Parental Involvement and Students' Educational Achievement:
A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract - To abide with the system of united support for students', schools need to build partnership and develop mutual responsibility with parents, for students' success in the educational system. In this way, parental engrossment increases, parents' effort to support schools encourages, and they directly make a positive influence to a successful educational system. Considering the importance of parents' participation and involvement in school, in this paper, we will look into the effects of parental contribution on students' academic achievements, the factors that interrupt parental involvement and the role that the school management is playing to promote parental involvement. Qualitative Data was collected through semi structured interview from nine parents to find out their involvement in their child's education. The data was then analyzed to deduct themes. Results of the study reveals that effective parent involvement contributes to greater academic achievements by their children. Educational achievement is a joint responsibility of the school, student and parent. It is recommended that the school management should encourage greater parental involvement by arranging parent training sessions.

Key words: education system, mutual responsibility, parent participation, parental involvement, school management.

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Many researchers recognize the important role that positive link between homes and schools, play in the development and education of children (Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Richardson, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). Parents are forever known to be the child's first educators. Studies have proven that if there is a balanced co-operation between schools, parents and the community, it can positively lead to academic achievements of students. Students whose parents keep themselves involved in their child's academics, mostly have strong and successful academic results and perform better in school. Research has also shown that successful students' have sturdy academic support from their involved parents (Sheldon, 2009). Moreover, schools with an encouraging school climate reach out to students' families, thus providing enhancement in educational system, by involving parents in various co-curricular activities as well as in developing parental skills and leadership and assisting parents to connect with other members of the school community. Schools become successful when a strong and positive relationship among students, parents, teachers and the community has been established (Sanders & Sheldon 2009). The reasons for establishing a partnership between the school and the community also includes improving school programs and also suggesting and helping teachers with their work, which can be achieved through strong and positive relationships with schools.

As per the Pakistani context of building a strong relationship between the school and the parents, many private schools of Pakistan encourage effective parental involvement by allowing parents to access the school through follow up discussions with the teachers and also by involving parents in various co-curricular activities held during the academic year, which includes project work, group work, sports day, milad day, independence day celebrations and socialization through networking.

Statement of the Problem

Parents are a child's first teachers. The most important factor in a child's success at school and in life, is the home background (Nedler, 1979). Parental contribution is important for students' success. Effective ways of parent involvement

should be instigated in studies to assure the academic achievement of children.

Purpose of the Study

1) To investigate the importance and effects of parental involvement on students' educational achievement.
2) To find out the factors that impinge on parental involvement.
3) To analyze the role that school management plays in parental involvement.

Research Questions

1) How important is parental involvement and what are its effects for student's educational achievement?
2) Which factors impinge on effective parental involvement?
3) To what extent is the school management promoting parental involvement.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations that may affect the study are that due to the shortage of time, partial population was selected. The population from which the study was conducted was limited to parents of grade five students of Private Schools of District South, Karachi, due to limitation of resources, access and time. Teaching techniques were also not considered.

Definition of Key Terms

1. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement refers to the amount of participation of a parent in a child's schooling and life.

2. Educational Achievements

Hopkins University, focuses on school, family, and community partnership programmes that will mature policy, and will practice with an effort to escalate student academic achievement and positive results. Epstein has acknowledged an outline containing six important factors of parental involvement. This framework is based on findings from many studies of what factors are most effective

Accomplishments relating to education, learning and study, especially in schools and higher educational institutions.

Literature Review

"Parental involvement is reading to preschool children. It is getting children ready for school every morning. It is volunteering at the school. It is serving on collaborative decision making committees, and it is lobbying legislatures to advocate for children"
(Jesse, 1996).

Teachers and parents play a major role in the educational achievements of students. Students need a constructive learning experience, one which provides support, motivation, and quality instruction, in order to succeed in school. With the increasing demand of education and the stress on parents, educational support needs to be extended beyond the school building. Many families are challenged with unpredictable schedules and circumstances while rearranging school, sports, family conditions, family time, work agendas and other responsibilities, allowing minimal time to provide support in any one given area (Swap, 1993).

Although it seems that parental involvement is a researched topic of many domestic and foreign studies, there are still concerns regarding parental involvement and what factors establish effective parental involvement in the education of students. Parental involvement in the education of students begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, suitable learning experiences, support, and a positive approach about school. Several researchers such as Berger (2008), Davies (1996), Epstein (2009), and Henderson and Mapp (2002) have studied parental involvement and its effects on the educational process over the years.

A leading researcher of parental involvement Joyce Epstein: originator and director of the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns with regards to children' education (Epstein, 2001, 2009). Those six factors are; **parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community.**

1) **Parenting** –this includes all the activities in which the parents engage, with the

purpose of raising happy and healthy children who become capable students.

2) **Communicating** – this refers to communication between the families and schools in various ways such as sending home notes and circulars, a school website, meetings with every parent at least once a year, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.

3) **Volunteering** – applies to recruiting and organizing help and support from parents for school programmes and students' activities.

4) **Learning at home** – refers to providing ideas and information to parents for best assisting their children with homework and curricular-related activities.

5) **Decision making** – it includes parents in the school decisions and develops parent leaders and representatives.

6) **Collaborating with the community** – pertains to identify and integrate communities' services and resources to strengthen schools, students, and their families. It also includes information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational and social support, information on activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programmes for students.

Each of these factors includes different practices of partnership which can lead to several outcomes for students, parents, teaching practices, and the school climate. In addition, each factor poses various challenges to involve all families, which must be encountered. That is why Epstein (2001, 2009) considers it to be considerable for each school to choose what factors are believed to be most likely to assist the school in reaching its goals for academic success, and to develop a climate of coalition between homes and the school.

According to Henderson & Berla (1994), parents also gain a more positive attitude towards the school and its staff, and gain more confidence in assisting their children with homework, by being involved with their education. For teachers, the benefits may be presumed to be better communication with parents, a deeper understanding of the family of their students and their situation, and more effective communication with both the homes and the community (Epstein, 2009). Henderson & Berla (1994) also claim that the schools will benefit from parental involvement by improved teacher morale, more support from families and higher student academic achievement. In addition, Clarke (2007) asserts that schools function best when parents and the community are active participants and have a sense of ownership of the school. Therefore, it is safe to say that these six factors not only benefit the students, but also their parents, teachers and schools.

Factors impinging parental involvement

Although parental involvement is known to be of substantial importance in the education of children, yet there is great diversity in parental involvement. Today's parents are often enthralled with the hullabaloos and demands of daily life. Burdened by low-income, inflexible work hours and language barriers, some parents are unable to attend school activities or participate in the schooling of their children on a regular basis (Ho, 2009). Bæck (2010) as well as Lee and Bowen (2006) cite cultural customs, inadequate financial resources, and lack of educational fulfilment as barriers to parental involvement in school. Davies (1996) found that "many parents suffer from low self-esteem and others did not experience success in school themselves and therefore lack the knowledge and confidence to help their children." Parents who did not experience success in school may view it negatively (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Parents may be frightened by the language, the syllabus, and the staff; therefore they avoid communicating with the school (Flynn, 2007). Hill and Taylor (2004) assert that "parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face many more barriers to involvement, including nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems, and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods" (2004, p. 162). Williams and Sanchez (2013) identify four areas that are barriers to involvement: time and poverty, lack of access, lack of financial resources, and lack of awareness. Similarly, Ho (2009) discusses the benefit of parents' involvement in schools, stating that it helps parents wave off a lack of socialization. Likewise, Hill & Taylor (2004) declare that parental involvement as an significant factor for prosperous learning. Students are often responsible for transporting

information to their parents regarding school programmes, activities, and events (Epstein, 1995). Some school managers and teachers may not know how to involve parents; therefore, educators who lack this knowledge could be taught techniques of involving parents and creating partnerships (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Administrators and teachers may not fully understand the importance and effects of parental involvement on student achievement (Flynn, 2007). Teachers who believe it is a waste of time to contact parents are the ones who do not feel parental support as an important factor (Flynn, 2007). To overcome the obstacles avoiding parental participation, schools need to provide a hospitable environment to the parents, where the school staff is humble and responsive towards parents (Wherry, 2009). It is serious that supervisors and educators should encourage a courteous mutual communication between the school and home (Wherry, 2009). Bouie, an educational consultant stated, "The answer is to stop treating parents like clients" and start treating them like "partners in helping children learn" (as cited in Wherry, 2009, p. 7). A survey was conducted by Davies (1991) of parents, in four school organizations, concludes that they claim that they want to be treated with admiration and do not want a professional customer association.

Tyler Bailey (2017) in his article suggests that "Communication is an intrinsic part of a student's education and maturity. Parents must have diverse conversation with their student." A parent cannot only focus on grades as the sole aspect of the student's education, rather the parents must engage their students daily and add value to their communication skills in speaking and listening. Family values are easily transferred through communication and core values are instilled in students through conversation at home with the family. Parents must make it a priority to communicate and learn from their child as they can learn an incredible amount about their child and become better prepared to support them by listening and evaluating how and what they converse.

Michael, Wolhuter & Wyk (2012) conclude that within varied school communities, the success of parental involved programmes depends on how fine the programme matches up with the needs of parents. This means that a school will well involve all parents, if it aims at providing education leading to the success of all learners.

Methodology
Research Design

The methodology of the study is wholesomely qualitative. Phenomenological approach is used to scrutinize the effects of parents' involvement on students' success. This research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. Qualitative research methods emphasize the measurement and analyses of causal relationship, not the process. Qualitative research method is considered as the most effective method to approach while investigating a research problem. T Gray, D.E. (2014).

The survey foreseen for this is of a transversal nature. The cross-sectional analysis provides information on the effects of parental engrossment on students' success & the factors that impinge parental involvement.

Population & Sampling

The targeted population of this study is selected as Private Primary schools of District South, Karachi. Parents of grade five students are purposefully selected for this survey study after being enlisted by their child's respective teacher/ Principal.

The present sample includes nine parents of grade five students, from three different private schools of District South, Karachi. Using Non- probability sampling technique: purposeful and convenient sampling, three were conveniently selected from each school for the data collection.

Data Collection

Responses collected through semi structured interview technique. Open ended question were asked and were then transcribed in respondent's words. Five different themes were emerged from the discussions 1. Status of Soft Skills in present teachers training curriculum. 1. Preferred soft skills 2. Acceptable Model of Teaching Soft Skills. 3. Teaching methods for soft skills. Theme 1. Status of Soft Skills in present teachers training curriculum: In discussion, participants presented their ideas and showed their concern about the present status.

Data Analysis

The responses are collected through open ended questions and are transcribed in the respondent's words. Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2002), mentioned to give a joint picture and to make bases for coding before extracting themes as Creswell (2017) suggests. Then narrative analysis were done for answering research questions. Findings are represented in realistic and analytical ways to give a clear picture. Coding and themes are used for data analysis.

Three different themes are emerged from this discussion:

1. Parental Involvement and its Effects.
2. Factors Interrupting Parental Involvement.
3. Role of School Management.

Theme 1. Parental Involvement and its Effects

Parental involvement is very important in all aspects of life, not just education, as parents form the environment at home and if there is no environment, there will be no progress. Based on the responses, it is summarized that the least involved parents try to just pass on notes to the teacher, rather than sparing time for visits, and they also try to let their child take ownership of their work. It is the teacher who puts in most effort to build up the confidence level of the child. On the other hand, the highly and moderately involved parents, try to meet the teacher quite frequently to discuss about the child's performance. Such parents work jointly with the student, the educator and the school to help bring improvement in the student's work and to help them gain more confidence in themselves. Respondent **Mu** says "I just go once a year, in PTM. If there's anything I want to discuss, I write a note in her diary." Positive parental involvement helps create a positive environment which encourages children to pay more attention towards studies, and also helps in personality and character development.

Theme 2: Factors Interrupting Parental Involvement

In the discussion, participants presented their ideas and showed their concern about the factors that affect parental involvement. Through their responses, it is summarized that the least involved parents try to leave the child all by themselves to sort out any difficulties faced in studies, whereas the moderately and highly involved parents try to find solution jointly, or they even approach people around them. Respondent **Fa** says "If I feel I cannot explain any topic to my child then I write it down in the diary that I am not able to exactly explain to my child whatever she has learnt in the class, so please reinforce once again. Then the teachers do make it a point that they make the child learn it again." Parents jointly feel that games and phones nowadays are a big distraction for the kids and the parents need to keep a strict eye on their kids. Respondent **Ma** says "The latest technology, the laptops and I phone is obviously very distractive for the child" and Respondent **Si** says "Nowadays games and I phones are a sort of hindrance, but we need to monitor the child vigilantly." Some parents also feel that language and advanced level of studies is a barrier in their way. As said by respondent **Mi** "I face a bit difficulty in teaching English because I am not that good in English." Other members of the family, servants, friends, T.V, and unawareness of the latest trends and technology creates a hindrance in positive parental involvement.

One of the parents highlighted the involvement of elderly family members in pampering the kids as being a hindrance in effective parental involvement.

Theme 3: Role of School Management

Through the discussion with parents, it is clearly seen that the school management would willingly welcome parents to offer their help, if they do, but parents on the basis of their personal routines and commitments are unable to offer much help. Mostly parents participate in group activities and events that take place in school, and help in setting up plays and festivals too. Parents are also encouraged to socialize with each other and create discussion groups on WhatsApp.

Two of the respondents say that the school prepares the kids and only informs parents about activities if parental involvement is required. Respondent **Su** says that "We don't get to know about what activities are going to take place, until and unless it really needs parent involvement."

One of the parents stated that she has served as a parent coordinator for two years and that, as a parent they are given duties every three

months to help the school management by offering their services and time.

Comparatively, two of the parents also state that the school management does not promote nor do they consider parental involvement as an important factor. They do not arrange workshops for parents, and also do not let parents discuss students' progress with the teachers.

Conclusion

Based on the results, it is recognized that effective parental involvement plays a major role in students' education as well as upbringing, personality and character building, as without parental involvement there will be no progress.

Parental involvement means that parents should stay updated with what is happening in the class room, helping the child with school assignments and activities, meeting with the teachers and discussing child's progress. Some schools cater to vigorous parental involvement through events and volunteered opportunities, but it's totally up to the parents whether to get themselves involved or not.

According to the responses of this study, it is concluded that students' educational achievement is a joint responsibility of the school, student and parent.

Parents being unaware of the latest technology and advancement in studies, often find it a barrier in their way of effective involvement. As cited by Flynn (2007), Parents may be panicky by the curriculum, the staff and the language; consequently they avoid communicating with the school. It is also concluded by the respondents that games and social media now a days are a big distraction for the kids. The school management allows the parents to participate, but does not arrange any parental involvement workshops.

- School management should encourage parents to visit schools at least once a month to discuss students' educational success.
- Parents should attend training sessions and should try to groom their knowledge in order to help their child in studies, as "A PARENT IS A CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER."

Findings

The major findings of this research are:

- Mostly the highly involved parents are actively involved in school activities too.
- The highly involved parents encourage the child to work on their own and also try to learn from the child, as said by respondent **Sa** "There were a lot of times when she was teaching me things I was clueless about."
- The least involved parents visit schools only when they are called, whereas the moderately and highly involved parents try to frequently take feedback from the teacher about their child's progress.
- The highly involved parents mostly find no hindrance in their way to communicate and teach their child, but the moderately and least involved parents claim that media, mobile games, mobile phones, family relationships and personal commitments often act as an obstacle.
- Effective parent participation contributes to higher academic achievements by their children.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, some recommendations are given as:

- It is suggested for future researchers to select a bigger sample of parents as it would offer better understanding and a developed level of data correctness.
- For the study to be replicated, it is suggested to select parents of students studying in different grade levels. This would probably show the level of variance in engrossment at several grade levels.
- The school management should encourage greater parental involvement by arranging parent training sessions.
- The Education Minister should work jointly with the Cyber Security Minister to block access for students to games and social media, as this is a big hindrance in students' educational success.

The literature clearly defines the factors of the framework of parental involvement and also offers solutions to obstacles that hinder engrossment. Schools, entire educational groups

and individuals must become enthusiastically involved in finding ideas to promote greater parent contribution for the benefit of the students.

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