

PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION IN BRITISH AND PAKISTANI SCHOOLS: PARENT-TEACHER-CHILD TRIANGLE

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ABSTRACT: *Home School Relations and parental participation in children's education are issues that are becoming increasingly more important day by day, both at home as well as at schools. This attracted my attention and I decided to study the parents' participation in primary schools of London and Pakistan. My study started with a single question; how important are parental involvement, attitudes and responsibilities in their children's education? As this study was conducted in England and Pakistan, I felt that the parents from ethnic minorities, who have not experienced such interactions and relationships in their countries of origin, find it challenging to comprehend the nature and importance of such positive relationship.*

There is a very limited concept of Home School Relations or parental participation in Pakistani schools, except for parents helping their children in completing massive amounts of homework – a basic requirement of every school in Pakistan, no matter how "Modern" its approach is. The Pakistani parents think that any other participation than helping with homework is interfering with school matters. They believe that the school and home have very set, hard-line roles, and according to them, a joint and ongoing collaboration between these two seemingly opposite entities is neither viable nor possible.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well known fact that the responsibility for children's educational development rests with their parents. Advocacy for involving parents in their children's education has a long history in the educational and professional fields. Educators and researchers have always emphasized parental participation and control in children's education, especially in the early years.

Historically, education was considered to be solely the responsibility of teachers, and parents and community involvement was not encouraged, as was stated by Edwards and Redfern [1],

Schools were viewed as a means of compensating for homes that were considered materially and culturally 'deprived', and many teachers felt themselves as compensating for the deficiencies in parents' responsibilities, interests, or involvement

Waller [2] says that It is therefore not surprising to learn that in one of the first published studies about home and school relations or partnership, in the United States of America, parents and teachers considered to be living in "conditions of mutual mistrust and enmity"

In the United Kingdom, the modern approach to parental involvement started with the 'Plowden Report [3]. The report gave the first official recognition of the role and responsibilities of parents and provided an initial recommendation to completing the teacher, child and parent triangle.

The constant emphasis for parental participation stems from an increasing awareness of their important role and the influence they have on the development of children. As we all know, parents are responsible for upbringing, their children and they are the providers of basic requirements such as food, shelter, health and protection to the totally dependent infant. Within the first four years of a child's life, parents, and in particular, mothers are the main teachers and serve as the first adults who have an effect on the environment within which the child can develop. Parents' views, attitudes, and beliefs in life affect their children. Rutter [4] said that,

The quality of that interaction between parents and their children cannot be ignored because there is abundant evidence that early experience may have negative long-term effects in certain circumstances

Early studies, like Floud *et al*, [4] and Fraser [5] showed the importance and effect of children's home environment on their educational achievements. However, Halsey [6] says that the majority of research focused on the lack of development of the intellectual resources of the working classes. It turned out that the material circumstances of the working classes were not solely responsible for the academic underachievement of their children, and so subsequent studies focused on the impact of parental attitudes instead.

Another research study, carried out by Jackson and Marsden in [7], entitled 'Education and Working Class', Douglas [8] concluded that:

Parents who are interested in their children's education come predominantly from the middle classes and those who are less interested come from the manual working class.

Currently there seems to be a growing awareness of the enormous range and diversity in homeschool work, and educationists and researchers still continue to work on this essential issue, for example, Bastiai [9], David [10], David [11], Tizard and Hughes [12], Wolfendale and Topping [13]. It is stated:

Excellence can be achieved only on the basis of partnership. We all need to be involved: schools, teachers and parents are at the heart of it. We also need the help of all of you, families and the wider community, HMSO, 1997 cited in David, [11].

Stated by Edwards and Redfern, 1998 [14]

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Douglas, as refereed in [8] conducted a research and analyzed the impact of parental interest on a child’s academic attainment. It highlighted the fact that significant advances in attainment correlated with high levels of parental interests. Douglas, as refereed in [8] concluded that:

Parents who are interested in their children’s education come predominantly from the middle classes and those who are least interested come from the manual working class.

But despite its claims, the main aim of its recommended minimum programme was the improvement of communication between the home and the school. It largely ignored the need to accommodate parental values and involve parents in the decision-making process.

Purpose of the Study:

This study inquired into parents’ interests and efforts that they put into the formal and informal education of their children in early childhood education. I was to find out whether parents help their children by participating in the home and school, attending meetings and PTAs in schools and doing extra-curricular activities outside school and at home.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

My sample of parents came out to be as follows:

- 1- Studied British-Pakistani parents to find out their behavior, attitudes, interests, and responsibilities towards their school-going children and their thoughts about the education and the educational system in Britain.
- 2- Compared with my first group of sample with the local British, English-speaking parents, whose children studied in the same schools as British-Pakistani’s children were studying in to see whether the differences were because of the culture, language or religion.
- 3- After this comparison I added another group, The Pakistani parents in Pakistan. This was added to see whether the Pakistani people in Pakistan behave in the same way as the British-Pakistanis in England, and do they have the same thinking about the education of their children, and about their social, educational and religious life.

- 4- I added the surveys of the schools that were to be studied to obtain information about what the school staff had to say about the minority parents.
- 5- I talked to the Head-teachers to find out if they had made some arrangements for such parents and if they had special interpreters or do they arrange special cultural programs or lessons for ethnic minority people.
- 6- I questioned school teachers to find out the problems they face with the non-speakers of English language, with the ethnic minority children and their parents, and their participation in the school as well as at home with their own children as far as education is concerned.

These three groups of parents, two in England and one in Pakistan, six schools in England and six schools in Pakistan, thirty school teachers in England and thirty in Pakistan and six head-teachers in England and six in Pakistan, I thought, would give a clearer picture.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As this study was focused on parental involvement in primary schools, it was found that Pakistani parents in London were not apathetic about their children’s education. On the whole, parents who did not attend school felt apologetic about this fact. The reasons stated for their lack of attendance included:

1. The school is not the main focus of family life. The skills taught at school were generally viewed at home as a part of the educational process only. The families generally recognized the importance of their role in educating the children.
2. Parents have “let go” attitude towards children. Frequent visits to schools were seen as an intrusion on a child’s school life.
3. Teachers have expectations of parents, which still reflect a primary school attitude. On the one hand, teachers expect children to be responsible for their actions, while on the other, when they encounter a problem, they are referred to parents.
4. Many parents felt uncomfortable at school because the attitude of teachers was patronising.

It was concluded that while teachers in Pakistani schools tend to measure parental involvement in terms of visits to school, the support system offered by the family was of equal, if not greater, importance.

In England the government set up the Taylor Committee to observe the existing arrangement for the management and government of schools in England and Wales. The resulting Taylor Report ‘A New Partnership for Our Schools’, [14] [17], recommended that parents be appointed as governors in primary schools. The main recommendation made after consulting parents were:

1. The parents felt that the schools should hold more regular open days to accommodate parents who miss school evening because of their work or any other reason and also to catch up with other events happening in the schools.
2. Welcome signs should be placed at the door of the school to encourage reluctant parents feel comfortable.
3. The schools should issue clear and regular communications to parents to make them aware of everything happening with their children.

4. Parents should be able to obtain clear explanations of educational terms and procedures.
5. There should be more 'parent-governors', (this is for parents in England only as there is no concept of school governors in Pakistani schools). There should be co-opted ethnic minority representatives as well.
6. Schools should organise tutor group associations, which are aimed at allowing parents an opportunity to get to know teachers informally.
7. Schools should also establish homeschool councils to discuss problems and hopefully to produce ideas and solutions.

The idea/aim of PTAs (Parent-Teacher Association) is to make schools more accountable to parents. To facilitate this, parents need to be given rights to see all curriculum documents, syllabi, receive annual governors' reports, and attend meetings to discuss these reports and any other matters relating to their children or school. Although there is the need for governors' training, it did not address the needs of parents who felt under-confident about their participation and also for ethnic minority parents for whom this system is new. The government has recently started many training programmes for new governors, especially for parents, which I also attended as I was a parent-governor in my son's school.

The educational authorities negate the role of parents as genuine partners in education. Parents might be free to choose a school, but they cannot choose what is taught there. The findings of these studies helped to shed light on some of the complex issues involved in homeschool relations and suggested ways in which current practice should be developed. The changes initiated before may result in parental involvement being perceived in a narrow way with the emphasis being placed on the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents rather than on a genuine partnership which directly benefits the pupils.

It is important that real opportunities exist for dialogue between all those involved in the education of children. Bastiani, as refereed in [10], echoed the sentiments of the previously discussed study. Central to his work is the view that:

There can only be a fundamental improvement in home-school relations when schools are able to identify parental needs, wishes and experiences, and are willing to respond to them in the spirit of a practical partnership.

Bastiani, as refereed in [10], through his publications, constantly refers to the need to strike a balance between the competing attitudes and approaches of the home and the school, and their different needs.

Before going further, it is necessary to first consider why good homeschool relations are so important for any child's education. During my research, in interviews and surveys I found out several reasons why parents should be involved in their children's education. These are outlined below:

1. Parents have a responsibility for the education of their children, and are therefore the legal client of a school.
2. Most of children's education occurs outside school, since this is where they spend the majority of their time. Parents are therefore co-educators of their children from the time of their birth. For these two elements of a

child's education to complement each other, good home-school relations are vital.

3. Not only do parents largely create the nature of a child's out-of-school education, they also seem to influence the extent to which their child benefits from in-school education. Evidence suggests that aspects of home background are the causes of unfulfilled potential and unequal chances in education. Therefore, to bring about equality of educational opportunities there must be equality of parental input.
4. Much of a child's education is provided in, or influenced by the family. Parents are legally responsible for the education of their children. However, parents vary in their conscientiousness and the effectiveness with which they meet their obligations. The school, having delegated responsibility to parents, must still monitor the parents' performance. Teachers represent the state by providing education expertise, which most parents do not possess and by providing an adult alternative to the parents to whom the child can turn in times of need. Whenever teachers "fill the gap" left by parents they have an obligation to contact them about such issues. This implies the need to collaborate with parents.
5. The final reason for involving parents in their children's education is democratic, rather than educational. Parents are co-educators and clients of the school as well as they pay tax and fee to the schools, and should therefore be involved in the decision making process that will ultimately affect their child.

Research evidence suggests that parental involvement in a child's education enhances the educational opportunities available and ultimately leads to greater levels of educational achievements, there are still strong grounds for involving parents as educational partners, as MacBeth [[17] asserted: In my view we neglect it at our peril, for our impact as teachers and our status as professionals may substantially depend upon the extent to which we take seriously the phrase, 'partnership with parents'[17].

The importance and effectiveness of good home-school relations is mentioned and discussed also in the HMSO report as refereed in [13], it says:

Research has shown good home-school relations to be a characteristic of effective (i.e. high-achieving) schools. As a result, home-school activities, rather than being peripheral to the life and work of the school, have moved to centre stage and increasingly involve the key processes of teaching and learning.

The key reasons, concluded after interviewing parents and teachers for involving parents in their children's schooling in the context tend to fall into three categories:

1. Parental choice and involvement is seen as a lever for raising standards in schools, and encouraging parents to act as critical consumers.
2. Mobilising parents is one way of trying to change the 'education establishment'.
3. If children, especially those who are disadvantaged, to achieve their full potential, their parents need to understand and be involved with their learning and feel confident in their relationship with the school.

According to Bastiani, as refereed in [9], stated the effects of a growing number and range of parent interest groups and representative organizations remain largely uncoordinated and inadequately resourced. For, in spite of the rhetoric, parents of children in Britain currently lack a clear agenda, a mandate for collective action and the political clout that is necessary to bring about genuine change.

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