The Parental Perception Of Children's Success At An International School

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Introduction and Background Information of the Study

This assignment examines parents' perceptions of children's success at an international school in Dubai when parents are involved in their children's educational journey. This qualitative assignment depends on individual narratives. It will explore its significance in local and international contexts and the relationship between the identified themes. The literature review will look at the perspectives of several scholars and their observations about the significance of parental involvement in their children's learning journey since childhood. According to Olsen and Fuller (2010), parental involvement in students' learning activities promotes students' morale and self-containment. According to Sapungan (2014), parental involvement enhances students' morale.

Parental involvement in a child's learning journey acknowledges that the student has a decisive attitude and improves behaviour (Kraft and Dougherty, 2013). According to Bæck (2010), parental involvement and support from schools help to improve students' overall attainment. These findings suggest that parental attachment to their child's education has an impact on learning outcomes.

Parental involvement takes many forms, such as homework help, active involvement in Parent-Teacher Conferences (PTCs), and educating children about their behaviour in class. Parental involvement is not mandated in schools, and parents should see it as a feasible resource that could impact student learning and overall achievement. Through this partnership, students may see the value of education through the involvement of their parents.

According to Von Otter (2014), parents who are intensely involved in education and aware of school-based activities can significantly help provide a conducive environment for the child to complete home learning tasks. Contrary to that, according to Gracia (2014), parental involvement is linked to their belief system, which affects the way parents are directly or indirectly involved in their child's academic attainment. Some parents who regard their children's education as the school's responsibility may not be willing to be so conscientiously involved.

According to Emerson *et al.* (2012), minimal or no involvement of parents in their children's schooling can hinder the overall academic progress of the children. However, according to Sapungan and

Sapungan (2014), some parents could not connect with their children's school or could not actively take part in their learning because of problems they face themselves, such as their lack of skills and perceptions that restrict them from doing so. Building on Sapungan's insights, this assessment investigates the factors involved that compel a child and his/her parent to hamper prospective academic attainment and potential involvement.

The Research Questions

1. How does parental involvement provide support for overall student achievement?
2. What are the interpersonal barriers that lead to low or no parental involvement?
3. What are the best practices to explore that will enhance a partnership between the school and parents and may enhance student motivation?

School Context

This research was conducted at one of the IB Continuum Schools in Dubai. The school is on a developmental journey, and it has a significant number of new students due to the strong reputation that it has earned in the community. The school is always focused on inducting new students into the school culture, and the school has many new teachers in secondary education, as the school is expanding rapidly. This school has an international student and staff population, including a significant percentage (approximately 30%) of Emirati students. This centres the school on the culture of the UAE while allowing an understanding of world cultures to blossom. SLT practices distributed leadership across the school, with middle leaders taking responsibility for their areas through their development plans.

This school is very inclusive in admissions and lessons. We use data effectively to plan for differentiation to ensure all students are challenged and supported appropriately. This support is provided through classroom differentiation, expert intervention from highly qualified SEN, EAL, and counselling staff (as well as ILSAs and outside therapists), and a modified curriculum.

This school is committed to the National Agenda, as reflected in the school's guiding statements (Vision, Mission, Values, and Strategic Objectives). The school is also committed to the IB and was authorized for the PYP, MYP, and DP last year. Our pastoral system is based on the ethos of the Learner Profile (linked to Islamic Values) and International Mindedness.

As a reflective teacher, the researcher has analyzed our internal and external results to identify areas of development for children each academic year. Each year, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority in Dubai (KHDA) mandates us to conduct Externally Assessed Assessments in English, Mathematics, and Science for all enrolled children in their Primary and Middle Years. The data collected each academic year are used as indicators to effectively measure children's learning skills, achievements, and overall progress in their academic years. This analyzed data clearly forms a basis

for the conclusion that children's performance and learning skills were a cause for concern. Many of the students do not speak English at home, although they practice it in school, and roughly 20% have SEND passports. It was clear from students' reports, based on the student voice survey, that in many households parental support is neglected in terms of enhancing children's learning ability and helping them with home learning tasks.

Also, the school's historical attendance data from events such as PTCs, coffee mornings, educational trip information sessions, and DP options evenings show that approximately 35%–40% of parents have managed to attend these meetings.

Hence, it is a priority to focus on how parental involvement provides support for overall student achievement and helps students develop the learning skills required at the secondary school stage. This not only helps students but also helps the researcher in their professional growth.

Literature Review

This research section reviews the related literature regarding the benefits of parental involvement and areas in which parents should be actively involved to enhance their children's overall academic development.

According to the UAE government, every citizen has the right to education. It provides free education in public schools and government higher educational institutions. According to Federal Law No. 11 of 1972, parents or legal guardians are obliged to send their children to school and show commitment to the UAE Ministry of Education guidelines.

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA, 2013), which oversees all schools in Dubai, has delved into several measures that can bolster parent-school relationships by making both parties sign a contract to improve parental involvement in children's schooling. One of the essential aspects of this contract is to highlight the responsibility of parents toward the learning of their children. According to Berger (1987), parents' involvement in their children's learning should extend beyond the limitations of PTCs or undertaking roles in various school activities. True involvement of parents includes being an active part of the decision-making process each academic year and collaborating with the child's teachers to understand the activities that can be done at home. This will enhance the academic achievement of their children with each passing academic year. According to the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (2010), when both parents are involved, it sets an effective tone and healthy circumstances in which an individual child becomes involved in education on his/her own, ultimately impacting his/her academic success in a positive way.

According to Patrikakou (2005), greater parental involvement in a child's learning, regardless of the financial status of the parent and the child's sex, has been found to have a positive correlation with the child's learning and attainment levels. Also, it is noted in the study that parents' education level is positively associated with a higher predisposition for them to be more vigorous supporters of their

child.

Socio-economic status and changes in the family system have directly impacted the time and accessibility parents have for involvement in their child's school. Therefore, when both parents work longer hours, time will be a constraint, and they will not be able to participate in activities such as coffee mornings and information sessions during regular school working hours, including attending PTCs.

According to the Dubai School of Government Policy Brief 2012, if students are to enhance their true potential through education, they will need the full support of their parents. Some of the key elements that have been associated with improved academic achievement are outstanding pedagogical approaches, high-quality curricula, and highly qualified teaching staff.

However, these elements tell only half the story. Parental involvement has a major role to play in improving students' achievements. Research has shown that parents should play an effective and impactful role not only in advancing their own child's accomplishments but primarily by being a part of school improvement. Additionally, students whose parents are involved in their schools' activities for institutional improvement tend to have better academic performance and fewer behavioural issues compared to children with no or less parental involvement. In Dubai, the level of parental involvement depends on factors such as the parents' cultural background and the role of helpers and nannies.

Epstein's Six Types Framework, suggested by Al Sumaiti (2012), is an effective and helpful tool for defining and identifying parental involvement practices. This framework has six types of parental involvement. Type 1 involves "parenting" to help parents develop vital parenting skills so that they can effectively develop school-home "communication," which is the 2nd type of practice parents should consider for their involvement in a child's overall academic success. Type 3 is titled "volunteering" and provides parents with a potential pathway so that they can get involved in their children's school activities and reinforce their child in the home environment through the home-learning strategy, which Al Sumaiti defines as "type 4: home-learning." Moreover, types 5 and 6 involve "decision making" and "collaboration with the school community," respectively, so that parents, by being active parts of the decision-making and collaborative processes, can fulfil their family needs as well as serve the school and community in the right way.

Burns (1995) states that culture is one of the possible barriers that has a direct influence on parental involvement in terms of enhancing a child's learning abilities. For instance, the way parents are involved in UAE schools is entirely different from the way parental involvement is adopted in African countries, Turkey, and the USA.

Parental involvement in schools, such as constructing materials for their own child, is necessary to instil in children's minds the idea that they are the building blocks of any learning environment. Furthermore, studies have found that some African schools considered parental involvement as necessary to schools as students are, due to the limited academic resources available at government

schools. Therefore, the most popular methods of involving themselves in school as well as in their own child's improvement were attending PTCs, constructing toilets, painting the school building, etc. Mutasa *et al.* (2013) further shed light on the process in which parents were involved in carrying construction materials such as sand, water, and cement as well as moulding bricks to build a school building. This is intended to strengthen the idea in children's minds that not only their academic involvement but also co-curricular involvement can add to their learning ability, interpersonal skills, and school improvement among other competing academic environments in their community.

According to Ngwenya and Pretorius (2014), in Zimbabwe, parents were involved in fundraising activities, purchasing uniforms for less fortunate people, and organizing after-school tutoring sessions. According to Tekin (2011), parental involvement in the academic environment of Turkey occurs in many forms, such as attending PTCs, participating in fundraising activities, and supporting and monitoring their children's work. According to Gunduz (2018), PTCs create a strong relationship between school and home, and these meetings help students improve their performance. Gunduz (2018) also highlights the importance of foundations that organize events for parents to inform them of the importance of social development and prosperity.

According to Watson, Sander-Lawson, and McNeal (2012), parental involvement in the USA is poor, and this has been a concern for many years. However, according to Tekin (2011), this perception changed at the beginning of the 20th century. Parents are now playing a very active role in their children's learning by helping them complete homework on time and improving communication with various subject teachers about matters of concern.

However, according to Huntsinger and Jose (2009), migrant parents may not feel comfortable being involved due to certain possible factors that hinder their participation, such as language, their level of education, and lack of familiarity with classroom practices.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Culture, language, negative experiences from the past, and lack of confidence are barriers to parental involvement at school (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). According to Von Otter (2014), parents who have low education levels lack the confidence to support their children with meaningful learning tasks in their home environment. This refers to the hindrance children face in their academic support, as such parents are less able to assist their children in moving forward in their educational journey. Another barrier that influences parental involvement is the discrepancy between the culture of the teaching staff and the parents when they have migrated from another country (Burns, 1993). On the other hand, some parents have less desire to visit school due to their lifestyle. The family structure in UAE culture has had an impact on the time available for parental involvement in school activities.

Parental Involvement and Student Motivation

According to Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005), parental involvement has an effective impact on the academic accomplishment and motivation of the child. However, research also suggests that different facets of parental involvement sometimes have opposite effects. These facets highly impact the different elements of student accomplishment because of the parenting style their parents adopt. For instance, if parents do not take an active part in the decision-making process at their children's school or do not contact their teachers regularly, the student may feel unmotivated to attend regular school events. According to Izzo et al. (1999), it has been observed that students felt more engaged with their school activities and events when their parents participated more regularly in school tasks. On the contrary, students with no or less involvement in school activities described less engagement in their academic environment when parents contacted their children's teachers or middle leaders more frequently.

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) uncovered that not all facets of parental involvement predicted their children's success and motivation. Similarly, Marchant et al. (2001) made a valid point in their research that supports the fact that potential parental involvement at school as well as in the home environment is related to student motivation and overall achievement. Their research also suggests further investigation of more relational aspects of parental involvement, such as parents being a part of curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) also reviewed the multiple facets of parental involvement practices affecting student learning ability and found that they should be investigated. The school environment can be turned into a community resource centre to encourage parents to get involved in school and their children's improvement. In this centre, parents can receive valuable guidance and information about the events, programs, and community resources available at their child's school. Showcasing parental involvement and talent at school can provide students with necessary information about their work, which can positively impact students, their peers, and individuals in their immediate environment. Thus, there is a better chance to boost academic success and motivation on the part of the child when both parents are engaged in the school environment to promote effective changes.

Methodology & Research Instruments

In this section, the methodology and techniques that were used in data collection are charted. To address the research question, a qualitative research method was used to gain preliminary information about parents' perceptions regarding parental involvement. The reason a qualitative research study was chosen for this research is based on McMillan and Schumacher's (2010) insight that qualitative research is rich in narrative description.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews in a natural setting to obtain in-depth insight. This provided the interviewer with the opportunity to develop inquisitive questions and gain greater clarity

on the topic. Roberts-Holmes (2014) further supported the point that open-ended questions enable the people being interviewed to express their views confidently and comfortably regarding a certain topic.

Participants

The data were collected from two parents, and their initials were used for confidentiality reasons. Both parents spoke Arabic as their home language, and both had obtained university education. Parents chosen for this study were those with children in secondary school, and they represented a mixture of middle and high socioeconomic status. The purpose of these interviews was to determine and identify the facets of involvement parents provide for their individual children, barriers to parental involvement, and the school's role in providing indispensable resources to the children's parents. These facets of parental involvement may impact students' academic success among their peers. The purpose of these interviews was to measure how the school involves parents in students' academic goals.

Data Collection

The main aim of this study was for interviews to examine participants' background information, insights, or perceptions of a phenomenon. To achieve this objective, this research observed and examined parental involvement at a private international school in Dubai.

Based on the RQs, each interview consisted of 12 questions in Appendix A that were written for parents. Parents were asked the same questions mentioned in the Appendix, but follow-up questions and discussions occurred to obtain a clear understanding and clarity. According to Creswell (2012), discussions can be collected from individual parents and can be used to raise further 'what if' questions by the researcher to fill the gaps.

The parental interviews were recorded using the application 'Otter' with the consent of the participants to ensure that the entire conversation was captured. This allowed the researcher an opportunity to replay the interview recordings to gain a greater level of understanding if anything was missed during the interview session. Audio recordings were transcribed into a.txt file immediately after the meeting to ensure information was not lost.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the interviews and then read them repeatedly in order to have a clear understanding of what the parents had said during the interview session. Audio recordings were replayed to make sure no information was missed. The researcher decided to code the transcript using the deductive coding method. Categories were pre-defined, such as individual participant

interviews, appendixes, and codebooks, and the aim was to interpret parental views (Creswell, 2012). The codebook is included in Appendix B.

Findings of the Study

This section illustrates the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. On the basis of the data gathered from the participants, findings concerning the picture of parental involvement and its benefits can be drawn as follows:

Improvement in Parent-School Relationship

Both parents were very consistent in their beliefs that there is a strong correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. However, interviews reflected that the school needs to involve parents in the decision-making process.

Organizational Structure to Promote Collaboration and Participation

According to Decker and Decker (2003), the goal of parental involvement is to construct shared ownership of education between parents and schools, thus drawing an organizational structure that involves parents and creating a platform for parents to collaborate effectively with school SLTs and participate in decision-making. This will allow open communication between all stakeholders, such as the school and the parental body.

Parental Involvement Practice to Excel Students' Achievement Level

Below is a detailed discussion of the major factors of this study in response to the research questions that were asked during the interview session. Both interview participants clearly stated that they helped their children with their homework and other school activities. One of the parents mentioned how both parents were involved in helping their children with home learning tasks and preparing them for assessments. This indicates that it is a common practice among parents to help their children with learning. One of the reasons could possibly be that the parents have attained a certain level of education that has improved their parenting, and therefore, they understand the importance of helping their children excel at school.

Participants' Responses and Discussion

Parent AN: "I believe if I support my child's educational activities in the home environment by helping him with the activities assigned to him as his homework and following up on his assessments, then I can raise his academic attainment."

Parent JA: "Like, in more ways than one, like, first of all, is following them up and seeing what they are doing and how they are doing and if they are struggling with any area or any specific subject we can support at home. It has been divided between my husband and me. So I have taken the languages and science parts, and my husband's handling the math part because he's an engineer, so he can handle that part."

The other element of parental involvement is attending Parent-Teacher Conferences and maintaining a high level of communication with their child's teacher. The noticeable part was that my participants generally attended each PTC to learn more about their child's education.

Parent AN: "My son has special educational needs. He has ADHD. Moreover, I have met the SEN teacher, and the communication I had in the PTC was very positive. They showed me what work they do with my son. And in a way, as a worrying mother, it felt good that there is a helping hand in school to support her."

Parent JA: "We have parent-teacher evenings. So that's the major one where we get information from the teacher about how our kids are doing, where they are struggling or what they are doing well and also emails if we have anything we want to ask the teachers, we send emails, they also send out newsletters where they tell us about anything that's happening, right."

This conversation with both participants signifies how important parental involvement is in their child's school activities to help him or her excel in learning. It is also noted that both participants have a certain level of educational achievement of their own, which made it easy for them to understand that their involvement could bear fruitful results for their child in his/her learning process.

Conclusion

Based on the research questions this study aimed to address, the study effectively explores how parental presence in school contributes to children's academics. Besides, parental involvement practices work as a catalyst or motivating factor for students if parents work with their children and provide strong support from home. According to Guay et al. (2005), this will provide emotional support to the child. The findings of this needs analysis signify the need for further research in the existing context to explore more facets of parental involvement that constitute a child's academic career in school, as the related literature presented above advocates that parental involvement in a child's regular school events is a crucial element in children's academic success.

According to Duchesne and Ratelle (2010), parents who demonstrate extensive support have children who engage in open communication, ask for help if needed, and establish emotional closeness with their family. There are some limitations present in this study that should be addressed in further studies. This study does not justify assuming that parental involvement automatically leads to outstanding academic achievement. Several other factors affect academic achievement, such as peer influence, self-esteem, the culture of the school, and previous experiences.

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