

Parent Teacher Interaction in Elementary Schools: Current Status and Issues

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Abstract

Parent teacher interaction is necessary to achieve targets of effective education at school level. In general, parents do not try to develop interaction with teachers of their siblings. This paper aims to discuss current status and issues regarding problems of teachers to develop interaction with parents. This was a survey study based on data from 640 teachers. This reveals that teachers have knowledge about the importance and ways to develop interaction with parents of their students. They use multiple ways in this regard but face problems in developing an effective relation with parents due to poor skill and non cooperative attitude of parents. This suggests a change in content and training pattern of teacher education courses. This on the other hand, highlights need of proper planning and implementation by education department in explaining role of teachers and school management to attain expertise to learn ways to develop interaction with parents.

Key words: Elementary education, parental involvement, parent teacher interaction, parents' responsibilities

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Introduction

Education process needs intensive participation of parents as well as teachers in whole educational process. For effective education of school level children, parent teacher interaction is necessary. It is a channel to reduce barriers for effective education of children. Parent teacher interaction means having a positive communication between parents and teachers. It is a way to develop a relationship among teacher and family of his students.

It is believed that parent teacher contact is necessary to achieve educational goals at school. It is a channel to develop family participation in educational process and has various benefits for students, teachers and parents. (Abdulla, Seeded & Alzaidiyeen, 2011). It reduces students' dropout rates and behavioral issues, develops school-community association and helps parents to understand the school work (Rockwell, Andre & Hawley (1996). By being contributed in children's education parents feel a sense of satisfaction. They can support in establishing goals and instructions towards decisions regarding their children (Murphy, 2002).

When teachers and parents work together, students learn easily (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Epstein, 2008). Parents who are not capable to assume this job are viewed as working from a cultural deficit. (Davies, Henderson, Johnson & Mapp, 2007). Parent teacher interaction helps to guide parents to have a strong link with teachers and school. It demands parents to response teacher in connection to their requests. Teachers can adopt multiple ways to communicate requests to parents. Writing messages on students' diaries, sending notices by electronic mail or by mobile messages are some common ways to communicate between parents and teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Role of parent teacher interaction is vital for effective education of school level children. Parent teacher interaction demands teachers to develop a mechanism to have a link with parents of their students. It needs training, vision and motivation of teachers to adopt numerous ways to develop strong connection with parents. Teachers' perceptions regarding need and techniques to develop interaction with parents of students play vital role in achieving targets of teachers. In general, parent teacher interaction has observed a weak area in performance of school teachers at elementary level. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate current status of parent teacher interaction and evaluate teachers' efforts and problems in developing interaction with parents of their students. Title of the study was "Parent Teacher Interaction in Elementary Schools: Current Status and Issues".

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate relationship among perceptions and actions of teachers regarding ways to develop interaction with parents of their students.
2. To find out objectives of teachers to develop interaction with parents of their students.
3. To find out ways that teachers adopt to interact parents.
4. To explore problems of parents to develop a positive interaction with parents.

Research questions

1. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions and actions about ways to develop interaction with parents of their students?
2. What are objectives of parents to develop interaction with parents?
3. What ways teachers adopt to develop interaction with parents of their students?
4. What problems teachers face to develop a positive interaction with parents?
5. Is there any difference between perceptions of public versus private school teachers about their aims to develop interaction with parents?

Review of related literature

In general, school and teacher is considered responsible for achievement of children at school. But in reality, learning process begins well before children enter school. Parents play a critical role in providing learning opportunities at home and in linking what children learn at school. Children spend more time in supervision of parents and family. By facilitating multiple learning experiences and activities outside the school, parents become an essential factor in children's whole learning and education. Parental commitment and involvement is necessary for better learning of children at school. Therefore, parental involvement and interaction with teachers and school is necessary for effective education and ideal upbringing of school level children.

Parent teacher interaction and its need

Parent teacher interaction means communication between parents and teachers. Parent teacher interaction is a way to engage parents in developing interaction between family, school and community. It is a channel to raise parental awareness regarding benefits of parental engagement in educational process of children. In views of Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012, p.7) parental

engagement consists of collaborations between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness of the benefits of involving them in their children's education, and providing them with the skills to do so. Parents and teacher interaction helps parents in defining the boundaries and functions of school, community and family in educational process of children. It is away to create conditions in which children learn more effectively and they take education beyond the school boundaries.

The home learning environment is influential in a child's social development and is an essential contributing factor to educational outcomes at all stages of the learning (Bull, Brooking & Campbell, 2008). Research shows impact of parent teacher interaction on academic achievement of children (Avvisati, Besbas, & Guyon 2010). Parent teacher interaction needs to keep parents informed about curricula, courses, school rules, and assessments. It enables parents and teachers to work together to support the child in his or her education (Lee and Bowen 2006). It helps parents in getting consultation regarding: providing better access to reading material, designating an area to do homework and assisting with the organization of homework and studies at home (Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012).

Gains in learning are most important when parents and school staff work together to facilitate encouraging learning environment in home and school. The combined effect of parental support in the home, a quality home learning environment, a positive relationship between parents and teachers, and a quality learning environment at school has been found to make a positive contribution to children's academic achievement throughout the schooling years (Gutman & Midgley 2000; Henderson & Mapp 2002).

Strategies for developing parent teacher interaction

Parental involvement within the school can act as a predecessor to effective practices at home. Parents are more able to assist their children if they are kept informed about how their children are doing in school and the best ways to encourage and motivate them to learn (Desforjes & Abouchaar, 2003). Castro, Casas, Martin, Lizasoain, Asencio and Gaviria (2015) explored associations between parental involvement and academic achievement in case of having parents with high academic expectations for their children and maintaining communication with children about school activities.

Unfortunately, many teachers are not especially skilled in the art to develop positive interaction with parents (Lawrence- Lightfoot, 2004). For effective education, teacher preparation and professional development programs should actively promote the development of communication skills for teachers to enable them to develop a healthy interaction with parents (Casper, 2003). Davern (2004) has reported school-to-home notebooks as commonly used written communication technique. He observed that many teachers use daily communication books to share information with parents, particularly for children who have special learning needs. Minke and Anderson (2003) suggested parent-teacher conference to develop a successful parent- teacher interaction. Kimaro and Machumu (2015) explored parents-teacher conferences and parent-teacher face-to-face contact are most desirable systems of communication for parent- teacher interaction.

Ramirez (2001) suggested use of technology like as telephone, electronic mail, school website to communicate quickly to a broad parent community. Salend, Duhaney, Anderson and Gottschalk (2004) has suggested internet as an “interactive tool for supporting the involvement of families in the homework process.

Procedure of the study

Topic of the study was descriptive by nature and survey method of descriptive research was adopted to complete this study. The study was delimited to elementary level in Punjab province of Pakistan. Population of the study was elementary level school teachers. A sample of 700 elementary level teachers was chosen adopting multistage sampling procedure. The procedure of sample selection included selection of 7 districts by random sampling, 20 schools from each district ($20 \times 7 = 140$) by convenience sampling and five teachers from present elementary school teachers in selected schools ($140 \times 5 = 700$) by random sampling. Tool of study was a self developed questionnaire having 30 items on a scale including three demographic information related items at the start. It was pilot tested on a sample of 50 teachers after evaluating its content validity by expert opinion method. Its' reliability was determined by Cronbach's Alpha Value that was 0.914. Data was collected by personal visits. Only 640 teachers returned the questionnaire. Data was analyzed applying mean score, correlation and t- test statistics on data using SPSS.

Results of the study

Results of the study can be seen here.

Relationship between perceptions and practices regarding parent involvement

Table1 indicates a relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices regarding their efforts to develop teacher parent interaction. According to data, paired sample correlation value ($r=0.526$, $p= 0.000$) indicates a strong relationship between mean scores of perceptions and practices of teachers (perceptions= 22.78, practices=22.623, $p= 0.000$). Results of t test ($t=1.14$, $P=0.25$) also exhibits insignificant mean difference between groups. This explores that teachers act according to their perceptions. There is no contradiction between teachers' thoughts and actions regarding teachers' efforts to develop interactions with parents of their students.

Table 1

Relationship between Perceptions and Practices to Develop Interaction with Parents (n=640)

| Groups | Group statistics | | | Paired sample correlation | | Paired sample t- test | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-----------|---|-------|-------|---------|------|--|
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error Mean | Correlation | Sig. | Paired Differences | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. | |
| | | | | | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Perceptions | 22.79 | 3.73 | 0.15 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Practices | 22.62 | 03.65 | 0.14 | 0.53 | 0.000 | 0.16 | 3.59 | 0.14 | -0.12 | 0.44 | 1.14639 | 0.25 | |

Objectives of teachers to develop interaction with parents

Table 2 shows results regarding teachers' objectives of developing interaction with parents of their students. According to data provided by teachers on three point scale (1=disagreed, 2= slightly agreed, 3= strongly agreed) exhibits that value of mean scores of all aspects indicated in table is above than 2.00. This explores that teacher try to interact parents to discuss problems of students with parents and guide them about ways to improve their children in studies. They want to explain importance of completion of home work and guide parents to monitor their children regarding assigned educational tasks at home. They monitor students' attendance at school and have a perception that their interaction with parents helps them to reduce dropout ratio and improve attendance ratio of students. Therefore, interaction of teachers with parents develop confidence in students, open better opportunities for education and ultimately help in effectiveness of education provided by teachers at school.

Analysis of comparison of scores of groups by independent sample t- test statistics with reference to type of schools indicates that; although mean score of private school teachers' group is lower than the scores of government teachers but there is insignificant mean difference between groups regarding aims of education in all aspects. These explores that teachers may be working in government schools or in private schools have same perceptions regarding need to develop interaction with parents.

Table 2
School Teachers' aims to Develop Interaction with Parents (n = 640)

| Sr. no. | Content | Group Statistics | | | Independent sample t- test (df=638) | | | | | | | |
|---------|--|------------------|-------|-------|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|------|
| | | School type | Mean | SD | Std. Error Mean | t- score | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| 1 | Increase teacher effectiveness in educational process. | Public | 2.677 | 2.665 | .666 | .036 | .473 | .636 | .025 | .053 | -.079 | .129 |
| | | Private | 2.652 | | .678 | .039 | | | | | | |
| 2 | Improve educational attainment of students. | Public | 2.653 | 2.656 | .631 | .034 | -.101 | .920 | -.005 | .050 | -.104 | .093 |
| | | Private | 2.658 | | .641 | .036 | | | | | | |
| 3 | Enhance higher rates of homework completion. | Public | 2.594 | 2.576 | .704 | .038 | .674 | .501 | .038 | .056 | -.073 | .150 |
| | | Private | 2.556 | | .734 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 4 | Enhance student motivation for study. | Public | 2.591 | 2.578 | .679 | .036 | .522 | .602 | .029 | .055 | -.079 | .137 |
| | | Private | 2.562 | | .715 | .041 | | | | | | |
| 5 | Reduce dropout rate | Public | 2.615 | 2.581 | .662 | .030 | 1.339 | .181 | .072 | .054 | -.033 | .178 |
| | | Private | 2.543 | | .703 | .040 | | | | | | |
| 6 | Develop positive interaction with parents | Public | 2.568 | 2.561 | .703 | .038 | .271 | .786 | .015 | .055 | -.093 | .124 |
| | | Private | 2.553 | | .698 | .040 | | | | | | |
| 7 | Enhance socialization | Public | 2.503 | 2.494 | .735 | .040 | .335 | .738 | .020 | .058 | -.094 | .134 |
| | | Private | 2.483 | | .736 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 8 | Improve educational opportunities for children. | Public | 2.576 | 2.550 | .663 | .036 | 1.041 | .298 | .057 | .05483 | -.050 | .164 |
| | | Private | 2.519 | | .723 | .041 | | | | | | |
| 9 | Communicate students' problems to parents. | Public | 2.544 | 2.516 | .697 | .037 | 1.071 | .284 | .060 | .05688 | -.050 | .172 |
| | | Private | 2.483 | | .741 | .042 | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|------|-------|--------|-------|------|
| 10 | Develop confidence in children to do things in better way. | Public | 2.544 | 2.502 | .688 | .037 | 1.577 | .115 | .090 | .05752 | -.022 | .203 |
| | | Private | 2.453 | | .766 | .044 | | | | | | |
| 11 | Develop the personality of children. | Public | 2.559 | 2.536 | .700 | .038 | .853 | .394 | .049 | .05770 | -.064 | .162 |
| | | Private | 2.509 | | .759 | .043 | .849 | | | | | |
| 12 | Guide parents to support their child at home | Public | 2.585 | 2.552 | .684 | .037 | 1.299 | .194 | .072 | .05585 | -.037 | .182 |
| | | Private | 2.513 | | .727 | .041 | 1.295 | | | | | |
| 13 | Improve students' attendance ratio at school. | Public | 2.585 | 2.553 | .701 | .038 | 1.195 | .232 | .069 | .05793 | -.044 | .182 |
| | | Private | 2.516 | | .763 | .043 | 1.190 | | | | | |
| 14 | Aware parents about the weaknesses of child in studies. | Public | 2.559 | 2.574 | .712 | .038 | -.546 | .586 | -.030 | .05541 | -.139 | .078 |
| | | Private | 2.589 | | .684 | .039 | -.547 | | | | | |

Ways adopted by teachers to interaction with parents

Table 3 exhibits techniques of parents to develop interaction with parents. According to data mean score of all aspects indicated in table is above than 2.00. This explores that teachers use multiple ways to interact parents. They use diary and electronic mail to communicate messages, students' progress and problems to parents. The arrange parent teachers meetings in general and special meetings with parents in specific situations in school and discuss students progress and ways to improve students' progress and issues. They sent notices to parents to communicate weak progress and in disciplined actions of children in school. Above than all, teachers give importance to parents during arrangements of co curricular activities. They invite them to show students' progress in activities other than studies. These all help teachers to develop a relationship with parents and share the ways to improve children from educational as well as all around development perspectives. T-test results shows insignificant mean difference between groups regarding all aspects showed in table. This explores that teachers in private as well as in public schools adopt similar ways to interact parents and involve them in educational process of children.

Table 3
School Teachers' Techniques to Develop Interaction with Parents (n = 640)

| Sr. no | Content | Group Statistics | | | | Independent sample t-test (df=638) | | | | | | |
|--------|--|------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|------|
| | | School type | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | t-score | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| 1 | Use diary to communicate messages | Public | 2.571 | 2.525 | .690 | .037 | 1.717 | .086 | .097 | .056 | -.014 | .209 |
| | | Private | 2.473 | | .745 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 2 | Sent e-mail to report progress/problems of children to parents. | Public | 2.443 | 2.467 | .769 | .041 | -.833 | .405 | -.049 | .059 | -.166 | .067 |
| | | Private | 2.493 | | .732 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 3 | Parent-teacher meetings | Public | 2.618 | 2.598 | .666 | .036 | .783 | .434 | .042 | .053 | -.063 | .148 |
| | | Private | 2.576 | | .695 | .040 | | | | | | |
| 4 | Call parents in special meetings | Public | 2.452 | 2.482 | .754 | .041 | -1.082 | .280 | -.063 | .059 | -.179 | .052 |
| | | Private | 2.516 | | .736 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 5 | Discuss students' strengths and weaknesses during parent-teacher meetings | Public | 2.594 | 2.554 | .687 | .037 | 1.528 | .127 | .084 | .055 | -.024 | .193 |
| | | Private | 2.509 | | .714 | .041 | | | | | | |
| 6 | Sent notices to parents regarding problems/issues related to children's education. | Public | 2.520 | 2.487 | .731 | .039 | 1.181 | .238 | .070 | .059 | -.046 | .187 |
| | | Private | 2.450 | | .774 | .044 | | | | | | |
| 7 | Sent performance report to parents on monthly basis. | Public | 2.535 | 2.517 | .722 | .039 | .680 | .497 | .038 | .057 | -.073 | .150 |
| | | Private | 2.496 | | .718 | .041 | | | | | | |
| 8 | Invite parents in co curricular activities | Public | 2.485 | 2.457 | .715 | .038 | .973 | .331 | .058 | .059 | -.059 | .175 |
| | | Private | 2.427 | | .794 | .045 | | | | | | |

Problems of teachers in developing interaction with parents

Table 4 exhibits problems of teachers in developing interaction with parents. Mean score of all of all aspects indicated in table is above than 2.00. This explores that parents adopt non cooperative attitude with teachers in developing a positive relationship with teachers. Teachers write messages for parents in students' diaries or sent notices via electronic mail but parents neither check and read diaries nor bother to response teachers. Uneducated parents especially remain unaware about the information sent to parents related to school plans due to their inability to read school notices sent via e mails and other ways. Working mothers do not give attention to attend scheduled meetings due to their busy routines. Parents also have lack of confidence to interact teachers of their children. They stay teachers responsible for the whole performance of children in school. A significant problem faced by teachers is that parents criticize them in front of children and this irritates them.

T-test results shows insignificant mean difference between groups regarding all aspects showed in table except the last one issues mentioned in series 8. This explores that teachers in private as well as in public schools face almost similar problems to interact parents. A prominent difference between public and private schools exhibited is that parents of students in private schools less criticize teachers in presence of children.

Table 4*School Teachers' Problems in Developing Interaction with Parents (n = 640)*

| Sr. no. | Content | School type | Group Statistics | | | | Independent sample t- test (df=638) | | | | | |
|---------|--|-------------|------------------|----------|------------|------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|------|
| | | | Mean | Std. Dev | Std. Error | t | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| 1 | Non-cooperative attitude of parents | Public | 2.559 | 2.536 | .696 | .038 | .874 | .382 | .049 | .056 | -.061 | .159 |
| | | Private | 2.509 | | .728 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 2 | Parents do not check their child diary | Public | 2.536 | 2.522 | .743 | .040 | .490 | .624 | .029 | .059 | -.087 | .144 |
| | | Private | 2.507 | | .745 | .043 | | | | | | |
| 3 | Uneducated parents do not read e mails/ messages and remain unaware of information or programs related to school | Public | 2.521 | 2.506 | .731 | .039 | .529 | .597 | .031 | .058 | -.083 | .144 |
| | | Private | 2.490 | | .732 | .042 | | | | | | |
| 4 | Working mothers do not spend proper time | Public | 2.500 | 2.473 | .752 | .041 | .940 | .348 | .056 | .059 | -.061 | .174 |
| | | Private | 2.444 | | .762 | .044 | | | | | | |
| 5 | Parents have lack of confidence to interact with teachers | Public | 2.503 | 2.475 | .7196 | .039 | 1.020 | .308 | .059 | .058 | -.055 | .173 |
| | | Private | 2.444 | | .748 | .043 | | | | | | |
| 6 | Often parents impose total responsibility of their child education to school | Public | 2.506 | 2.489 | .752 | .041 | .591 | .555 | .036 | .060 | -.083 | .154 |
| | | Private | 2.470 | | .776 | .045 | | | | | | |
| 7 | Parents do not complaint directly to the teacher | Public | 2.465 | 2.461 | .767 | .041 | .125 | .901 | .007 | .060 | -.111 | .126 |
| | | Private | 2.457 | | .758 | .043 | | | | | | |
| 8 | Criticizing teacher in presence of children | Public | 2.544 | 2.479 | .689 | .037 | 2.355 | .019 | .137 | .058 | .023 | .251 |
| | | Private | 2.407 | | .784 | .045 | | | | | | |

Discussion and implications

Parent teacher interaction reduces parents' frustrations regarding educational problems of children and provides chances to teachers to guide parents about effective parenting techniques. Present study has explored current status for objectives, ways and problems of teachers regarding parent teacher interaction. Results show that teachers give importance to parent teacher interaction for certain reasons. They also work to develop interaction with parents adopting multiple ways ie; sending notices, writing comments and messages through student diary, e- mailing, arranging parent teacher conferences forums and report assessment results to rents but face problems to attain their goal. Parents think their role in education is not important because education of children is responsibility of school and teachers. They criticize teachers in presence of children and avoid talking teachers directly. Uneducated parents are not confident to talk to teachers impressively nor able to read messages of teachers. Working mothers attend less meetings due to their professional responsibilities. These issues indicate parents' lack of interest and training to participate in educational progress of children. They feel, their responsibility is just to send a child to school. This is an alarming sign for quality education and quality working of teachers. In fact, quality working of teachers not depends on the 100% availability of educational resources in school. It also demands cooperative attitude of parents. There is no suspicion to admit that presence of quality resources at school is necessary for quality education but we cannot ignore the role of parents in training and achievements of a person in whole life.

A significant finding of the study indicates working of private teachers better than the teachers of government sector schools. This calls administration of government schools to take the task serious for them. In general, parents who are more sensitive for education of child, send their child to private school. Parents having less resources and poor concerns about education of child take less pain and select government schools for children. Therefore, teachers of government schools need to focus attention to children at school. They require working for searching opportunities for interacting parents of their students and give them awareness about importance of parents' role and parent teacher interaction in education of children at school.

Comparison of results of this study with the available literature related to the issue clues that teachers working in elementary schools are not skillful in art to develop interaction with parents (Lawrence- Lightfoot, 2004). Although they have knowledge about the art and techniques as suggested by experts in education (Davern, 2004; Minke & Anderson, 2003; Kimaro & Machumu, 2015; Ramirez, 2001; Salend, Duhaney, Anderson & Gottschalk, 2004) but fails to get fruitful results due to their lack of motivation, skill and developed norms in school culture. This requires need of teacher trainers to think about their training styles and teaching contents enabling teachers to get cooperation of parents in teaching learning process. This also suggests administration of schools to design a need based responsibility chart for teachers. Teachers should be communicated to develop a culture in government schools to work with motivation to attain the target to get cooperation of parents. Role of media to explain parents regarding parents' role in education, value and benefits of their link and positive communication with school and especially teachers of their siblings can never be ignored. Therefore, upper management of school cadre in the country can appoint a team to design and publish literature to communicate parents regarding significance of parent teacher interaction in educational output of elementary level students.

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