Exploring Teachers' Practices of Parental Involvement at ECD Level in Gilgit City

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore teachers' practices of parental involvement at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) level in Gilgit city. The study focused on applying Epstein's fourteen parental involvement strategies in the schools of Gilgit city. Data were collected from sixteen teachers using a convenient sample of four schools having four ECE levels. The findings were compared first, within the same school teachers, then across the school teachers against each question. Results indicated that teachers use diverse strategies for parental involvement to help their children read, listen, and write. Strategies are also diversified in terms of class level and schools. The majority of the teacher's design projects, assign home projects, make models, and color, cut, and paste different collections. However, there is a lack of awareness about making sure parents are effectively involved in the ECD level.

Keywords: parental involvement, ece, Epstein's parental involvement strategies

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Introduction

The term Early Childhood Education (ECE) is applied to educate young children from birth to approximately age six. It has emerged as the most prominent field, which gained tremendous amount of worldwide attention in the last two decades (Bruce, 2011). Research proves that ECE builds the foundation for child's well-built cognitive, emotional, physical and social skills (Epstein, 2009; Pardhan & Juma, 2011). The need of providing quality ECE is strongly emphasized, because it is evident that learning experiences in child's early years have profound impact on children's long term, holistic development (Bruce, 2011).

Teachers alone cannot fulfill the needs of children; rather a collective effort of teachers and parents is required to make a difference in a child's life. The active involvement of parents in their children's learning has shown profound influence on academic, social and behavioral outcomes (Tekin, 2011). Therefore, it becomes essential to involve parents in learning events of children so that both stakeholders (teachers and parents), put efforts in children's development. It does not only enhance the child motivation and attitude in learning, but also develops a healthy relationship between teachers and parents.

Research studies about parental involvement from the last decades point out that home environment and family involvement in education have a very significant role for students' achievement in school as well as for better future (Epstein, 1984; Leichter, 1974; Marjoribanks, 1979). This clearly shows that parental support and involvement at school and home enhance children's accomplishment, even after student's capabilities and family socioeconomic position are taken into account. However, all the families are not being involved in school related activities (Lightfoot, 1978).

In order to bond the gap between home and school, both teachers and parents are essential. In the past, parents were totally ignored and the value of parental contribution in children's education and academic achievement was missing. The teachers determined all the things for the children by themselves and children even were harshly punished (Wragg, 1989). However, studies have shown that parent teacher partnership have led to improvement in quality of education which is being imparted to the children. In western context, many programs have successfully launched by the government to engage parents, families and community members within schools.

Parental involvement has been viewed in many ways in different programs and contexts. Epstein (2011) formulated fourteen strategies to

involve parents in learning actions at home with their children. The fourteen strategies were further classified under five major themes of parental involvement: (a) activities emphasizing reading; (b) learning through discussions; (c) informal learning activities at home; (d) contracts between teacher and parent; and (e) developing teaching and evaluation skills in parents.

Parental involvement in children's learning can highly affect the school performance along with higher academic achievement (Dhingra & Manhas, 2009 2009). However, parental involvement has been interpreted differently in the literature. Baker and Soden (1998) reviewed 200 studies on parental involvement and found that misunderstanding exists among exponents and researchers on the subject of what comprises effective parental involvement. They noticed that the contradiction in defining parent involvement across studies makes it difficult to assess collective knowledge across studies (Walters, 2008).

In the late 1980s, Joyce Epstein projected the School – Family – Community -Partnership Model (Partnership Model), which rapidly became dominant in parent involvement study. The model has two main parts. The first shows the partnership of schools, families, and communities as overlapping spheres. The spheres symbolize that schools, families, and communities each have an authority in the education of a kid. The second piece of the Partnership Model determines the interpersonal associations and outlines of influence that are most central in a child's schooling (Epstein et al, 2002).

The notion of early years of Education is not really new in the context of Pakistan. It has gained tremendous attention in the last few decades. However, the efforts to established early children education centers and to train teachers by the government still need rigorous effort and more attention (Juma, 2004; Hunzai, 2007). Seemingly, teachers' practices of parental involvement are not up to the desired need. According to Pardhan (2012) teachers' training programs need to enhance teachers' skills to increase parental involvement in their child's learning and developmental process.

If we see in the context of Gilgit, we can find valuable work done in the field of early childhood development especially by the NGOs and private sector. Teachers' capacity in this area is sufficiently increased through workshops, seminars and short training courses. However, insufficient literature is available regarding education of early school children practices especially in Gilgit-Baltistan. In this scenario, exploring the teachers' practices of parental involvement would be a fruitful attempt to generate indigenous knowledge. Moreover, the findings from this study

would provide sufficient standard ways to improve ECE through filling the gap between home- school partnerships.

Role of parents in their child's education especially at earliest stages has highly been emphasized. Ample of studies are available which highlights the importance of parental involvement in preschool educational programs (Walters, 2008; Fasina, 2011; Mukuna & Indoshi, 2012). In the last decade, early childhood education has gained tremendous attention in context of Gilgit-Baltistan. Many efforts are taken to provide quality education to early school going children and to give awareness to the parents of young children about their physical and mental growth. However, Pardhan (2012) is of the view that parental involvement in child's learning process is not appreciable in the context of Pakistan. In this regard, exploring the teachers' practices of parental involvement in the context of Gilgit city may provide sufficient results about the quality of education being imparted to young children. The study is undertaken to explore how teachers motivate the parents to be involved in their children's activities in light of Epstein's fourteen points of parental involvement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:
1. How much do teachers design activities for students and their parents to emphasize reading?
2. How much do teachers emphasize on learning through discussions between the child and the parent at home?
3. How much do teachers emphasize parents to initiate informal learning activities at home?
4. How do teachers establish formal agreements with the child's parents to supervise child's learning and behavior at home?
5. How much do teachers ask and explain certain strategies for developing teaching and evaluation skills in parents?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to private Early Childhood Schools, which have four levels in Gilgit city. The findings of the study should only be generalized to four sample schools.

Methods

In this study, the qualitative research methods were used. The major intention was to explore the parental involvement in ECD level schools of Gilgit city. Teachers of four schools were the participants of the study.

Since the research informs that decisions regarding sample selection are based on the research questions, theoretical perspectives, and its focus (Sargeant, 2012). While selecting the research site and participants, the researcher should also need to consider certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical immediacy, availability, willingness to participate, and has in-depth knowledge about the related topics. Therefore, I viewed my selection criteria under the purposive sampling strategy (Seidman, 2013).

The researchers conveniently selected four private schools of Gilgit city as a target population. These schools have four levels. Thus, all the teachers of selected schools were the targeted population. Four teachers from each school were purposively selected as a sample, thus the total sample size was 16. The following criteria was applied for selection of the sample 1) Teacher should at least two years of teaching experience and 2) only one teacher from each ECD level of each selected school was selected.

The data was gathered through open ended questionnaires. The researchers developed the questionnaire in light of Epstein's fourteen parental involvement strategies and checked through pilot testing on four teachers. The opinions of two experts were also sought to validate the instruments. The experts helped to finalize the questionnaire by suggesting the suitable vocabulary and refined the questions of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was modified and refined after feedback. The questionnaire contains open ended question in order to get the data.

The hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed among the participants and data was collected in written form. For analysis, the qualitative data were coded and analyzed through thematic analysis procedures. Themes were identified according to the research questions. A comparison was made among ECD level teachers of each participating school. The emerging themes helped researchers to explore the similarities and differences among ECD level teachers of the schools.

Before data collection, a permission letter was written to the school principals. After getting formal permissions from schools, another consent letter was given to each of the research participants. The school principal and the research participants were assured that the data collected would be confidential. Neither the school's name nor the name of the teacher would

be revealed for anonymity purpose. Rather pseudo names such as school 1, teacher 1 and school 1, teacher 2 are used to follow the basic principles of research ethics. Based on their consent, the data collection procedure began.

Findings

The intention was to see how far our teachers in Gilgit use standard practices of parental involvement that has been developed in the western country context. So, those effective parental strategies can be applied and practiced in our ECD schools for better student learning.

Activities emphasize reading

Under this theme, teachers were asked four research questions. Question one asked the research participants to respond whether they ask parents at ECD level to read to their child regularly or not? Question two asked teachers about how often do teachers ask parents to listen to the child read aloud? Question three asked teachers about how often do they ask parents to keep extra learning material at home for a short period of time? And, question four asked teachers how often do teachers ask parents to take their child to the library?

Findings under each research question were analyzed between different levels of the same school and across schools. It is evident from all participating schools that teachers encourage parents to read for their child on regular basis or during parent teacher meetings parents are reminded to read for their children. However, it is revealed that teacher apply diverse strategies of parental involvement at different levels for children's reading. For example, in school 1, the two lower levels are emphasized to read on regular basis. While, the two upper levels are reminded to read only in the parent - teacher meetings. In the remaining three schools, the results are different. For instance, in school 4, the results are reverse. In school 4, teachers ask parents to read to their children on regular basis at higher levels, whereas teachers emphasize to parents to read to their child in parent - teacher meetings at lower ECE Levels. These results revealed that it varies from school to school. Some of the possible factors might be the need of the children, teachers' professional knowledge, and parents' response.

It is evident from all participating schools that teachers encourage parents to listen to their child read aloud most of the time or during parent teacher meetings. However, the teacher of level 3 in school 3 reported that,

"most of the parents are uneducated, so it's useless to tell them listen to their child read aloud". This is a unique statement as compared to other teachers and schools. The question arises here, are parents of the entire class uneducated? Or this was just a generalization from the teacher.

It is evident from the results that all the four schools show that all the teachers in each level asked to keep the extra learning materials but never asked to change, especially in lower classes in each school. However, in two schools, teachers asked to change the learning material sometimes in higher Classes. However, the teacher of ECD 3 in school 3 reported that she always asks the parents to keep extra learning material and change it after intervals.

It is evident from the results that majority of the teachers in all the schools never ask the parents to take their children to the library, but only few of them ask to take children to library once a week or once a month. In school 1 and school 3, the teachers never ask to take to library because they reported that there is no any public library nearby. However, in school 2 and school 4, few teachers ask the parents to take their children once a week or once a month if possible. While, the others teachers in the same schools also never ask like the teachers of school 1 and school 3.

Learning through discussion
Under this theme, the teachers were asked about how often they talk about their child's day; he or she did in the classroom? Do teachers provide any assignment in which students have questions to ask from their parents, like their experience etc.? Do teachers ever ask the parents to watch any TV show along with their children and discuss the show afterwards?

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers do ask the parents to inquire about their child's daily activities in the classroom. They ask the parents if they ask about their child's day, and what he or she did in the classroom. All the teachers of school 3, ECD level 1 and ECD 3 in school 1 and teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 4 in school 4 always ask parents if they ask about their child's day. However, the remaining teachers in each school ask sometimes, usually and in parent-teacher meeting.

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers provide the assignments in which students have questions to ask from their parents like their experience etc. All the teachers in each school provide written assignments always or sometimes on need basis and few teachers provide assignments usually. However, the teachers of ECD 1 and ECD 3 in school

3 reported that they provide the assignments to the children to ask orally to their parents about their experience, not in written form.

It is evident from the results that majority of the teachers always ask to watch the shows along with their children and discuss those shows afterwards and discuss afterwards, few of the teachers ask sometimes and some teachers ask in parent - teacher meeting. However, the teacher of ECD 1 in school 1 and the teachers of ECD 2 and ECD 4 in school 3 never ask to watch a TV show and discuss it with their children afterwards.

Informal learning activities at home

Under this theme, the teachers were asked about what kind of activities do teachers design for parents to involve their children at home that would be educationally helpful? Do teachers send suggestions to a child's home for activities related to a child's school work that can be played with parents? What type of suggestions do teachers provide to the parents to use the home environment to stimulate their child's interest in reading?

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers designed different types of activities for the parents to involve their child at home that would be educationally helpful. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 4 in school 1 designed project works, tell them to arrange study tours, attend religious events, marriages, etc. In school 2, all the teachers give home projects like creative works, making models, and coloring, cutting and pasting and different collections. All the teachers in school 3 and 4 give home projects that involve children in house hold activities, design indoor and outdoor activities and home tasks related to education. However, the teacher of ECD 3 in school 1 does it a different way where she tells them to develop booklets with the help of low cost to no cost materials. Teacher of ECD 3 in school 3 never gives any such assignment until now.

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers send home suggestions for activities related to child's school work that can be played with parents except the teacher of ECD 2 in school 4. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 1 reported that they send suggestions always on diaries. The teachers of ECD 2 in school 1 and ECD 4 in school 4 send suggestions usually on need basis. While, the teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 4 in school 2, teachers of ECD 1 and ECD 3 in school 4 and all the teachers of school 3 reported that they provide suggestions sometimes in diaries and notebooks. However, the teacher of ECD 3 provides the suggestions always.

It is evident from the results that most of the sample teachers provide suggestions to the parents to use the home environment to stimulate their child's interest in reading. Teachers of ECD 2, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 1 reported that they ask parents to display charts, story books, and develop time table. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 3 in school 2 reported that they suggest parents to keep story books, magazines, models, charts and read with them. Teacher of ECD 4 in school 2 and ECD 2 teacher in school 3 suggests to the parents to play with their children, watch TV and use computer and play games. Teachers of ECD 1 and ECD 4 in school 3 reported that they suggest parents to keep books, stories and different pictures. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 3 in school 4 suggest the parents to keep stories, pictorial books, charts etc. While, the teacher of ECD 4 in school 4 and ECD 1 teacher in school 1 ask parents to involve the children in house hold work and give them extra time. However, the teacher of ECD 3 of school 3 said she never suggests but she tells to read the posters on their way.

Contracts between teacher and parent

Under this theme, the teachers were asked about what kind of formal agreements teachers establish for the parents to supervise and assist the child in carrying out the homework. Do teachers establish any formal agreement where the child provides rewards based on child's school performance and behavior?

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers establish formal agreements for the parents to supervise and assist the child in completing the homework tasks. Teachers of ECD 1 and ECD 4 in school 1 reported that they never establish any formal agreement for the parents to supervise and assist the child in completing the homework tasks. Teachers of all levels in school 2 reported that they provide feedback of their child's progress and weaknesses by writing in their diaries and tell them to guide and look after during their homework. However, the teacher of ECD 2 in school 1 and the teacher of ECD 3 in school 3 write comments on the notebook on how to take care and guide the parents in every teacher-parent meeting on how to supervise during the homework. Teachers of ECD 2, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 4 reported that they suggest parents to make timetables and supervise. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 3 in school 3, and teacher of ECD 1 in school 4 guide them by writing suggestions in their child's diaries or notebooks daily.

It is evident from the results that all the teachers establish formal agreements where the child provides rewards based on child's school

performance and behavior except the teacher of ECD 1 in school 1. Teachers of ECD 2, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 1 reported that they establish formal agreements where the child provides rewards and penalties based on child's school performance and behavior. Teachers of ECD 2, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 2 reported that they establish formal agreements and guide to provide rewards and maintain portfolios and checklists. Teacher of ECD 1 in school 2 said, she doesn't send any formal agreement but she appreciates the child and parents both. Teachers of ECD 2, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 3 reported that they establish formal agreements where the child provides rewards and penalties based on child's school performance and behavior. Teacher of ECD 1 in school 3 said she discusses in teacher-parent meeting, like she makes happy faces and stares on their faces. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2 and ECD 3 in school 4 reported that they always establish formal agreements for parents. However, teacher of ECD 4 in school 4 does on need basis sometimes.

Developing teaching and evaluation skills in parents

Under this theme, the teachers were asked how often teachers invite parents to come and observe the classroom for some time. To what extent do teachers explain certain strategies to parents for teaching, for making learning materials, or for planning lessons?

Do teachers provide a questionnaire to parents so they can evaluate their child's progress and provide some feedback?

It is evident from the results that most of the sample teachers are inviting the parents to come and observe the classroom sometimes regularly. Teachers of ECD 1 and ECD 2 in school 1 reported that they invite them sometimes on need basis. However, teacher of ECD 3 in school 1 said she always invites and teacher of ECD 4 said that parents are invited to discuss the progress of their child not to observe. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 3, and ECD 4 in school 2 and teacher of ECD 1 in school 3 invite mostly. Teacher of ECD 4 and the teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 4 invite the parents sometimes. Teacher of ECD 3 often invites. Teacher of ECD 2 in school 2 and teachers of ECD 2 and ECD 3 in school 3 never invite the parents, because they think that children don't take interest in the presence of parents.

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers explain the certain strategies to parents for teaching, for making learning materials, or for planning lessons. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 4 in school 1 reported they guide parents how to prepare children for tests and engage them and also suggest them to make time tables. Teacher of ECD 3 in

school 1 said she elaborates each step twice a week. However, all the teachers of school 2 reported that they suggest for making home portfolios and giving them creative work. All the teachers in school 3 reported they provide time tables that guide and lead students of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 3 tells them to make time tables and give them time. While, the teacher of ECD 4 reported that she makes lessons and sends to their parents.

It is evident from the results that all the sample teachers provide questionnaire to parents, so they can evaluate their child's progress and provide some feedback, but few of them provide orally. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 4 in school 1 reported that they provide questionnaire for feedback on need basis. However, teacher of ECD 3 in school 1 said parents discuss the strengths and weaknesses verbally, not in written form. All the teachers of school 2 reported that they don't provide questionnaire, but tell them verbally or write in the diaries to provide the feedback about their child's progress. Teachers of ECD 1 and ECD 3 said, they never provide but tell the parents orally. Teacher of ECD 2 in school 3 sometimes provide and teacher of ECD 4 in school 3 said she made progressive report, where the parents have to write comments. Teachers of ECD 1, ECD 2, and ECD 3 in school 4 provide on need basis and teacher of ECD 4 tell the parents orally.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results showed that Epstein's fourteen strategies of parental involvement are partially applied in Early Childhood Education schools in Gilgit city. It is also found that there is a gap between parents and teachers, which resists them to work on the better future of their children in schools as well as at home. The parents need to take a lot of care of their children at early stages, because this early nurturance process stops them from aggressive and cruel modes of living (Swick, Ros & Kovach, 2001). The purpose of early childhood education is to boost up children's development in the areas of cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and language domains. Parents who are up to date and concerned in their children's school can definitely impact their child's position and presentation. Parents' active involvement in their children's learning experiences have been shown to improve children's academic outcomes (Senechal, 2006).

The results of study inform us of the ways in which teachers can involve the parents in their children's activities, whether in school or at home. The findings of the study indicated that the teachers in Gilgit city have less aware about their practices of parental involvement in the light of Epstein's fourteen strategies of parental involvement. They still need to be trained to involve the parents fully, like the teachers involve the parents in western context (see Sandler's model of parental involvement).

The results of the study are in accordance with Sandler (1995) that one of the reasons that teachers can't involve the parents in their children's education is lack of resources or communication gap between teacher-parent and child-parent. Parents are not giving such attention in their child's education due to their household work or their job.

The findings gave an insight to the teachers as well as the parents that how to involve the parents in their child's school activities and help the teachers in teaching - learning process. Because, teachers, students and parents are inter — dependent and constructed in a triangular shape (Epstein, 2011). It is also concluded that students' background, status and dynamics has a great impact on child's learning process and parental involvement. The findings of this research could also be used to establish a healthy relationship between parents, teachers and students (Knopf & Swick, 2007). The research study had the implication for schools, teachers and future researchers of Early Childhood Education.

Recommendations

- The schools need to develop a comprehensive action plan to ensure parental involvement in their learning process for early years of children.
- Further, they need to support teachers by providing valuable time and space to their teachers to put theory into practice.
- Schools should arrange the workshops for parents and tell them how to utilize the time and resources available at their home.
- Schools can directly adopt Epstein's (2009) fourteen strategies of parental involvement.
- Teachers should buildup the relationships with the parents and focus on assisting in the development of reading skills in the children.
- Teachers should invite the parents to the school and involve them in their children activities as much as they can.
- Teachers should improve their practices to motivate the parents by telling them of the importance of their involvement in their child's education.
- In-service teachers training programs should emphasis the parental involvement strategies.
- Teachers should provide proper home assignments and send suggestions to the parents to get involved in their child's.
- The questionnaire was the only research tool to gather information. During data analysis the researchers noted that certain aspects needed further exploration and interview could be the suitable tool to collect data. Future researchers can use interviews and observation to identify fruitful results.

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