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THE IMPACT OF PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT ON STUDENT'S LEARNING OUTCOMES

Dr. Syeda Rakhshanda Kaukab ^{*1}

^{*1} Department of Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, PAKISTAN



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ABSTRACT

The significance of parental involvement, commitment and active participation in children's education has been documented extensively in recent years across the globe specifically in Europe and the United States. However, it was noted through literature review that currently this is a sparsely researched area for South East Asia. Therefore, the researcher selected this topic to explore the impact of involvement of parents in schools on the educational development of the children.

This research study has been conducted to examine the impact of parent or family involvement in the learning outcomes of their children in multiple directions. The research was conducted in five towns of Karachi city. The academic performances of 20 secondary school students from each of the 5 towns, of boys and girls from public and private sectors, were recorded. Schools from each of the five towns were selected through simple random sampling. Two parents and two teachers from each school were interviewed through structured and unstructured questionnaire using survey method as a tool for data collection.

Keywords:

Parent-teacher meeting, parents' involvement, school-family connections, learning outcome, academic achievement, diverse family background, effective school reform.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement keeps the learner motivated, interested and keen in his/her work. It bridges the gap between school and parent. The involvement of parent in school issues not only enhances the student's learning in all subject areas but it also plays a vital role in the overall development of the child's personality (Rollande DESLANDES, 2009). Decades of research have shown that parent and family involvement considerably contributes in a variety of ways to a child's learning outcome in all domains. Although significant changes have taken place over the course of time in

teaching methods and learning practices, this finding has remained persistent throughout all study scenarios.

The importance of parental involvement in school reform efforts, including advocating for change, using standards and test scores as tools for holding schools accountable for student achievement, participating in the development of improvement plans, and taking part in opportunities created by reforms, such as governance councils etc., cannot be denied. “When parents become involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools” (Henderson).

Current research reveals that there are a large number of activities in which parent / family may be involved in school. Many schools in town provide opportunities to parents to participate in various school events. Parents are invited to sponsor various functions and field trips. Sometimes mothers are allowed to accompany their daughters for a trip. It is believed that involvement of parent and local communities may improve student’s achievement (A project is managed by Reform Support Unit, Government Sindh AI- Mehran Research & Development Foundation). Good schools engage parents in various school activities. The contribution of schools varies in this regard. Some of the schools provide higher opportunities to get involved in individually designed learning activities to achieve maximum learning outcome; others assign projects which develop understanding and good relationship between parent and children.

Regular parent-teacher meetings is a kind of parent school connection which has a positive impact on a student’s progress. Home-school communication and interactions, including direct parent-teacher contacts and relationships as well as more general communication between school and home regarding school events and school policies may bring betterment in the overall grooming of the child.

Home environment should be highly supportive for student’s learning. Parent, siblings and other family members should take special interest in the learning of children in a family and they should play positive role for the whole development of a child. For successful development of personality, all the three domains should be addressed properly. The main feature of a supportive home environment is the supervision and structure that parents give children outside of school to support their education, such as limiting television viewing time and providing controlled time for homework and learning. There is strong evidence of researches showing positive impact of parental involvement on students, families and schools. (Harold, www.education.com, 1993). Parents’ help in school homework and discussion about various issues at school enhances student learning. For example, many parents hardly spare time out of their schedules, doing so only to contact teachers over the telephone or through notes for more urgent issues, and do not actively participate in volunteer program activities offered in schools.

It has been noticed that some of the parents put a lot of emphasis on studies only, ignoring the physical health and activity of the child. Similarly, many schools do not provide sufficient physical exercise due to lack of resources and facilities. Physical activity is a necessity for growing children, to ensure healthy growth and development. Parent should ask the administration and teachers to facilitate the students in this regard.

Parental involvement in any aspect always results in some kind of benefit for the child because they hold the most concern among all stake holders of education. Unfortunately literature review noted that some were parental involvement is not entertained, parents feel unwelcomed at school (LaBahn, 1995) and are unable to participate actively in the education of their child.

The following figure shows relationships among student, family, and school variables and their effects on student learning outcomes. Bold lines show path of malleable variables the school can affect to improve student learning outcomes.

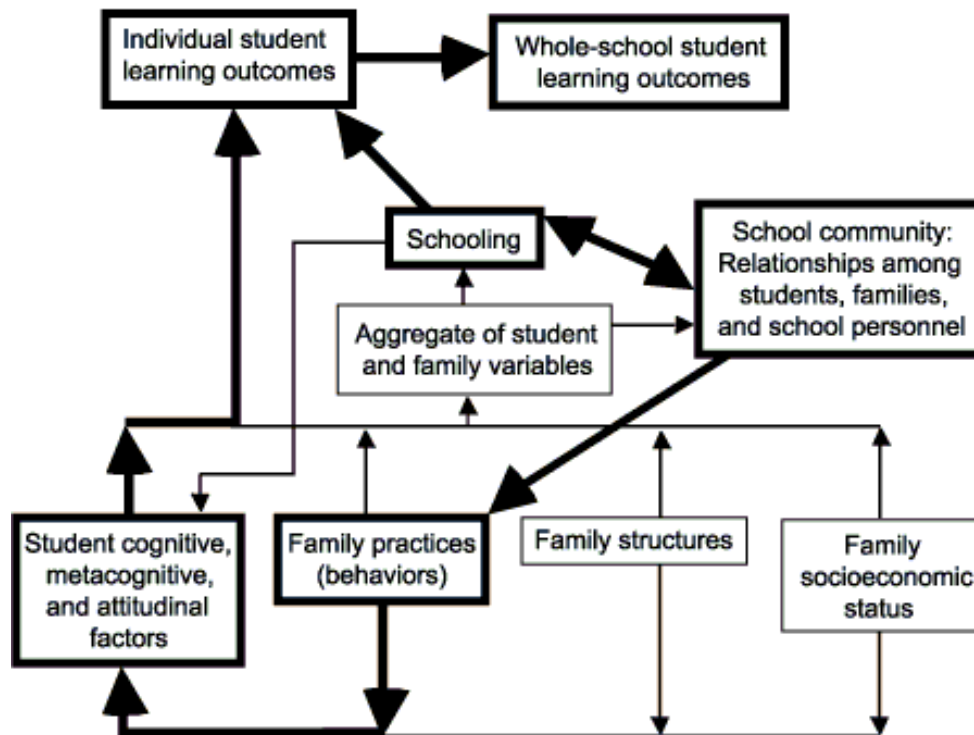


Figure 1: This has been taken from (Sam Redding, 2004)

ENGAGING FAMILIES IN EDUCATION

Constructive home-school activities may be generated to engage parents in their children's learning. Comprehensive nature of intervention is the source impact on learning rather than the individual parts. Relationships among students, families and school personnel would encompass all the components of solid foundation. In aggregate, they exert influence in two directions: on the individual families of students and on the operation of the school itself. Parents interact with their children's schooling in different ways, at different points in time, with a consistent message. This allows their importance in the process of family attention to learning to increase and gain focus. Teachers consider the advantages of parental support in the learning process in variety of ways at different points in time and student's learning becomes a matter of concentration to interact with parent to make it successful. The growing effect of more frequent interaction among teachers and parents develop an atmosphere of trust and respect between home and school, ultimately resulting in more supportive school community, increased social capital for children and each child's school success.

Schools include well planned parent-teacher conferences based on well-defined objectives and explicit homework policies which are promulgated to the parents, resulting in an overall enhanced role of parent in the learning phenomena of child and constant interaction with all the relevant personnel at school contributing in the whole development of the child.

Thus a culture of constant dialogue between parents and teachers is introduced and good relationship and understanding establishes, hence enhancing school performance.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

Keeping in view the existing deteriorating condition of school's role in students' academic achievement and rapidly growing tuition culture, there is a need to highlight the role of parents in this regard. Parents may build pressure on school administration to provide quality education to their ward, for which schools are being paid a handsome amount. Generally, students spend six to eight precious hours in the beginning of the day at school, which is the most energetic time to be productive. Learning at school must address all the three domains, i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor. It is a common observation that families where parents are involved with children's studies, co-curricular activities and other school related matters, children grow into confident, responsible and balance personality.

There is a need to modify and modernize the education system in such a way that schools begin to interact with parent frequently and regularly share all matters for the whole development of the child. (Duncan, 1992, p. 13).

3. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The specific phenomenon focused in this study was "impact of parental involvement on student's learning outcome in various schools of Karachi".

The strategies included:

- Parent's involvement and participation in decision making at the school
- Arrangement and configuration of the school's policies and procedures regarding homework and parent-teacher conferences
- Overt and unambiguous discussion of the roles of parents, teachers, and students about learning standards, and homework policies
- Parent education focused on home task and study habits

The study was designed to answer the following central questions:

- Is there any relationship between parental involvement and student's learning outcomes?
- Does qualification of parent has impact on their involvement with students, teachers and school matters?
- Which parental attitudes result in the best child outcomes?

4. METHODOLOGY

Parent:

Interviews have been conducted to collect the first hand information about the diversifying role of parents in providing support for their child's education, in making home an ideal and conducive place for learning, and in helping their children with homework.

The research tool prepared for this purpose was structured to comprise of the following open and close-ended questions:

- How do they support the learning process at home and provide an organized study environment?
- Do they speak positively about specific subjects and school in general?
- Are they often getting involved to communicate with teachers and other school staff?
- Do they attend parent/teacher conferences regularly?
- Do they attend extracurricular events in which their child is involved?

Teacher:

Interviews were also conducted with the teachers to know their opinion about their support in learning process and communication with parents about student's progress

- Do you support learning process at school by teaching, through a variety of methods?
- Do you communicate with parents about students' accomplishments and needs?
- Do you demonstrate professionalism?
- Do you provide a safe and supportive learning environment that boosts students' success?

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Most of the parents were of the opinion that they spend time in the evening with their children, discuss the learning activity carried out by them, and use to check their notebooks. They also said that they always discuss subjects and teacher positively and never encourage negative criticisms against the teachers. They always attend parent-teacher meetings (PTM) and other co-curricular events on priority basis.

Another group said that in this competitive world, parents have very high expectations from their children and to achieve the target they are focused on the grades of their children. They told the researcher that they are very much concerned about the studies of their wards. The majority of the groups consisted of parents of 8th, 9th, and 10th graders, who attend school regularly, pay attention to studies and remain motivated all the time due to the extra vigilant attention of their parents. If they obtain a lower grade in any subject, the parents immediately contact the teacher to inquire about the reason and resolve the matter. They believe that two-way communications between teachers and parents is highly effective not only for academic achievement but also for the control of emotional balance.

Majority of the parents told the researcher during interviews that they not only influence their ward's academic achievement but due to their frequent visits, overall discipline of the school

such as teacher's absenteeism, punctuality, timely correction of notebooks etc. have been improved. These parent claimed that they made association with other parents and forced school administration to hire Physics teacher and Pakistan Studies teacher. Both the subject teachers were not available since long.

During interview with parents of one school, the harsh reality unveiled that some of the parents are least concerned in the learning outcome. These parents do not value a fair and just approach to learning, and instead encourage a cheating culture by promoting unfair means to achieving high grades.

Some of the parent complained that teachers nowadays have been ineffective in their teaching methods. The objectives for these teachers is no longer to each but to have the children memorize the information. To correct this issue, it is important that parents, students and the society in general seeks to improve the education system.

It is important to remember that intelligence is not the only factor contributing to a positive learning environment. While intelligence plays a strong role, the main goal of education is to develop a positive character within the students. The complete education gives one not only the power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. The broad education will, therefore, transmit to one accumulating knowledge of the race but also the understanding the experience of social living. If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, and illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, "brethren!" Be careful, teachers! (Dr. Martin Luther King)

The Prophet, peace be upon him, told us that "the best gift a father can provide for his child is education" (Al-Tirmidhi). Moreover, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Nelson Mandela).

Majority of the teachers said that the guiding and monitoring factors have great impact, e.g. if fathers check homework daily, the child is more likely to complete it on time. The most accurate predictor or forecaster of a student's achievement or success in life is neither income nor social status except family involvement and their concern matters. (Berla, 1994) Parent-teacher relationship is very important in improved learning outcome, not only for academic development but for social wellbeing as well.

Many teachers said that parents and teachers are the two important stakeholders that contribute equally in children learning outcome. Whatever is learnt at school must be practiced at home regularly to be effective. Teacher-parent interaction and communication is very important for the betterment of child at both the primary and secondary levels. At primary level, practical help is required while at secondary level monitoring is important to achieve the objectives as well as for the control of social and emotional development and personality grooming.

A group of young teachers were of the opinion that in the current scenario, the environment is totally different and presence of peer pressure and technology during upbringing of child and continuous surveillance may frustrate a child. Proper direction and guidance may help. At secondary level, dictation by parents is not accepted. Again there is a difference between role of

educated and uneducated parents in child learning outcomes. In the 21st century, due to technological revolution, all kinds of relationships are at great risk. It is very difficult to maintain a balance between various roles.

According to some teachers, parental involvement is equally important at all levels. Parents must visit school to interact with teachers and learn of their children's performance. Parents' frequent visits encourage and motivate students and boost their performance. Any misconducts and mishaps can also be reported, and managed with understanding and care.

Another group of teacher shared their opinion that parental involvement keeps the learner motivated, interested and keen in their work. It bridges the gap between school and parent. The involvement of parent in school matters not only enhances student's learning in all subject areas but it also plays a vital role in the overall development of the child's personality. Children of concerned parent are generally well mannered, well behaved and proactive.

According to a research study by Ronald Ferguson, "nearly half of a child's achievement in school can be accounted for by factors outside the school, including parent support." Subsequently, a child receives the most significant help and support from home, of course parents ranging from sending school well fed, well-rested, ready to absorb to setting high expectations. (Hall, 2010)

6. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The current research and the previous researches all are evidences that children's attitude towards their studies, learning at school, homework, assignments, tests, motivational level, attitudes towards school, behavior with the teachers etc. are influenced by the attitudes of their parents towards learning and school.

After the analysis of data, it was found that parental involvement has significant effect in better academic performance of their children. The present research has proved that parental involvement enhances the academic achievements of their children.

Following are some of the attributes and characteristics showing support for a Child's Education

Attendance:

Having perfect attendance, being regular and punctual is very important for higher academic achievement.

Attitude:

Parents should always be positive towards school, teacher, administration and school related matters

Education as a Top Priority:

Education must be given top priority among all the activities of life at all levels.

Parents as Role Models:

Generally children consider parents as a role models so parents should exhibit positive character to shape the opinion and attitude about learning.

Parental Involvement:

Research reveals that self-confidence, self-respect etc. are closely related to parental involvement in academic matter and school and allows the child to be motivated to perform at his/her best level.

Communication and Interaction:

Parent should develop a positive relationship with the teacher and frequently communicate with them.

Making Home an Ideal Place for Learning

Reading Habits:

As we know, mother's lap is the first institute for a child and parents are the first teachers. Therefore parent should make home an ideal place for learning. Parent may have collection of good books and should develop a habit of reading themselves to promote good reading habit among children. Bedtime stories play vibrant role encouraging reading habit among children. Visit to local libraries, book fair, and book shops may enhance reading interest.

High Expectation:

Parents should set high expectations, but close to reality to ensure that their children do not develop negative connotations with education.

Discipline:

Parents should maintain good disciplines in various activities at home; things must be done according to routine, i.e. waking up, sleeping, lunch, dinner, homework, watching television, playing games, going out etc.

Entertainment as Source of Learning:

A wise selection of watching television, movies, excursion etc. may contribute to learning a lot towards value education and peace education.

Establish Good Relationship:

Parents should establish a good relationship with their children, should spend quality time with them, listen to them carefully and respond them with understanding; they should encourage them for their performance and achievement.

Parental Involvement and Grades:

Parents need to be aware of their wards grades. They can reinforce and admire endeavors and assist in their homework, preparation of assignments, projects and assessments.
(Klepfer, Dealing with Oppositional Parents)

The effects of family background, home environment and parental education are measured and recognized in the research literature.

From the limited evidence available, Henderson and Mapp (2002) draw convincing conclusions as to the qualities that successful school's efforts to engage families might include.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) echo Swap's (1993) concluded that effective parent engagement must be comprehensive in nature, with the school consistently interfacing with parents at many points, in many venues, over the course of the schooling years (Sam Redding, 2004).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Five major principles may be applied to parent involvement in schools:

- No doubt parental involvement brings improvement in all domains of development and it is most effective when it is comprehensive, well planned, and long-term.
- Parental involvement on long term basis may be considered as integral part of school reform plan.
- Impact of parental involvement in student's learning may not be confined to nursery, primary or elementary grades. Researches show strong evidences that parental involvement is highly effective at secondary and higher secondary level for the moral development of student in addition to academic development.
- Policy makers are advised to design such policies that involve parents and family members in schools. There is a need to introduce a new model of school education highly interactive, collaborative and communicative among all stake holders of education.
- Schools should organize seminars, open houses and conduct workshops to educate parents regarding ways to help them.

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