

# EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT DURING PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS IN A MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRY

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The impact of overt parental involvement in schooling has not received the attention that it deserves, but has come to the limelight due to recent emergency distance learning. Parental involvement has always been hailed as a crucial part in early childhood learning success. However, the importance parents give to attainment levels of children can cause them to cross boundaries of acceptable support and involvement. Giving importance to attainment has always been high in the middle eastern part of the world for various reasons, for instance, as aiding in higher career opportunities. While on surface, this may seem acceptable, this competitiveness can sometimes be taken personally, to the extent that parents are willing to go over the boundaries of what is morally acceptable involvement and support, committing academic misconduct and distorting teachers' assessment of student's contribution and learning (Khan and Mulani, 2020).

To further investigate the importance of parental involvement, Al Sumaity (2012) explained that parental involvement was pivotal in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), given the culturally diverse nature of the country's population, made up of nationals and the majority population of expatriates from many countries. However, when a parent is involved,

this has a ripple effect on the student's attitude, engagement, student-teacher relationship, and finally academic achievement (Sakiz & Aftab, 2019; Smith et al., 2019; Deer et al., 2020). The issue is the balance between helping a child and doing the work for the child which is a serious breach of academic conduct. This delicate threshold is often crossed by parents wanting desperately for their child to 'be the best', 'do the best' and 'achieve the best', often at the cost of integrity of assessments. With the intention to investigate and eventually instil academic integrity values in younger children, our study focuses on the primary schooling years.

Teachers have always been in a difficult position of balancing the parent-teacher relationship and balancing the parents' involvement in their students' learning. On one hand, they may be faced with over-involved parents, on the other hand, ones that are negligent (Calarco, 2020; Harris & Goodall, 2008).

The framework on teaching and learning developed by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority in the UAE informs schools on criterion on assessments and attainment levels; however, it does not explicitly outline guidelines on assessment design, parental involvement, or academic integrity (KHDA, 2015).

Amid ambiguity in societal norms and gaps seen in formal guidelines by authorities, it is imperative to explore whether primary teachers are aware of the issue, place the importance on honest work, and are capable of managing parental involvement in student assessments. Following on from prior studies in the UAE (Khan and Mulani, 2020; Khan and Mulani, 2021), we set out to explore and understand teachers' perception and expectation of students and parents in their K-12 schoolwork and assessments, and to identify gaps in pre-service teacher training that should prepare teachers on assessment design and management of parental involvement.

The study collected responses using an anonymous survey that was sent to teachers and middle leaders after receiving necessary ethical approvals. The measurement items were put into a survey questionnaire which requested the target respondents to answer using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly disagree). A total of 31 teachers responded. Nine responses were removed due to incompleteness, leaving 22 valid responses for data analysis, which is an acceptable 70% response rate (Davidoff, 2002). The respondents who completed the survey were teachers from K-12 schools that offered British and Indian curriculum schools (two of the most prominent syllabi offered in schools across UAE) and aimed to draw a comparative analysis of teachers' opinions on parental involvement. We had 81% respondents in the role of teachers and 19% in the role of subject leaders in their respective schools. We also collected other demographic data such as areas of teaching such as STEM (24%), Social Sciences (24%) and Arts/PE (52%). The overall experience of the teachers in their current role ranged from (1) less than three years (41%), to (2) between three to five years (32%) and (3) above five years (27%). 86% of the respondents worked in a capacity where they designed assessments, 67% in grading assessments, and 38% in checking quality of assessments and grading.

Descriptive statistics was used to help us understand parental involvement across four

categories: (1) expectation of parents and students when working on assessment, (2) level of parental involvement in assessment, (3) expectation of teachers when setting up assessments, and (4) preservice teacher training to prepare teachers on assessment design to manage parental involvement. Results indicate that teachers believe their students and parents are well informed about the importance of their work assessment (mean value 1.88), while teachers believe their discussions with parents do help parents understand their expectation of their involvement (mean value 1.72). Results also show that while teachers believe parental involvement in child's education may be helpful (mean 1.4), that overt parental involvement hinders assessing students in primary school; in fact high mean values (3 to 4.4.) of parental involvement factors indicate that teachers believe parents helping students in completing their assessments or home learning work is not acceptable and not acceptable (mean 4.4). Teachers also believe their prior training programs help teachers in setting up students' assessment (1.92), and would also help to manage parents' expectation of assessment (1.95). Results also indicate teachers believe assessment rubric plays a major role in how and where students complete their projects (mean 1.86).

Finally, using a t-test and observing the p-value, we found no statistically significant difference between British curriculum and Indian curriculum in terms of teachers' perception of level of parental involvement in primary school assessment. However, when we observed the mean values, that parental involvement in assessment is slightly more in Indian curricula than British curricula.

We believe the results of this study mark a milestone as it is one of the first and rare efforts to identify parental involvement in primary school students' assessment completion as not just helpful, but sometimes detrimental. The study highlights how teachers view parental involvement as hindering when the involvement is unacceptable (eg. parental complete entire model, parents complete entire home learning

work). Additionally, the study highlights the importance of assessment rubrics in managing parental involvement and the importance of preservice training for teachers in managing parental involvement that was not covered in respondents' prior training.

We believe this study paves way for further investigation to understand parents and students perceptions of parental involvement, and look further into preservice teacher training to see how teachers may be better prepared when they are in-service.

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