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“Dad, read us a story!”

An ecological systems approach to understanding fathers’ perceptions on shared storybook reading in Jordan

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Abstract

Fathers' involvement (FI) in the education and development of their young children is a growing phenomenon. Research has shown that children with parents involved in shared reading exhibit stronger cognitive, social, and problem-solving skills (Betawi et al., 2014). Unfortunately, FI is still lacking in shared reading, especially in the Middle East and North Africa region. We Love Reading (WLR) trains adults on how to read with children. Highlighting the importance of FI in shared reading, the current research employs Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development to understand WLR father ambassadors' perceptions on and their involvement in reading with their young children in Jordan and also how their involvement in reading affected other aspects within their homes, extended families, neighborhoods and communities. Field research was conducted in Jordan through semi-structured interviews in Arabic. Findings showed that a majority of participants felt reading was the mothers' responsibility and were not involved prior to their WLR training. After the training, all participants continue to read with their children, many read to children other than their own and encourage others in their communities and families to read with children, creating a ripple effect starting within homes and extending to other aspects of participants' surroundings.

Keywords: Middle East and North Africa; Jordan; Early Childhood Education and Development; Parental Involvement; Fathers' Involvement; Shared Storybook Reading; Ecological Systems Theory of Development.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BPP	Better Parenting Program
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECA	Early Childhood Aged
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECED	Early Childhood Education and Development
FI	Fathers' Involvement
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MI	Mothers' Involvement
PI	Parental Involvement
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
WLR	We Love Reading

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1. Introduction

Investment in early childhood education and development (ECED) is one approach countries can take to mitigate poverty and develop human capital to boost and diversify economies (Early Childhood Development, n.d.). Early childhood development (ECD) has even found a place in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The second target under SDG 4 "quality education" aims to "ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (Education- United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d.). To meet this target, ECED initiatives need to consider the role parents have in the education of their young children at home.

Studies have shown that parental involvement (PI) in ECED helps increase children's literacy, self-esteem, self-discipline, academic achievement, attendance, and connection or motivation toward schooling (Swain and Cara, 2017). According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), parents are the most influential figures and role models in children's lives, especially in their children's early years. Therefore, to achieve the UN target, it is necessary to understand PI in the development and education of their children. Historically, mothers have been the focus of research when studying PI in ECED. Michael Lamb (1975) claims that fathers are the "forgotten contributors" when researching PI in children's development, particularly in the early years. More recently, this trend of fathers as "forgotten contributors" has been changing with a new wave of understanding and research into the topic of Fathers' involvement (FI) in children's development. However, the research is still sparse. The lack of research on FI in ECED is especially evident in countries that have strong views on gender norms for the role of men and women. This is true for countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with strong tribalistic histories that are deep rooted in the makeup of societal structures, including the structure of families within the society (Craig et al., 2018).

Investment in ECED in the MENA region is among the lowest worldwide (El-Kogali and Krafft, 2015). However, Jordan has emerged as one of the leaders for ECED in the MENA region (Al-Hassan, 2018). Despite being recognized as a leader for ECED in the region, focus on PI, specifically FI, have been limited. The limited focus on FI can be connected to the cultural guidelines for gender roles within society (Craig et al., 2018). Fathers in a household are seen as

breadwinners and authority, while mothers are expected to take on the role of caretaker and nurturer (Augustin, 2015). Men are taught, from a young age, that their role in society is to work and secure the necessary means to provide for a family. Men are also raised with the belief that women bear the responsibility of overseeing their children's education (ibid.). Shared storybook reading is one area in particular that lacks male role-models and FI.

Reading interactions provide young children with learning opportunities that other caregiving activities do not. The cognitively stimulating interaction through reading has also shown to enhance academic and psychosocial skills and behaviors for young children prior to entering formal education (Baker, 2013). We Love Reading (WLR) is an organization founded in Amman, Jordan that aims to encourage these reading interactions by educating adults on how to read aloud with children and inspire a love for reading. WLR plays an essential role in the current research by working as a gatekeeper and providing access to a group of father ambassadors that are trained on how to read with children. Understanding the perceptions of these fathers on how shared storybook reading has affected their lives and attitudes sets the foundation of this research.

To gain a deeper understanding of FI in reading with their early childhood aged (ECA) children, the current research utilizes Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development as a theoretical framework. This framework enables the researcher to examine the way different levels of participants' environments affect and are affected by the process of participants reading with their children. Since FI in ECED remains an understudied subject, gaining insight on the perception of fathers currently involved in reading with their young children can be a valuable addition to existing research.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to examine WLR father ambassadors' perceptions in Jordan on their involvement in reading with their ECA children. More specifically, the research aims to understand WLR fathers' perceptions on how reading with their young children is affected by and has affected their surrounding environments. The environments examined in this study are based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, which starts from the innermost environment such as the home and extends out to the outermost layer of culture and society.

In order to understand participants' perceptions, the following research questions are applied:

1. How have Jordan's WLR father ambassadors' perceptions of and involvement in reading with their ECA children changed as a result of the WLR training?
2. How do WLR father ambassadors in Jordan perceive that their involvement in reading with their ECA children has affected other aspects within their homes, extended families, neighborhoods and communities?

1.2 Inspiration

The current research aims to contribute a new perspective to existing research on ECED and storybook reading at home, while also adding to the much-needed research on FI in ECED.

The inspiration for this research came from a deep-rooted passion for ECED and over a decade's worth of experiences in the ECED field. Spending time in the field, it was evident that FI made a difference on students' development, especially on their motivation toward reading. FI was less common in ethnic classrooms, which piqued an interest into understanding why. As someone that identifies as Middle Eastern, I reflected back on my own childhood. My father never read to me as a child and when I discussed this with him, he mentioned that the idea to grab a book and read to my brother and me never crossed his mind. It was simply not something he ever thought to do because he expected that my mother would take responsibility for it, along with the rest of our education. He also mentioned that his father never read to him or his siblings, and he could not recall any man from his family ever reading with their children. This led me to expand my inquiry with other men in my family, closer to my age, who were currently living in the Middle East. I was surprised to find they held the same perception that my father did thirty years ago. From their responses, and further conversations with ECED professionals working in the field of development, I found the inspiration for this study.

1.3 Delimitations

It is important to note that this study only focuses on WLR father ambassadors' perceptions on their experiences in shared storybook reading with their children. The study only interviews

participants that have undergone the training administered by WLR. Therefore, the study does not take into account the general perception of MENA fathers. This was done in an effort to understand fathers' perceptions as a result of their training. The study does examine the quality, style, or length of storybook reading, and does not have a set requirement for the amount of reading that occurred. Another aspect that is not specifically targeted by the study is the fathers' socioeconomic backgrounds. There are questions in regard to occupation and citizenship which may allude to certain socioeconomic traits, but it is not explicitly an element of this study.

1.4 Thesis structure

The study consists of seven sections beginning with this introduction. Following the introductions is the contextual background, to give readers a better understanding of Jordan and the development efforts taking place within the country. Then, there is a literature review that provides a summary of research already available on fathers' participation in children's development. Readers are then informed on the theoretical framework that guides the development and analysis of the study which is followed by the methodology section that details the methods used. Readers are subsequently presented with the findings from the data analysis before final concluding remarks are given.

2. Contextual Background

2.1 Jordan: an educated yet unstable environment

Jordan is nestled underneath Syria, to the left of Iraq, the right of Palestine, and above Saudi Arabia (See appendix A for: *Map of Jordan*). With 3 of the 4 bordering countries in conflict, Jordan has, over the years, faced many challenges such as an influx of refugees and interruption of its trade-routes. More than half of the population of Jordan is below 18 years of age with around 20 percent under 8 years old and a national average of 5.6 children per household (Al-Hassan and Lansford, 2011). The *Education for Prosperity* report states that, "[y]outh unemployment is 31.8%, and total workforce participation is only 41%" (NSHRD, 2015, p.42). The nation's youth are graduating at high rates but have a difficult time finding a job while key Jordanian industries are having difficulties locating skilled technicians to enter their workforces (NSHRD, 2015). One major factor as to why this disproportionality exists is due to the cultural and social pressures placed on youth to attain certain university degrees (such as engineering) over other degrees or forms of post-secondary education. This creates a large disparity between the output from higher education and the needs of Jordanian labor market (ibid.). According to El-Kogali and Krafft (2015) another cause of unemployment is the disparity between labor market demands and youth's cognitive and non-cognitive competencies. Investing in ECED can be an integral method for mitigating these disparities and developing the human capital of future generations (ibid.).

According to Al-Hassan and Lansford (2011), Jordan's goals related to ECD emerge from research demonstrating that interventions promoting children's cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional development can have beneficial effects on children's development, including their academic achievement, social relationships, and productivity in adulthood. Investment in ECED is not only beneficial for young children but also to parents and the economy as well. Investing in ECED means increasing educational institutions for young children, enabling parents that otherwise would have to stay at home to join the workforce, raising national productivity and family earning. "Every $1 spent on ECED generates a return from between US$6 and US$17" (NSHRD, 2015, p.58).

2.2 Jordanian society

Jordan, like many countries in the MENA region, has a long history of tribalism and, as such, has strong tribal structures within its society (Craig et al., 2018). These tribal structures define and shape the roles and social interactions that take place within Jordanian society. Societal groups, such as the Bedouin, Village, and City, were guided and formed by the tribalistic history of Jordan, however, the extent to which each group is influenced by tribalism varies (Dababneh, 2005). Tribalism also guides interactions between the two spheres of society, dictating how individuals participate in public and private spheres (Pettygrove, 2006). According to Pettygrove (2006), "[u]nderlying the tribal system in Jordan is a patriarchal system of values, which is the source of gender roles that dictate the appropriate behaviors and occupations of women and men" (p.16). These patriarchal values are most apparent in the standards and roles set for men and women, especially in the private sphere of families. Within families, fathers are seen as breadwinners, decision-makers and authoritative figures, while mothers are homemakers, nurturers and educators- responsible for children's upbringing and education. Fathers are also regarded as the provider of moral and ethical guidance for their children, instilling values of family heritage and religion, and ensuring their children's safety and financial provision (Betawi *et al.* 2014). This perception of fathers' roles places men as the "decision-makers" within the family while women's roles are more service oriented (Pettygrove, 2006). However, recently Jordan has been undergoing a process of urbanizations with a decrease in tribes and an increase in its female workforce. Therefore, lingering traditional tribal and patriarchal norms are no longer compatible with the progression of modern Jordanian society, and these traditional views should be challenged. Interventions in ECED and the inclusion of parents in ECED provide a space to address the current challenges faced by Jordanian youth while also creating a shift in cultural views on gender roles and responsibilities within the home.

2.3 Early childhood education and development in Jordan

ECED has been a focus for educational development and investment in Jordan for many years now. The First National Conference for Educational Development placed a spotlight on Early Childhood Care and Education in 1987. This was followed by Jordan signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 199,1 and the National Conference on Childhood held in 1992 that resulted in the National Plan of Action for Children to be implemented from 1993 until 2000.

In 1993, a target for increasing kindergarten enrollment was developed after the National Seminar for Children, which included the development of legislation to help ensure optimal childhood growth. In 1994 the Ministry of Education established an official preschool sector that provided over 1,000 free public preschools (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Progress in the area of ECED has been slow due to many setbacks such as cultural and societal influences and financial instability in the country. This is especially true for children living in the poorest areas of Jordan. El-Kogali and Krafft (2015**)** state that, "only 11 percent of children three to four years old are attending some form of ECCE among the poorest fifth of households, while 39 percent attend among the richest fifth of households" (p.160). Education at these ages mainly takes place in the home, as most families believe that children are too young for school and it is the mother's responsibility to care for and educate her child during this time. The disparity in school attendance is also seen in the amount of reading children are exposed to in differing socioeconomic classes worldwide. A U.S. study showed that children living in low-income households are read to less than children in moderate or high-income households, 40 percent compared to 64 percent (Duursma and Pan, 2011). According to the 2017 *Situation analysis of children in Jordan,* "[l]ow family income can adversely affect the ability of parents to nurture and positively care for their children, by constraining both money and time available for their children" (UNICEF, 2017, p.28).

The 2015 report by the Queen Rania Foundation found that*,* "41% of mothers reported that they or another member of their family never read to or looked at picture books with their children and only 1 in 3 mothers reported reading to their child more than once a week" (Hatamleh et al., 2019, p.19). Results also showed that only 35 percent of families in Jordan had children's books in the home and that there was a very limited engagement in ECED activities by family and community members (Hatamleh et al., 2019). For this reason, there has been a shift in focusing on parenting as a critical area for ECD in Jordan.

A key ignition for the promotion of ECED and family involvement has been the Better Parenting Program (BPP). The BPP was introduced in 1996 by UNICEF in collaboration with local partnerships and six countries in the MENA region. The project was developed in an effort to

address the lack of basic knowledge and support that parents of young children had in regard to child rearing- with specific focuses on health, nutrition, and psychosocial development (Al-Hassan and Lansford, 2011). Duursma and Pan (2011) argue that since reading frequency is closely tied to language and literacy development, it is imperative to gather an extensive understanding of children's interactions with literacy at home. Duursma and Pan go on to state that with a deeper insight into reading practices in homes, intervention programs will be better equipped in understanding and targeting their efforts towards supporting families (Duursma and Pan, 2011)

2.4 The role of fathers in the education of their young children

As previously mentioned, tribal values are unmistakable when looking at the family structures and the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the home. Out of curiosity for the validity of this research, a preliminary (informal) survey was conducted and found that even male figures within the researcher's circle of friends and family still adhered to tribalistic roles within their families. These men were college-educated, worked for local and international NGOs, were United Nations personnel, and most were married to college-educated women that have worked or are currently working outside the home. Yet regardless of their exposure to these institutions and experiences, when asked the questions, "do you read with your ECA child?" or "do you feel it is your responsibility to be involved in the education of your ECA child?" they almost all answered, "no," "that's the mother's job and my job is to play," or "my wife does all that and my responsibility is to work".

It is important to note that Jordanian culture does emphasize the involvement of fathers in the home. This involvement is usually seen through interactions such as: spending time with children through play, taking them along to run errands, ensuring the safety and financial provision of children, instilling moral and ethical guidance, and educating children on family religion and heritage (Betawi et al., 2014). It is evident that the missing element in FI in Jordanian households is in relation to the academic education of their children, especially during the early childhood years. Reading can be a stepping-stone to getting fathers more involved in the education of their children. According to Swain et al. (2016), shared storybook reading can provide fathers an opportunity to engage with their children and fulfill parts of their role as a "modern father" within the boundaries of their role as breadwinner. This would also encourage a more literacy filled home

environment that would consequently influence the beliefs that children develop surrounding reading.

2.5 We Love Reading and a mission to inspire the love of reading

WLR is an organization taking on the challenge of instilling a passion for reading throughout Jordan. Upon her return home, founder and molecular biologist Dr. Rana Dajani was driven to take action in cultivating a culture of reading in Jordan after noticing a lack of libraries and reading for pleasure in the country. “This lack of reading extended across the Arab world and many developing countries” (WLR Story and Philosophy).

It is important to keep in mind that WLR is not focused on literacy, since according to DeBaise (2019), the literacy rate in Jordan is at a high of 98 percent. Instead the organization focuses on the extensive and endless advantages that come from inspiring a passion for reading in children. Swain et al. (2016) claim that books “have the potential to contribute to a way of life that encourages children to read for pleasure and promote discussion, thereby increasing vocabulary, critical awareness and imagination” (p.436). Through research and personal experience, Dr. Dajani realized that creating a love for reading can begin at an early age, with the support of parents reading regularly to their children (WLR Story and Philosophy).

Research shows that interactions between parents and children that are cognitively stimulating, such as reading aloud, not only promote reading but also math and psychosocial skills in young children prior to their entry into formal schooling (Baker, 2013). The organization's target of training parents on how to read aloud to children is an intensely important task. Along with the aim to train adults, Dr. Dajani also decided upon a goal to “to establish a library in every neighborhood in Jordan” (WLR Story and Philosophy, n.d.). Since the organization’s founding in 2006, the work of the organization has extended to over 55 countries and has established over 4,400 libraries across refugee camps, rural, and urban communities. One of the most inspirational outlooks of the organization is their belief in “creating change at the local level by empowering people to be change makers in their own communities” (WLR Story and Philosophy, n.d.).

WLR's focus on training adults on how to read aloud to children was the perfect fit for collecting the data needed for this study. The WLR training focuses on training adults into becoming reading Ambassadors within their communities and homes. The training manual and curriculum were self-developed by the organization and aim at building the capacity of WLR ambassadors in several areas, including reading aloud, teaching, social entrepreneurship, and communication. ambassadors are engaged in a two-day workshop which then gives them access to an online network of over 3,000 ambassadors worldwide. The workshops equip ambassadors with the knowledge of why reading for pleasure is important and how to encourage children to read for fun. Ambassadors also learn skills in reading aloud and spend time practicing these skills with one another. The training program aims to create a ripple effect within communities through peer-to-peer training where Ambassadors are asked and encouraged to pass on the knowledge, information, and skills they received to others.

At the time of data collection, the organization had trained over 200 men on how to read with children and was still undergoing workshops with adults every month. Their training and approach differ for each country and culture as the organization believes that there is no *one size fits all* approach to their work.

3. Literature Review

PI in ECED has been a topic of research and program development for many years. Most research in this area has mainly focused on mothers' involvement (MI) in ECED both at home and in schools. FI is a fairly new topic in educational research. Research on FI is still sparse especially in the MENA region. This section further explores the existing research on ECED in the home, parental and FI in ECED and the importance of reading with ECA children in order to better understand the significance of FI in shared storybook reading with their young children.

3.1 Importance of focusing on ECED in the home

ECED researchers claim that, for children, learning begins in the home before they enter a formal education setting (Wasik, 2012). The home environment is a significant factor in children's psychosocial and cognitive development. According to Swain et al. (2016), home settings also play a pivotal role in the development of "emergent literacy skills amongst preschool children and children's overall literacy acquisition" (p.434). Learning in the home takes place through family interactions that teaches children their home language and grammar. This kind of learning is created through experiences rather than explicit teaching and provides the foundation for children to develop literacy skills- "skills that will help them later decode the symbols of their social setting, especially the symbols essential for reading and writing" (Wasik, 2012, p.16). Research shows that development of these skills and children's overall experience with literacy at a young age contribute to children's future academic achievements.

Swain et al. (2016) mention that earlier research indicated that academic achievement of children was linked to mothers' educational attainment. However, according to their citation of Melhuish et al. (2008), this only relates to "5 percent of academic achievement, while other factors related to socio-economic status (SES) and home learning resources and activities have a significant explanatory role" (p. 434). Melhuish et al., (2008) claim that the home learning environment plays a greater role in the academic achievement of children. The argument then leads to the effect that different characteristics within the home may have an impact on the literacy practices of families. A study by Sylva et al. (2004) insisted that the learning interactions and activities parents provide in the home is more influential than a family's background and characteristics. For this reason, the

present research focuses on storybook reading as a learning interaction between fathers and children. Wasik (2012) states that shared storybook reading supports cognitively stimulating interactions between parents and their children which promotes language development in children more than other methods of parental engagement.

3.2 Benefits of storybook reading as a home learning activity

Families are considered to be the initial coordinators for the care and development of their young children (UNESCO, 2006). There are many activities that families can be involved in to assist the development of their children. This research focuses on shared storybook reading as an at-home engagement activity as research has shown that children's early experiences with reading is linked to early language, literacy, and socioemotional development. When parents engage in storybook reading, they most often are not setting an intention to directly teach lessons on language or literacy, but regardless these skills still get taught during the parent-child reading interaction (Baker, 2013). When parents engage in storybook reading, "children learn to recognize letters, understand that print represents the spoken word, and learn how to hold a book, turn the page and start at the beginning" (Duursma et al., 2008, p.554). Children also learn print concepts such as book orientation, directionality of print, and story structure. Research also shows that children's books have up to fifty percent more uncommon words than what can be found on television, helping children develop a greater vocabulary. Along with exposure to uncommon words, children develop better language through the verbal interaction that takes place during storybook reading, making reading a very beneficial parental engagement activity (Duursma et al., 2008).

Cognitively stimulating interactions, such as shared storybook reading between children and their parents, is also a key factor in the emotional and behavioral development of young children. Baker (2013) claims that this social, emotional, and behavioral development displays young children's abilities to "demonstrate positive emotions during social interactions, regulate positive and negative emotions, and form secure relationships with parents, teachers, and peers" (p.186). Essentially, young children that have increased language skills are better able to communicate feelings and are able to navigate social interactions more easily. This is especially true when examining FI in the development of their ECA children. Duursma and Pan (2011) say there needs

to be a conscious shift into focusing reading intervention efforts to target fathers as they are a resource that has yet to be fully tapped into.

3.3 Fathers: an untapped resource

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, adults in children's proximal environment have the most influence on their cognitive and social emotional development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As such, scholars posit that parent's act as the first contributors of socialization for their children, and positive parent-child interactions during the early years increases children's focus, attention, and ability to follow directions. This is especially true when we look at fathers and their involvement in ECED, and the evidence that states how maternal and paternal involvement differ in their effects on children.

As previously mentioned, much of the research on PI in ECED has focused on mothers, but fathers also play a significant role in the development of their children in the early years. The lines defining maternal and paternal roles have started to change as fathers are becoming more involved in care-activities such as feeding, changing, and nurturing, which were previously seen as mainly maternal responsibilities (Lamb and Lewis, 2010). Lamb et al. (1987) argue a three-component framework for FI in their children's development. Lamb categorizes FI into three dimensions: accessibility, engagement, and responsibility (Lamb et al., 1987). In the first dimension, accessibility, Lamb describes fathers' physical presence and availability, focusing on activities that deal with supervision and a father's ability to be called upon versus one-on-one interactions. Activities in the accessibility dimension include cleaning or watching T.V. while the child is playing close by, meaning the father is able to provide childcare if needed. The second dimension, engagement, looks more closely at the specific one-to-one interaction between fathers and their children. Lamb considers this to be the most exhaustive aspect of FI because these activities are focused on being present and engaged with children in activities such as playing, reading, changing and feeding. It is also important to note that these activities are not multi-tasking activities and are done in succession while focusing solely on the child. The third component, responsibility, is seen by Lamb as the most important because it encompasses not only fathers' understanding but also their provision of all aspects of their child's needs and welfare. An example of responsibility would be a father knowing what time their child has to be at school, securing their safe and timely

transportation, ensuring they have all that they need (i.e. homework, lunch, etc.) and securing their return home. FI in these different dimensions of activities provides a shift from traditional beliefs on gender roles and responsibilities within the home. Fiese (2018) states that this shift in father child interactions could be a catalyst for long-term change and provide a new norm for gender roles in the developing child.

A substantial amount of research proves that FI in the development of their young children provides for better socioemotional and academic outcomes. According to Ihmeideh (2014), involved fathers provide their children with guidance and support that helps boost their self-esteem and sense of security. Correspondingly, children with involved fathers exhibit early language and communication abilities, higher levels of self-regulation and self-control, greater social-skills and problem-solving capabilities which leads to fewer behavioral challenges, positive outlook on schooling, and have higher social-emotional competencies. FI in ECED also yields positive life satisfaction for children, where they encounter greater levels of happiness and less emotional distress (Betawi et al., 2014). Fogarty and Evans (2009) claim that having an involved father promotes positive traits in children such as, "empathy, self-esteem, self-control, feelings of ability to achieve, psychological well-being, social competence, life skills, and less sex-stereotyped beliefs" (p. 2).

FI in ECED also provides fathers with great benefits. FI encourages men to be better workers, spouses, feel more productive, and have lower levels of psychological distress. Involved fathers also have proven to be more productive citizens, are more sensitive, intuitive, and are more competent as parents (Ihmeideh, 2014). Being an involved father also helps men better deal with stressful situations and the hassles of everyday life (Fogarty and Evans 2009). FI in ECED also builds confidence in parenting, decision-making, knowledge, skills, involvement, and understanding of children's development and school curriculum.

Unfortunately, very little research has been done on the impact that FI in reading with their young children has on developing literacy. Many researchers believe that this is due fathers spending less time with children than mothers do, and that mothers read more on a daily basis to their children than fathers do (Duursmaand Pan, 2011). Swain et al. (2016) suggest that FI in shared book reading

helps establish a curiosity of print in children by fathers exhibiting personal values and beliefs and modelling positive reading behaviors in front of their children. They continue to state some of the reasons as to why fathers are less likely to be involved in reading and other ECED practices in the home. The question of masculinity and social roles may play a part in why fathers have refrained from participating in ECED activities with their children (ibid). Many fathers still claim the role of "breadwinner" in their families, so they might not have the time to engage in ECED activities, while others may see the areas of ECED as "female spaces" and as such do not feel it is their role to get involved. Socio-economic backgrounds may affect FI in literacy practices, as research shows that fathers in lower socioeconomic conditions are less likely to participate in home literacy activities than those that are in higher socioeconomic conditions (ibid.). Regardless of the barriers to FI, researchers agree that the earlier fathers get involved in the development of their children the better the outcomes.

3.4 Fathers' Involvement in Jordan

As previously stated, research on FI in ECED is limited- this is especially true when considering the MENA region. In Jordan, research on PI in ECED is slowly beginning to emerge due to the country's growing interest in ECED. The existing research on PI in ECED mainly examines MI and proved difficulties looking into FI as a result of cultural constraints (Betawi et al., 2014). As previously mentioned, Jordanian culture dictates gender roles and outlines the responsibilities of fathers and mothers within families. Although these gender roles are beginning to change, many fathers still believe that their role in the development of their young children is to be the provider and authoritative figure. With financial and job market difficulties in Jordan, fathers' main priorities are that of securing a job and making financial ends meet. According to Ihmeideh (2014), there needs to be more focus on the inclusion of fathers in ECED based on the knowledge of how powerful their role is in the development of their children. In an effort to combat the lack of FI in Jordan, UNICEF's BPP helped the Jordanian government target fathers and promote FI in their young children's education (Betawi et al., 2014).

More recently, the increased participation of women in the workforce is bringing about necessary, albeit slow, societal changes- particularly within families. According to Ihmeideh (2014), women are becoming more aware of the need for fathers to be involved in child-rearing and that this

requires men to increase their parental knowledge and skills. In an effort to share this vision of FI in childcare, UNICEF, in partnership with Islamic associations in Jordan, provided training for Imams in mosques and produced a book entitled, *Imam's Guide to Early Childhood Development* (Betawi et al., 2014). This program was a very important entryway into targeting fathers, since fathers have a religious obligation to be their children's guide for providing values based on religion.

After examining the previous research on FI in ECED, it is clear that a lack of research still exists in understanding the effect FI in shared storybook reading has on the development of fathers and children.

3.5 Gaps in research

As previously mentioned, research on FI in ECED is fairly limited, as it is still a new topic of discussion in the field of ECED. Current research advocates for an increase in PI in the development of their children, although the majority of the existing research mainly considers MI. There is also significant research that highlights the importance of parents reading with their ECA children to support children's cognitive and psychosocial skills prior to their children entering the formal education system. However, research is very limited in relation to the effect fathers' engagement has on their children's development. The limited research and skewed focus on MI is especially true when considering ECED research within the MENA region. Along with lending support to the important role that PI and reading with children at home has on the development of young children, the current study aims to contribute to the research gap by providing a study that examines FI in fathers reading with their ECA children in Jordan.

4. Theoretical Framework

Swain and Cara (2017), state that home literacy environments are diverse and affect multiple levels of development based on a variety of practices, attitudes and beliefs. With this understanding, the current research employs Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development as a theoretical lens. Bronfenbrenner's theory enables the research to gain a more extensive understanding of the influence FI in shared storybook reading has on WLR father ambassadors' perceptions and the environments they reside in. This section provides a deeper understanding of Bronfenbrenner's theory and the way it guided the current research.

4.1 Ecological systems theory of development

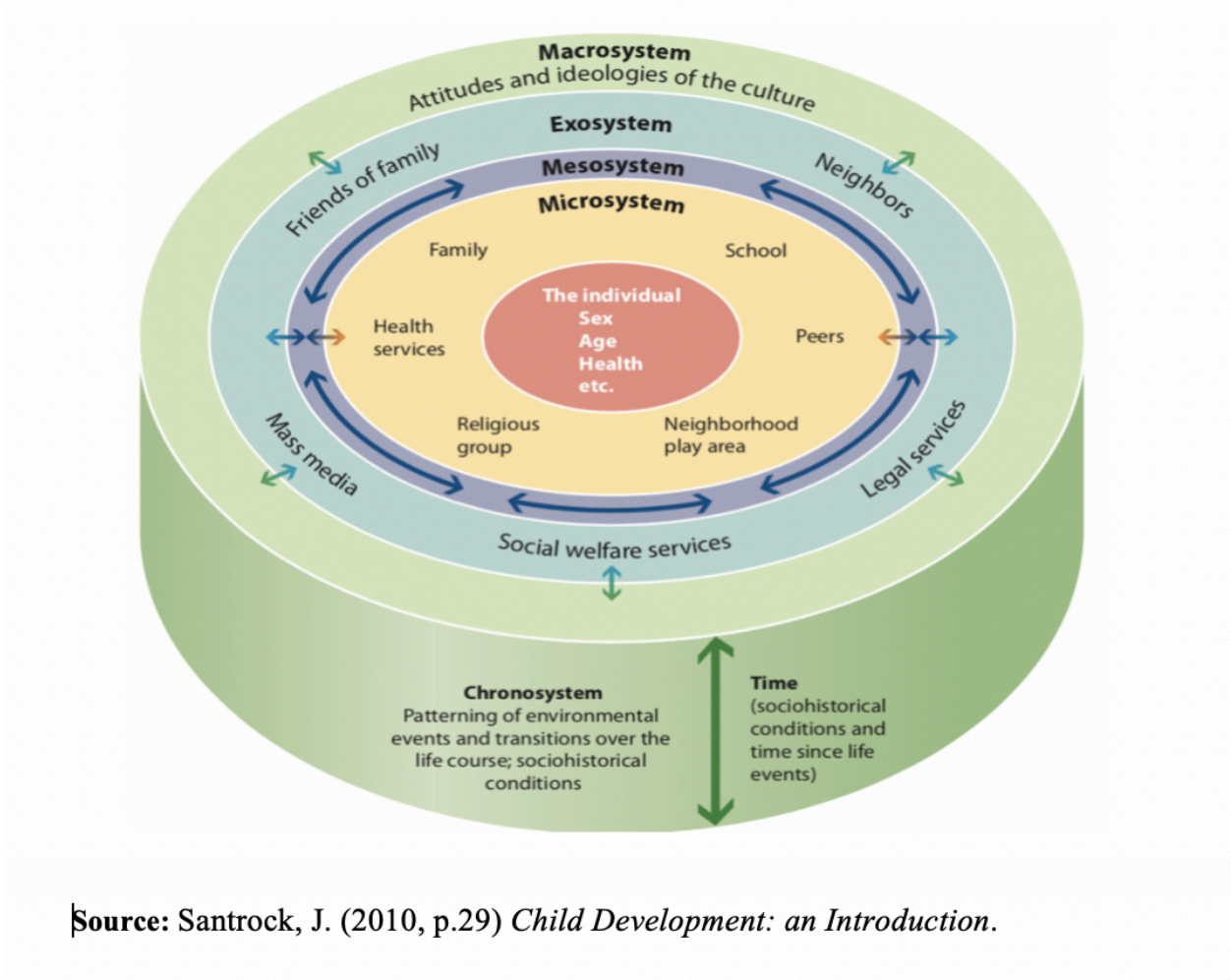
Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development states that human development involves the scientific study of the reciprocal interaction between a developing person and the changing immediate environment in which they live, while also considering the way these interactions are influenced by the larger contexts in which environments exist (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner mentions that it is of particular importance to consider the two-directional interaction between individuals and environments in which the individuals are not only impacted by their environments but also influence and restructure the environments they reside in (ibid.). The ecological systems theory of development has evolved since its initial inception. In his initial theory, Bronfenbrenner did not examine the personal characteristics of individuals and of those they have direct interactions with, which inspired the progression of his theory.

In the final version of the theory, known as the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model, Bronfenbrenner expanded further on the impact interactions between people, personal characteristics, layers of context, and time have on an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment" (p.797). These interactions, that take place in the immediate environment, are known as *proximal processes* (ibid.). Bronfenbrenner describes five interconnected environments, or *ecosystems*, that influence an individual's development known as the *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem,* and *chronosystem* (see figure 2). The first four

layers make up the *context* in Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model. The microsystem is the first and innermost setting that influences development, it consists of all the immediate environments that an individual interacts with such as the home, neighborhood, school, and extended family. Following this layer is the mesosystem, which are the interrelations between microsystems, such as the relations between home and school. The exosystem refers to the link between environments that do not directly include an individual but does have an influence on the individual's immediate environments, for example how parents' workplaces affect children. Surrounding these three layers is the macrosystem or the societal conditions in which the developing person lives, such as cultural attitudes and ideologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner describes these spheres as being similar to the layers of a Russian doll, where one ecosystem is situated within the next (ibid.). The chronosystem was later incorporated into the model as a final layer which reflects the *Time* aspect of the PPCT model and includes all of the experiences a person has throughout a lifetime, these include environmental events or major life transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner explains that what happens in the immediate environment is also a result of the external context in which these environments exist. He states that, "[i]t is as if within each society or subculture there existed a blueprint for the organization of every type of setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.4). These "blueprints" are a result of aspects within the macrosystem, such as public policy and culture, and work as a catalyst for the creation of characteristics that exist in the innermost environments which "…steer the course of behavior and development" (1979, p.9). Bronfenbrenner then discusses how over time these "blueprints" can change at any level and correspondingly cause changes in the other levels (ibid.).

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development



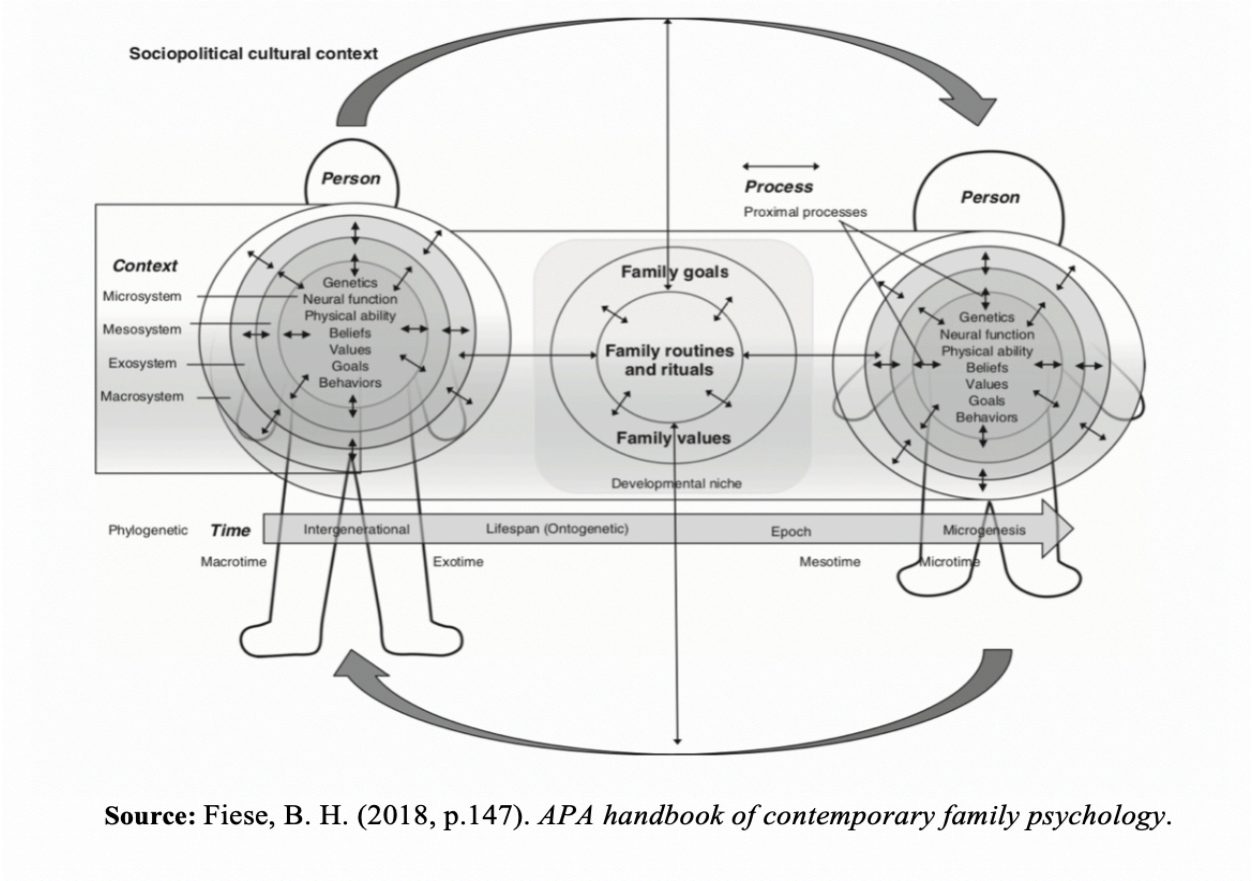
Source: Santrock, J. (2010, p.29) *Child Development: an Introduction*.

Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a framework for analyzing homes as the initial setting for development, as they are the innermost environment in which individuals interact directly with one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The home environment presents the smallest system in which relationships between children and parents are formed and learning begins and where parents are viewed as the primary educators of their children. When relationships between parents and children are strengthened, parents are more likely to be involved in the education of their children (ibid.). In his own words, "...in order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child" (Bronfenbrenner, 1978). To examine these interactions and relationships further, the current research turns to Fiese (2018) for a *reenvisioned* model of Bronfenbrenner's theory that captures the reciprocal parent-child interaction more closely.

4.2 A reenvisioned ecological systems theory

Fiese (2018) reconceptualized Bronfenbrenner's theory to focus on the effect parent-child interactions have on the family system (see Figure 2). In the revised model, children are at the core of their own development while also part of "a larger systems of individuals who are at the center of their own development, and they mutually impact each other's developmental processes over time" (Fiese, 2018, p.148). By focusing on the family environment, researchers can gain deeper insight into the ways in which this environment alters and is altered by the individuals living within them.

Figure 2: Reenvisioned model of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development



Source: Fiese, B. H. (2018, p.147). *APA handbook of contemporary family psychology*.

According to Bronfenbrenner, any changes in the individuals, rituals, routines, goals and values that take place in homes is a result of, the previously mentioned, proximal processes. Proximal

processes are the interactions between family members living within a home and are seen as the "primary engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p.798). These mutually influential interactions are how families develop their routines, rituals, values and goals which then affect the socioemotional well-being of parents and children and children's development of language, social skills, and academic achievement (ibid.). It is also through involvement in these activities and interactions that children understand and make sense of their surroundings (Hayes et al., 2017). Some examples of these activities are adults playing with children, children playing in groups, reading, and skills building activities. Engagement in these activities is how individuals "both play their part in changing the prevailing order while fitting into the existing one" (Tudge et al., 2009, p.200).

Criticism of Bronfenbrenner's theory is rooted in the assumption that his theory mainly focuses on context and the influence different layers of context have on development (ibid.). However, this is not the case, and as clearly mentioned, Bronfenbrenner's theory places significant importance on the interactions between individuals and views these interactions as the basis for development, especially in the early years (Tudge et al., 2009). It is important to note that the way these interactions take place is influenced by personal characteristics of individuals and the immediate and broader contexts in which individuals exist. In much of his work, Bronfenbrenner discusses the ways in which fathers' characteristics, presence, and interactions can have a positive or negative effect on the development of their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986; 2006). Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the importance of both fathers and mothers on the development of their children and takes note in his work on the tendency for research to focus on the mother-child relationship (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;1986). The current research explores the involvement of fathers in shared storybook reading with their ECA children as the developmental interaction taking place within homes.

4.3 Theory in action

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory of development provides a practical framework for the necessity to strengthen PI in ECED initiatives. This is because parents' involvement plays a critical role in the development of young children. According to Wahedi (2012), "when strong supportive linkages exist among the persons or organizations in the microsystem, positive child and adolescent development are enhanced" (p.24). Bronfenbrenner (1979), discusses how children's

development excels when they are involved in verbal and cognitively stimulating interactions with their parents. Using Bronfenbrenner's final PPCT model and Fiese (2018)'s revised model of Bronfenbrenner's theory, the current research examines shared storybook reading as the *process* or interaction that WLR father ambassadors are involved in with their children. Through Bronfenbrenner's final model, the current research analyzes how different settings affect and are affected by fathers reading to their young children at home. With Fiese's revised model, the research examines the bidirectional influence that engaging in reading has on fathers and their children. According to Tudge et al. (2009), researchers must ensure that certain characteristics are met in order to appropriately implement Bronfenbrenner's theory correctly.

Tudge et al. (2009), state that studies using Bronfenbrenner's theory should include individuals that differ in a minimum of one of the most relevant characteristics such as age, gender, or race. Participants in the current research differ in age, nationality, and employment status fulfilling the *person* requirement in the model. The aspect of *context* is satisfied by participants living in different cities around Jordan. Also, focusing on the home as the environment where fathers read with their children is motivated by Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the home being essential to the skills development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, in regard to *time,* participants are asked about the evolution of their involvement in reading with their children from before their participation in the WLR training until the time the current research was conducted. These stipulations created a timespan of two to six years depending on when each participant completed their WLR training.

According to Bronfenbrenner, ultimately, the contextual factors that influence a person's development happen within the microsystem through the people, places, and things that the individuals directly interact with (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Acknowledging the significance of interactions taking place within the microsystem, this study mainly focuses on the influences within the immediate environment of the home. This study also considers how other immediate settings, such as neighborhoods, extended families, and communities, and the larger societal and cultural beliefs are affected and affect the process of fathers reading with their children within the home. Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's theory, this study develops expectations for how the macrosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem levels influence WLR father

ambassadors' perceptions of and involvement in reading with their children and, in turn, how WLR father ambassadors influence these three levels (see table 1). These three levels involve: the cultural beliefs at the macrosystem level, the community, neighborhood, extended family at the mesosystem level and aspects within the home at the microsystem level.

In terms of the macrosystem level, as previously mentioned, cultural norms and expectations at the societal level create the boundaries for roles and interactions in the immediate environment. Based on the societal structures that exist in Jordan, the research expects that most participants were not reading with their young children prior to their training with WLR. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also suggests that FI in their children's education depends on the way men view the education of children as the responsibility of women. This is expected to be true for Jordan as research on Jordanian society posits that gender roles and expectations have their roots in tribalistic norms. As previously discussed, these norms view fathers as providers expected to work outside the home and mothers as homemakers and nurtures responsible for child rearing. The current research expects that these societal norms trickle down and influence FI in reading at home with their young children. Since Bronfenbrenner's theory presents environments as having a bidirectional influence on one another, this research predicts that FI in reading at the home level will influence societal expectations for gender roles over time. This expectation is not measured in the current research but provides a space for further exploration on the topic.

Another aspect of expectations not directly measured in this research is at the exosystem level. These expectations do however set the foundation for how the current research is beneficial for the advancement of ECED initiatives. At this level the expectation is that ECA children that are not being read to at home will have a more difficult time managing their behavior and social interactions outside the home. It is also expected that these children will have a more difficult time adjusting upon their entrance in formal education institutions. The research also anticipates that after FI in reading at home with their ECA children, will encourage their child's social and behavioral skills outside the home and will promote increased academic achievement once children enter formal education.

In terms of the mesosystem level, or the level in which an individual's different immediate environments interact with one another, the belief is that prior to FI in reading at home, fathers are

also not reading outside the home in other areas of their immediate environment. The expectation is that after their involvement in the WLR training and reading at home with their children, fathers will also read to children other than their own and establish a deeper role within their communities. It is also assumed that fathers involved in reading at home will begin encouraging others in their immediate environment to read to children as well. Bronfenbrenner describes how children's experience with the interactions and structure in one setting carry over and transform interactions, activities, and relationships in other settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Recognizing this aspect of the theory, the current research also expects that FI in reading at home will promote children's enjoyment and frequency of reading and will encourage children to read with others.

Finally, in terms of the microsystem level, the research examines changes taking place within home to form research expectations at this level. The expectation is that fathers not involved in reading at home do not perceive reading with their children as part of their parental responsibilities. Furthermore, the research anticipates that fathers involved in reading at home will change their perception on being responsible for reading and will also feel a closer bond with their children. Palm and Fagan, (2008) claim that fathers' belief and attitudes toward their involvement in early childhood activities impact the degree of their participation in them. According to these expectations, supporting FI in reading at home with their ECA children would be an alteration of existing patterns within Jordanian households. According to Fiese (2018) "sustaining change often requires realignment of family interaction patterns" (p.225). Therefore, this transformed interaction between fathers and children would encourage changes in fathers and children and provides more cognitively and emotionally stimulating home environments.

Table 1: Ecological systems theory of development and research expectations

Process: Shared storybook reading between fathers and their ECA children.			
Person: WLR father ambassadors.			
Context		**Expectations for fathers' perception on and involvement in reading prior to WLR training**	**Expectations for fathers' perception on and involvement in reading as a result of the WLR training**
	Macrosystem	Jordan's societal ideals on gender roles will make it so that most fathers are not involved in reading at home with their ECA children.	As FI in reading at home with their ECA children will cause a shift in existing tribalistic gender roles within the home.
	Mesosystem	Fathers that are not involved in reading at home with their ECA children will also not be reading to children in their extended family and neighborhoods.	Fathers involved in reading at home with their ECA children will also read to children other than their own. FI in reading at home with their ECA children will encourage others in their immediate environment to read. FI in reading at home with their ECA children, will promote children's enjoyment and frequency of reading. FI in reading at home with their ECA children, will encourage children to read with others.
	Microsystem	Fathers that do not read at home with their ECA children, do not feel responsible for reading with their young children.	Fathers involved in reading at home with their ECA children will feel a closer bond to their children. Fathers involved in reading at home with their ECA children, will feel more responsible for reading.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

The current research was conducted using a qualitative research design based on a social constructivist ontological position. A qualitative method was chosen as the research position relies on the perception of participants on a situation through gathering verbal information from interviews, rather than numerical or quantifiable data (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Bryman, 2012). According to Bryman (2012), constructivist research "implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision (p.33). In a constructivist approach, researchers are able to position themselves within their research and consider the ways in which their own experiences shape the interpretation of the research (Bryman, 2012). This positioning was an important aspect as the researcher not only identifies culturally with the participants in the research, but also as an early childhood educator, and much of the fascination with this research comes from first-hand insight into the implications of fathers reading with young children. According to Moustakas (1994), the research topic is developed from researchers' interests and curiosity of a problem or topic and that personal experience provides clarity on the foundation of the problem. Taking into consideration the researcher's passion for early childhood education and personal experience in the field of ECED a phenomenological approach was the best fit for conducting this research.

The researcher's positionality within this study influenced the use of a hermeneutical phenomenology approach, which aims to understand the lived experiences of fathers and their involvement in reading with their ECA children. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), this type of research focuses on interpreting the common lived experience shared by participants. This is opposed to a transcendental phenomenology approach in which the researcher must put aside their own experiences and focus on describing participants' experiences rather than interpreting them (ibid.).

The research was also conducted through a single-case study, employing WLR male ambassadors in Jordan, was used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being examined by this research. The use of case-studies allows for a phenomenon to be studied within its context, and a single-case study enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being

studied. Data for this research was collected over a four-week fieldwork period in Amman, Jordan beginning on January 26th and concluding with final interviews on February 18th, 2020.

5.2 Data collection

As mentioned in the introduction, the organization WLR worked as a gatekeeper to the research by providing access to the above-mentioned sample group. Bryman (2012) stated that with the support of gatekeepers, researchers can reach participants more smoothly, mitigating many issues participants might have with being involved in the research. However, it is important to note that often times, gatekeepers may seek to influence how the research is conducted (ibid.). Data was collected through the use of semi-structured telephone interviews. As per the WLR's request, interviews took place at the organization's main office. The choice of using telephone-interviews was made due to the fact that a majority of participants lived in cities outside of Amman, with some even living in refugee camps, creating difficulty in access. Bryman (2012) states that the remote nature of telephone interviews has the potential to remove any biases that participants may have in regard to the researcher's personal characteristics. One criticism of telephone-interviews is the probability that the length of the interview would not exceed 25 minutes whereas in-person interviews could go on for much longer (ibid.).

A total of 20 semi-structured telephone-interviews were conducted, however, only 15 were used in the data analysis of this research. Five interviews were not included in the analysis of this research because the interviewee's children were not in the required age range.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to provide their own perspective and insight on the research topic (Bryman, 2012). The interviews were guided by a list of questions and topics as outlined in a general interview guide (see appendix B: List of interview questions). Not all interviews followed the specific outline of the guide, as participants would most often answer or allude to multiple topics during their response to one question. This is one of the benefits of using semi-structured interviews as it allows for some flexibility and the researcher was able to ask clarifying questions that were not included in the guide but were brought on by statements made by participants. According to Hammett et al. (2015), a semi-structured interview also "allows for a degree of comparative analysis and is well suited to exploring understandings and perceptions"

(p.141). This is an especially important aspect of semi-structured interviews as the main focus of this research is to understand the perception of participants.

Interviews were conducted in Arabic with the use of a translator. Although the researcher does speak Arabic, a translator was used to ensure that all the information was accurately communicated to participants. However, the researcher was present during all interviews and able to take notes and guide the interviews.

5.3 Research Sample

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select the sample of participants for this study. This was done in an effort to ensure that the sample interviewed for the study was suitable for the aim of the research. A purposive sample uses set characteristics to choose participants and meet specific needs of the study. When choosing this method of sampling, one must be aware that the targeted group cannot be used to make generalizations or as representatives of the population at large (Cohen et al., 2007). Participants in this research were chosen based on their gender and that they had all completed the WLR training on how to read to children. They were then classified by whether or not they had children and if their children met the desired ECA range of 3-6 years of age (see table 2). When identifying participants, it was acknowledged that many of the participants had completed their training years prior to the interview and that although their children may not have met the preferred age range at the time of the research, they did so at the time the training was completed.

Table 2: Participant information

Participant	Age	Nationality	City of residence	Occupation	Number of children within age range	Year of WLR training	Date of interview
Participant 1	38	Syrian	Ramtha	Volunteer	2	2014	3/2/2020
Participant 2	47	Jordanian	Sahab	Supervisor	1	2016	3/2/2020
Participant 3	45	Jordanian	Tfileh	NGO worker	2	2016	3/2/2020
Participant 4	40	Jordanian	Tfileh	Cashier	1	2017	4/2/2020
Participant 5	42	Jordanian	Amman	Company owner	1	2016	4/2/2020
Participant 6	25	Syrian	Irbid	Volunteer	2	2016	4/2/2020
Participant 7	41	Jordanian	Irbid	Volunteer	3	2018	4/2/2020
Participant 8	46	Syrian	Irbid	Unemployed	2	2017	4/2/2020
Participant 9	37	Jordanian	Tfileh	Company employee	2	2017	6/2/2020
Participant 10	55	Jordanian	Tfileh	Officer	1	2016	6/2/2020
Participant 11	39	Syrian	Azraq	Unemployed	2	2016	10/2/2020
Participant 12	33	Syrian	Zaatari	NGO worker	2	2016	11/2/2020
Participant 13	48	Syrian	Azraq	Unemployed	2	2017	11/2/2020
Participant 14	43	Jordanian	Mafraq	Librarian	2	2017	11/2/2020
Participant 15	31	Jordanian	Karak	Museum Security	1	2014	18/2/2020

The research specifically targeted WLR father Ambassadors because these participants were able to provide a recollection of their perceptions on and involvement in reading with their ECA children prior to the WLR training. These participants were also able to give insight into how these perceptions and involvements changed as a result of their WLR training. For ethical reasons, the research did not include children in the research sample as the researcher was not equipped with the resources to ensure that the proper needs for interviewing children would be met.

5.4 Data analysis

As previously mentioned, all interviews were transcribed, and any mention of participants' identities were made anonymous. The transcription process was interesting as they required translation and not just a simple transcription. Temple and Young (2004) discuss this translation dilemma and state that translators are always having to decide on the cultural significance that is transmitted through language. Since the research has knowledge of the Arabic language, she was able to translate the interviews during the transcription process without the use of a translator. According to Temple and Young (2004) it is rare for a researcher to be fluent in the language of the communities they are researching and be able to translate themselves. It is important to note that the use of a translator during the interviews did leave a mark on the research itself. Translators are not invested in the same way and do not have the extensive knowledge of the research as researchers do. This leads translators to make certain assumptions and guide interview questions in a way that may not completely agree with the aim of the researcher (Temple and Young, 2004). This is seen once interviews are transcribed and the analysis process begins.

Once the transcriptions were finalized, they were placed into a qualitative data analysis software known as NVivo. To ensure validity, transcriptions were "*managed,"* as in, checked for any visible flaws (Bryman, 2012). Following the managing of data, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify main and sub-themes across and within transcriptions. The thematic analysis allowed the researcher to determine regularities and links between the interview transcriptions.

5.5 Reliability, validity and limitations

As previously mentioned, given that there were specific characteristics considered for choosing participants in the study, this limited the chance of the researcher's influence on the selection of

participants. Another measure taken to ensure the validity of the research was the inclusion of *peer reviewers* as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2017). Several peer reviewers were debriefed on the data collection and research processes conducted in this study. These reviewers were familiar with the phenomenon explored in this study and were therefore able to challenge the methods and interpretations of the research.

In an effort to ensure reliability of the analyzed data, detailed notes were taken and kept during the course of the study, along with high-quality audio recordings that were transcribed and saved in several secure locations (ibid.). As previously mentioned, the transcriptions were managed and checked for flaws before being analyzed.

As for limitations, social desirability was taken into consideration as a possible hindrance to the validity of the collected data. Social desirability occurs when participants present researchers with information in a way that is seen as more acceptable rather than the genuine reflection of their reality (Bergen and Labonté, 2020). This is of particular concern when considering the cultural value that is placed on certain activities like storybook reading (Swain et al., 2016). Measures were taken to prevent or mitigate the occurrence of social desirability. First, as previously mentioned, the research employed telephone interviews which would potentially remove any biases participants have towards researchers. This also ensured that interviews were conducted during a time and place that was convenient and comfortable for participants (Bergen and Labonté, 2020). Another aspect of the research that worked to avoid social desirability was that translators culturally identified with participants. Aligning by sociodemographic characteristics, such as ethnicity, is a strategy used to build mutual rapport between participants and researchers (ibid.).

5.6 Ethical considerations

LUMID ethical guidelines were consulted for the duration of this study. Participants were presented with the purpose and aim of the study before they decided on their participation. As mentioned above, interviews were recorded, and verbal consent was requested prior to beginning each interview (see appendix C: participant consent). Bryman (2012) debates between what is "ethically desirable" and what is "practical" around the attainment of informed consent. He states that some researchers may want to secure the consent by obtaining signed consent forms. This study was unable to collect a signed consent form as interviews were conducted over the telephone.

However, as outlined in the consent, participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time and refrain from answering any questions they did not wish to answer. Participants were also told that all of their personal information would be handled with complete confidentiality, which they did not seem too concerned with.

6. Findings and Analysis

This section employs concepts from the theoretical framework to analyze the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with participants to answer the research questions of:

1. How have Jordan's WLR father ambassadors' perceptions of and involvement in reading with their ECA children changed as a result of the WLR training?
2. How do WLR father ambassadors in Jordan perceive that their involvement in reading with their ECA children has affected other aspects within their homes, extended families, neighborhoods and communities?

Data collected from interviews were analyzed and categorized by three main themes: participants' recollection of their perceptions on and involvement in reading prior to the WLR training, participants' perceptions in and involvement in reading as a result of the WLR training, and participants' perception on the affect their involvement in reading has had on their immediate surroundings.

6.1 WLR father ambassadors' recollection of their perceptions on and involvement in reading prior to WLR training

The first set of findings analyzed WLR father ambassadors' perceptions on who they felt was responsible for reading to ECA children and the extent of their involvement in reading at home prior to their participation in the WLR training program.

6.1.1 Responsibility for reading

Prior to their participation in the WLR training, 73 percent of WLR father ambassadors in Jordan felt reading was the mother's responsibility. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, this was an expected outcome when considering the cultural view of gender norms and how these societal ideals find their way down to the individual. One participant spoke directly to the aspect of cultural norms stating, "…in terms of our culture and norms and the life that we live, all of this was placed on the woman" (Participant 3). Participant 15 pushed this remark further by saying that the act of parenting falls on the mother. The consistent opinion was that mothers are home more and have more time than men to read and parent, as men are expected to work outside the home.

As Participant 8 put it, “I used to think the mother more. Because a man is not always free, but the mother is there [in the home] more.” This perception follows the societal belief of women as homemakers and anticipated to be in the home more than the father. Participant 7 also stated that, “more than anything the mother is with them [children] than the father… Fathers go out and work. He has responsibilities towards the home.” The term “responsibility” was brought up several times when mentioning the role fathers played outside the home as their obligation towards the home. Participant 10 stated that, “the father has a lot of responsibility, especially if he works. I mean it is necessary for him to follow up, but the mother is always at home.” This coincided with Participant 9’s claim that, prior to training with WLR, he believed reading was the mother’s responsibility because she has more time and “the man has his job and things.”

Although the majority of participants did meet the expected result, four participants did not. Three of these participants believed that the responsibility for reading within the home should be shared between individuals and one believed that it was the fathers’ responsibility. Participant 1 stated that the responsibility should be given to “who was free or had the time. It was a must for both.” Participant 13 also believed that the parent that is not busy should take the responsibility for reading while also saying that they should both share participation in the task as children might understand or connect more with one parent over the other. For Participant 5, it did not matter who read as long as reading was taking place and there was clear communication so that one person can take over from where the other left off.

6.1.2 Involvement in reading

Another expectation of the research that was based on the cultural view of gender norms in Jordan was that the majority of participants would not be involved in reading with their young children prior to the WLR training. This was proven true as only 33 percent of participants had engaged in reading with their children prior to training with WLR. Participant 3 claimed that he did not really care for reading and that, “as the provider our whole lives are in relation to work. So, we did not really pay much attention to these things.” Participant 1 had a different reasoning for not engaging in reading, in which he said, “before the training I did not have the skills needed to help motivate a child and how you’re supposed to read or motivate them, or keep their attention.” Participant 10

said that although he did not engage with his children in storybook reading, he did pay attention to his children's schoolwork. "I like mathematics, so I would mostly go over mathematics with them from their school-books" (Participant 10). This refers back to Bronfenbrenner's discussion of the *person* and how it is important to consider different aspects of a person's identity, which can include their interest, and how these aspects impact their interactions with others.

6.2 WLR father ambassadors' perceptions on and involvement in reading as a result of the WLR training

The second set of research findings assessed WLR father ambassadors' perceptions on who is responsible for reading after their training. The research also considered if participants' involvement in reading with their children changed after the WLR training.

6.2.1 Responsibility for reading

When asked if their perception on who was responsible for reading changed after their training with WLR, 87 percent of participants felt that reading should be a shared responsibility between parents. Participant 4 stated that it is necessary for this perception to be altered. "I feel it has changed and it is necessary that it changes. Because this perception places a large burden on the woman especially for women that work outside the home" (Participant 4). For two participants they felt that their style of reading was a positive reason for them to take responsibility for reading. "Sometimes when I read it comes out even nicer than the mother. I honestly have a nicer way of reading than their mother" (Participant 6). Participant 12 stated that his children, "start to ask for both ways, the way that I read and the way she does" and this is why he felt that they should share the responsibility by taking turns or picking up reading where the other left off.

Three participants did not feel their perception changed from before they completed the WLR training. As previously mentioned, Participant 5 already perceived reading as a shared activity between the individuals in the home. Participant 8 felt that it should be based on personal preference and whoever had more emotional capacity but still felt that the mother was mainly responsible for reading. One participant was a complete anomaly from what was expected in that he believed that fathers are the ones that should assume responsibility for reading in the home and

held this belief prior to and after training with WLR. “Nothing changed. The father is the one responsible, before the program and after the program, I thought this” (Participant 14).

6.2.2 Involvement in reading

All participants stated that they currently read with their children, although the length and frequency differed amongst them. Participant 1 felt that after training with WLR he gained the skills he needed to begin reading and learned how to motivate children and keep their attention while reading to them. Participant 2 felt similar in that he learned how to connect to children and, “get them to enjoy reading more.” For participant 8, the training made him realize that he needs to be reading with his children. He stated that, now “I buy them books from the store or take them to the library.”. For other participants, they began to enjoy reading which motivated their involvement in reading with their children. “I started to love reading them stories… I have the mentality or spirit to gather them and have them listen to a story from me” (Participant 11). A newfound enjoyment of reading was a consistent response from many participants. Another aspect that participants mentioned frequently was that they became more involved because their children began asking for them to read. “The children began asking me to read to them. And when the children are asking you to read it encourages you to do it more” (Participant 4). This element was also mentioned when participants discussed how their involvement in reading with their young children affected their immediate environments.

6.3 WLR father ambassadors’ perceptions on how reading with their children has affected their immediate environments

The final set of data analyzed participants’ perceptions on how their involvement in reading at home with their children has affected their immediate environments. The data was organized into three categories: changes within the home, extended families, and communities.

6.3.1 Changes within the home

Participants mainly spoke about two changes they noticed the most within the home. The first was their relationship with their children and the second was their children’s increased interest in reading and request for reading.

Participants' relationship with their children

When asked if they felt a change in their relationship with their children, 93 percent of participants stated they have a closer relationship with their children after they began reading with them. Participant 6 claimed that his relationship with his daughters became closer because reading gave him an activity to be involved in with them. "There was something for me to do with them. Children get bored and now that I have this thing to do with them, I started liking them more honestly" (Participant 6). This feeling of having something to engage in with the children was echoed for many of the participants.

> "Children are with the mother most of the time. So, there became an opportunity for you to sit with your children. Yes, it is reading and at times you do not exceed more than thirty minutes, but it's nice. I mean there is harmony, there is bonding."
>
> - Participant 2

For some participants, they felt that there was an increase in communication between them and their children as a result of the time they spent reading together. "I felt like I was giving them something that was right, and I felt that they started communicating with me about everything and telling me everything" (Participant 7). For Participant 15, this communication led to him getting to know his son more. "We got to know each other more. So, you start to know, like my child what is important to him. Or what I feel he cares about" (Participant 15). This nearness that participants described, was also mentioned in participants' perceptions of their children enjoying their fathers' company more.

> "The child after you take the time to read with them you feel like even your child starts to enjoy you more. And enjoy sitting with you and comes to you asking for you to read to him and to be close to you. But before I mean in the beginning, I remember that my child every time I would get home, he would ask me for my phone and to connect to the internet for him. And his whole time was spent on the iPad, computer, or telephone."
>
> - Participant 3

Participant 4 stated that he felt his relationship with his children changed for the better and that his children became closer to him. He said he felt this way because his children would constantly ask for him to read with them. Participant 11 echoed this response saying, "the most important thing is children. They started to wait for me so they could hear a story." These positive feelings and bonds between participants and their children were an expected outcome based on Bronfenbrenner's theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that relationships between individuals may already be positive but become more so with increased interactions between the individuals, which he claims enhances the pace and occurrence of development.

Children's interest in reading and requesting to read

The second change many participants spoke about was that they observed an increase in their children reading and requesting to be read to. Participant 14 said that prior to the WLR training, his children would read but felt bored when doing so and did not enjoy reading. He stated that now,

> "[t]hey started themselves, I mean, bring me a book now and say, 'dad read us this story' and if we read that story, they would say to read it again. We started to sometimes take books with us even when we go out on errands, we take in the car with us. And my daughter reads to her brother or they ask me about certain words sometimes, 'dad what does this word mean?'"
>
> - Participant 14

Participant 3 said that, "my youngest son, he comes to me every day and asks to read him a story. He became attached to reading stories." This was a consistent theme mentioned by participants as Participant 5 talked about how his daughter brings home a new book every day from the library and Participant 9 noted that,

> "I started to sometimes look at them and notice that they had a story with them and I would ask them, 'what are you doing?' and they would say 'we're sitting reading a book, do you want to listen with us?'"

Some participants even noticed that their children began reading more with other children. Participant 10 stated, “I have one of my sons, he reads to younger kids, or to his classmates, or gathers kids around the house.” As Bronfenbrenner (1979) mentioned, interactions taking place in one setting have an influence on the interactions taking place in another. This expectation was also validated by participants’ insight into the effect their reading at home had on other aspects of their immediate environment such as with their extended families.

6.3.2 Changes within extended families

After changes in the immediate environment, participants discussed changes they experienced with their extended family. 73 percent of participants reported that they began reading with children other than their own after their participation in the WLR training. For a majority of these participants, the children that they did read with were members of their extended family.

> “I can tell you that they started to like when I would come, and say ‘uncle, will you read a story with us?’, ‘today will you read us a story?’ I mean they started encouraging it as well. When you sit with children you feel their innocence and enjoy it.”
>
> - Participant 9

For two of the participants, reading with their extended family became a weekly event and also encouraged other adults in their family to read with their children.

> “We gather on Fridays with my children, my siblings’ children, the grandchildren and during those days we make time to read. I even got my brothers involved in reading with the children. It has become a part of our family gatherings.”
>
> - Participant 2

For participant 5, inspiring his siblings to join in and read with children began with some hesitation. “My siblings are younger than me and would say things like ‘come on man what's wrong with you, reading to them.’” However, this did not deter him from continuing to read and eventually did motivate his siblings to join in. “I kept going until they began to even gather the children

themselves… now my siblings and I gather every Thursday" (Participant 5). For some participants, their involvement in reading trickled out into their larger neighborhood and community.

6.3.3 Changes within the community

The final environment that participants spoke about was their neighborhoods and local communities. Participant 11 was one of the individuals that spoke to this occurrence.

> "In the neighborhoods of the camp and at my house I make it like a gathering for the children and read them a story. And after the story we talk about what we benefited from the story. Or just read and that's it. At the mosque sometimes or at the school when I was teaching. We would have activities and I read a story for the kids. And the same idea, I ask them about what we benefited from the story and they give me the feedback of what they learned."
>
> - Participant 11

Some participants spoke about how reading with children reinforced their role within the community.

> "First of all, I became known. For example, when a child would see me, they would say, 'that's my storyteller, [Participant 6]'. And the children started liking me. It changed and made me a good person in their lives."
>
> - Participant 6

Strengthening their role within the community also established positive feelings for participants. Participant 15 discussed how he felt when organizations and individuals began inviting him to read at fundraising events and local NGO initiatives. "When you are invited personally you feel proud and like you have a good method [of reading]" (Participant 15). These examples of how, participants' interactions reading within their homes with their children had a ripple effect on other aspects of their immediate environment was an expected outcome based on Bronfenbrenner's theory. Bronfenbrenner repeatedly discussed how interactions performed in different settings are dependent and have an effect on one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986; 2006).

6.4 Discussion of findings

Based on Jordan's culturally dictated gender norms, the research expected and found that a majority of participants would not have been involved in reading prior to their participation in the WLR training. This expectation came from combining an understanding of the deeply rooted tribalistic and patriarchal society in Jordan with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and acknowledging how society can influence behaviors within the home. The expectation was validated as 67 percent of participants stated that they did not engage in reading with their children prior to their WLR training. Another explanation for this finding can be gathered from the beliefs and experiences that participants experienced within their own homes and communities growing up. If participants had not experienced their own fathers reading to them or witnessed other male figures in their communities and extended families reading to children, this would explain why they would not think to read with their own children. In this example, the interactions within one microsystem level, such as fathers' homes growing up, their communities or extended families has an effect within fathers' own homes and families as adults. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) states, "events in one setting exert their influence on a person's competence and relations with others in quite another setting decades later" (p.284). Bronfenbrenner's insight builds a foundation for understanding why fathers in Jordan may not be engaged in reading with their children.

Fiese (2018)'s reenvisioned model of Bronfenbrenner's theory provides an understanding of the changes participants mentioned as a result of their involvement in reading with their children. The bidirectional influence that takes place on fathers and children can explain how, after their engagement in reading, 87 percent of participants felt that reading within the home should be a shared responsibility between parents. This finding was a considerable change from the 73 percent of participants that felt reading was the mother's responsibility prior to their WLR training. Many participants stated that they began to enjoy reading with their children and listed this joy as one of the reasons for them continuing to engage in shared storybook reading. As for the influence on children, almost all the participants stated that they observed their children reading more and requesting to be read to more. Fiese's model also provides an explanation for the fact that 73 percent of participants reported that they began reading with children other than their own after their WLR training. Participants mentioned they started to read with children in their

neighborhoods, at their local mosque, with their extended families and a few were even invited to read at community events. Participants also spoke about encouraging other adults to read with children. Participants' enthusiasm for reading with children other than their own and encouraging others to read are considered mesosystem level changes. These mesosystem level changes demonstrate how fathers' engagement in reading with their children at home has increased the visibility of reading in other areas of their immediate environment. The results of this research provide insight into the intricate processes of how individuals influence and are influenced by their surroundings. These processes are a fascinating concept to be researched further, especially in regard to FI in ECED.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to contribute to the current research on FI in ECED, specifically in the MENA region. This contribution was done by gaining insight on the perception of fathers trained on reading with their ECA children in Jordan. To understand these perceptions, WLR father ambassadors were selected as the participants for this research. These fathers were trained by WLR and were contacted by the researcher with support from the organization. The following research questions were applied: how have Jordan's WLR father ambassadors' perceptions of and involvement in reading with their ECA children changed as a result of the WLR training? And, how do WLR father ambassadors in Jordan perceive that their involvement in reading with their ECA children has affected other aspects within their homes, extended families, neighborhoods and communities?

To answer these questions, the study was guided by a review of the current literature surrounding ECED, FI, and the significance of reading in children's development. This study also turned to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development as a theoretical framework to guide the data collection and analysis from semi-structured interviews with participants. Bronfenbrenner's theory analyzes how the layers of environment that surround an individual impact and are impacted by the developing person. The current study examined how expectations and beliefs at the macrosystem, or societal level, can shape the interactions that take place within the microsystem, or home. This study also took into account how the process of fathers reading with their ECA children affected other aspects of participants' homes, neighborhoods and communities. Through Fiese (2018)'s reenvisioned model of Bronfenbrenner's theory, the research was able to focus on how the interaction between fathers and their young children affected both fathers and the children they read with.

This bidirectional effect was evident upon analysis of participants' responses. All of the participants stated that they currently read with their children whereas a majority did not engage in reading prior to their WLR training. As a result of their involvement in reading at home, many participants mentioned they also began reading to children other than their own and encouraged other adults to read with children as well. Participants also stated that they noticed an increase in their children reading and requesting to be read to. These results were not entirely surprising as

Bronfenbrenner described how the different environmental layers are constantly influencing one another. Since Bronfenbrenner (1979) described how interactions in different settings have a lasting impact on individuals decades after their occurrence, we can predict that fathers reading with their ECA children will have a lasting influence on their children's interactions in the future and for generations to come.

FI in ECED remains to be an untapped resource. Therefore, understanding the perception of fathers currently involved in reading with their ECA children can provide a much-needed push toward progressing ECED in Jordan and targeting interventions to include fathers. It is particularly important to focus on FI in developing countries where resources in pre-primary education are limited and PI can have a significant impact on ECED.

7.1 Future research on fathers' involvement

Due to the limited scope of the current study, many aspects could not be investigated further, such as the inclusion of children as participants. Analyzing the effect FI in shared storybook reading has on children through a longitudinal study that evaluates changes in children's academic and psychosocial skills, as well as behaviors, would push the current research and expand further on the effect of FI on children's development.

Another aspect that would enhance the current research would be to interview a more diverse collection of fathers on their perceptions on and involvement in reading with their children. It would also be beneficial to interview WLR father ambassadors prior to their training. Following these preliminary interviews with supplementary interviews would provide a distinct view of how fathers' perceptions and actions change as a result of their participation in the WLR training.

Also, upon analyzing the information received from participants, the researcher noticed that a majority of participants began to feel that reading should be a shared responsibility between both mothers and fathers. It would then be interesting to understand whether participants felt more responsible for other tasks within the home that they did not feel responsible for prior to their involvement in reading. Considering the limited research on FI in ECED, the current research can

be expanded in many different ways to provide further knowledge on the impact FI has on the development of ECA children.

8. References

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Map of Jordan

Source: Bickerton, I. J., Jaber, K. S. A., and Irvine, V. E., 2020, Jordan. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/place/Jordan

9.2 Appendix B: List of interview questions

Background questions:

1) Age:
2) Marital Status:
3) Nationality:
4) Years living in Jordan:
5) City of residence:
6) Occupation:
7) Wife's occupation:
8) Number of children/ages:

Questions related to WLR training:

1) How did you get involved with WLR?
2) When did you first train with WLR?
3) How did you feel about the training?
4) Do you use the knowledge, skills, and tools that you learned from the training?
    - If so, how often and where?
5) Do you think it is important to have more programs like WLR that teach men how to read with children?

Questions related to involvement in reading before and after training:

1) How did you feel about reading to (your) children before your training with WLR?
    - Has your perception changed?
    - If so, in what way?
2) Did you read with (your) children before your training with WLR?
3) Do you read with (your) children now (post-training)?
    - If yes, how often?
4) Do you read to children other than your own?
    - If yes:
        - How does reading to other children make you feel?
        - Does reading to other children change how you feel about your role within your community? (Please elaborate)

Questions related to relationships, attitudes and behaviors:

1) How did your child(ren) feel about reading before you trained with WLR?
2) Has as your child(ren)'s attitudes on reading changed since your training with WLR?
    - If yes, in what ways?
3) Has your child(ren)'s social and/or emotional behavior changed since your training with WLR?
    - If yes, please explain?
4) Do you feel that your relationship with your child has changed since your training with WLR?
    - Please explain?

Questions related to reading within the home:

1) Before the WLR training, who was reading with your children and how often?
2) Does your children's mother read with your child(ren)?
    - If yes, do you know how often?
3) Before the WLR training, who did you believe should have the main responsibility for reading with your children?
    - Please elaborate.
4) Has your perception about who is mainly responsible for reading changed since your training with WLR?
    - If so, in what ways?

9.3 Appendix C: Participant Consent

Participant consent

1. Please state your name:
2. Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this research?
3. Please note that…
   a) even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind;
   b) You can withdraw permission to use data from your interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted;
   c) You have had the purpose and nature of the assignment explained to you and you have had the opportunity to ask questions about the assignment;
   d) participation involves a 20-30 minute interview with the researcher;
   e) you will not benefit directly from participating in this assignment;
   f) your interview will be audio-recorded;
   g) all information you provide for this study will be treated with confidentiality;
   h) your identity will remain anonymous in the final report of this assignment;
   i) This will be done by changing your name and disguising any details of your interview which may reveal your identity or the identity of people you speak about;
   j) disguised extracts from your interview may be quoted in the final thesis written by the researcher;
   k) a transcript of your interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 3 months;
   l) You are free to contact the researcher directly to seek further clarification and information.
      i. For any further information, questions, or concerns please contact:

         Madina Olomi **Email:** madinaolomi@gmail.com **Telephone:** 079 005 1454