

Parents' beliefs about the role of Kindergarten in literacy development

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Abstract

This study is part of a wider research conducted in 13 state kindergartens in Pyrgos, in Western Greece, during the school year 2017-2018. The purpose was to investigate parents' beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development. Data collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty mothers and analysed by the method of content analysis. Data analysis revealed that all mothers recognise the role of kindergarten in the socio-emotional development of children but they do not seem to realise its role in the development of language and literacy. In conclusion, parents need to be informed about the role of kindergarten in literacy development, what is important for children to learn before they enter primary school and how they can enhance literacy in family environment. The findings emphasise the importance of a meaningful cooperation between kindergarten teachers and parents. Implications and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: Parents of children of kindergarten age, Beliefs, Kindergarten, Literacy development

In modern and technologically developed societies, written language is everywhere encountered and all children's literacy development is crucial, because it is their "passport" in order to be able to respond to the ever-increasing demands and challenges of the time. In the 21st century, literacy goes beyond writing and reading knowledge and means many different skills (de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016), related to the individual's ability to effectively understand and use written language in all media (printed

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or electronic) (Valtin & Mascia, 2021). Unlike in the past, when the concept of literacy had a static nature, today it is considered a dynamic, culturally placed and multifaceted process (Saracho, 2016), which begins from birth and continues throughout life.

Family plays a very important role in children's literacy journey. It is the first literate environment in which children experience their first literacy experiences by interacting with others members of their family and engaging in everyday activities (Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Tafa, 2008). Literacy is part of the culture of the family (Heath, 1983; Street, 2011) and as a result, children bring different literacy experiences and start school from different starting points (McLachlan & Arrow, 2017). This is closely linked to their school career and general development (Heath, 1983; Landry et al., 2008; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019; Weigel et al., 2006).

Kindergarten introduces children to the first institutionalized level of education and it has its own special characteristics. In Greece, under 4521/2018 Law, two-year kindergarten attendance was made compulsory, in order to compensate for the unequal opportunities provided by the different social environments of origin of children. Kindergarten starts when children turn 4 years old and its pattern is determined by the curriculum (Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework-CTCF, 2003), which is flexible and takes into account new social conditions and scientific developments, such as the modern theoretical approaches to the development and learning of children, the technological progress, the new demands of society or the guidelines of international organizations. The kindergarten curriculum aims to give opportunities to all children to come into contact with the written language and to prepare them for integration into the modern literate society.

Family-Kindergarten cooperation is particularly crucial and it contributes to literacy promotion (Thomas, 2016). According to Heath (2012), as an informal education provider, the family should be in a dialectical relationship with the school, which is the formal education institution. Daily informal learning should be linked to and complement formal learning (Saracho, 2016). Consequently, continuity is ensured and children's knowledge, attitudes and skills are completely developed.

Parental beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development have received little attention in the empirical literature and this paper is an attempt to highlight these parental beliefs. In Greece, there are also, very few studies which refer to parents' perceptions about the role of kindergarten, in general. According these studies, parents appear to understand the significant role of kindergarten in socio-emotional development and its contribution to a smooth transition to primary school. In fact, differences in the way parents perceive the role of the kindergarten

affect their expectations from the school and the cooperation with the school. This study is based on the idea that listening to and understanding parents will help to the cooperation between family and school which helps to literacy promotion. Input from the perspective of parents can help educators better understand children's early literacy as they arrive in kindergarten, assist parents in developing effective strategies for enhancing literacy at home and encourage parental involvement at school.

The family as the first literate environment

Children are initiated in a natural and effortless way in the written language in the context of family. The role of parents is essential in creating an appropriate learning environment for children (Montano & Hindman, 2016). Parents are in the most advantageous position, because they have strong bonds with children, they possess important information about their character, skills and inclinations and they spend most of the day with them. Therefore, they have countless, authentic opportunities for learning at their disposal. Through daily contact and interaction with children, parents can motivate them to learn, instill the love for reading and bring them into contact with the written language spontaneously and effortlessly through practices that make sense to the latter (e.g. reading books, storytelling, songs, games) (Bennett et al., 2002; Timmons & Pelletier, 2015).

However, not all parents act in the same way, resulting in children starting school with different assets. According to numerous studies (Baker & Scher, 2010; Bingham, 2007; Dhima, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Radisic & Seva, 2013; Iflazoglu Saban et al., 2018), parents' beliefs about literacy and the way someone becomes literate play a key role in literacy development. Actually, they determine parents' practices and their school expectations. A series of researches conducted on parents' literacy beliefs and practices have shown that parents tend to be divided into two broad categories (Evans et al., 2004; Friesen & Butera, 2015; Sonnenschein et al., 1997; Weigel et al., 2006). Some parents believe that they play an important role in children's education, display a holistic view of literacy development and emphasise on practices that enhance its emergence. Instead, others believe that school is primarily responsible for children's education and emphasise on practices of decoding the written language.

Kindergarten as the first organised learning environment

Kindergarten is the first organised environment of formal learning aiming at the full infants' development (physical, cognitive, social and emotional) (Berlinski et al.,

2009). Its role is essential because it contributes to the acquisition of many skills, the cultivation of learning motivation as well as the prevention and in-time dealing with learning difficulties (early intervention). At the same time, it prepares children for their smooth transition to primary school, which is often accompanied by increased demands on what children need to know (UNESCO, 2015).

The purpose of kindergarten is to create the foundations on which all children without exception will build their future learning. More specifically, it provides equal learning opportunities to all children and it counterbalances the differences that may exist among children from different backgrounds (e.g. migrants' and refugees' children, Roma's children or those with special needs, children living in households at particular risk of poverty and social exclusion) (Mullis et al., 2012; Naudeau et al., 2011). In this way, kindergarten assist all children sharing approximately the same level of abilities and skills during their transition to primary school, which form the basis for their educational career (Naudeau, et al., 2011).

The role of kindergarten teachers is of high-priority (Tafa, 2008), since they are asked to recognise children's abilities and inclinations, their weaknesses, their interests and their needs and also to ensure learning motives and conditions for them all. Parents are the basic and valuable helpers in kindergarten teachers' work, who can give significant information about children, but also work with the former, in order to achieve the necessary "*continuity*" between children's two most important learning environments.

The language and literacy development in kindergarten

In Greece, the curriculum for kindergarten (CTCF, 2003) is based on the philosophy and principles of emergent literacy (Tafa, 2008). According to this philosophy, children become literate in the context of a continuous process (Teale & Sulzby, 1986), whose the basic mean is the oral language. During this process, they acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) that precede the development of the conventional reading and writing. Oral and written language are developed in parallel in the context of everyday communication situations that make sense to children and it is through the former that children are initiated into the latter (Tafa, 2008; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Language teaching aims at the communication skill meaning pupils being able to communicate in an effective and appropriate manner for any special communication situation. Kindergarten teachers are asked to utilise children's pre-existing knowledge and experiences to create a favorable learning environment, aiming at the

acquisition of oral communication skills (speaking and listening) and written communication skills (reading and writing). Coming to kindergarten, children have already mastered oral language in a natural way in the family context and they have already acquired some knowledge, attitudes and skills in relation to the written language. Kindergarten has to support children to better organise their oral language, so that it is more in line with what is required in literate societies, to bring them into contact with text language and to motivate them to learn. In this way and according to CTCF (2003, p. 587), it can play an important role *"in school failure prevention which, at an early age, is primarily associated with the child's lack of familiarity with language aspects related to the written language"*.

According to CTCF (2003) and as far as oral communication is concerned, the aim is to develop skills related to the comprehension and production of oral texts (speaking and listening) and the development of metalinguistic awareness. In particular, children should be given opportunities in the context of functional communicative situations to narrate, describe, explain and interpret, participate in discussions and argue, enrich their vocabulary and gain phonological awareness (Tafa, 2008).

Regarding written language, the aim is to develop skills related to the comprehension and production of written texts (writing and reading). In fact, children should come into contact with different genres of written language (e.g. books, newspapers, magazines, brochures, maps, inscriptions) and realise that these different genres are used for multiple purposes and convey different messages. They should also be given chances to adopt basic reading conventions, to understand simple texts or instructions given to them, to draw information from various sources, to recognise familiar words in their environment and to *"use"* the classroom library (Tafa, 2008). Moreover, children must be given the opportunity to realise that the written language is a representation of the language, that the phonemes of the spoken language correspond to letters and that there are different semiotic systems and alphabets. It is also crucial that they realise the social dimension of the written language, which is associated with the reasons why people write. Children need to understand the use of the written language as a means of communication and a source of pleasure. At the same time, they should be encouraged to produce individual and/or group texts for various communication purposes (e.g. cards, narrative texts). Children are also, encouraged to use writing materials, write their name in capital and/or lower-case letters, copy words that serve functional needs (e.g. sign their drawings, write wishes on cards) and generally write as they can. The most important of all is for the children to realise the usefulness of the written language and to be motivated to achieve it.

Kindergarten-Family collaboration to enhance literacy

The family is the *"first school"* for children. Although it practices an informal form of education, it has the most significant influence on the child's language and cognitive development. The kindergarten is the first organised environment of formal learning and it is the *"bridge"* that connects the family with the primary school (Symeou, 2007). The cooperation between these two institutions is necessary and can help catalytically in the literacy promotion, because it can give continuity at home and bridge the distance that may exist between family and school. When these two environments come together, they coordinate their course in the same direction and work together harmoniously. Then, children understand it, feel safer, adapt more easily, acquire a positive attitude towards school, experience learning as part of their daily lives and school success rates increase (Wilson, 2019).

Kindergarten-family collaboration can easily be achieved when literacy practices and home learning are in line with what happens at school. But this is not the case when what is done at home is very different from what takes place at school. Teachers have the responsibility to inform parents regularly about what takes place at school and to provide them with information, materials and tools to enhance children's home literacy (Bojczyk et al., 2017; Morrow, 2014; Swain & Cara, 2017). There is no point in trying to *"fix"* families by transferring school methods to home. Teachers should take into consideration and utilize children's *"knowledge funds"* (Moll et al., 1992) and propose practices that suit the culture of the family. At the same time, it is important to give parents the opportunity to be involved in school activities, to express their needs, their feelings and to make suggestions (Bojczyk et al., 2017; Morrow, 2014). When parents are involved in their children's education, they communicate positive beliefs about school and learning to their children, and children in turn tend to have positive feelings about learning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Report, 2016).

Objective of research

The aim of the present study was to explore parents' beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development.

Research questions

- What mothers believe about the way that literacy is developed in kindergarten? Are there differences among mothers' beliefs?
- What mothers believe that is important for children to learn in kindergarten, in regards to language development (oral and written)? Are there differences among mothers' beliefs?
- Do mothers express need for training/guidance on how literacy develops in kindergarten and how they can promote literacy at home?

Methodology

This study is part of a wider mixed research which comprised two phases, the quantitative followed by the qualitative one. The purpose of that wider research was to investigate the literacy beliefs and practices of parents of children of kindergarten age. The research was conducted in 13 state kindergartens in Pyrgos, an urban area in Western Greece, during the school year 2017-2018. In the first phase, the sample consisted of 147 parents (father or mother) of children – aged 5 years old – attending the 13 kindergartens in the town of Pyrgos, while in the second phase the sample consisted of twenty mothers.

Particularly, the results from the first phase of the research showed that parents seem to be divided into two groups, who have different beliefs about literacy. One group has more facilitative beliefs (F) about literacy and gets involved in various literacy practices which help literacy emergence. The second group has more conventional beliefs (C), is involved in more skills-based practices and believes that school is primarily responsible for teaching children. The purpose of the second phase was to shed light in more and in-depth aspects of the problem regarding parents' literacy beliefs, among which were mothers' beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development.


In order to explore mothers' beliefs about the role of kindergarten, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with a random sample of ten mothers of each group of parents. The sample was sufficient enough to reach saturation, as after the first six-seven interviews, no significant differences were found, which could indicate to us the expansion of the sample. Only mothers were selected, both because the selection of a homogeneous sample contributes to the validity and reliability of

the research (Bryman, 2016), and because mothers are involved more in children's education and seem to have the ultimate responsibility for raising their children (Reay, 1998; Vincent & Ball, 2006). This was also found in the present research, where the participation of mothers was much greater (89,8%) than that of fathers (10,2%). Regarding the mothers' demographic characteristics participating in the second phases, most belonged to the 36-40 age group (80%), they were married (90%) and they had finished high school (90%).

The content of the interview protocol was based upon the exploration of the research questions and consisted of three open-ended questions. First, mothers were asked to answer if they know the way that literacy is developed in kindergarten. After that, they were requested to mention if there are some abilities/skills, in regards to language development (oral and written), that are important for the children to know before they enter primary school. At the end, mothers were asked if they would like to be trained on how literacy is developed at kindergarten and how they could enhance literacy at home.

All interviews were individual and were recorded with the mothers' consent, in order to ensure that full information was obtained and to reduce the time taken to manually record the interviews. They were conducted at schools and at a time arranged by the mothers. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. All qualitative data was analysed by the method of content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then they were read again and again to get a whole sense, i.e. to gain a general understanding of what the participants were talking about. The next step was to divide text into smaller meaningful units and then further condensing them but at the same time retaining the core meaning. After that, the condensed meaningful units were labeled by codes and then these codes were grouped into categories. According to the study's aim, categories went further and created themes (Figure 1) (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Figure 1 Example of analysis to higher levels of abstraction
 (Adapted from Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

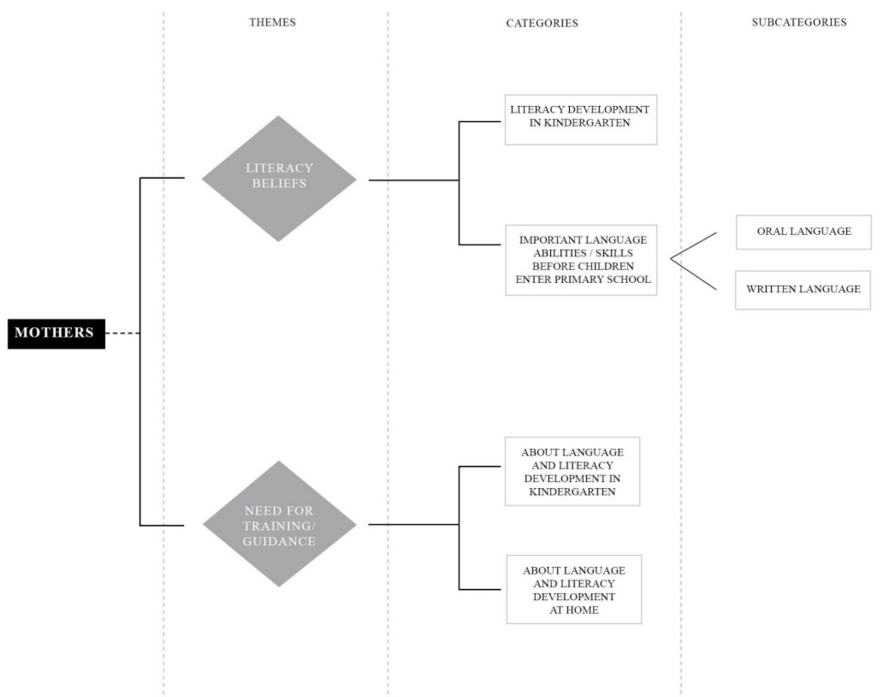
Higher levels of abstraction- Interpretation	Theme	<i>Literacy Beliefs</i>
	Category	<i>Important language abilities/skills before children enter primary school</i>
	Subcategory	<i>Oral language</i>
	Code	<i>Communication skills</i>
	Condensed meaning units	<i>to communicate correctly, to speak in correct sentences, to talk properly</i>
Lower levels of abstraction- Text	Meaning unit	<i>In oral speech, I think they should be able to communicate properly and satisfactorily with their teacher, with their friends, that is what we are looking for, a child to be able to speak in correct sentences, to talk properly ...</i>

Regarding ethical issues, research had the approval and permission from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. Parents were being informed for this, for the purpose, the procedure of the research, their voluntary participation and their ability to quit the research any time they wanted, too. Then, they were asked whether they wanted to participate in the study and all of them agreed and signed a volunteer participation form. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, instead of real names of participants, a code to each participant was used, so that the identity cannot be revealed.

Results

The purpose of the interviews was to explore mothers' beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development. Through content analysis two main themes, four categories and two subcategories were emerged (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Results of qualitative data analysis



Based on the results, all mothers in both groups seem to recognise the important role that kindergarten plays in the children’s full development, especially the social-emotional one. Mothers believe that in kindergarten children are primarily socialized and at the same time, they acquire knowledge and skills that are necessary for their development and a smooth transition to primary school.

I believe that (the role of the kindergarten) is preparatory and the children must be prepared for the primary school, because they will have another schedule and extra workload and the child must begin to learn to concentrate, to communicate differently with the teacher and to learn to follow, to pay attention to the teacher. (F5)

Mothers also recognise the important role of the kindergarten teachers, not only in how they work with children, but also in how they collaborate with parents for the benefit of the child.

... The kindergarten teacher can guide the parent on many issues, the kindergarten teacher can also get stimuli from the parent and improve or adjust some things. I think

that cooperation is very important at all grades, especially in the kindergarten, which is the first grade for the child [...] Of course, a constructive and very fruitful collaboration. (F7)

However, regarding the first research question about the way that literacy is developed in kindergarten, the majority of mothers – especially from the conventional group – seem not to be aware of this and wonder about the exact role of kindergarten and if children must learn the letters in kindergarten. In addition, they are often confused by what they hear from the social environment or the activities that some kindergarten teachers implement in the classroom, so they do not know exactly what should be happening in the classroom.

Er... to do a little preparation for the letters, I don't know whether it is allowed before they go to primary school, how far this can get. (C6)

I do not know its role. There are kindergartens where children have learned the alphabet, spelling... [...] I think this is not important, but when I listen to other mothers with older children saying that they are in over their heads when their children go to the first grade, because they (the children) should have proceeded in the kindergarten... (C9)

Concerning the second research question about what mothers believe that is important for children to learn in kindergarten, in regards to language development (oral and written language), mothers mentioned a variety of skills that they consider important to be developed during the attendance in kindergarten. They also, referred more to the written language than to the oral one. This seems that they may do not realise the importance of the oral language in the development of the written language. Only a few mothers from the group with facilitative beliefs appear to realise the connection between oral and written language. Typically, mother F3 reported: *“oral language is the basis, that is, from that point (the child) will go to the written (language)”*.

In particular to oral language, all mothers mainly referred to important communication skills that the children need to develop in order to be able to communicate comfortably with others through a well-structured speech. The majority of mothers reported that it is important for the children to understand what is being said and can express themselves correctly and according to the grammatical, semantic and pragmatic rules of the language. They should also be able to argue, express their feelings and be able to engage in dialogue by taking turns to speak.

To communicate, to understand, to perceive, what else? When she is in a group and has a dialogue, to wait for her turn. (F2)

Look, I think oral language, at this stage, is more important... [...] To be able to talk, to be able to claim something [...] to have the courage to go to a teacher, to express himself, to claim his right. (F3)

In oral language the children should be able to speak correctly, to have the right articulation [...] To be able to express themselves correctly, because if they do not speak and do not articulate the letters correctly, they will have a problem in the written language afterwards. (C7)

There are also some mothers with facilitative beliefs and only one with conventional beliefs who seem to recognise the important role of vocabulary in language development. Typically, mother C5 stated: *"it (the vocabulary) will help him later in school, not only now that he will go to the first grade (of primary school) but also later"*. Similarly, mother F4 stated that the children *"also acquire the vocabulary, because they will be asked to write something, so I believe that they must have it in their mind, in order to be able to write it"*.

Only a few mothers from the two groups also mentioned that it is important for the child to be able to "describe an image" (F7), narrate or retell stories.

...to be able to tell a story [...] because the same will take place later in primary school [...] to be able to narrate. (C3)

In all the above, there were some mothers from the two groups who added that activities that take place in the kindergarten, such as poems, songs, discussions and various events, contribute significantly to oral language. Specifically, mother F1 stated: *"All the poems and songs, mainly oral, of course they help him/her. All this, the "circle time", the questions and answers"*.

As for what is important for children to learn in relation to written language, all mothers pay attention mainly to skills related to the alphabetic code and they do not seem to understand that it is important for the child to understand the communicative role of writing, which is a key purpose of the curriculum of the kindergarten. Only one mother from the group with facilitative beliefs mentioned that the child should *"understand that the written language has a specific purpose, that it happens for a reason"*. (F2)

In particular, all mothers want and consider important the children's familiarisation with letters, that is, the child should learn some letters, both the name and the sound of the letter and be able to write it.

Okay, it is important to know some phonemes, some letters. (F8)

Okay, to have an idea of the letters, not just to see a letter and not know it at all. (C5)

To have a familiarisation with the letters, not to work on the material of the first grade (of primary school), in the kindergarten. (C6)

Of course, there are also some mothers from the two groups who think it is important that the child know all the letters of the alphabet or "as much as possible so to make it easier to adjust to the first grade (of primary school)." (C4)

For some mothers, especially from the group with facilitative beliefs, the development of visual-motor coordination and fine motor skills is also important for the familiarization of the children with the written language and especially to learn to write.

to be able to hold his/her pencil correctly and to be able to make -not necessary letters- but to make this effort, that is, to have learned to hold the pencil correctly and to start this first process nothing more. (F4)

These mothers also mention skills such as being able to write legible letters in order on the lines and in the right order.

To know how to write the letters in order, that is, not to write letters here and there. (C2)

It is also important for some mothers from the two groups, that the child can write his or her name. Typically, mother C8 reported: "I believe that the most important thing is to know how to write his/her name...". Finally, reference is made by some mothers to the children being able to write and read certain syllables and to try to read words that they encounter in their environment, since, as mother F9 stated: "When they know letters they can spell".

Spelling, the initial stages of spelling. (C9)

They must be able to write the letters and if possible some syllables, yes. (F5)

Some mothers – especially from the facilitative group – also referred to activities that take place in kindergarten and based on what they say, they help significantly in the development of the written language. They stated that the various language games that take place in the classroom contribute significantly to that and bring the children into contact with the letters, the phonemic character of the language and the graphophonemic correspondence. All these help children to learn to “read” words from their familiar environment. Reference is also made to the various classroom “routines”, to the various topics developed in kindergarten and to the matching of image-word.

...in kindergarten I think even the space helps, everything that the child sees on the wall, on the board, all these stimuli, I think all these images are embedded and then help the child to connect the word, the meaning with the image that they have in mind and to write a text. (F7)

with the card-games that the kindergarten teacher plays with the children, with the date they say, for example, “today is Thursday, of the (X) month” and the children can understand that it is Thursday, even only visually... [...] Yes I think it will work somehow in their subconscious, that it is a word that starts... the games they play, which words start with “p” and the children start saying different words either successfully or not, they say various words... I think this helps. (F1)

Additionally, the mothers mentioned that the institution of the lending library, which the kindergarten teachers have established every Friday, has helped in familiarisation with the written language in combination with the homework they put on the children, such as painting something they liked from the fairy tale or writing the title of the fairy tale.

The kindergarten teacher has helped a lot with book lending every week and work related to the book, that children have to do afterwards... to draw what is in the book, to find words from a specific letter, this has helped a lot. (F6)

However, it is important to refer that there are a few mothers with conventional beliefs and only one with facilitative beliefs who support the view of writing and reading readiness. In other words, they believe that children will learn everything they need to learn when they reach a certain level of mental maturation, so they do not need to be pushed too much in kindergarten. Characteristically, mother C5 said: “No, I think it is not necessary for them to know how to write, they will learn everything in time... [...] because, if we push children, at some point they get tired...”

Relating to the third research question, when the mothers were asked about whether they need training-guidance on how literacy develops in kindergarten and how they can promote literacy at home, it was found that most of their concerns regard issues related to the child's attendance at primary school. The majority of mothers believe that "*Kindergarten is something else.*" (F1), while primary school "*has strictness, it is not like in kindergarten, there are no more games, that's where things really change...*" and "*it is not like when we went to school, they give them so much homework*". (C2)

Only a few mothers with facilitative beliefs mentioned that they would like general guidance and training before primary school, so that they could learn how they can support children at home.

The kindergarten is important, [...] finally, the period before kindergarten is also important [...] maybe all this should be done before kindergarten, that is, when children are 2 years old, so, we, the parents, should be more alert. In other words, I would like to have all this information before this foundation is created, that is, if I have made some mistakes, which I certainly have made, I could have avoided some of them. (F1)

I would like to know how to help him/her at home, at every step. [...] As a parent, what I could do at home. I think there could be seminars for parents for helping them, because many parents do not know. (F2)

Discussion

As mentioned above, the present study is part of a wider research that aimed to investigate the literacy beliefs and practices of parents of children of kindergarten age. That study corresponded with research literature and shows that there are parents who have a holistic view of literacy and emphasise on practices that enhance its emergence and parents with more conventional tendencies who focus on the acquisition of a narrow set of skills, which are related to the alphabetic code (Bingham, 2007; Evans et al, 2004; Debaryshe & Binder, 1994; Djonov et al., 2018; Iflagzoglou Saban et al., 2018; Sonnenschein et al., 1997). These different parental beliefs about literacy seem to be related to mothers' beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development but not at a great extent. Even though there are some differences between mothers from the two groups, the majority of mothers appear not to have a clear perception about the role of kindergarten. This is in line with the findings of the study of Papandreou and her colleagues (2009).

The results showed that all mothers recognise the important role of the kindergarten, especially in the child's socio-emotional development and this finding aligns

with other researches on parents' views on preschool education (Mousena & Papa-prokopiou, 2009; Papandreou, Birbili, Martidou, 2009; Sahin et al., 2013; Malovic & Malovic, 2017). Mothers also perceive that kindergarten prepares children for a smooth transition to primary school and recognise the significant role of the kindergarten teacher to the whole learning process and to the establishment of an effective partnership with families. This has been mentioned in other studies, too (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Malovic & Malovic, 2017; Montano & Hindman, 2016; Papandreou, Birbili, Martidou, 2009).

However, the majority of mothers do not appear to have a concrete idea about the role of kindergarten in literacy development and particularly the way that literacy is developed in kindergarten. Mostly mothers with facilitative beliefs have an holistic view of literacy development. They seem to understand that literacy development happens in the frame of a communicative event in which a written text is embedded (Heath, 1983) and refer to activities that take place in kindergarten which support the emergence of literacy. The fact that these mothers have a more holistic view of literacy development may be contribute to realise that through a variety of activities in classroom children's literacy is developed.

Furthermore, most mothers from the two groups do not seem to understand the importance of oral language, that oral and written language are connected, developed in parallel and that the first contacts of the child with the written language are made through the oral language. This can be attributed to the fact that in their answers they seem to place more emphasis on the written language than on the oral one. When it comes to oral language, most mothers focus on developing communication skills so that the child can communicate comfortably in the context of any communicative case. The mothers may not conceive that oral language is more complicated than what is generally believed. They seem to not know that it is important for the children to develop meta-linguistic awareness and vocabulary, to be able to describe, explain, interpret and narrate, in other words to become familiar with decontextualized speech. This kind of discourse is used in written texts and the familiarity with, it is a presupposition for comprehending texts and write your own ones.

Regarding the written language, all mothers focus on familiarising children with letters and seem not to become aware of all the aspects of written language. Skwarchuk and her colleagues' research (2014) reached the same finding. Mothers believe that when the children know some letters, they can read and it makes easier to adapt to primary school. This, however, shows that parents may not apprehend that the written language does not only mean "spelling skills" but also "comprehension", which is a very complicated process and many factors (e.g memory and attention,

vocabulary, morphological and syntactic awareness) contribute to this. In addition, they do not realise that the purpose of the approach to the written language in kindergarten is to provide opportunities for all children to come into contact with the language of texts, and understand that different genres of text are used for multiple communicative purposes and convey different messages embedded in a variety of social instances. The parents seem to adapt a narrow view for kindergarten that of introducing and teaching letters the children. On the other hand, the curriculum adapts a quite different view that the most important is to give children opportunities to read and write, to make sense of the way that written language works, and help them to understand the usefulness and the communicative character of the written language and most important acquire motivation for its learning.

All the above mentioned show that mothers from both groups have a vague picture about the role of kindergarten in literacy development and they are not well informed about the curriculum and how literacy is taught in kindergarten. The majority of them do not perceive that in kindergarten children come to contact with language and literacy through various and playful activities that make sense to children and which are far from exercising recognizing and writing letters. Contrary to that mothers consider the kindergarten as a flexible form of education that contradicts the strict framework and the increased demands of the primary school. This results in most mothers seeking information and being particularly concerned about the transition to primary school and the way literacy developed in it, ignoring – in some way – the significant contribution of kindergarten in literacy development.

This is why kindergarten teachers should inform parents about the important role of kindergarten in the literacy development. Parents must be informed for the curriculum, the way that literacy is developed in kindergarten, the skills that are important for children to develop before they start primary school, and the way that they can enhance literacy at home. In addition, they must be given opportunities to express their needs for training-guidance.

The findings of this study contribute to better understand mothers and their beliefs about literacy development in kindergarten and create a substantial and fruitful collaboration with them, which consists of a necessary element for children's literacy development. They can also conduce to the design of Family Literacy Programs (FLPs), which will be based on parents' real needs. Various official bodies (e.g. universities, libraries), in collaboration with kindergartens, could organise training and guidance programmes for parents on literacy issues. Parents need to understand that literacy development does not begin in primary school, but it is a continuous phenomenon

that begins from birth and that preschool age is the most important and appropriate period for its enhancement, as literacy foundations are laid.

Recommendations-Limitations

As the majority of the sample consisted of mothers, we do not have sufficient data on the fathers' beliefs about the role of kindergarten in literacy development. Thus, in a future study, the sample could consist of a larger percentage of fathers, so as to thoroughly explore the role of the father in the child's education and in family literacy enhancement.

Moreover, we should bear in mind that cooperation between parents and kindergarten teachers is not always feasible and sufficient although there are those who stress its importance. Therefore, an action research aiming at identifying a framework within which a meaningful cooperation of the two parts can be achieved would have significant benefits for parents, children and kindergarten teachers. In addition, a large-scale research aiming at exploring parents' needs from various socio-cultural contexts and creating FLPs based on their respective needs would be of great interest and would significantly help to enhance home literacy.

Finally, all research data came from the participants' reports and it should definitely be taken into account that the participants may give answers based on social desirability (Lavidas & Gialamas, 2019).

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