (Dehaene, 2009). The emotional problems that

students face in school like bullying or forms of abuse at home can interfere with reading progress to the extent that they achieve little growth over an extended period of instruction (Glew et al., 2005). When it comes to the general intelligence factor, the IQ level of the reader plays an important role in the reading acquisition process (Morris et al., 2012). For instance, a student's intelligence may provide an estimate of his or her ability to acquire reading; teachers have long noticed a variation in their students' response to reading instruction as a function of general intelligence (understood as general cognitive abilities). Moreover, in his theory about multiple intelligences, Gardner viewed all learners as gifted and talented in some unique way. Some are intelligents in music, others might excel in linguage or in logical-mathematical thinking. It has been found that this variety of skills are highly correlated with the students academic performance; for instance, a student who is linguistically intelligent demonstrates a sensitivity to the sounds, rhythms, and meanings of words which can influence reading acquisition skills (Morgan, 1996).

The physical factor refers to the extent to which the reader can see and hear clearly (Flaudi, 2013). For example, Auditory acuity is measured in two dimensions: frequency and intensity. Frequency refers to the ability to hear different pitches, or vibrations of a specific sound wave. The pitches are actually musical tones; the higher the tone, the higher the frequency. Because different sounds of the spoken language have different frequency levels, a person may be able to hear sounds clearly at one frequency but not at another. Intensity refers to the loudness of a sound and is measured in decibels; the louder the sound, the higher the intensity, or decibel level. How loud does a sound (or decibel level) have to be before a person should be able to hear it? A person who can hear soft sounds at 0 to 10

decibels has excellent hearing. Students who cannot hear sounds at 30 decibels are likely to encounter some difficulty in learning to read.

Environmental factors include the home, school, cultural, and social environments (Foster et al., 2005). The home is the child's first environment where parents play a central role in the early reading acquisition of their children before and after their child is enrolled at school. This includes reading to their children, encouraging their children to read by providing them with the necessary tools, and teaching them the value of reading (Boyle, 2014). This factor will be the focus of this study and will be elaborated in the following section.

Family literacy practices

Research has shown that the experiences that students have before they begin to read formally have an influence on their early reading acquisition. (Aram & Ofra, 2013; Evans, 2000; Manolitsis, Georgiou, &Parilla, 2011; Morrow, 2001; Roberts, 2005; Senechal, 2006). The next section will look in detail at how home literacy practices can affect students' early reading acquisition. However, in this section the focus is on the concept of family literacy practices, what motivates the children's literacy development in a family setting, and what kinds of activities are considered to be family literacy practices.

Taylor (1983) introduced the concept of "Family Literacy" in her study that focused on the development of literacy and language at home in the USA. The term was then used in describing the literacy practices that happened within a household. Taylor (1997, p. 3) argues

that "the accumulated ways of knowing and funds of knowledge of family members – their local literacies – are complexly and intricately woven into their daily lives." The new dimension that was added to the field had to do with the importance of daily activities and learning patterns within the student's family and community. Taylor's focus was not limited to formal education; she also focused on the informal literacy practices that children were engaged in with their parents.

Goodman (1986) has also pointed out that the literacy skills acquired by children in the household are developed when they encounter print items (e.g., newspapers, books, magnetic refrigerator letters, posters, writing materials for making lists) that are on display all around the household. Moreover, Saracho's (2000) research examines the different literacy activities (categorized into formal and informal) that involve several family members and their young children, and how these engagements are entertaining for both sides as they are motivating, and of interest to both parties. Parents' use of activities such as shared reading, the use of explanations and expansions of children's vocabulary, the introduction of 'rare' words—words that are unfamiliar to the child, teaching songs and rhymes and introduction of the alphabet are all considered to be family literacy practices (Perry, 2008).

According to Skibbe (2008), parents' literacy practices within the home clearly play a key role in children's literacy development, and families can act as an important "sponsor of literacy" by using a variety of practices that facilitate preschoolers' emergent literacy development, including reciting nursery rhymes, teaching book and print conventions; encouraging invented spelling through functional or purposeful writing experiences, making shared-reading experiences routine, and developing narrative and language skills through

family dinnertime practices. In addition, some parents may take on a "family as educator" role by explicitly teaching their children about literacy forms and functions. One of the home literacy activities that has received a lot of theoretical and empirical attention is parental story book reading to children, where all the studies agree on its positive influence on the children's early reading acquisition (Aram & Ofra, 2013; Evans, 2000; Manolitsis, Georgiou, &Parilla, 2011; Morrow, 2001; Roberts, 2005; Senechal, 2006).

For more than three decades, studies suggest that children's literacy is developed when family members engage in reading to and with children and during important parent-child interactions (Saracho, 2002). Hess and Holloway (1984) identified five categories that may motivate the children's literacy development in a family setting:

1. Value placed on literacy: how parents encourage their children to read.

2. Press for achievement: how parents keep their children interested in reading by adding milestones and celebrating them or helping them achieve them

3. Availability and instrumental use of reading materials: how parents integrate reading and writing into their children's everyday life.

 4. Reading with children: how parents go about reading and listening to their children

5. Opportunities for verbal interaction: how parents allow verbal interactions and integrate them into storytelling and understanding

In general, parents interact with their children in a variety of ways. When family members (e.g., parents, older siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles) read certain stories to

children repeatedly and respond to their questions in relation to reading, children conclude that print is meaningful. The quality of interactions that the children have with family members is important in the children's literacy development (Vacca and Vacca, 2000)

A method frequently used to assess the home literacy environment has been to obtain information from parent questionnaires about the frequency that parents read to their children (Roberts et al., 2005). Several studies reported relationships between home literacy experiences, either measured by questionnaires or by naturalistic observations, and the development of vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, and language comprehension skills at different preschool ages (Beals, De Temple, & Dickinson, 1994; Dickinson & Tabors, 1991). For instance, the items in the used questionnaires in the previous studies referred to seven normally occurring situations in family life such as mealtime conversations, family visits, and singing lullabies and nursery rhymes with the child. In some multilingual contexts, parents were asked to indicate which language was used in each of the seven situations (Leseman and Jong, 1998). A smaller number of studies concentrated on qualitative characteristics of literacy and literacy-related interactions by using observation methods (Dickinson and Tabors, 1991). However, the studies that investigated the influence of home literacy practices on students early reading acquisition used questionnaires for parents and assessments for the early literacy skills in general (Aram & Ofra, 2013; Georgiou & Parrila 2011; & Senechal, 2006). In their study about the contribution of early home literacy practices to first grade reading and writing achievements in Arabic, Aram and Ofra (2013) used a questionnaire to collect data about the parents' education, income level, occupation, and the types of literacy practices that they were engaged in with their children at home. To assess the early literacy skills, the two researchers

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developed their own instruments to measure the readers' reading accuracy, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and letter knowledge. In the current study, the researcher will use an adapted version of the questionnaire used in Aram and Ofra study. However, questions about family income will not be included because SES will be controlled in this study.

Relationship between home literacy practices and reading acquisition

In this section, the relationship between home literacy practices and reading acquisition will be examined. Particular emphasis will be given to the quantifiable practices which have been found to most strongly predict proficiency in early reading acquisition.

It is well documented that children enter school differently prepared to benefit from formal educational experiences and that these initial individual differences often translate into subsequent differences in reading and other areas of academic achievement (Burguess, 2002). When parents, educators, and researchers are asked about the origins of these initial differences, the most commonly given answer usually involves some aspect of the home literacy environment. Hence, it is important to examine what actual evidence there is linking the literacy environment provided by parents to their children with children's language development generally, and their reading skills specifically. Although it is widely believed that home environments are critical in the acquisition of literacy, Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) commented that relatively little was known about the specific characteristics or activities in homes that support literacy development. In the remainder of this section, some of these characteristics will be presented.

Scarborough, Dobrich, and Hager (1991) provides some insight that helps understand the relationship between how much time parents spend reading to their children and the development of reading as a skill. Fifty six middle class American children and their 112 biological parents participated in the study. The students' IQ level, sensory and auditory skills, socio-economic status, and age were controlled. A questionnaire was given to parents about how often the parents and their child read books together in a typical week at the age of 36, 42 and 48 months. The response choices were "not at all," "once or twice," "three or four times," "five or six times," and "daily or more often". Three subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery were used: picture vocabulary, letter-word identification, and word attack where the reader had to read nonsense words phonetically. One of their key findings was that the frequency of joint book reading in English helped preschoolers in becoming better readers in Grade 1 and 2.

Chang and Lu (2005) studied the relationship between parent-child shared reading and the coaching of parents on grade one students' early reading acquisition in China. The Chinese language is a diglossic one where the standard Chinese is different from the Cantonese (vernacular). The results underline the importance of shared reading and coaching for reading achievement, even among children who are already receiving formal literacy instruction. Students who were reading with their parents at home got better grades on their reading assessment.

By examining the relationship between specific aspects of home literacy environment and the advancement of children's reading at school, we can highlight the importance of particular early parent-child literacy interactions when it comes to further

developments of the children's literacy and their literacy achievements. A study done by

Senechal (1998) examines the correlation between two specific aspects of home literacy

experiences and early reading acquisition; it focused on the importance of shared book

reading and parents' direct teaching of reading (names and sounds of letters, decoding) as

two factors that might influence the child's vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and/or word

recognition. Fifty eight grade one students were recruited to participate in the study with

their parents. Parents' education level and children's IQ were controlled. The sample

represented middle-class families in Canada and the children were selected from three

different schools that follow the same French reading curriculum. Parents were asked to

complete a questionnaire on parent-child activities where they had to answer five questions

about their children's experiences with storybook reading: the frequency of storybook

reading in a typical week (at bedtime and other occasions), (b) the frequency with which

their child made requests for book reading (as an indicator of child interest), (c) the

estimated frequency of library visits with their child, (d) the estimated number of children's

books available in their homes, and (e) the age of their child when they started reading to

him or her. Parents'direct teaching of reading was also assessed by using a questionnaire to

know during a typical week how often the parents teach their children letters and their

sounds, how to decode, how to segment letters, and how to combine letters to form a word.

Children's Title Checklist (CTC), which consists of 40 titles of popular children's books and

20 foils, was distributed to children to check if their parents really read with them at home.

Alphabet knowledge, vocabulary, decoding, and phonemic awareness were assessed for

each child individually near the end of the school year by Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test.

Examination of the descriptive statistics for the home literacy variables under study revealed

that parents reported a high frequency of storybook reading with their children. However, parents who frequently read storybooks did not necessarily report teaching their children about reading. After analyzing the collected data from parents questionnaires and reading assessments, the results revealed that the children of those who read stories to their children very often scored high on the vocabulary test while the children that had direct teaching of reading at home scored higher on decoding test.

Similarly, Evans (2000) tried to investigate the relationship between home literacy practices and KG3 students early reading development in USA. Sixty-six children with their parents participated in the study. Parents were given a questionnaire which asked about the family composition and income, parents' education, languages spoken, general home environment (including number of books at home, subscriptions to magazines and newspapers, print resources in the home), and any special needs that parents noted in their child. How much time in a week parents managed to find to read together with their child; age of their child when they first began to read to him/her; age of their child when they began to read to him/her on a regular basis; who else read to the child; and who typically initiated book reading episodes were also addressed in the questionnaire. Children were interviewed regarding the frequency of shared storybook reading at home, frequency of library visits, and how their parents helped them read. The readers' phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and letter knowledge ,in English, were assessed. The main goal of the study was to identify which types of literacy-related activities chosen by parents relate to children's skill acquisition during the beginning stages of reading. The results of this study showed that the frequency of being read to, was correlated with children's vocabulary scores. The

frequency of home activities that entailed letters, such as learning letter names and sounds, predicted knowledge of letter names, letter sounds, and phonemic awareness.

Silinskass (2012) studied the influence of shared book reading frequency and parents direct teaching of reading to their children by teaching them letters names, letters sounds, and how to decode, in a one-year longitudinal study from KG 3 till grade one in Finland. Parents were asked to rate the frequency of shared reading by a single question: in KG3, "How often do you read to your child/read books together with your child?" In Grade 1, parents were asked to rate the frequency of shared reading by a single question: "How often do you read books or magazines with your child?". Moreover, parents were asked also to rate the frequency of the direct teaching of reading by two questions: "How often do you teach/have previously taught letters to your child?" and "How often do you teach/have previously taught your child to read?" In this study, the focus was on investigating reading skills with measures that had a strong emphasis on decoding (kindergarten) and reading fluency (Grade 1). The reason for this was that such skills can be assumed to be associated with the frequency of parents' reading-related activities. The results showed that the better word reading skills in Finnish children showed in kindergarten and grade one, the more shared reading and direct teaching of reading parents reported.

Kirby and Hogan (2008) tried to investigate the home literacy environment to determine which characteristics or activities distinguish the homes of later good readers from the homes of later less successful readers in USA. The participants in this study were 49 Grade 1 children and their parents. Early reading ability tests (word identification, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary) were conducted to classify the readers as successful

or poor readers. A questionnaire about the kind of home literacy practices that parents were engaged in with their kids at home was given to parents. All children came from homes in which English was the main language of communication. The tests were performed on the means of each of the frequency of family literacy practices variables, the number of books in the home, and the SES variables. According to the parents' responses, children who were good readers were read to by adults and were taught printed letters, letter sounds, and how to read new words significantly more frequently than children who were poor readers. Activities which focused on direct literacy instruction were associated with high reading levels. Hence, increasing the frequency of activities, such as teaching printed letters and how to read new words, during the preschool years may facilitate early literacy acquisition. Moreover, maternal education level played a major role in predicting early reading ability in Kirby and Hogan's study.

When it comes the acquisition of reading in Arabic, only one study was found that investigated the influence of shared reading on grade one students' early reading acquisition (Aram & Ofra, 2013). This longitudinal study assessed the literacy development of native Arabic-speaking children from kindergarten to the end of first grade, focusing on the role of home literacy activities (mother–child shared book reading and joint writing). The contribution of these activities in kindergarten to children's reading and writing at the end of first grade were evaluated by controlling the family SES and children's early skills (vocabulary and letter knowledge). Eighty-eight Arabic-speaking children and their mothers participated in the study. Results revealed that family SES, children's early skills (vocabulary and letter knowledge) and home literacy activities in kindergarten correlated

with children's achievements at the end of first grade. Joint writing contributed significantly to children's literacy in first grade and the contribution of shared reading was almost significant. Shared book reading exposes children visually to the Arabic orthography, and these repeated experiences with books may contribute to children's perception of the orthography, and there is evidence that visual orthographic skills are important for reading acquisition in Arabic (Abu-Rabia, Share, & Mansour, 2003).The study extends our knowledge on literacy acquisition in Arabic, highlighting the significance of early parent–child literacy activities as a predictor of Arabic-speaking children's literacy achievements in school, where the results revealed that there is a strong relationship between both (Aram and Ofra, 2013).

To sum up, specific aspects of the home literacy environment have been found to contribute to children's early reading skills in specific ways. Studies that explored this topic usually focus on the role of shared book reading in developing the young readers vocabulary or on the role of direct teaching of reading to young children by teaching the letters names and sounds and how they form a word in predicting children's literacy achievements in school. In specific, the ability to read depends on language knowledge, while reading simultaneously provides a resource for language enrichment. Thus, children who have rich vocabulary have an advantage in reading. In addition, letter knowledge has been considered as a major predictor of later literacy achievements in school across languages. It helps young children in understanding the alphabetic code and learning that words are made up of patterns of letters. Also, it assists children in establishing and recalling words in memory, and in decoding unfamiliar words. For that reason, the current research studied the influence

of shared book reading and direct teaching of reading (letter names, letter sounds, decoding) that the children were involved in with their parents at home on grade one students vocabulary, letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, and fluency. The students' SES and parental level of education were controlled. Furthermore, the three schools were following the same Lebanese Arabic curriculum.

Multilingualism in Lebanon and the Arab World

Lebanon is a "truly multilingual country where many languages are operational in many areas of life" (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999, p.2). In active daily use in the country, one encounters major languages such as Arabic, French, and English that serve as the vehicles for basic communicative and educational functions. Armenian, Kurdish, German and Assyrian are also actively used as home/community languages in some contexts and sometimes as languages of instruction, as in the case of Armenian. In fact, Lebanon's language situation is rooted in its educational history where Jesuit and Protestant missionaries founded several schools and two institutions of higher education, which still play a dominant role in Lebanon today: the Syrian Protestant College (1866), later the American University of Beirut, and Saint Joseph University (1875) (Thonhauser, 2001). Before the coming of Christian missionaries in the second half of the 19th century, Arabic was the main language in use in society and education. With the missionaries, French and English were introduced in force and shared the education field with Arabic. During the French mandate (1925-1943). French was the major language of government and education dominating Arabic and English. After independence, Arabic and English witnessed a comeback, where Arabic became the main language of everyday communication and elementary education, and English was considered as a language of

education in mathematics and sciences in post-elementary education on a par with French. As a result of the forces of globalization, nowadays English is gaining grounds in various economic, social and educational domains. "Despite lip service paid to the cause of Arabic, the trend to strengthen foreign languages, especially English, has continued and is underscored by decree #5589, which was passed in 1994" (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1996, p. 104). It indicates that any of the foreign languages (English, French, German) may be used as the language of instruction in all of Lebanon's schools whether foreign, private or public at the pre-school and elementary levels.

Shaaban and Ghaith (2002) investigated the perceptions of university students in Lebanon regarding the different dominant languages to determine the linguistic and cultural vitality of Arabic, French and English. Results showed that French was seen as the preferred foreign language for Christians, English was considered as the most vital language for use in the domain of technology, business, education, and health while Arabic was perceived as the main tool of everyday communication from the most friendly to the most formal situations. This finding matched with the findings of other researchers that highlighted the status of Arabic as the language of everyday communication in Lebanon (Abou, Kasparian and Haddad 1996). Diab (2009) conducted a study that aimed to investigate Lebanese university students' perceptions of their ethnic, national, and linguistic identity and their preferences for choice of first foreign language (FL) and medium of instruction in pre-university schools in Lebanon. The study also aimed to explore the differences in perceptions of identity and preferences for FL learning in Lebanon between male and female students, students from different religious backgrounds (Muslim and Christian), and students whose first FL is English and those whose

first FL is French. Findings showed that the Lebanese university students in this study valued the importance of English as an international language, while the students whose first FL is French showed a strong attachment to the French language and its culture. Finally, the first FL learned was an important factor influencing these students' preferences for choice of medium of instruction.

This multilingual phenomenon also results in code-switching (CS), which is embedded in the Lebanese culture (Joseph, 2004). CS has two main forms: one intersentential that occurs between sentences (referred to as CS) and the other that occurs within sentences (referred to as code mixing); however, the two terms are often used interchangeably (Bista, 2010). Further, Yao (2009) states that "generally speaking, code-switching, a common phenomenon in language contact, permeates bilingual and multilingual society. It refers to circumstances in which a speaker uses two or more than two languages" (p. 1). This is the Lebanese environment in which Bahous et al. (2013) explored university faculty and students' views on Code Switching in higher education classes in an American-style institution in Lebanon. The findings show that faculty are unaware that they code-switch contrary to what non-participant observations showed. The surveys showed that students code-switch to learn better and that their faculty code-switch in class.

A study was conducted by Chahine (2011) to investigate the different reasons students code-switch, how they code-switch, why, where and when they code-switch. It attempted to show how much students engage in codeswitching nowadays and to describe the reasons young children codeswitch in the classroom with one another. The results revealed that children tended to code-switch very often in order to negotiate the language of their

interactiona and to adapt to other students' favored language and their capability in addition to manage conversational talk.

In summary, many languages (Arabic, French, and English) are used by the Lebanese in their daily activities. These languages are part of Lebanon's history where we can obviously notice three major sub-communities: the francophone, the anglophone, and the Arabic oriented one. The Lebanese attitudes towards these three languages are influenced by many variables like the importance of the language and the religion to which the person belongs. Since multilingualism is common among the Lebanese population, parents in different sub-communities choose from among multiple languages when they communicate with their children during everyday activities: from reading, to eating, to giving commands. Given the influence of home literacy practices on reading achievement discussed above, this multilingual environment might impact the child's reading acquisition in Arabic in different ways. Parents might read to their children in one, two or more languages and the frequency of reading in a certain language might vary. Hence investigating the influence of home literacy practices in a multilingual environment on grade one students' early reading acquisition will focus on the language dominance in the context of literacy practices in the current study where Arabic is the native language of all the participants, however, it was not always the dominat language when it comes to home literacy activities. Moreover, based on the literature, shared book reading is correlated with enriching the readers' vocabulary, but the studies that have been conducted were mostly conducted in monolinguistic environments even the one that was done in Palestine. Hence, investigating how shared book reading in a multilingual environment can influence the readers' vocabulary will be interesting.

Relevant work exploring reading acquisition in Arabic in a multilingual Arab country has been conducted by Wagner (1993). Wagner compared the early Arabic reading acquisition skills of Arabic speaking Morrocan students and those from Berber communities for whom Arabic is not the primary spoken language. Letter knowledge, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, reading fluency and comprehension skills were assessed for grade one till grade five students in two public schools in Morocco that have the same curriculum. In grade one, two, and three the students from Morocan Arabic speaking communities scored higher than the Berber children on the five assessments. The differences in the scores were linked to the differences of the students' language profiles. It is true that the Moroccan speaking students do not communicate with their parents in Modern Standard Arabic at home, but many words are the same in both standard and vernacular Moroccan Arabic. The Berber language belongs to the Hamitic family (like the Ethiopian language) which is very different. In grade four and five, the differences in reading skills between the Berber and Moroccan speaking students disappeared. Wagner's study did not investigate the influence of home literacy practices on early reading acquisition because all the parents of the selected students were unschooled. However, the study is directly relevant to the influence of multilingualism on the acquisition of Arabic literacy.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an overview of the research design, a description of the study site and participants, the data collection tools, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis procedures.

Overview

This research study is quantitative in nature. This study was conducted in three private schools serving middle SES multilingual communities in North Lebanon with different profiles of language use. The participants were grade one students and their parents. The study investigated whether grade one students' early Arabic language proficiency differed across language communities; the nature and frequency of home literacy practices in these communities and whether ther was a relationship between home literacy practices of middle-class families in North Lebanon Governorate and grade one students' early reading acquisition in Arabic and examined how this influence differed across linguistic communities. Two instruments were used: a questionnaire completed by parents to indicate the nature and frequency of home literacy practices and the languages in which these are carried out; and an early Arabic reading assessments for the readers. ANOVAs were used to compare grade one students early Arabic reading proficiency across language communities. The frequency of different home literacy practices were determined and compared across the different language communities. Moreover, correlations between the frequency of home literacy practices and

early Arabic reading acquisition skills achievement at school were examined and these correlations were compared across language communities.

Participants

Population

The population in the current study was all grade one students from middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate and their parents. According to the Lebanese Arabic curriculum and grade 1 Arabic teachers, grade 1 students are taught all the letters of the Arabic language in their three positions, all the vowels (long and short), long-vowel syllables, single word recognition, and some basic text reading. Upon finishing first grade, children are expected to recognize all letters in all word positions, the diacritics (symbols representing short vowel), and long vowels. They are also expected to syllabify words, blend consonants to form a word, and read single words and some basic texts. Hence, the children who are expected to have achieved this level of reading development in Arabic constitute the population for this study.

Sampling procedures

According to the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) in Lebanon, there are 203 private schools that have elementary sections in North Lebanon Governorate. Twenty one schools out of the 203 have similar and comparable tuition fees (around $3500 for grade 1 annually). The schools were selected based on the language context to which their students belong (Arabic, English, or French oriented). The three selected schools teach English, French, and of course Arabic. However, the language of instruction is different in the

three schools. To control SES, the three schools were selected based on having similar tuition fees.

Sample

Hence, the sample in the current study was the students of grade one from three different schools in North Lebanon Governorate with their parents. The total number of students was 50, 30 girls and 20 boys, where their average age was 6. These participants were distributed over the three schools as follows:

1- The first school, which will be referred to as "School A", is a private school located in Tripoli. School A follows the Lebanese curriculum and the majority of its students are Lebanese coming from middle class families based on tuition fees, as mentioned above. Arabic is the language of instruction in the lower elementary classes at this school. It was therefore assumed that the majority of households of the grade one students in this school are Arabic oriented (i.e. are likely to use Arabic more frequently at home than other languages). Students take 8 hours of Arabic per week, 8 hours of English, and 3 hours of French. Social sciences, math, and science subjects are all taught in Arabic. Fifteen students (9 girls and 6 boys) accepted to participate in the current study.

2-The second school, which will be referred to as "School B", is also a private school located in Batroun area. School B was founded by French missionaries and is known for its students' fluency in French. The school follows the Lebanese curriculum and has the same tuition fees as School A. French is the language of instruction for all subjects (other than Arabic and English language instruction) until grade 6. After that, social studies are taught in Arabic in

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order to prepare the students for the official Brevet exams. The students take 8 hours of Arabic per week, in addition to 10 hours of French and 3 hours of English. Sixteen students (10 girls and 6 boys) accepted to participate in the current study.

3-The third school, "School C", is located in Al Koura. English is the main language of instruction where social studies, math, and science are taught in English. School C has similar tuition fees as School A and B. In addition to having 10 hours of English per week, Arabic is taught for 8 hours and French for 3 hours. The students of School C are known for high achievement on the English language official exams whether in Brevet or in Grade 12 certificate examinations. Nineteen students (11 girls and 8 boys) accepted to participate in the current study.

Data Collection Tools

Questionnaire

A **questionnaire (see Appendix A)**, adapted by the researcher from a previously used questionnaire (PIRLS, 2006), was prepared to investigate the nature and frequency of parents' reading activities at home and the language they use most frequently while engaging in these activities with their children. The questionnaire was designed to identify who completed the questionnaire (mother or father). Then the parent had to indicate which home literacy practices – from a list included in the questionnaire - were carried out at home with their children. The first main section of the questionnaire provided data relevant to the second research question, which asks about the kind and the frequency of home literacy practices in each language environment. The second section of the questionnaire consists of 10 items

organized in three major parts. Part one asks about shared book reading where parents have to indicate how often they read with their child in Arabic, English, and French on an ordinal Lickert scale from "not at all" to "daily". Part one is relevant to the third research question which asks if there is correlation between the frequency of home literacy practices and early Arabic reading acquisition. Part two, which was entitled "Language", aimed to make sure that parents were answering seriously part one questions. For that reason, the same questions were repeated but in a different way. Moreover, by answering question 7 in which parents had to specify which language(s) their children spoke before attending school and which one were using very often, the researcher can more accurately the language profile of the family and served as the basis to categorize the student/parent data in one of three language dominance groups. Part three aimed to get general information about parents' level of education and the language most often spoken at home with their children. Most of the items for this questionnaire were adapted from previously published questionnaires (Senechal, 1998; Pirls, 2006) and a few were developed for the specific purpose of this study. The reason for not adopting any particular questionnaire is the fact that these questionnaires were developed for countries that are monolingual.

Concerning the content validity of the questionnaire, three experts in the field of reading assessed its validity. The first expert is an Arabic coordinator in a well reputed school in Ras Beirut with a Ph.D in Arabic literature. The second expert is a team leader at Ana Aqra Association with 15 years of experience in designing Arabic reading curricula. The third expert is a senior Arabic teacher for elementary classes at a well reputed school in greater

Beirut area with 25 years of experience in teaching early Arabic literacy skills and training other Arabic teachers.

Given that French, Arabic, and English were the languages of instruction in school A, B, and C respectively the questionnaire was translated into the three languages.

Reading Assessment

In this study, the researcher assessed grade one students' letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and fluency in order to answer the first research question which asks if early Arabic reading proficiency differs across different language environments.

To assess the students' letter knowledge, the researcher used the assessment developed by Ana Aqra Association. Assessments for the Arabic language were developed and are utilized by teachers implementing the Balanced Literacy Approach (BLA) while teaching reading Arabic. The BLA internationally assess children on the main foundational reading skills and their comprehension skills based on grade level. Ana Aqra adapted these tools to Arabic and to the context of the Lebanese curriculum. Teachers in Lebanese schools are using them as well. The tools were tested and used as part of the universal screening tools for the QITABI project that impacted the improvement of reading in Arabic in 260 schools and will be used in all schools while scaling up the project. The association has also developed a manual about how to conduct the letter knowledge test and a rubric to grade the reader (See Appendix B).

The students' phonemic awareness was assessed by a test developed by Mohd (1997) for the same purpose. The purpose of this phonemic awareness subtest is to assess the reader's

ability to segment words into their constituent phonemes. This task included four trial items and eight experimental stimuli of varying difficulty. The first four stimuli are comprised of a CVC syllable and the final four were comprised of a CVCV or a CVCVC structure. The examiner instructed the reader to sound out all the sounds he/she hears in a word. In the trial items, the examiner modeled the desired response by saying the word and pronouncing all its phonemes separately

Peabody Picture Vocabulary (PPV) test was used to assess the readers' vocabulary in standard Arabic where the researcher showed the reader pictures so that he/she had to name the item presented in each. The assessment of vocabulary is important because research has shown a strong relationship between spoken vocabulary and reading performance (Wagner, 1993, p.88). The Arabic version of the Peabody assessment was developed and validated by Wagner in 1993 to assess grade one Moroccan students' oral vocabulary.

The reading fluency test was developed by Ana Aqra Association, tested and used as part of the universal screening tools for the QITABI project also. The association has also developed a manual about how to conduct the fluency test and a rubric to grade the reader (See Appendix B).

Data Collection Procedures

After getting IRB approval, an email was sent to each school in which the researcher described the main aim of the study and how the data were going to be collected and analyzed. The researcher informed the schools how she was going to secure the confidentiality of the collected data, emphasizing that the school name and other identifying information were not

to be included in any research reports. All codes and data were kept in a password protected computer that is kept secure. Also, a consent form was sent to the parents of grade one students to get their confirmation in participating with their children in the current study. Refusal to participate in the study did not involve any loss of benefits to which the participants otherwise entitled, nor did it affect their relationship with AUB.

Questionnaire

The researcher asked the parents of grade 1 students to complete the questionnaire. The participation was voluntary. A letter was sent to parents including a description of the study, statement of methodology, the estimated time to complete the study, risks and benefits, and finally a part about the confidentiality of their participation. After reading the letter, parents had enough time to accept or reject participating in this study. Parents had to indicate the consent for both their and their child's participation to be eligible to participate in the study. Refusal or withdrawal to participate in the study did not involve any loss of benefits to which parents are otherwise entitled nor it affected their relationship with AUB or the school.

Reading assessment: The researcher had individual meetings with each student to assess his/her early Arabic reading skills. These assessments took around 30 minutes to complete for each student.

Data Analysis

The difference in the language of instruction at the three schools of the current study was not the only basis for categorizing the parents and their children as belonging to the Arabic, English, or French dominant environments. The parents' responses to the language

use parts of the questionnaire were used to categorize the data into the three language communities. The researcher analysed the items of the questionnaire that dealt with how often the shared reading, teaching of letters, and teaching how to read a word activities took place in a certain language (Arabic, English, or French). The frequency with each activity was conducted in a particular language was scored on a 1 to 5 scale (1 for not at all, 5 for several times per day) with a total across all three languages of 3 to 15. Hence, each child had 3 scores, one for each language. The language with the highest score was considered as the dominant language, as long there had to be a minimum difference of 4 between the scores for one language. The data that did not meet this criterion had to be excluded.

To address the first research question, an ANOVA was used to determine if early Arabic reading proficiency differs across different language contexts, the researcher compared the results of the reading assessment tests of the students by using ANOVA. To address the second research question, parents' responses to the items in the study questionnaire related to the nature and frequency of different home literacy activity were analysed and reported. Cross-tabulation was used to report the frequency of home literacy literacy practices across the different language environments. When it comes to third research question, the researcher conduct a correlational analyses between home literacy practices and early Arabic reading assessments. Correlations were also compared across the different language communities.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship between home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon governorate and grade one students' early reading acquisition in Arabic in different language contexts. The research questions examined in the study were:

1.   Does grade one students' early Arabic reading proficiency differ across different language contexts where the families are Arabic, English, or French oriented in middle SES households in North Lebanon?

2.   Do home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate differ in kind and frequency across contexts with different language use profiles where the families are Arabic, English, or French oriented ?

3.   Does the frequency of home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate correlate with early Arabic reading achievement of grade one students and does this relationship differ across language contexts where the families are Arabic, English, or French oriented?

      This chapter consists of three sections, which present the following: (1) the difference in Arabic reading proficiency between students coming from different language contexts; (2) the difference between the types and frequency of using of home literacy practices across contexts with different language use profiles; and (3) the correlation

between the frequency of home literacy practices and early Arabic reading acquisition and how these correlations differ across language contexts.

Research Question 1: Differences in Arabic reading proficiency across language environments

In order to check if the proficiency in early Arabic reading skills differs across the different language environments, the researcher conducted a series of ANOVAs. Table 4.1 reports the descriptive statistics including the means and standard deviations for the total Arabic reading proficiency score and the scores for the component assessments: vocabulary, phonemic awareness, fluency and letter knowledge. For the total reading assessment score the highest mean belonged to the Arabic dominant group (M=235.2) , followed by the English dominant group (M=214.0) and then the French dominant group (M=209.4). When it comes to the mean of each early Arabic reading assessment separately, the means of the Arabic dominant group was highest in all four assessments with the English and French dominant groups having comparable means. Further details are available in Table 4.1.

In order to compare the means across the different language contexts, a series of One Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) and follow up pairwise analyses were conducted. The ANOVA analyses showed that there were statistically significant differences between the three language environments when it comes to the overall total of Arabic reading proficiency assessment score (F= 7.2; df=2; $p < .01$), the vocabulary assessment (F = 5.6 ; df=2; $p < .01$), and letter knowledge assessment (F= 4.6; df=2; $p < .05$). However, there

were no significantt differences for the phonemic awareness and fluency assessements. To know which specific groups were statistically significantly different from each other, post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test were conducted. For the overall total of Arabic reading proficiency assessment score, the post hoc comparisons indicated that there was a mean difference between the Arabic dominant and the English dominant environments ($M = 21.2$, $p < .05$) first, and between the Arabic and French environments secondly ($M = 25.8$, $p < .01$) as shown in Table 4.3. When it comes to the vocabulary assessement, the mean difference was only only significant difference between the Arabic and French dominant environments ($M = 3.9$, $p < .01$). Finally, for the letter knowledge assessment, the mean difference between the Arabic and French dominant environments was significant ($M = 11.1$, $p < .05$).

Research Question 2: The types and prevalence of home literacy practices

In the questionnaire, parents were asked to indicate which of the following activities they carried out at home with their child: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things they had done, talking about things they had read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading aloud signs and labels, and visiting libraries. The second research question raises the issue of whether the frequency of parents who engage in these different types of home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate differed across contexts with different language use profiles. The results of the descriptive statistics addressing this question are reported in Figure 1.

Table 4.1 *Descriptive Statistics Summarizing the Arabic Reading Proficiency Overall and for Component Assessment across the Sifferent Language Environments.*

		N	Mean	St deviation
Total of assessments	Ar dominant	15	235.26	24.31
	En dominant	19	214.00	20.17
	Fr dominant	16	209.43	15.24
	Total	50	218.92	22.58
Vocabulary	Ar dominant	15	23.66	2.25
	En dominant	19	21.36	3.74
	Fr dominant	16	19.68	3.53
	Total	50	21.52	3.59
Phonemic awareness	Ar dominant	15	11.13	1.12
	En dominant	19	10.42	1.30
	Fr dominant	16	10.43	1.31
	Total	50	10.64	1.27
Fluency	Ar dominant	15	56.53	3.87
	En dominant	19	53.73	6.53
	Fr dominant	16	53.37	4.96
	Total	50	54.46	5.42
Letter knowledge	Ar dominant	15	137.06	11.13
	En dominant	19	128.47	10.93
	Fr dominant	16	125.93	9.89
	Total	50	130.24	11.44

Table 4.2 *ANOVAs Comparing Arabic Reading Proficiency Across Language Environments*

		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Totalofassessmnets	Between Groups	2	2953.405	7.270	.002
	Within Groups	47	406.231		
	Total	49			
Vocab	Between Groups	2	61.644	5.668	.006
	Within Groups	47	10.876		
	Total	49			
PhonA	Between Groups	2	2.609	1.650	.203
	Within Groups	47	1.581		
	Total	49			
Fluency	Between Groups	2	46.626	1.624	.208
	Within Groups	47	28.706		
	Total	49			
LetterKnowledge	Between Groups	2	527.256	4.625	.015
	Within Groups	47	114.013		
	Total	49			

Table 4.3 *Pairwise ANOVAs Comparing Arabic Reading Proficiency Across Language Environments*

Dependent variable	Lang. env.	Lang. env	Mean difference	Std. error	Sig.
Totalofassessmnets	ArabicDominant	EnglishDominant	21.26*	6.96	.010
		FrenchDominant	25.82*	7.24	.002
	EnglishDominant	ArabicDominant	-21.26*	6.96	.010
		FrenchDominant	4.56	6.83	.784
	FrenchDominant	ArabicDominant	-25.82*	7.24	.002
		EnglishDominant	-4.56	6.83	.784
Vocab	ArabicDominant	EnglishDominant	2.29	1.19	.119
		FrenchDominant	3.97*	1.18	.004
	EnglishDominant	ArabicDominant	-2.29	1.13	.119
		FrenchDominant	1.68	1.11	.299
	FrenchDominant	ArabicDominant	-3.97*	1.18	.004
		EnglishDominant	-1.68	1.11	.299
LetterKnowledge	ArabicDominant	EnglishDominant	8.59	3.68	.061
		FrenchDominant	11.12*	3.83	.015
	EnglishDominant	ArabicDominant	-8.59	3.68	.061
		FrenchDominant	2.53	3.62	.765
	FrenchDominant	ArabicDominant	-11.12*	3.83	.015
		EnglishDominant	-2.53	3.62	.765

It is clear that the majority of parents, regardless of their language use profiles, read books with their children (Arabic dominant: 86.7%; English dominant: 100%; French dominant: 93.8%), tell stories to them (Arabic dominant:100%; English dominant: 100%; French dominant: 87.5%), and teach them how to write letters and words (Arabic dominant: 73.3%; English dominant: 100%; French dominant: 87.5%).The percentage of parents who sing songs with their children was also large in the three language environments. However, when it comes to playing with alphabet toys or visiting libraries, we can notice that parents were rarely engaged in these activities with their children. Moreover, none of the parents indicated that they read signs like road signs and labels to their children.

The percentages of parents engaging with their children in some activities varied across the language contexts. For instance, around a quarter of parents coming from French and Arabic language environments (28% & 25%, respectively) indicated that they talked with their children about things they had done during the day, while 63.2% of parents belonging to the English dominant environment indicated that they did this activity with their children. When it comes to talking about things they had read with their children, we can notice that the majority of parents belonging to the French and English language environments were engaged in such activity with their children (89% & 98%, respectively) which was not the case in the Arabic dominant environment (40%).
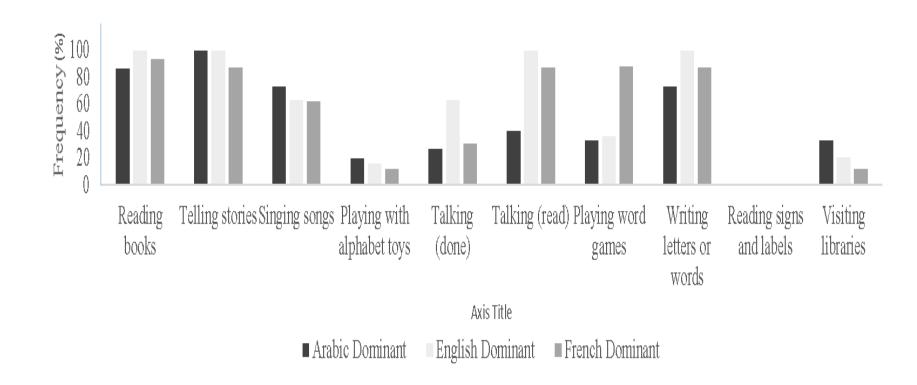
Figure 1. Percentage of parents that indicate that the conduct a series of home literacy activities with their children within three different language environments – Arabic, English & French dominant.

Research Question 3: Correlating frequencies of literacy practices with Arabic reading proficiency

In order to respond to the third research question regarding the relationship between home literacy practices and Arabic reading proficiency, a series of Pearson correlation analyses were conducted. The first analysis was conducted by correlating the overall frequency of home literacy practices with the overall score on early Arabic reading assessments. The overall frequency of home literacy practices (OFHLP) was calculated by summing up the frequency of shared reading (SRF), teaching letters (TLF), and teaching how to read a word (THRW). Parents rated the frequency with which they conducted each activity was on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (several times a day) where parents had to indicate how often they engage in these activities with their children in general first and then they had to specify the frequency of being involved in these activities with their children in the following three languages separately: Arabic, English, and French.The total scores of the overall frequency of home literacy practices ranged from 6/15 to 13/15. In turn, the overall score on early reading assessments was calculated by summing up the results of the following tests: vocabulary, phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and fluency. The vocabulary test consisted of 25 pictures where the students earned one point on naming each picture correctly in the modern standard Arabic. The phonemic awareness test had a maximum score of 12 where the student was asked to segment 12 words into their constituent phonemes. In the letter knowledge test, the student had to know the name of each Arabic letter based on its location: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. Some letters were with diacritics, some were not. Each correct answer was given one point

and the scores ranged between 98 and 147 out of a maximum possible score of 147. In order to assess the students' fluency, a short story was given to each student to read. The story was composed of 62 words and each correct word was considered as one point. The scores ranged between 46 to 62 (the maximum score). The maximum overall score on early reading assessments was 246 and scores ranged from172 to 244. The Pearson correlation analysis showed that there was no signigicant correlation between the total frequency of home literacy practices and the total score of early Arabic reading assessments (*r =-.014; p=.462*).

Table 4.4 *Correlations between Home Literacy Practices and Early Arabic Reading Assessments*

	Total of ass.	Letter Knowledge	Phonemic Awareness	Vocabulary	Fluency
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices (OFHLP)	r =-.014 p = .462	r = .267** p = .030	r = .366** p = .004	r = -.101 p = .243	r = .172 p = .116
Shared Reading Frequency(SRF)	r = -.033 p = .410	r = -.065 p = .327	r = .087 p = .273	r = -.217 p = .065	r = -.033 p = .410
Teaching Letters Frequency(TLF)	r = .105 p = .235	r = .377** p = .003	r = .502** p = .000	r = .021 p = .444	r = .384** p = .003
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency (THRW)	r = -.103 p = .238	r = .224 p = .059	r = .154 p = .142	r = -.019 p = .447	r = -.009 p = .476

*p<.001   **p<.005

The correlation between the frequency of literacy practices and reading proficiency was examined more closely in terms of sub-scores of the different measures. Table 4.4 presents the results of this set of correlation analyses. Significant correlations between the overall frequency of home literacy practices (OFHLP) and letter knowledge *(r = .267, p < 0.05)*; OFHLP and phonemic awareness *(r =.366 , p < 0.01)* were found. Moreover, the frequency of teaching letters was highly correlated with each of letter knowledge *(r = .377, p < 0.01)*, phonemic awareness *(r =.502 , p <0.001)* , and fluency *(r = .384, p < 0.01).*

To examine more closely the relationship between home literacy practices and reading proficiency within each language environment, correlation analyses between the overall frequency of home literacy practices (OFHLP) and early Arabic reading assessments were conducted in each language environment separately. Table 4.5 presents the results of the correlational analyses for the students in the Arabic dominant language environment where the results showed no statistically significant correlation between the overall frequency of home literacy practices (OFHLP) and early Arabic reading assessments *(r = -.093, p = .37).* However, there were statistically significant correlations between the frequency of teaching letters at home and phonemic awareness $(r = .717, p < 0.001)$, letter knowledge $(r = .646, p < 0.01)$, and fluency $(r = .611, p < 0.01)$. However, there were no statistically significant correlations between the frequency of shared reading or teaching how to read a word frequency, and the early Arabic reading assessments, respectively.

Table 4.5 *Correlations between Home Literacy Practices and Early Arabic Reading Assessments in the Arabic Oriented Language Environment.*

Variables	Vocabulary	Phonemic awareness	Letter knowledge	Fluency	Total of assessments	N
Shared Reading Frequency (SRF)	r = .041 p = .443	r = .373 p = .083	r = .236 p = .199	r = .325 p = .119	r = .197 p = .124	15
Teaching letters frequency (TLF)	r = .415 p = .061	r =.717** p = .001	r = .646** p = .005	r=.611** p = .008	r = .597** p =.005	15
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency (THRWF)	r = .154 p = .292	r = .052 p = .427	r = .205 p= .232	r = .117 p = .339	r = .123 p = .327	15
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices (OFHLP)	r = .223 p = .307	r = .428 p = .067	r = .437 p = .082	r = .337 p = .143	r = -.093 p = .371	15

When it comes to the English dominant environment, there were no statistically significant correlations between the overall frequency of home literacy practices (OFHLP) and the total of early Arabic reading assessments. Moreover, Table 4.6 shows that there were no correlations between the frequency of any of the home literacy practices and any of the Arabic reading assessment submeasures.

In the French dominant environment, Table 4.7 shows that there was no significant correlation between the overall frequency of home literacy practices and the total of early Arabic reading assessments in the French dominant environment. Also, there were no statistically significant correlations between shared reading frequency and any of the early

Arabic reading assessment submeasures. However, there were statistically significant

correlations between the frequency of teaching letters and phonemic awareness ($r = .553$,

$p < 0.05$) and fluency ($r = .561$, $p < 0.05$). There were also significant correlations between

teaching how to read a word and phonemic awareness ($r = .528$, $p < 0.05$), and letter

knowledge ($r = .788$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4.6 *Correlations between Home Literacy Practices and Early Arabic Reading Assessment in the English Oriented Language Environment*

Variables	Vocabulary	Phonemic awareness	Letter knowledge	Fluency	Total of ass.	N
Shared Reading Frequency (SRF)	r = -.106	r = .160	r = -.016	r = -.045	r = -.067	19
	p = .333	p = .256	p = .474	p = .427	p = .298	
Teaching Letters Frequency (TLF)	r = -.280	r = .343	r = .193	r= .223	r = .197	19
	p = .123	p = .075	p = .215	p = .180	p = .142	
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency (THRW)	r = -.126	r = -.064	r = -.130	r = -.308	r = -.205	19
	p = .303	p = .397	p= .297	p = .100	p = .287	
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices (OFHLP)	r = -.164	r = .256	r = -.057	r = -.123	r = -.016	19
	p = . 295	p = .177	p = .266	p =.208	p = .474	

Table 4.7 *Correlations between Home Literacy Practices and Early Arabic Reading Assessment in the French Oriented Language Environment*

Variables	Vocabulary	Phonemic awareness	Letter knowledge	Fluency	Total of ass.	N
Shared Reading Frequency (SRF)	r = -.179 p = .254	r = .000 p = .500	r = -.021 p = .469	r = -.106 p = .348	r = .101 p = .377	16
Teaching Letters Frequency (TLF)	r = .134 p = .310	r = .553* p = .013	r = .347 p = .094	r= .561* p = .012	r = .424 p = .033	16
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency (THRWF)	r = -.058 p = .416	r = .528* p = .018	r = .788** p= .000	r = .263 p = .162	r = .433 p = .074	16
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices (OFHLP)	r = -.062 p = .278	r = .423 p = .023	r = .478 p = . 141	r = .397 p = .176	r = .372 p = .078	16

To examine even more closely the relationship between home literacy practices and early Arabic reading skills, correlation analyses between the frequency of only *Arabic* home literacy practices and early Arabic reading assessments were conducted in each language environment separately. It was possible to explore this because in the questionnaire parents were asked to specify how often they were engaged with their children in the following literacy activities in Arabic, specifically: shared reading activities, teaching of letters, and teaching how to read a word. The frequency of each activity was rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (several times a day). The total score of the frequency of these three Arabic home literacy activities ranged between 6/15 and 13/15 in the Arabic dominant environment, 6/15 and 11/15 in the English dominant environment, and between 5/15 and

12/15 in the French dominant environment. The results showed that there were no correlations between the overall frequency of Arabic home literacy practices and early Arabic reading assessments in the Arabic ($r=.37; p=.08$), English ($r=.06; p=.40$), and French($r=.24; p=.18$) dominant environments as shown in Tables 4.7; 4.8; and 4.9 respectively. Moreover, the frequency of shared reading and the frequency of teaching how to read a word did not correlate with any early Arabic reading assessment in the three different language environments. However, the frequency of teaching letters in Arabic correlated with the total of Arabic reading proficiency assessments *($r=.58; p < 0.01$)*, letter knowledge *($r=.53; p < 0.01$)*, phonemic awareness *($r=.49; p < 0.05$)*, and fluency*($r=.62; p < 0.01$)* in the Arabic dominant environment; with letter knowledge *($r=.46; p < 0.05$)* in the English dominant environment; and with phonemic awareness *($r=.52; p < 0.01$)* in the French dominant environment.

In sum, students of the Arabic dominant environment scored higher on the early Arabic reading assessments than their collegues in the English and French language environments. The results also showed that parents in the three different language environments were involved in the same home literacy practices but the frequency of engagement differed across the different language contexts. Finally, the teaching of letters was the main home literacy practice that correlate with early Arabic reading skills especially letter knowledge and phonemic awareness. However, this correlation differed across the Arabic, English, and French contexts.

Table 4.8 *Correlations between Arabic Home Literacy Practices and Early Arabic Reading Assessment in the Arabic Dominant Environment*

	Total of assessments	Letter Knowledge	Phonemic Awareness	Vocabulary	Fluency
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices (OFHLP)	r = .37 p = .08	r = .10 p = .35	r = .01 p = .47	r = .15 p = .24	r = .13 p = .31
Shared Reading Frequency (SRF)	r = .38 p = .08	r = .23 p = .19	r = .37 p = .08	r = .16 p = .27	r = .14 p = .30
Teaching Letters Frequency (TLF)	r = .58** p = .004	r = .53** p = .009	r = .49** p = .017	r = .34 p = .07	r = .62** p = .002
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency (THRWF)	r = -.43 p = .052	r = .20 p = .23	r = .05 p = .42	r = .15 p = .29	r = .117 p = .339

Table 4.9 *Correlations between Arabic Home Literacy Practices and Early Arabic Reading Assessment in the English Dominant Environment*

	Total of ass.	Letter Knowledge	Phonemic Awareness	Vocabulary	Fluency
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices (OFHLP)	r = .06 p = .40	r = .007 p = .48	r =.85 p = .36	r = .35 p = .06	r = .01 p = .47
Shared Reading Frequency (SRF)	r = .13 p = .29	r = .26 p = .14	r = .06 p = .39	r = .13 p = .29	r = .05 p = .41
Teaching Letters Frequency (TLF)	r = .38 p = .08	r = .46** p = .04	r = .34 p = .10	r = .21 p = .22	r = .29 p = .13
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency (THRWF)	r = .28 p = .11	r = .29 p = .10	r = .38 p = .05	r = .13 p = .29	r = .24 p = .15

Table 4.10 Correlations between Arabic home literacy practices and early Arabic reading assessment in the French dominant environment.

	Total of ass.	Letter Knowledge	Phonemic Awareness	Vocabulary	Fluency
The Overall Frequency of Home Literacy Practices	r = .24 p = .18	r = .36 p = .08	r = .10 p = .34	r = .22 p = .20	r = .16 p = .27
Shared Reading Frequency	r = -.004 p = .49	r = .06 p = .41	r = .19 p = .235	r = .27 p = .14	r = .25 p = .17
Teaching Letters Frequency	r = .28 p = .14	r = .32 p = .12	r = .52* p = .01	r = .25 p = .17	r = .27 p = .15
Teaching How to Read a Word Frequency	r = .22 p = .19	r = .31 p = .11	r = .41 p = .06	r = .37 p = .07	r = .23 p = .19

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The current study is a quantitative study designed to investigate how the students'
proficiency in reading in Arabic differs across three different language environments, the
nature and prevalence of home literacy practices in Lebanon, and the relationship between
home literacy practices and grade one students' early reading acquisition in Arabic. The
first section of this chapter is organized by research question and it discusses the results of
this study in light of the relevant literature. The second section discusses the implications of
the findings for practice and further research, while the third section presents a discussion
of the study's limitations.

Discussion of the results

The first research question of the current study aimed to examine if early Arabic reading
proficiency differs across the different language environments. The results of the study
showed that children in the Arabic dominant group scored higher on letter knowledge,
phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and fluency assessments than children in the English and
French dominant groups. What might explain these differences? Based on the approach to
sampling the students' SES, parental education, age, nature of schooling particularly with
respect to literacy instruction, number of Arabic hours per week at school, and the
curriculum followed at school were largely controlled. However, parents in the Arabic
dominant environment read stories in to their children more frequently in Arabic and taught

them how to write Arabic letters more frequently. It is possible that this explained the differences. Indeed, the correlation of direct teaching of letters with reading proficiency suggests that this is particularly important.

These results coincide with Aram and Ofra (2013) study which highlighted the importance of early parent–child Arabic literacy activities as a predictor of Arabic-speaking children's literacy achievements in school, where the results revealed that there is a strong relationship between both. However, in Aram and Ofra study, SES was the independent variable not the language environment. For native English-speaking children, a large body of literature has documented that the frequency of English home literacy practices significantly contributes to children's early language and literacy outcomes (Burgess et al., 2002; Molfese, Modglin, & Molfese, 2003). Various forms of home literacy activities, including shared book reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), direct teaching of letters by parents (Burgess et al., 2002), and exposure to literacy materials (Johnson, Martin, Brooks-Gunn & Petrill, 2008), make a significant positive contribution to students early reading skills.

The second research question of the current study aimed to identify the types of home literacy practices engaged in by families sampled in North Lebanon and to investigate if the percentage of parents engaging their children in the different types of home literacy practices in middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate differed across contexts with different language use profiles. The results revealed that parents, in the three different language use environments, were engaged with their children in the same activities but there were differences in how commonly these practices were engaged in by

parents in the different language-oriented communities. The activities were: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things they had done, talking about things they had read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading aloud, and visiting libraries. In the questionnaire, parents were asked to add other home literacy practices than the ones listed, but no one added any other activity.

With regard to the types of activities engaged in, these were similar to those identified in other studies conducted in other parts of the world. For example, Stainthorp and Hughes (2000) were investigating what types of home literacy activities the parents of successful American young readers were engaged in with their children at home and how those activities differ from those of the poor readers. The data obtained indicated that there were no differences in the types of activities of the two sets of parents. They also showed that the types of activities are similar to those of the current study. Moreover, in their study about the role of parental involvement in children's reading skills, Senechal and Le Fevre (1998) investigated what kind of literacy activities were common in the households of Canadian French speaking families. The kinds of activities were also similar to those of the current study. Hence, this similarity is not surprising because the commonly used activities in the current study are also common in other countries like the United States (Stainthorp & Hughes, 2000), and Canada (Senechal & Le Fevre, 1998).

With regard to the percentage of parents engaging their children in home literacy practices, there were differences across three different language environments. The majority of parents in the three different language environments read books with their children, telling them stories, and teaching them how to write letters and words. However,

when it comes to the other home literacy practices, the percentages of parents engaging

with their children in these activities varied across the language contexts.

Having almost the same high percentage of parents engaging in reading books,

telling stories, and teaching how to write letters and words was similar to previous studies

conducted in other parts of the world were parents were highly engaged in these activities

with their children regardless of their SES, language environment, and nationalities (Boyle,

2014; Burguess, 2002; Kirby & Hogan, 2008; Saracho, 2002; Senechal et Le Fevre 1998;

Stainthorp & Hughes, 2000). One explanation for the prevalence of these three activities in

particular could be parents' awareness of the strong correlation between shared reading and

teaching of letters with early reading acquisition skills – i.e. parents are likely to prefer to

engage their children in the kinds of home literacy practices that can highly influence their

reading skills especially if the parents are grade oriented (Burgess, & Anthony 2000, Evans

2000, Kirby 2008).

Singing songs with children was also frequently done by parents in the three

language environments of the current study which is also similar to other countries

worldwide. For instance, in the United States, parents consider songs as a source of joy for

children for that reason parents consider exposing their children to music can help them in

learning sounds and words and at the same time enjoy their time (Welch, 2001). While in

Australia, parents believe that by singing songs with their children, they can gain skills and

confidence (Temmerman, 1998).

The percentage of parents who visited libraries with their children was low in the

three language environments in this study. According to many studies done about the

influence of home literacy practices on early reading acquisition in different countries and which examine the relationship between specific aspects of home literacy environment and the advancement of children's reading at school, visiting libraries did not predict or improve the prediction of child reading outcomes (Evans, 2000; Kirby & Hogan, 2008; Sénéchal.& LeFevre 2002). Moreover, and probably more importantly, public libraries are not commonly found in Lebanonese towns and cities limiting the possibility of this kind of activity.

Moreove, in this Lebanese sample few/no parents indicated that they engaged their children in reading road signs. This is quite different in other contexts, such as the US. For example, Hoban (2017) studied the attitudes of grade one students in U.S.A. towards the presence of signs and labels in their reading books. Students showed positive attitudes especially towards signs which they considered as "something you can read when you can't read words yet." They also found the signs and labels as something helpful that tells people what to do or not to do, where to go or stop, and which way to go. One possible reason behind the neglect of the importance of reading signs and labels with children in the three different language environments in the current study might be the lifestyle in Lebanon where road signs and traffic rules and regulations are not an important feature of everyday life; indeed, many signs are often ignored or not respected.

Concerning the other home literacy activities, such as playing word games, it was obvious that the percentage of parents, coming from the French dominant environment, who practiced this activity was much higher than the percentage of those coming from the Arabic and English dominant environments. No studies were found investigating variation

in this particular practice in different communities. There is some discussion in the literature on the importance of playing word games in general in that it helps children focus on sounds and letters, and develop skills they need for reading, writing, and spelling (Kabiri & Ghafoori 2014).

That was also applicable for other home literacy practices like the talks between parents and children about what they had read and done during the day.

The third research question aimed to investigate if there is correlation between home literacy practices and early Arabic reading acquisition, and if this correlation differs across different language contexts. In the Arabic dominant environment, there were high correlations between the frequency of teaching letters (TLF), on the one hand, and letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, and fluency, on the other. When it comes to the English dominant environment, there were no correlations at all between any home literacy practices and any early Arabic reading assessments. The parents in this environment were most frequently involved in literacy practices in the English language, but they did some shared reading and teaching of letters activities with their children in Arabic and French. In the French dominant environment, the frequency of teaching letters correlated with phonemic awareness and fluency in Arabic. Also, the frequency of teaching how to read a word correlated with letter knowledge and phonemic awareness.

This raises the question if there are similarities between learning to read in French and Arabic. The researcher decided to investigate the correlation between home literacy practices conducted in the three different languages (Arabic, English, and French) and early Arabic reading acquisition without limiting the investigation to home literacy activities

conducted in Arabic only because many studies about cross language transfer of linguistic

skills revealed that transfer is not restricted from L1 to L2 but the reverse is also found,

what is called cognitive retroactive transfer. For instance, in their study *Cognitive*

Retroactive Transfer (CRT) of Language Skills, Abu-Rabia, Shakkour, and Siegel (2013)

examined the effects of an English intervention program that aimed to help struggling

readers in English. The readers were also struggling in Arabic which is their first language.

After comparing the pre and post tests results, it was found that the intervention program

helped improving the readers reading skills in English as well as those same skills in

Arabic. However, that was not the case in the current study when it comes to the students

coming from the English language environment. While there were no correlations in the

English environment between home literacy practices (including direct teaching of letters)

and Arabic reading achievement, there was a significant correlation in the French dominant

environment.

The nature of each language might be the reason behind this difference. In his book

Reading in the Brain, Stanislas Dehaene concluded that English is a particularly opaque

language with a lot of complex phoneme-grapheme correspondences and irregularities. He

also found that it took one or two additional years of schooling before an English child

reaches the reading level of a French child. As an example, by the end of grade 1,

Francophone children read about 87% of words and 80% of nonwords accurately (Ziegler

et al., 2010). Young Francophone readers outperform their Anglophone peers although both

groups are outperformed by young readers of more phonologically transparent

orthographies. Hence, the less complex nature of the French language might be the reason

behind its correlation with Arabic phonemic awareness and Arabic letter knowledge where the student transfered some reading skills from French to Arabic.

When the researcher conducted a correlation analysis between the home literacy practices done in Arabic only and early Arabic reading assessments, the findings showed that teaching of letters was the only practice that had influence on early Arabic reading acquisition. In the Arabic dominant environment, teaching of letters correlated with letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, fluency, and the total of early Arabic reading assessments which is similar to what we discussed above. When it comes to the English language environment, there was a correlation between teaching of letters in Arabic and letter knowledge. While the parents in the English dominant environment did not read too much to their children in Arabic or teach them how to read a word, many of them did engage in teaching Arabic letters to their children several days a week (3-6 days).

In the French dominant environment, the teaching of Arabic letters correlated with phonemic awareness. Many parents in the French dominant environment reported that they taught their children how to read a word in Arabic on a daily basis. While teaching a child how to read a word, parents usually teach the alphabet to their children, model to their children how to manipulate phonemes together to get a word at the end, how the word has different syllables, the difference between a phoneme and a letter. Hence, the children had an opportunity to learn the Arabic alphabet and how to manipulate phonemes which might be the reason behind increasing their phonemic awareness.

Frequency of shared reading activity at home is positively related to children's vocabulary (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Senechal, LeFevre, & Thomas, 1998) and literacy

skills (Burgess,1997; Wood, 2002). The studies that have investigated the correlation between parent-child shared reading and early literacy skills have concluded that the more parents are involved in shared reading activities, the more their children score higher on vocabulary tests (Chen et al 2010, Korat & Haglili 2007, Leseman & de Jong 1998, Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony 2000, Manolitsis, Georgiou & Parrila 2011, Senechal 1998, Senechal 2006, & Silinskas et al. 2010). However, this was not the case in this study. This difference might be explained by the diglossic nature of the Arabic language where the spoken language (vernacular) is different from the formal one (Modern Standard Arabic). When showing the pictures to the students in the Peabody test, all of them were able to say the name of the item shown in the vernacular Arabic. However, when the researcher asked them to say it in Modern Standard Arabic, "like it would be mentioned in their reading books or in the stories they read with their parents," the number of corrects answers decreased. It has been suggested that low literacy rates in Arabic are rooted in the linguistic distance between the language of literacy and the spoken vernacular (Saiegh-Haddad 2003, 2007, 2011, 2012). Arab students are not taught the Modern Standard Arabic as their mother tongue. Rather, it is delivered to them in the form of prescriptive grammatical rules that they are asked to memorize and follow rather than acquire with logic. The early oral exposure to the Standard language appears to be the only means available to prepare children for literacy acquisition in Standard Arabic.

To our knowledge, the current study is the first to investigate the influence of home literacy practices on grade one students' early reading acquisition in a multilingual environment. There was a common assumption among the staff in the three schools that

there would not be any difference in the proficiency between the students of each language

environment because the three schools are following the same curriculum. However, this

assumption was not supported by this study's results where grade one students of the

Arabic dominant environment outperformed their colleagues in the English and French

environments.

Implications for practice

First, teachers of the Arabic language can design workshops in which they can present the

results of the current study to show parents that being involved in home literacy practices

can enhance their children's early Arabic reading skills. Moreover, curriculum specialists

can design reading activities that align with the literacy practices the students are engaged

in with their parents at home. In this way, curriculum designers can create a strong

connection between home and school. In addition to that, school principals and teachers

could revise the followed methodologies of teaching Arabic at their schools to check their

effectiveness especially that the three schools which participated in the current study were

following the same Arabic curriculum and using the same Arabic book. Given the weaker

Arabic reading achievement in the English and French dominant contexts, modifications to

the instructional approaches might be needed.

Implications for research

The results of the current study can open the door for more research about the correlation

between home literacy practices and Arabic early literacy skills in different Lebanese

governorates, and different multilingual Arab countries especially that there is little research that tackles this topic. Moreover, we need more research about the way in which parents are involved in home literacy practices with their children. For instance, the contribution of storybook reading to children's developing reading proficiency does not depend merely on the frequency of shared reading but also on the manner of reading. Moreover, follow up studies should investigate the reason behind differences in the frequency of practicing certain activities like playing word games and the frequency with which parents talk about what they had read in the three language environments. We also need studies that compare and relate developing reading proficiency across the thre languages: Arabic, English and French. Also, a follow up longitudinal study with the same group of students who participated in the current study is needed to check if, with time, they will reach the same level of Arabic reading proficiency even though they are coming from different language dominant environments.

In addition, having research about the students' perceptions towards the home literacy practices they are engaged in with their parents would be very interesting because the child's interest in what he/she is doing is an important variable. Furthermore, having research about how to connect schools and families in the Lebanese context is also crucial to provide quality education for students. Conducting studies to explore the relevance of disglossia to Arabic reading acquisition is also needed.Finally, replicating this study but adding SES as a variable would enrich our understanding of the factors influence reading acquisition in Arabic and how these might interact. However, there are only two schools in Lebanon that are still considering Arabic as their language of instruction in the low

elementary classes and the students in both schools are coming from middle SES households.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to the present study that need to be acknowledged. The results cannot be generalized to other communities that may differ in terms of region, language environments, and SES. Hence, they are restricted to middle SES households in North Lebanon Governorate.

Moreover, the data on the frequency of family literacy practices were self-reported. This could affect the results, especially given that parents might have the tendency of giving more favorable responses to the questionnaire items. Furthermore, the questionnaire did not include a section in which parents had to mention how they were practicing each home literacy practice presented in Part 1 in the questionnaire, how often, and in which language. Hence, observation and ethnographic studies of family literacy practices would be needed to overcome these limitations.

In addition to that, the child's interest in reading was not controlled which could certainly affect the frequency of reading and would impact the results of this study especially if these varied systematically across the three sub-communities. In other words, the questionnaire was missing a question in which parents had to choose the frequency with which their children made requests for book reading. In previous studies that aimed to investigate the influence of home literacy practices on early reading acquisition, the child's intereset in reading was controlled (Evans 2000; Senechal 1998).

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Student Name: ---------------------------------

Questionnaire code: ---------------------------

<p style="text-align: center;">**Questionnaire**</p>

You are kindly asked to complete this questionnaire in order to know more about the literacy activities you typically did with your child when s/he was 3-5 years old. The collected information will be extremely useful for helping us understand how shared reading and parents' direct teaching of early reading skills can influence Grade one students' early reading acquisition in Arabic. Therefore, we kindly ask you to respond to all the questions you feel comfortable answering. Please, reflect briefly on each question before responding and provide a response as accurate as you can. Please be sure that your responses to this survey will be completely confidential and your children's names will be given codes.

Section 1

General Information

- This survey was completed by:
  - Mother
  - Father
  - Both
  - Other: _____

- Which of the following activities did you carry out at home with your child?
  - Read books
  - Tell stories
  - Sing songs
  - Play with alphabet toys (for example , blocks with letters of the alphabet)
  - Talk about things you had done
  - Talk about what you had read
  - Play word games
  - Write letters or words
  - Read aloud signs and labels
  - Visit a library
  - Other: specify-------------

Section 2

Shared Reading

1- How often do you read books with your child?
- **1** not at all or rarely
- **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- **4** once a day/daily
- **5** several times a day

2- If you read with your child, in which language do you read? Please, check all that apply.
- Arabic
- English
- French

And how often in the selected language(s)?

If **Arabic:**

- **1** not at all or rarely
- **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- **4** once a day/daily
- **5** several times a day

If **English:**

- **1** not at all or rarely
- **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- **4** once a day/daily
- **5** several times a day

If **French:**

- **1** not at all or rarely
- **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)

- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

Teaching Reading

3- How often have you previously taught letters to your child?
- o **1** not at all
- o **2** very rarely
- o **3** sometimes
- o **4** very often
- o **5** daily

If **Yes,** in which language(s)?

- o Arabic
- o English
- o French

And how often in the selected language(s)?

If **Arabic:**

- o **1** not at all or rarely
- o **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

If **English:**

- o **1** not at all or rarely
- o **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

If **French:**

- o **1** not at all or rarely

- o **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

4- How often do you teach your child how to read a word?
- o **1** not at all
- o **2** rarely
- o **3** once or twice a week
- o **4** several days a week
- o **5** daily

And how often in the selected language(s)?

If **Arabic:**

- o **1** not at all or rarely
- o **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

If **English:**

- o **1** not at all or rarely
- o **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

If **French:**

- o **1** not at all or rarely
- o **2** once or twice a week (1–2 days)
- o **3** several days a week (3–6 days)
- o **4** once a day/daily
- o **5** several times a day

5- How old was your child when you started reading books/picture books to him or her?

(please estimate age) ------------------------------

Language

6- In what language did most of the shared reading activities and teaching reading take place?

Shared Reading

- o Arabic
- o English
- o French

Teaching Reading

- o Arabic
- o English
- o French

Comment: --

7- What language did your child speak before he/she began school? -----------------

If your child spoke more than one language at the same time please mention that by specifying which language he/she was using very often--------------------------

Information about the parents

8- What is the highest level of education completed by the child's father and mother?

Father----------------------   Mother------------------------

9- What kind of work do the child's father and mother do as their main jobs?

Father----------------------   Mother------------------------

10- About how long did it take you to complete this survey?

------- minutes

APPENDIX B

EARLY ARABIC READING ASSESSMENTS

a- Letter Knowledge

The student has to know the name of each letter based on its location: at the beginning, in

the middle, at the end of the word, and with diacritics. The CO-PI has to count the number

of mistakes made by the student while naming the letters.

التلفّظ بالحرف مع الصّوت الطّويل			الأصوات الطّويلة	التلفّظ بالحرف مع الصّوت القصير			الأصوات القصيرة	موقع الحرف (أين نجده؟)			موقع الحرف	إسم الحرف و صوته		حروف الأبجديّة
ي	و	ا		◌ِ	◌ُ	◌َ		آخر الكلمة	وسط الكلمة	أوّل الكلمة		صوت الحرف	اسم الحرف	
			تو				عًّ				أ			أ
			جا				لِ				جـ			ج
			بي				ئ				بـ			ب
			زي				ـز				ـز			ز
			ثو				ـُثـ				ـثـ			ث
			لي				ـگـ				لـ			ل
			عو				حَ				ـعـ			ع
			تي				دِ				ت			ت
			ذو				ـُغـ				ذ			ذ
			ظي				قِ				ظ			ظ
			را				ضَ				ك			ر
			غو				مُ				ـنـ			غ
			فو				لِ				ف			ف
			ني				ـيَ				ـغـ			ن
			ضو				شِ				ض			ض
			قي				خَ				ق			ق
			كي				ضِ				ر			ك
			حا				ـُثـ				ـتـ			ح
			يي				صَ				أ			ي
			دي				ـُد				د			د
			شو				عِ				ش			ش
			صا				هَ				ـذـ			ص

			هي				أَ			ر			**ه**
			ميد				خِ			ن			**م**
			ويد				وَ			غ			**و**
			خي				مِ			ح			**خ**
			سيد				هِ			ي			**س**
			طا				صَ			ف			**ط**
										ص			**ص**
										ه			**ه**
										م			**م**
										و			**و**
										خ			**خ**
										س			**س**
										ط			**ط**

ملاحظة المعلم (ة):

عدد الإجابات الخاطئة ؟

b- Vocabulary

Peabody picture vocabulary test will be used where I will show the reader pictures that I want him/her to point out where the picture I will ask about is. The PPV is important because research has shown a strong relationship between spoken vocabulary and reading performance (Wagner, 1993, p.88). The 25 pictures will show the following items:

ارنب	سلحفاة	باب
هدية	كرسي	ملعقة
سرير	لعبة	اصابع
تفاحة	منزل	لوح
اذن	عين	سيارة
كتاب	كلب	طاولة
فراشة	ورقة	شوكة
قلم	ساعة	فستان
		موزة

c- Phonemic awareness

The purpose of this phonemic awareness subtest is to assess the reader's ability to segment words into their constituent phonemes. This task included four trial items and eight experimental stimuli of varying difficulty. The first four stimuli are comprised of a CVC syllable (C= Consonant; V= Vowel) and the final four were comprised of a CVCV or a CVCVC structure. The examiner will instruct the reader to sound out all the

sounds he/she hears in a word. In the trial items, the examiner will model the desired

response by saying the word and pronouncing all its phonemes separately (Mohd,

1997).

- با ب
- عو د
- تي ن
- ما ضي
- را س
- زي ر
- دو د
- فا ر
- جا ر
- قا ضي
- كا نو ن
- مي زا ن

d- Fluency

To assess the student's fluency, the CO-PI will give a short story to the child to read. The

story will be composed of 62 words and the CO-PI will be counting the number of correct

and wrong words.

تصحيح ذاتي	في رؤية المطبوع وإستيعابه	في البنية	في المعنى	الجملة
			خطأ	
				سلَّة سَمَر.
				رَنَّ جَرَسُ البَيت رِن رِن رِن
				جاءَت سَمَر! و جاءَت كَنكوتَة ميَو ميَو
				مَعَ سَمَرَ سلَّة
				في سلَّة سَمَر سَمَك

				سَمَك في ماء !
				ساعَدَ باسِم وَ مَها سَمَر . ساعَدَ دادا سَمَر
				سَبَحَ سَمَك سَمَر في الماء
				جاءَ دادا . مَعَ دادا سَلّة
				في سَلّة دادا كُرَة .
				نَطّت كُرَة دادا وَ نَطّت كَتكوتَة .
				لا لا ! ! كُرَةً دادا في الماء .
				نَطّت سَمَكَة مَها
				ساعَدَ باسِم سَمَكَة مَها
				سَمَكَة مَها في الماء .

المستوى القرائي للمتعلّم	عدد الكلمات الخطأ	عدد الكلمات الصحيحة
	62/	62/

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