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The effectiveness of family literacy programs in Qatari preschool settings

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There is an increased recognition that family literacy programs can play a fundamental role in enhancing young children's literacy learning. Research in early literacy development stresses the importance of a partnership between home and school in promoting literacy skills among children (Nutbrown, Hannon, & Morgan, 2005). The concept of family literacy was used to refer to the interrelated literacy practices used by parents and/or family members and children in homes (Hannon, 2000; Teale, 1986). Although family literacy programs are a relatively new phenomenon within the educational context in Qatar, the effectiveness of these programs and the attitudes of those who are involved in these programs remain unknown. Therefore, this study was designed to assess the effectiveness of family literacy programs on children's literacy development implemented in Qatari preschool settings. It also explored the main areas of family literacy programs. Moreover, it examined the attitudes of teachers and parents towards their involvement in literacy learning after the implementation of the family literacy programs. A multi-method approach was utilized, including questionnaires, interviews, and observations. To achieve the objectives of the study, family literacy programs were established in Qatari preschool settings where teachers and parents worked together to facilitate preschoolers' emergent literacy learning and development. The effectiveness of family literacy programs were assessed based on ORIM framework (Hannon, 1998), which conceptualizes families as supporting their children's literacy learning through providing "opportunities" for learning, showing "recognition" of children's activities, "interaction" with children in terms of literacy activities and providing a "model" of a literacy user. Results indicated that family literacy programs

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implemented in Qatari preschool settings supported children's literacy learning. Furthermore, the results revealed that both kindergarten teachers and parents of preschoolers expressed positive attitudes towards their involvement in the family literacy programs. In addition, it has been found that literacy practices advocated by ORIM framework were ranged from high to moderate, with "recognition of children's activities" receiving the highest rate, followed by providing "opportunities" for learning. Finally, the study revealed that parents addressed all four strands of literacy with "books" and "oral language" receiving the highest rate. The study suggested developing strategies and policies regarding family literacy programs within Qatari kindergarten and primary schools. The study also identified practices needed for parents to promote children's literacy learning and development. Future directions for research and practical implications are also discussed. Key References: Buhs, E., Welch, G., Burt, J., & Knoche, L. 2011. Family engagement in literacy activities: revised factor structure for The Familia – an instrument examining family support for early literacy development. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(7), 989-1006. Hannon, P. 1995. *Literacy home and school: research and practice in teaching literacy with parents*. London: Falmer Press. Nutbrown, C., Hannon, P., & Morgan, A. 2005. *Early literacy work with families: Policy, practice and research*. London: SAGE. Pomerantz, E., Moorman, E., & Litwack, S. 2007. The how, whom, and why of parents' involvement in children's academic lives: More is not always better. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 373-410. Teale, W. 1986. Home background and young children's literacy development. In W. Teale and E. Sulzby. *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. ** This paper was made possible by NPRP grant # (NPRP 8-921-5-122) from the Qatar national research fund (a member of Qatar foundation). The statements made herein are solely the responsibility of the authors.