

Understanding the importance of parental involvement in the education of Children at home and school: a study of Abou Lkacem Chebbi's Primary School, Douz

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Abstract

Because of the positive role of parental involvement on youth academic achievement, many parents and school teachers desire more collaborations between the family and the school. However, obstacles often arise prohibiting such positive interactions. In this study, Douz's inhabitants, a town situated in the south of Tunisia demonstrated their strong involvement in their children's education by helping them with their homework. Moreover, parents and teachers at Abou Lkacem Chebbi's Primary School completed an in-depth interview and a structured questionnaire regarding the barriers to involving parents in their children's education. Parents and teachers identified barriers that fit into three descriptive categories: (a) time poverty/work commitments, (b) lack of communication (lack of cooperation), and (c) lack of awareness. Suggestions for decreasing barriers were also discussed. Findings suggest that taking families' needs and sharing decision-making responsibilities into consideration during the planning phases of school-based programs and events improve parental involvement. Furthermore, results strongly revealed that giving parents more meaningful roles, keeping them informed and presenting opportunities for them to support educational and developmental progress at home and school can be effective in increasing parental involvement among these inhabitants. Implications and recommendations for practitioners are discussed.

Keywords: Education, parental involvement, language teaching, school-based programs.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the study

Children have two main educators in their lives, their parents and their teachers. Parents are the prime educators until the child attends nursery or starts school and remain a major influence on their children's learning through school and beyond. The need for strong family involvement is clearly stated by Easterbrooks and Baker (2002, p. 84) who argued that "successful children come from committed parents". The authors (2002, pp. 26, 36) proposed that communication is learned and shared within the cultural contexts of the family, and that it will not develop normally without these social contexts in place. Their focal point is that families are an integral part of language development. Parents represent the child's first and foremost means to access language. Therefore, 'families are the first educators of their children and continue to influence their children's learning and development during the school years and long afterwards' (Jennings & Bosch, 2011: 1). In other words, parental involvement in the education of children begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support and a positive attitude about school.

In addition, Gunning (2007) reiterated this point by claiming that achieving education outcomes cannot be done only at school. He maintained that it is a responsibility shared by all citizens and, most importantly, "parents need to become partners in their children's lives" (p. 13). This reveals undoubtedly that education starts at home and parents need to be actively involved in their children's education as parental involvement in children's education has long been noted for its effectiveness in the child's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2003, 2005; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). No less important, schools become successful when a strong and positive relationship among children, parents, teachers and the community has been established (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Although it seems that parental involvement is the researched topic of many studies (Hill, N.E, 2004; Sanders, M. 2006; Epstein, J. L 2002, Turnbull, A (2011), there is still little concern regarding parental involvement and what constitutes effective parental involvement in the education of children. One of the major objectives of the present study is therefore to show that the home environment and its resources present the first setting where parents can interfere to help their children in their education (parental involvement at home).

Despite the benefits of parental involvement in children's education, most educational interventions have ignored this educational constituency emphasizing pedagogic issues. Yet as argued by Ballantine (1993:95): 'Schools have a role to play in making it possible to involve parents...there are constructive ways to involve parents both in the education of their own children and in the school programs'. As truly put out by Every Child Matters (2003) in Peters, Seeds, Goldstein and Coleman (2007: online) (Cited in M, O & Makuba, E. 2013):

Research suggests that parenting appears to be the most important factor associated with educational achievement at age 10, which in turn is strongly associated with achievement with later life. Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence in education than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers.

There is no clear line to show where the parents' input stops and the teachers' input begins. Instead, schools and parents have crucial roles to play and the impact is greater if parents and schools work in partnership. When parents and schools work together, children have higher achievement in school and stay in school longer (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2002; Reynolds & Clements, 2005).

Similarly, Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004) state that problems concerning behaviour and school-related outcomes are easier dealt with if parents and teachers work together and there is a positive correlation between parental attitudes and their children's academic performance. Education is, therefore, a shared responsibility of parents, schools and teachers and various institutions in society. Another main objective of the present article is to help consolidate school-family partnerships to increase parents' interventions in their children's education. The study is then guided by the following questions.

- How are the parents involved?
- How do parents help their children in education (e.g., doing homework, visiting libraries, reading books...etc)?
- What do teachers understand by the concept of "parental involvement"?
- What is the importance of parental involvement in children's schooling?
- What are the barriers associated with involving parents in their children's education?
- What strategies/measures can school and teachers use to ensure that parents are actively involved in their children's education?

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Parental involvement:

1.2.1.1 Definition of parental involvement:

Various definitions of parental involvement have been proposed. Broadly, it can be defined as parental behaviour with, or on behalf of children, at home or at school, as well as the expectations that parents hold for children's future education (Reynolds & Clements, 2005) (Cited in Berthelsen, D & Walker, S, 2008). Ho and Willms (1996) defined parental involvement through 4 constructs: home discussion, home supervision, school communication and school participation. Parental involvement can therefore be categorised into 2 broad strands: parents' involvement in support of the individual child at home and parents' involvement in the life of the school. In this context, parental involvement means parents' interventions in their children's education both at home and at school.

Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) in Jennings and Bosch (2011: 3) view parental involvement as '...enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning'. This involvement represents a shared approach to the education of children. This means that children's education is successful when it is the result of a partnership between parents and teachers. For the present study, the author chooses both strands to discuss parental participation at home and at school to support their children's learning outcomes. Both strands recognize parents' active engagement at home and school.

At home, a close-ended questionnaire has been distributed to parents whose children are enrolled in Abou Lkacem Chebbi's Primary School to investigate the importance of parental involvement in children's education. Parents/careers were asked about the frequency and how confident they feel when helping their children with homework. In addition, parents were fairly divided on whether a child's education is primarily the parent's or the school's responsibility. Parents were also asked about the barriers which hinder them from getting more involved in their child's school life. Finally, parents were asked about the activities that might be considered involvement.

At school, an open-ended interview has been administered to teachers to generate their opinions about parental involvement. By the same token, teachers' perceptions about the meaning of "parental involvement" were first generated. Then, teachers were asked about the

barriers associated with involving parents in their children's education. Finally, teachers were invited to offer suggestions on how to help consolidate parental involvement and school-family partnership. All the instruments used for the current study and the reasons behind their selection will be described in later sections in more further details

1.2.1.2 The importance/the benefits of parental involvement in the education of young children

This section discusses how parental involvement benefits children in their learning. It is certainly worth noting that research reveals many benefits for school systems and parents to become involved in their children's learning. According to Angelica Bonci (2003) "parents often begin their participation doubting that their involvement can make much difference, and they are generally very gratified to discover what an important contribution they can make". In the author's view, school people and parents need to be aware that parental involvement supports students' learning, behaviour, and attitudes regardless of other factors such as parents' income, educational level, and whether or not parents are employed.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and many other studies show that students show a better ability to read when their parents are involved in their education and when the parents themselves value reading. According to the PISA, certain activities are more strongly related to better student performance than others. For example, reading books to children when they are just beginning primary school benefits children because it shows them that reading is something that their parents value. Children of parents who are involved in their education in these ways are generally found to be more receptive in their studies and individual projects. It should also come as no surprise that parents who read to their children, have books available, take trips, guide TV watching, and provide stimulating experiences which contribute to student achievement.

Involving parents in their children's literacy activities not only benefits their children but also parents themselves. Numerous benefits have been reported for the parents, including greater skill acquisition, greater confidence and self-esteem, a better child-parent relationship and increased engagement with learning (Cited in Bonci, A. 2011). Similarly, in response to parental involvement, Bastiani (2003) identified several benefits accruing from involving parents in their children's education. Some of these benefits are:

- A greater willingness of parents and schools to share information and tackle misunderstandings and problems at an early stage.
- Parents' active encouragement and support for children's learning produce tangible academic benefits that last throughout a child's school.
- More positive pupils' attitudes and behaviours.

Moreover, the importance of parental involvement in children's education is clearly stated by Arita (2012: online) (Cited in Mafa, O. & Makuba, E. 2013) who argue that:

In addition to improving academic progress, parental involvement pays off in other significant ways. Numerous studies have shown that parents' involvement is a proactive factor against adolescent tobacco use, depression, eating disorders, academic struggles and other problems. By staying involved with their child/teenager, parents can be a source of support, create a climate for creating a tough issues and serve as role models for responsible and emphatic behaviour.

As clearly stated above, parental involvement not only improves children's academic success but also reduces problem behaviours. Parents and schools agree on goals both behavioural and academic which serve as a form of social constraints that reduces problem behaviours.

Furthermore, parents who maintain frequent contact with the school have higher achieving children than parents who have infrequent contact. In turn, schools that are well-connected with the community tend to have higher achieving students than schools with fewer ties. Parents who become involved in their children's schooling tend also to develop positive attitudes towards their children's teachers. They rate teachers higher in interpersonal and teaching skills, perceive them as wanting them to develop their children and as very helpful in suggesting ideas for home activities (Epstein, 1987). Parents' degree of involvement is also likely to be affected by the school itself. If teachers care about the welfare of the child, show respect and trust for parents, and develop communication ties with families, parents are more willing to become actively involved in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Therefore, to increase parental involvement, schools need to provide a welcoming climate where the school staff is respectful and responsive to parents (Wherry, 2009).

Involved parents tend also to enlist the support of others, become actively involved in community issues, and further their education (Becher, in Hemderson, 1987). Children whose parents are involved in these ways are generally found to be more receptive to language, show a better ability to read and learn when their parents are involved in their education and when the parents themselves value reading. Additionally, children of involved parents are motivated to learn for learning's sake, and have more control over their academic performance because they adopt their parents' positive attitudes towards school and learning. They know, too, that they can obtain guidance from their parents on how to navigate school and its challenges. Remember that children learn more by imitating their significant adults.

Desforges and Aboucher (2003), however, found that parent-child conversations in the home were more valuable, in terms of encouraging children's school achievement than parents' involvement in school activities. In other words, schools should encourage parents to talk to their children about school activities at home. This suggests that parent-child conversations at home about school activities are directly linked to parental involvement. For example, if teachers assign homework, parents who are actively involved in their children's education are undoubtedly encouraged to talk about the homework and offer help where possible. Parental involvement must, therefore, not only be viewed in terms of parents coming into the school to talk about their children or to perform certain activities. Helping children with their homework is parental involvement. On the whole, children have positive attitudes towards homework and feel that it is important to help them do well at school. Positive attitudes to homework are associated with positive attitudes at school. Pupils, as a result, tend to learn better when they hold positive attitudes about schools and teachers (Cited in Angelica Bonci, 2003). Remember that involving parents in their children's literacy activities not only benefits their children but also parents themselves and school in general.

Despite the benefits underscoring parental involvement many families, however, require assistance in providing the basics of a supportive home learning environment. Many types of parental involvement that are associated with better student performance require relatively little time and no specialized knowledge. What matters is genuine interest and active engagement. What children need is to see their significant adults value their education and care about what they are doing at school. The most important factor is communicating with the child. It opens the door for better parent-child discussion, dialogue and involvement.

Other reasons include improving school climate and school programs, developing parental skills and leadership, assisting families in connecting with others in the school and the community, and assisting teachers in their work. All these reasons emphasize the importance of parents playing an active role in their children's education and keeping a strong and positive relationship with schools (Epstein, 2001, 2009).

The following section discusses, therefore, different forms of parental involvement that may be beneficial for children, parents and schools as well.

1.2.1.3 Types of parental involvement

Although most parents do not know how to help their children with their education, with guidance and support, they may be increasingly involved in home learning activities and find themselves with opportunities to teach, be models for, and guide their children. The following are types of parental involvement developed by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment in 2012. Many types of parental involvement that are associated with better learners' performance require relatively little time and no specialized knowledge. What is important is parents' active engagement in their children's education.

- **Show your children that you value reading**

Parents significantly influence their children's learning. Young children pay very close attention to what they see their significant others do and imitate them. For example, children may see their parents read. Not surprisingly, children whose parents consider reading a hobby enjoy going to the library and spend time reading for enjoyment at home and are more likely to enjoy reading themselves. This is because their parents' habits and attitudes towards reading, school and learning are positive. This indicates clearly that children are more likely to enjoy reading when their home environment is conducive to reading. Moreover, children of parents who read and enjoy reading themselves absorb their parents' interest in reading and enjoy reading too. What is perhaps more important is for parents to show their children that reading is a daily, enjoyable, valuable activity, and that it is made even more beneficial when people discuss what they have read with others. Therefore, parents have to begin reading to their young children as essential as feeding and clothing them. Parents who do not have enough time to read can still encourage their children to read by, for example, offering books as presents. By doing so, parents help to sensitize their children that reading is a valuable activity worth striving for. Children, in turn, adopt their parents' positive attitudes towards reading and schools. These activities could also be viewed "protective" factors in reducing the incidence of special educational needs because children whose parents engaged regularly in home learning activities were less likely to be at risk for special educational needs (SEN) (Sylva et al., 2004).

Therefore, parents' reading habit emerges as an important type of parental involvement. In other words, reading with the child is parental involvement. As PISA and many other studies show, children exhibit a better ability to read when their parents are involved in their education and when the parents themselves value reading.

- **Get involved at school because you want to not because you have to**

When parents take the time to meet their child's teachers, or when they volunteer for activities at school, they signal to their children that they value education. Parents can also be involved in their children's education by participating in activities at school, such as meeting with teachers to discuss children's progress or volunteering at school. These types of activities show children that their parents value learning and education, and it shows schools that these

parents care about their children's education which, in turn, might prompt teachers to devote more attention to these children. Parents need also to contact their child's school through conferences, notes, and volunteering.

- **Read your children a story, too:**

Parental involvement in a child's education should start at birth and never stop. Results from PISA show that some types of parental involvement when children are entering primary school are strongly associated with reading performance and even more instilling a sense of enjoyment of reading in children. These types of involvement emphasise the value of reading and using words in contexts-such as reading books or talking about what the parent had done rather than treating words and letters as isolated units-such as playing with alphabet toys (p. 18). It is neither difficult nor time-consuming to help children begin to develop these cognitive skills early in their lives. All it requires is for parents to read with their children a story and discuss what they have read.

Adult-child shared storybook reading is a context that is naturally occurring for many children and is viewed by many theorists as particularly potent in stimulating emergent literacy as well as speech, listening, and other developmental skills important for academic success (Bus, 2001; Clay, 1998; Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Interactive and reflective conversation during book reading can impact how children think and how they use language. Keeping the conversation open encourages children to reflect on what they want to say, put their thoughts into a logical order, and find the words to communicate their thoughts. A major purpose of discussion between adults and children about story content is to develop young children's ability to make sense of and respond to decontextualized language (McKeown & Beck, 2006, p. 287). Parents, therefore, can support their children with meaningful questions and comments to make meaning from the decontextualized text to focus them on important story ideas and encourage them to reflect on these. For this particular reason, shared book reading with young children is known to foster the type of language development that is linked to literacy at school (eg, Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). For the above reasons, parents are urged to read with their children from infancy (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2010).

- **Talk with your children about the world around them:**

One place this kind of engagement can occur easily and naturally is at the table, over daily meals about TV programmes and films, for example. This kind of conversation will become a habit, something that everyone in the family looks forward to, no matter how old they are. It becomes a welcome even necessary opportunity to express oneself, to connect deeply with other family members, to feel close, cared for and respected.

Desforges and Aboucher (2003), however, found that parent-child conversations in the home were more valuable, in terms of encouraging children's school achievement than parents' involvement in school activities, suggesting that schools should encourage parents to talk to their children about school activities at home. This suggests that parent-child conversations at home about school activities are directly linked to parental involvement. For example, if teachers assign homework, parents who are actively involved in their children's education are undoubtedly encouraged to talk about the homework and offer help where possible. Parental involvement must, therefore, not only be viewed in terms of parents coming into the school to talk about their children or to perform certain activities. Helping their

children with their homework is basically parental involvement. Homework is known for its effectiveness on the child's education and future. It is the key link between home and school as it enriches and broadens a child's knowledge. For the present study, parents are asked about the importance of helping their children with their homework, as helping children with their homework is a crucial predictor of parental involvement.

The activities listed above are types of parental involvement that not only present perfect opportunities for parents to provide support for their children but also help to consolidate school-family partnership and collaboration. Although the main focus of this report is the importance of parental involvement in the education of young children, it is certainly worth noting that research reveals many benefits for school systems and parents to become involved in their children's learning. School-family partnership is also of great interest in this study.

1.2.1.4 Determinants of parental involvement: Parental beliefs and the nature of parental involvement

How parents feel about schools and the emotional connections that they had to school may influence the kinds of attitudes to school and the learning that their children assume. Parents' cognitions about their role have been identified as a major contribution to their willingness to engage in supporting parenting. Durisic, M. and Bunijevac, M. (2017) focused on three forms of parental cognition: parents' aspirations concerning their children's future occupations, their self-efficacy in reading and educating their children and their perceptions of the school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). Parental aspirations refer to the idealistic hopes or goals that parents may form regarding future attainment. Parents who hold high aspirations for their children's future are likely to be more willing to exert more effort to ensure that those aspirations are realized. Parenting self-efficacy refers to parents with high self-efficacy who are generally more optimistic, authoritative, and consistent in their interactions with their children than those with lower parenting self-efficacy. Perceptions of the school refer to parents' degree of involvement that is likely to be affected by the school itself. If teachers appear to care about the welfare of the child, communicate respect for parents and develop effective means of communicating with families, parents are more willing and able to become involved in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Similarly, Berthelsen and Walker (2008) distinguished two other types of feelings. These feelings may be positive or negative depending on the nature of those previous experiences. Negative feelings about schools may prevent parents from making connections with their children's schools. Positive feelings about schools experiences are likely to enhance parental involvement.

Additionally, the expectations that parents hold for their children's future achievement are important. If, for example, parents expect high levels of parental achievements and commitment to schooling, the child is more likely to adopt these positive attitudes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Remember that children learn by imitating their significant adults. There is also a need to understand how parents construct their involvement and the way they understand their involvement. Parental participation may be active because parents believe that they hold the primary responsibility for children's educational achievements and the school is only one of the many places where children learn. In other words, these parents assume their responsibility in helping their children to succeed at school. Other parents may hold a notion of partnership with schools that responsibilities for children's learning are

shared between parents and schools. Still, other parents may not believe that they should take responsibility/for an active role or may lack the confidence to be involved. For these latter parents, developing personal self-efficacy beliefs that can be effective in supporting children's learning at home and at school requires encouragement from teachers and schools (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Sometimes, parents are reluctant to offer to help their children with school work because they feel ill-equipped to do so. They fear that they have forgotten what they had learned as students, or they worry that they had never studied and can be of no real help. Teachers can help to support families/parents by ensuring that all children have some kind of individualized attention. Teachers can also encourage parents to play a more active role in their child's education by emphasizing that schools are only one of the many places where children learn. What is perhaps more important is parent-teacher consultation and collaboration which create the climate for maximum realization of a child's potential.

1.2.2 The importance of school-family partnership

In this context, Sharifah, Nor Jennifer and Wee Beng Neo (2011) argued that "the education system in the new millennium should encourage all schools to promote and adopt partnership among educators, parents and families, communities business and corporate organizations in their improvement efforts". Moreover, Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) in Jennings and Bosch (2001: 3) view parental involvement as '...enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, teaching and learning'. This involvement represents a shared approach to the education of children. In response to parental involvement, Bastiani (2003) identified several benefits accruing from involving parents in their children's education. Some of these benefits are:

- A greater willingness of parents and schools to share information and tackle misunderstandings and problems at an early stage.
- Parents' active encouragement and support for children's learning produce tangible academic benefits that last throughout a child's school.
- More positive pupils' attitudes and behaviours.

Furthermore, Deborah Davis (2000) listed other benefits accruing from enhancing communication with families:

- A feeling of community: Parents feel that they are part of the school community, as they are kept aware and informed of school events and other important school information.
- Clear information: Parents learn about the school's curriculum, assessments, achievement levels, and reporting methods.
- Parents receive information about how to support their children: Parents have the information they need to help their children thrive and achieve. When families are happy, children tend to do better in school.
- Relationships are developed: When schools and families share information and strategies, everyone feels connected to the school community.
- Positive outcomes: School staff realizes the positive ways that parents contribute to children success.

Effective communication with families means that the school welcomes and consistently supports families to support their children. Two-way communication about school programs and children's progress will result in better outcomes for children. It should also come as no surprise that frequent and positive communication helps teachers see the importance of using frequent, clear and positive communication strategies with parents. The more that parents and teachers share pertinent information about children, the better equipped they will be to help

those children become successful. In response, schools that are well connected with the community tend to have higher achieving students than schools with fewer ties. In this sense, student learning is most effective when it is the result of a partnership among the school, teachers, parents and the community. This suggests that parents need to feel welcome at their children's school to focus on appropriate signs and responsive staff. To do so, there exists a variety of techniques for involving parents in their children's education at school. In response, earlier research on parental involvement in education suggests that school-family partnership should be informed by Epstein's Six Types of parental involvement practices (Shaifah et al., 2001; Epstein et al., 1997). The proposed model is outlined below (Cited in Mafa, O § Makuba, E. 2013):

Type 1: Basic Responsibilities of Families

This refers to the basic responsibilities of families to ensure children's health and safety; to provide parenting and child-rearing skills needed to prepare children for school and to build home positive conditions that support school learning and behaviour appropriate for each grade/level.

Type 2: communication: Basic Responsibilities of Schools

Type 2 refers to the communication from school to home about school programmes and children's progress. Schools should design effective forms of communication so that families could be informed about school programmes and children's improvement and success.

Type 3: Volunteer: Parent Involvement at School

It refers to parents, who come to school or support children's performance, to attend workshops or other educational programmes to improve themselves so that they are able and confident to assist and help their children in their learning.

Type 4: Home Involvement: Parents' Involvement in Home Learning Activities

This consists in instructions from teachers to parents to assist their own children at home or learning on learning activities that are associated with the children's class work. For example, if teachers assign homework, parents who are actively involved in their children's education are certainly encouraged to talk about the homework and offer help where possible. Parental involvement must, therefore, not only be viewed in terms of parents coming to the school to talk about their children or to perform certain activities (Desforges and Aboucher, 2003). Helping their children with their homework is undoubtedly parental involvement.

Type 5: School Governance: Leaderships and participation

It refers to parents and community activities in independent advocacy groups that monitor schools and works for school improvement.

Type 6: Collaboration with the Community

It refers to the school having connections with other business representatives and other groups that share responsibility for the children's education and future success.

Epstein (2001, 2009) argues that there are many reasons for developing and establishing a partnership between school, family and community. The main reason for such a partnership is to aid children in succeeding at school. Other reasons include improving school climate and school programs, developing parental skills and leadership, assisting families in connecting with others in the school and the community and assisting teachers in their work. All these reasons emphasise the importance of parents playing an active role in their children's education and keeping a strong and positive relationship with schools (Cited in Masa, D § Mila, B, 2017).

While parental involvement in children's education has long been known to be effective, consistent parental involvement has not yet been achieved. Different obstacles have been

associated with parental involvement in children's learning. The next section is, therefore, designed to identify the barriers to parental involvement.

1.2.3 Barriers to parental involvement

While most teachers and school administrators are in favour of greater parent participation in children's schooling, some obstacles exist. Many teachers worry that parents, particularly low-income parents, may not have enough time, training, or education themselves to help their children with school work (Becker and Epstein, 1982; Epstein and Becker, 1982; McLaughlin and Shields, 1987; Moles, 1982). Moles (1982) reports that many teachers also have low expectations that parents will follow through on commitments to help their children with school work. The time factor and communication problems are among the frequently mentioned problems that prevent parents from being actively involved in children's education.

According to Moles (1982), the time factor was associated with working parents, traders and farming parents. Burdened by the distractions and demands of daily life, some parents are unable to attend school activities or participate in the schooling of their children regularly (Ho, 2009).

Furthermore, Moles cite communication problems as another barrier to parental involvement in school. Some parents lack knowledge and are uncooperative. Parents of such children hardly respond positively and hardly attend consultation days. In addition, it is well documented that parents who themselves did not enjoy school, or had a bad experience at school, may have difficulties communicating with teachers, which may affect their level of involvement as well as their beliefs and expectations. Nevertheless, as Seeley (1982) argues, parents' involvement might be facilitated if the relationships between parents and teachers become a true partnership based on mutual sharing, helping and accountability. He contends that as long as schools see the parents' role as one of background support (i.e., providing food, clothing and shelter), the current relationship between parents and teachers will remain unequal and based on assumptions of power.

In favour of the barriers to parental involvement, Nancy E. Hill and Lorraine C. Taylor (2004) identified other obstacles that have been associated with parental involvement. Parents' psychological state influences parental school involvement. For example, depression or anxiety presents barriers to involvement in schooling. Studies consistently show that mothers who are depressed tend to be less involved than non-depressed mothers in preparing young children for school and also exhibit lower levels of involvement over the early years of school. Self-perceptions also affect parents' school involvement. Negative feelings about themselves may also hinder parents from making connections with their children's schools. Parents' confidence in their own intellectual abilities is the most salient predictor of their school's involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996). A factor that may be especially important in this regard is the experience of poverty. Poverty exerts direct effects on parents' mental health and self-perceptions through increased stress resulting from the struggle to make ends meet. Parents' own experience as students shapes their involvement in their children's schooling. As a parent prepares a child to start school, the parents' memories of his or her own school experiences are likely to become reactivated and may influence how the parent interprets and directs the child's school experiences (Taylor, Clayton & Rowley, in press). Memories of supportive school experiences are likely to enhance parents' involvement and comfort (Cited in Nancy E. Hill & Lorraine C. Taylor, 2004).

Cooper and Crosnoe (2007) argued that the lack of money, time and energy limits economically disadvantaged parents' involvement in their children's education. Moreover, Lareau (2003) indicated that parents living in low-income neighbourhoods do not have access to the same financial and educational resources as their middle-class counterparts. Although many parents are required to balance their work-life with children's school, this may be especially difficult for low-income parents, who may have less flexible work schedules. Because of this, they may experience time poverty. Hill and Taylor (2004) assert that "parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face many more barriers to involvement, including non-flexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems, and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods" (2004, p. 162) (Cited in Masa Durisic & Mila Bunijevac, 2017). Time poverty refers to the lack of poor working families' free time to dedicate to their child's educational concerns (Neuman & Chin, 2003). Coupled with economic disadvantage, being a single parent makes it more difficult to get involved. Single parents are less likely to be involved in their children's schooling because of other family or work obligations (Lee, Kushner & Cho, 2007; Smith-Battle, 2007). Families' socioeconomic status is beyond the scope of this research since parents from different SES have been considered. This is harmonious with the purpose of this study which seeks to generate parents' different perspectives and opinions about parental involvement in their children's learning.

To overcome the barriers preventing parental involvement, schools need to build a welcoming climate where the school staff is respectful and responsive to parents' needs because a key principle of an effective partnership is mutual respect.

1.2.4 Decreasing barriers to parental involvement and teachers' role in consolidating school-family partnership

Schools can help parents decide to be involved by offering a range of options for interactions that take parental needs into account. First, invitations to parents to be involved convey to parents that their involvement is welcomed and valued and provide motivations to be involved. Hoover-Dempsey and his colleagues (2005) argue that important invitations come from 3 sources: the schools, teachers and children themselves. A school climate that conveys to parents that they are welcome in the school is essential. Parents can also be kept well-informed about their children's learning and improvement. Second, the school staff can also show respect for parental concerns and suggestions. Such a school climate sets a strong foundation for involvement. Invitations from the teacher build personal trust that is the basis for creating a partnership around children's learning at home and school. Finally, invitations from children for help with their learning (for example, doing homework) can prompt involvement. Therefore, different forms of invitations guarantee trust, respect and help for parents to take part in their children's education.

Research indicates that pupils and parents consider homework or home learning to be an important part of school life and the evidence shows a positive relationship between time spent on homework and achievement at the secondary school level (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). On the whole, pupils have positive attitudes towards homework and feel it is important to help them do well at school. Positive attitudes to homework are associated with positive attitudes at school. As a result, pupils tend to learn better when they hold positive attitudes about schools and teachers. This can only be achieved in a home environment conducive to learning and reading.

Teachers need to form strong and trusting relationships with all parents, especially those who may be less willing to develop a partnership with schools. Teachers can encourage parents to play a more active role in their child's education by emphasising that schools are one of the many places where children learn. Teachers can also send notes for parents to be informed about their children's improvements at school. In turn, parents have to respond actively to their children's concerns and interests and show them that they care about what they are doing at school. This may, of course, encourage teachers to devote more attention to these children.

In supporting parental school partnership, Nancy E. Hill and Lorraine C. Taylor (2004) distinguished two mechanisms. The first is by increasing social capital. That is, parental school involvement increases parents' skills and information, which makes them better equipped to assist their children in their school-related activities. As parents establish social relationships with school personnel, they learn important information about the school's expectations for behaviour and homework. They also learn how to help with homework and how to augment children's learning at home (Lareau, 1996). When parents are involved in their children's schooling, they meet other parents who provide information and insights on school policies and practices, as well as extracurricular activities. Parents learn from other parents how difficult situations are handled successfully. In addition, when parents and teachers interact, teachers learn about parents' expectations for their children and their children's teachers. Baker and Stevenson (1986) found that compared with parents who were not involved, involved parents developed more complex strategies for working with schools and their children to promote achievement.

Second, Lee and Bowen (2006) and Dika and Singh (2002) cite social capital in families as being positively linked to their students' achievement, graduation rates, higher educational attainment, as well as motivation and involvement in school. Similarly, Ho (2009) discusses the benefit of parents' involvement in schools, noting that it helps parents overcome a lack of social capital. Likewise, Hill and Taylor (2004) assert that parental involvement in the school supports students' achievement by increasing the parents' social capital. (Cited in Masa Durisic & Mila Bunijevac, 2017)

To overcome the barriers preventing parental involvement, schools need to provide a welcoming climate where the school staff is respectful and responsive to parents (Wherry, 2009). Administrators and teachers must encourage respectful two-way communication between the school and home (Wherry, 2009). Bouie, an educational consultant stated, "The answer is to stop treating parents like "clients" and start treating them like "partners" in helping children learn" (as cited in Wherry, 2009). Schools need to make parents feel that their contributions are worthwhile, welcomed, interesting and valued.

Moreover, some school systems have employed parent involvement coordinators to lead and coordinate parental involvement activities and programmes within the system to overcome obstacles between the home and school (Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2009) described the role of parent involvement coordinators as a way of encouraging more parents to become involved in a variety of aspects of the school. Parent involvement coordinators often conduct workshops for parents to inform them of the school curriculum and remind them that they are their child's most important teacher (Epstein, 2009).

The essence of effective partnerships between parents and school staff was summarized in seven principles by Turnbull and colleagues (2011). A key principle of an effective partnership is trust. The teacher is required to have reliable, confidential, open and honest relationships with parents. Furthermore, the relationship must be based on mutual respect

which means respect for the opinions of others and respect for the dignity of others. Parents should be convinced of the persons who are professionally involved in the work of their children. Effective partnerships require two-way communication that will enable the exchange of knowledge and ideas between all parties involved. No less important is the imperative of protecting children, which is achieved through early identification of problems, their solutions, the identification of appropriate strategies and the promotion of knowledge about the protection of children. Interaction between the school and home needs to be more positive requiring teachers to contact families throughout the year and not just when problems arise. It may be beneficial for administrators and educators to attempt to involve all parents in the education of their children and make the educational experience more positive for everyone involved.

Furthermore, Machen and colleagues (2005) argued that school personnel should establish workable and realistic ways to involve parents in education. Eccles and Harold (1993) identified three ways to involve parents: give them more meaningful roles, keep them informed and present opportunities for them to support educational and developmental progress at school and home.

Graham-Clay (2005) reasoned that strong communication between parents and school personnel is fundamental to this partnership and to building a sense of community between home and school. Therefore, school personnel must continue to develop and expand their skills to maximize effective communication with parents. All these practices help parents as well as teachers to overcome the barriers preventing parental involvement.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this article is to understand the importance of parental involvement in the education of primary school children. The literature indicates that parental involvement in the education of children begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support and a positive attitude about school (Epstein, 2009; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Rumberger et al., 1990; Swap, 1993; Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). More importantly, this article recognises the important role that a strong and positive bond between homes and schools can lead to academic achievement for learners (children). Sanders and Sheldon (2009) maintain that schools become successful when a strong positive relationship among children, parents, teachers and the community has been established. Considering the importance of parents' participation and involvement in school activities, in this paper, we will shed light on the barriers preventing parental involvement. Because many families are faced with overwhelming and unpredictable schedules and circumstances while juggling schools, allowing minimal time to provide support in any one given area (Swap, 1993). In addition, we will conclude and make recommendations that are important for planning suggestions and programmes that are focused on the importance of parental involvement.

Towards the end, the article presents ideas on how teachers and families can be encouraged to work as partners to improve children's performance at school. This chapter describes also the research instruments used to analyse the data. Finally, the chapter concludes by examining the corpus itself and demonstrating the reasons behind its selection.

2.2 Participants

The participants involved in the present study are primary school teachers and parents of children who are enrolled in Abou Lkacem Chebbi's Primary School. The sample constitutes 35 parents and 15 teachers who volunteered to take part in this study. **Table 1** below provides the general profile of the teachers.

Table 1: Teachers' General Profile N= 15

Gender		Educational background		Teaching experience	
Male	Female	Diploma in teaching	Bachelor of Education degree	5-10 years	11 years plus
3	12	9	6	2	13

Teachers were selected randomly representing different teaching experiences and educational backgrounds. The majority of teachers have more than 11 years of teaching experience.

They were informed about the research and its purpose beforehand so that their answers would be informative and clear. We should make it clear that a formal letter has been written describing the study and its purpose. A formal consent has been received from the responsible authorities (the school's headmaster) allowing the researcher to contact teachers inside the school.

Parents as well were selected randomly from different socioeconomic statuses (SES) and educational levels. This is of course harmonious with the objective of this research which aims to study the importance of parental intervention in children's education. In other words, variable such as the SES variable is beyond the scope of this study.

2.3 Data collection instruments

Because of the immense amount of information and variables involved in the parental involvement theme, both qualitative and quantitative studies have been useful in the demonstration of understanding of the topic.

The interview allows the researcher to break down specific issues into detailed subgroups, using extensive information from observation and questioning to draw meaningful connections that may not have existed through strict statistical data (Deslandes and Bertrand 166). For example, Fan and Chen discussed the significant advantage of the qualitative methodology when they write about how it allows "more than a typology for parental involvement, it not only deals with specific types of parental involvement, it allows an attempt to explain why parents choose to be involved". This detailed investigation is only allowed through the observation and verbal discussion allowed within the qualitative analysis.

Although the majority of the research documented utilizes the qualitative forms of methodology, research-based on quantitative analysis also serves an important role in the overall understanding of the parental involvement sphere. Quantitative methods allow the researcher to use a much larger population in a much quicker manner.

The researcher began her study with a broad inventory survey to collect quantitative data on the everyday practices that parents employ to stimulate their child's academic achievement. Once this was completed, the researcher acknowledged the need for specific in-depth information and developed a complimentary qualitative interview in response.

The use of dual methodology not only made the information from each separate study more understandable and relevant, it allowed a scientific connection to be drawn between the two very different studies. This attitude is reiterated when Campell and Verna discuss their

satisfaction with the methods, “we found that our qualitative work fits nicely within the framework of the inventory. The blending of both quantitative and qualitative data helps to give our studies more substance” (Campell and Verna 509). Throughout an examination of research conducted within the realm of parental involvement, the most constructive and informative were those that were able to connect quantitative research statistics to meaningful qualitative information (Cited in Kristy L. O’Donoghue).

2.3.1 Parents’ Questionnaire

The first questionnaire created was for the parents. In the first part, the parents’ biological information followed by six different questions was created. Then, the biological section was excluded from the survey so that participants would not feel biased toward answering the questions. Remember that one of the major aims of the present study is to examine the extent to which parents were involved in their child’s education. Considering the literature regarding parental involvement, the more parents were involved, the more successful their children were. I wrote questions that dealt with the parents’ involvement at home. I asked the parents if they help their child with homework, the frequency of helping their child with homework and how confident they feel when helping their child.

Another relevant predictor of parental involvement is the expectations parents hold for their children’s future attainment. For this reason, I asked the parents about the child’s primary responsibility. Despite the overwhelming data that supports the need for the parent to get involved in the education of their children, multiple obstacles stand in the way of convincing parents to get involved in the education of their children. Therefore, any obstacles that may inhibit parents from actively seeking involvement in schools must be identified and addressed to build a positive relationship with the school system. Therefore, questions that dealt with the barriers associated with parental involvement were asked. In this section, parents are invited to choose the barriers that prevent them from being actively involved in their children’s education.

The last section in the survey was linked to school-family partnership and parental involvement at school. I write questions that dealt with the parents physically going to the school and meeting with the teacher to discuss the child’s progress or behaviour and volunteering at the school for extracurricular events.

2.3.2 Teachers’ Interview

Teachers’ interview allows the researcher to break down specific issues into detailed subgroups, using extensive information from observation and questioning to draw meaningful connections that may not have existed through strict statistical data (Deslandes and Bertrand 166). The teacher’s interview went through two drafts before I distributed 15 copies to primary school teachers. Teachers were first invited to define the term “parental involvement”. As such, we generate teachers’ perspectives about parental involvement.

Part two of the interview addresses the barriers which prevent parental involvement. Interviewed teachers explained the difficulties which most families suffer from when trying to be involved in their children’s learning or may lack the confidence to be involved.

Studies also indicated that parental involvement is most effective when viewed as a partnership between educators and parents (Davies, 1996; Emeag Wali, 2009). The last part of the interview was dedicated to encouraging teachers to offer suggestions and recommendations on how to help consolidate parental involvement at school and hence the school-family partnership.

2. 4 Data collection procedure

The first step of the research was spent reading about parental involvement, in general, to find out what areas of research to focus on. This study relies on a random sampling method in the sense that it involves parents from different backgrounds who are not made for the present research. They are pre-existing inhabitants of the country. The researcher requested that the parents' questionnaires should be completed by parents themselves who were, in turn, assured that the data collected was for the research purposes only and their confidentiality would be respected during the study. The survey was filled in by 35 parents who appeared to be informative, helpful and relaxed. It took approximately 15 minutes for every respondent to answer the questions.

As for the teachers' interviews, a letter has been written to the school head explaining the purpose of the study. The researcher received the school head's consent afterward. Primary school teachers were contacted by the school head who first introduced the researcher to the respondents and explained the purpose of the study. Teachers, in turn, appeared welcoming and enthusiastic about the topic. They complained that it is a hot topic which deserves much attention from three parties: parents, teachers and pupils as well. It took approximately 30 to 45 minutes for every teacher to fill in the interview. Some teachers appeared to be very talkative and had many things to say about the topic. Their responses reflect undoubtedly their opinions and their perceptions. This echoes with the aim of the interview which reflects the participants' inner opinions and perceptions. Teachers are also assured that their answers are to be treated in strict confidence and they are only used for the present study.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of the questionnaire data (parents' questionnaire)

Parents' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. Quantitative analysis was done through a statistical analysis of data using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software, which is frequently used in Applied Linguistics and educational research (Dornyei, 2007). For example, the number of participants who selected each item was calculated using frequency, the results were analyzed and tabulated and then they were converted into percentages (e. g, to figure out the number of the participants who answered a particular item among the whole participants in the study). Qualitative analysis was carried out through the analysis of the results of the open-ended questions. It is used to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and opinions of the teachers and to dive deeper into the problem.

This section represents the results of the questionnaire as well as the interview analysis. The questionnaire is divided into 4 main sections. First, part 1 deals with parental involvement at home. Part 2, however, addresses parents' feelings and expectations about parental involvement in the education of their children. Part 3 identifies the significant barriers to parental involvement. The last part examines parental involvement at school to help strengthen parental involvement.

• *Parental involvement at home*

Question 1 identifies whether parents help their children with homework or not. In response to this question, all participants indicated that they helped their children with homework at home. Question 2, however, deals with the frequency of helping with homework. Responses to this question are better explained in the following table:

Table 2: Frequency of helping with homework

Frequency of helping with homework	No. of mentions (N= 35)	Percentages (%)
Every time	24	68%
Most times	2	8%
Occasionally	1	2%
Never	0	0%
When the child asks for help	8	22%

As the above table clearly shows, the majority of parents reported that they helped their children with homework every time at home. However, few parents helped their children only when the child asks for help. There were also only 2 parents who indicated that they helped their children most time with their homework. This suggests that the majority of the participants are aware of the importance of parents' involvement in the education of their children. Helping children with their homework reinforces children's positive opinions about school and education. It also shows children that their parents value what they are doing. Their parents' support, guidance and help guarantee success at school.

- **Parental feelings and expectations**

Consistent with parental involvement is how parents feel about schools and the emotional connections that they had to school. As for parents' feelings about school, parents are asked about their feelings when helping their children with homework in question 3. Parents may feel confident when helping their children with homework because of those previous experiences at school. On the contrary, other parents may feel less confident to help their children with homework because they feel ill-equipped to do so or they have forgotten what they have learned or they fear that what they know could not be of real help. Differences in parents' feelings are clearly explained in the following table.

Table 3: Parents' feelings when helping their children with homework

Parents' feelings	No. of mentions (N= 35)	Percentages (%)
Always confident	15	42%
Never confident	1	2%
Confident most of the time	9	25%
Confident some of the time	10	28%

According to table 3, almost half of the parents feel always confident when helping their children with homework which can indicate their positive feelings about school experiences that are likely to enhance parental involvement. No less important are parents who feel confident most of the time. However, only one parent is reluctant to offer to help his/her child because he/she feels never confident to do so.

There is also a need to understand how parents construct their involvement and the way they understand their involvement. Question 4 asked parents about the child's primary

responsibility. Table 4 below shows the difference in parents' opinions about their involvement at school.

Table 4: Parents' beliefs and expectations

Parents' beliefs and expectations	No. of mentions (N= 35)	Percentages (%)
Wholly the parents' responsibility	0	0%
Mainly the parents' responsibility	5	14%
Both equally	27	77%
Mainly the school's responsibility	3	8%
Wholly the school's responsibility	0	0%

Parents' responses to this question revealed that the majority (77%) of parents hold a notion of partnership with the school that responsibilities for children's learning are shared between parents and teachers (schools). Other parents, however, argued that children's education is mainly the parents' responsibility. These parents believe that they hold the primary responsibility for their children's educational achievements and the school is only one of the many places where children learn. In other words, these parents assume their responsibility in helping their children to succeed at school. Still, other parents (8%) may not believe that they should take responsibility/for an active role or may lack the confidence to be involved. These parents believe that children's education is mainly the school's responsibility. While most parents are in favour of greater parent participation in children's schooling, some obstacles exist. Therefore, the next table addresses the barriers that prevent parents from being actively involved in their children's education.

• *Barriers to parental involvement*

Table 5: Barriers associated with parental involvement

Barriers to parental involvement	N. of mentions (N=35)	Percentages (%)
Lack of awareness	4	11%
Work commitments/lack of time	29	82%
Communication problem (Lack of cooperation and partnership)	2	7%

According to the table, the great majority of parents (82%) reported that they are unable to balance their work-life with their children's school due to the lack of time. Time poverty refers to the lack of ...families' free time to dedicate to their child's educational concerns (Neuman & Chin, 2003). However, only four parents reported that the lack of awareness/care is another main reason which limits parental involvement. In other words, these parents are not aware of their responsibility in helping their children to succeed at school. Perhaps

negative feelings about themselves may hinder these parents from making connections with their children’s schools. In other words, these parents may lack the confidence to offer their children help. Remember that parents’ confidence in their own intellectual abilities is the most salient predictor of their school’s involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

Another reason that has been identified as a serious obstacle to parental involvement is communication problems. Some parents lack knowledge and are uncooperative. Parents of such children hardly respond positively and hardly attend consultation days, for example. This may affect their level of involvement as well as their beliefs and their expectations about their children’s school achievements.

Apart from the three mentioned reasons, some parents argued that other reasons have been associated with parental involvement. They reported that “*a factor that may be especially important in this regard is the experience of poverty*”. Poverty exerts direct effects on parents’ mental health and self-perceptions through increased stress resulting from the struggle to make ends meet. For example, disadvantaged parents do not have access to the same financial and educational resources as advantaged parents, especially traders and farmers.

To overcome the barriers associated with parental involvement, there should be a welcoming climate where the school staff and parents work in partnership and cooperation. Parents have to be partners in all educational activities. The goal is to establish a partnership model in which teachers and parents share expertise and control to provide the optimum education and success for children, each contributing different strengths to the relationship (Hornby, 2011). In this respect, the purpose of the next section is to show parental involvement at school which provides an important opportunity for schools to enrich current school programmes by bringing parents into the educational process.

• **Parental involvement at school**

Table 6: the activities parents do to help their children at school

Parental involvement at school	N. of mentions (N=35)	Percentages (%)
Discussing child’s progress	18	51%
Volunteering at the school for extracurricular events	2	5%
Visiting the child’s class	7	20%
Attended a school event in which a child’s participated	5	14%
Talking to parents of other children	3	8%

According to table 6, the great majority of parents go to school to discuss their children’s progress with teachers. This step is relevant to school-family partnership. It allows parents as well as teachers to share information and tackle misunderstandings and problems at an early stage. Being involved in their children’s education allows parents to be part of the school community as they are kept well informed of the school’s curriculum and reporting methods. Consequently, pupils’ attitudes and behaviours about school are enhanced because their significant adults care about their education and what they are doing at school.

No less important, some parents indicated that visiting the child’s class is significantly another form of parental involvement. By doing so, parents receive information about how to support their children in their learning. Parents have the information they need to help their

children thrive and achieve as they share the information and the strategies with each other. Consequently, relationships between families and schools are developed. The main reason for such a partnership is to help children succeed at school. Other reasons include improving school climate and school programs, developing parental skills, assisting families in connecting with others in the school and the community and assisting teachers in their work as well.

Another relevant predictor of parental involvement at school is volunteering for extracurricular activities at school. Parents' responses to this question revealed that they do not have time to come to school to attend workshops or other educational programmes. This implies that some parents need to be aware to make the balance between their work on one hand and assisting their children in education on the other hand. Schools, in turn, should design effective forms of communication so that parents could be informed about the school's programmes and their children's improvements.

3.2 Analysis of the interview data (Teachers' Interview)

This section includes teachers' interviews. Primary school teachers were first invited to define "*parental involvement*". As a response, the majority of teachers view parental involvement as "guidance, support and help... more than teaching itself". They argue that parents need always to be involved in their children's education so that we (teachers and parents) tackle misunderstandings and problems at an early stage. "*Parents need to visit their children's school regularly so that we would be informed about their children's difficulties from the onset and we give their parents suggestions on how to navigate the school its challenges*", one teacher asserted.

Other teachers, however, maintain that parental involvement can be viewed as positive and negative involvement. Parents who are positively involved in their children's education tend to share information, guide and support their children's learning. On the contrary, parents who are negatively engaged, lack the confidence and knowledge to assist their children. They rarely come to consultation days at school or visit their child's class to discuss his/her progress.

Interviewed teachers suggested that one way parents can contribute positively to their children's education is to assist them with their academic work at home. Parents who read to their children, assist them with their homework, and provide tutoring using resources provided by teachers tend to do better in school than children whose parents do not assist them. Furthermore, teachers indicated, "*the level of parental involvement is associated with academic success*". In other words, children whose parents are actively involved in their schooling benefit better than children whose parents are passively involved. Specifically, teachers explained, "if parents attend teachers' conferences, accept phone calls from the school and read and sign messages from school, their children will benefit academically more than children whose parents do none of the above activities". Overall, primary school teachers concluded, "*children's educational achievement is enhanced when it is the result of a partnership between children, parents and teachers. All these partners need to work together for the child's sake to guarantee success and achievement*".

Although parental involvement is recognized as being of significance in the education of children, there remains a great diversity concerning involvement. Among the barriers that interviewed teachers cite is a lack of time, money and communication. Today's parents, teachers asserted, "*are often preoccupied with the demands of daily life. Burdened by low-income, inflexible work hours, some parents are unable to attend school activities or*

participate in the schooling of their children on a regular basis". Other teachers indicated that "many parents suffer from low self-esteem and others did not experience success at school themselves and as such lack the knowledge and confidence to help their children". In general, interviewed teachers in this study believe that three areas are barriers to parental involvement: time poverty/work commitments, lack access or communication problems and lack of awareness. Johnson (1994) asserted "feeling of inadequacy, limited school background, or preoccupation with necessities may prevent parents from communicating with schools" (1994, p. 46). In the current study, parents and teachers agree upon the same reasons preventing parents from being actively involved in their children's education.

Findings from the last part of the interview addresses suggestions and ideas teachers offer to help consolidate school-family partnership to work in a mutual relationship full of respect, help and support. In this respect, teachers suggest that the involvement of parents should be viewed as a continuous process that has its evolutionary stages through childhood and adolescence, and is especially important in the periods of the transition of children from one to another level of schooling. The Partnership Model developed by Hornby (2011) is the most appropriate model one in which teachers are considered to be experts on education and parents are viewed as experts on the children (Hornby 2001). Furthermore, teachers suggest that reading events in public spaces, like libraries, are significant activities that children can attend with their parents. Schools need also to be more aware of involving parents in leadership and decision-making roles. By doing so, schools and teachers become aware of parents' perspectives and needs. Because when parents are involved in leadership and decision-making roles, they become more supportive of the school's efforts and they have a better understanding of school issues and priorities. This can perhaps be achieved by *creating flexible schedules and variable forms of communication that will also give parents the greatest opportunity for successful participation in their child's education*, as one teacher recommended. Another teacher added, "we may not be able to help every family to become more involved. There will always be circumstances and situations beyond our control that will prohibit certain parents from being able to find a way to participate in school life".

Overall, the interview's findings revealed that there are different and effective ways in increasing parental involvement. For example, giving them more meaningful roles, keeping them informed, and presenting opportunities for them to support educational and developmental progress at school and home represent effective and good practices that can help consolidate school-family partnerships.

4. Discussions and conclusions

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the importance of parental involvement at home and school since parents' contribution to children's education has long been recognized for its effectiveness in ameliorating children's school achievements. In the home context, a questionnaire has been distributed to 35 participants from different SES backgrounds whose children are enrolled in Abou Lkecam Chebbi's Primary School.

Findings strongly revealed that the majority of parents help their children with their homework. They always feel confident because of their previous experience with school. These involved parents tend to develop positive attitudes towards their children's teachers. They rate teachers higher in interpersonal and teaching skills, perceive them as wanting them to develop their children and as very helpful in suggesting ideas for home activities. This suggests also that these parents tend to maintain frequent contact with the school, have higher achieving children than parents who have infrequent contact. Additionally, these parents

expect high levels of parental achievements and commitment to schooling and their children are more likely to adopt these feelings. Remember that children learn by imitating their significant adults. Parents who are confident to be involved are developing high personal self-efficacy beliefs that can be effective in supporting children's learning at home and school.

What remains are reluctant parents who are rarely encouraged to offer their children help with their homework. They cite insufficient financial resources and lack of educational attainment as barriers to parental involvement. They believe that education is mainly the school's responsibility. Parents who may lack the confidence to be involved, developing personal self-efficacy beliefs that can be effective in supporting children's learning at home and school, require encouragement from teachers and schools. Teachers can also encourage these parents to play an active role in their children's learning and remind them that schools are one of the many places where children learn. The home environment and its resources serve as an important influence in the development of children's education.

Despite the benefits underscoring parental involvement in increasing children's success, enhanced parent and teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate, there remains a great diversity concerning involvement. In this article, surveyed parents often mention the lack of financial resources, lack of communication and time poverty due to distraction and demands of daily life as barriers to parental involvement in school life. Most school personnel and teachers would like to involve families but do not know how to build positive and productive programs and are consequently apprehensive about trying (Epstein, 1995).

There should be workable and realistic ways to involve parents. Recent findings suggest that several approaches can be effective in increasing parental involvement. For example, Graham-Clay (2005) reasoned that strong communication between parents and school personnel is fundamental to this partnership and to building a sense of community between home and school. Therefore, school personnel must continue to develop and expand their skills to maximize effective communication with parents. Cohen, Linker, and Stutts (2006) noted, "an ideal collaboration on behalf of children should have participation from all parties which includes parents and school personnel at various levels".

Examining the barriers to parental involvement in schools from multiple perspectives allows researchers, parents and educators to identify the areas in which collaborations between parents, school personnel can be enhanced. However, earlier studies have focused primarily on parents' perspectives and have not included those of school personnel. In this study, we examined specific barriers to parental involvement from the perspective of parents and school teachers at Abou Lkacem Chebbi's Primary School. Parents, as well as teachers, agreed upon the same obstacles which prevent parents from active participation in their children's schooling. This similarity is better explained in the following diagram:

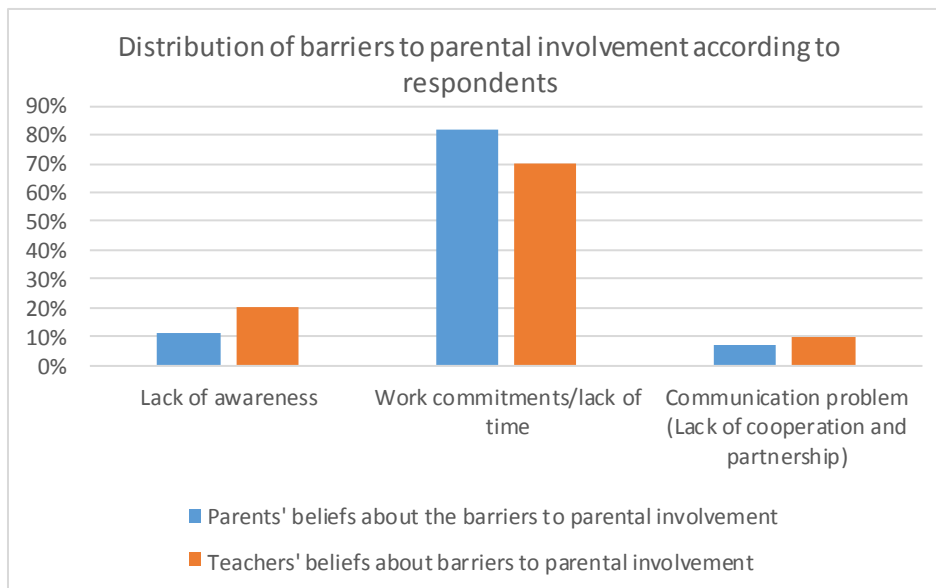


Diagram 1: Distribution of barriers to parental involvement according to teachers and parents

According to the above diagram, parents and teachers share the same barriers preventing their active involvement in their children’s learning. The lack of time or work commitment is among the most important factor that parents suffer from. To overcome this barrier, teachers suggest that parents need to help their children by devoting more attention to schooling their children. Teachers on their part are looking for the most appropriate model one in which teachers and parents share expertise and control to provide the optimum education for children. Mutual respect, long-term commitment to a wide range of activities, and sharing of planning and decision-making responsibilities are the essential components for a true partnership between parents and teachers.

Teachers as well need to be aware that parental involvement provides an opportunity for schools to enrich school programs by bringing parents into the educational process. This echoes the Partnership Model developed by Hornby in 2011 in which teachers are considered to be experts on education and parents are viewed as experts on the children. Contrary to the Partnership Model, in the Expert Model, teachers consider themselves to be the experts regarding all areas of the development and education of children, whereas parents’ views are given little credence (Cunningham & Davis, 1985). In other words, teachers maintain decisions overall decisions, while the parents’ role is to receive information and instructions about their children.

No less important is the lack of awareness and cooperation between teachers and parents. Teachers argued that not all parents have equal capacities for fuller participation in all activities. They found that *“some parents suffer from low self-esteem and others did not experience success in school themselves and therefore lack the knowledge and confidence to help their children”*. Parents who did not experience success may view it negatively (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). These parents can be encouraged by assuring *“that every child has a kind of individualized attention and parents are the child’s first and primary partner in the learning process”*, teachers contended.

In this study, we have also explored the kinds of activities parents engaged in to increase parental involvement at school. The following diagram explains the different types of activities parents do to strengthen their school contribution.

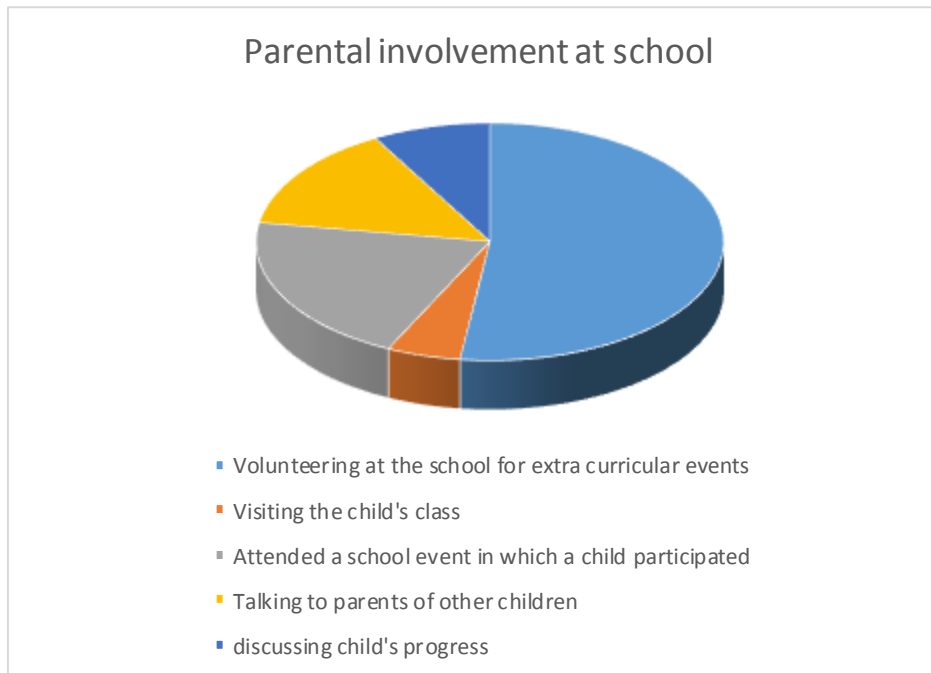


Diagram 2: Distribution of suggestions and ideas to consolidate parental involvement at school

Involved parents argued that discussing a child's progress with teachers is the most appropriate form of parental involvement. This suggests that these parents devote much control and attention to their children's schooling. They are more supportive of the school's efforts and they have a better understanding of school issues and priorities. In response, children of these parents will benefit academically more than children whose parents are not involved. Other school activities including attending a school event, talking to parents of other children and volunteering at the school for extracurricular events are among the least favored events that parents do. This may be explained by the fact that schools need to diversify the forms of involvement to cater to parents' time and interests.

Furthermore, parents offer other ideas on how to consolidate parental involvement at school and create a strong school-family partnership. For example, invitations to parents to be involved convey to parents that their involvement is welcomed and valued and provide motivation to be involved. Important invitations come from 3 sources: the school, teachers, and children themselves. A school climate that conveys to parents that they are welcome in the school is essential. Parents can also be kept well informed about their children's learning. The school staff can show respect for parental concerns and suggestions. Invitations from the teacher build personal trust that is the basis for creating a partnership around children's learning at home and school. Invitations from children for help with their learning can also prompt involvement.

The teachers also offered suggestions on how schools can get parents involved. These suggestions have been addressed in the last part of the interview. Here are some of the recommendations:

- Invite parents to an Open House (parents need to feel comfortable while exchanging talks with teachers)
- Have a parent visitation day
- Have an open line of communication with parents
- For parent-teacher conferences, have the teachers contact all of the parents by phone or letter before conferences, also provide some incentive to students to get their parents to come to conferences,
- Provide child-care for parents during parent-teacher conferences and meetings
- Publish a school calendar of events
- Create a school improvement team that includes parents
- Keep parents informed about their child's academic success through progress reports and report cards
- Assign homework that requires parental supervision and participation
- Create a daily assignment notebook, agenda book that teachers and parents can respond in, these are sent home once a week and are reviewed and signed by the parents
- Teachers need to make sure they show appreciation to parents for their support. This can be in the form of a note, for example.

5. Limitations and strengths of the study

This study is not without limitations. Future researchers might consider replicating the study with other populations, including children's perspectives and using a variety of methodologies (ethnographic methods and longitudinal designs to study the significance of parental involvement in the school setting). Furthermore, many of the participants' responses focused primarily on factors that affected parental involvement at school, but not necessarily outside of school. Future researchers might want to consider addressing circumstances that affect parents' ability to be involved with their child's education outside of school as well.

Despite the limitations, this study has several strengths as well. Study findings introduce barriers to parental involvement that have been rarely addressed, namely lack of awareness issues due to lack of correct contact information and children hindering home-school communications. Furthermore, this study included in-depth, rich perspectives and a variety of adults who play a major role in the home-school relationship. The mixed methodology allowed us to provide a more contextualized perspective of parental involvement. In particular, this study included school teachers as well as parents from different backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. Thus, this diversity of views presented a more representative understanding of how participants at this primary school and in this community defined parental involvement and described their interactions in given circumstances.

Furthermore, this study helps us to gain more insights into the significance of parental involvement not only for children's academic attainment but also for parents themselves. This study is also significant in the sense that it seeks to highlight the mechanisms through which involvement promotes academic achievement. When parents cannot become involved, how can schools compensate for the loss of benefits of involvement? Moreover understanding each family's unique barriers and resources is important for establishing and maintaining effective collaborations between families and schools.

In conclusion, the findings presented here add to the understanding of the importance as well as the barriers to parental involvement in education. Although some findings are consistent with previous studies, this study highlights additional considerations in working

with these families. In particular, by revealing a broader range of barriers to school access, both parents and teachers now have specific areas to focus their efforts to engage these parents in schools. Furthermore, detangling how parental lack of awareness hinders the involvement efforts challenges researchers and teachers to rethink how information and communication between the home and school occurs. It is probable that increasing the type and number of methods used to contact parents will foster more consistent parental involvement from a wider range of parents. Finally, including parents in the planning process, providing opportunities for involvement and offering incentives may further, enhance the home-school collaborations.

6. Conclusion

Many researchers have found that parental involvement in schools is an effective strategy for promoting children's achievement. Yet, schools struggle with the ways to recruit and involve parents. The barriers that discourage parents from participating in school are not insurmountable. This study presents specific practices that are effective at recruiting and working with typically hard-to-involve parents. For example, surveyed teachers encourage parents to visit the classroom, and to contact them with a question, comment, or concern. Invitations from schools or teachers convey to parents that their contribution is welcomed and valued. They emphasized that parents need to be informed about the curriculum being taught in the classroom. There should be a mutual partnership between parents and school if they want to enjoy the fruits of success and educational achievements.

The essence of effective partnerships between parents and school staff was summarized in seven principles by Turnbull and colleagues (2011). The principle of an effective partnership is trust. The teacher is required to have reliable, confidential, open and honest relationships with parents. Furthermore, the relationship must be based on mutual respect which means respect for the opinions of others and respect for the dignity of others. Parents should be convinced of the competence of persons who are professionally involved in the work with their children. Effective partnerships require two-way communication that will enable the exchange of knowledge and ideas between all parties involved. No less important is the imperative of protecting children, which is achieved through early identification of problems, their solution, the identification of appropriate strategies and the promotion of knowledge about the protection of children.

In 1981, Henderson concluded, "The form of parent involvement does not seem to be critical, so long as it is reasonably well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting" (p. 7). Henderson's argument still holds up quite well. It should be amended, however, to say that the form of the involvement does indeed seem to be critical. To involve the maximum number of parents in the education of their children, schools must understand the personal needs of those parents. Schools cannot understand their students' parents unless they are in two-way communication with those parents. Once teachers and children are talking, schools must then plan their interventions and programs to focus on parental needs.

There are two major mechanisms by which parental school involvement promotes achievement. The first is by increasing social capital. That is parental school involvement increases parents' skills and information (i.e., social capital), which makes them better

equipped to assist their children in their school-related activities. In other words, when parents establish relationships with school teachers, they learn important information about the school's expectations for behaviour and homework and how to augment children's learning at home (Lareau, 1996). When parents are involved in their children's schooling, they meet other parents who provide information and insight on school policies and practices, as well as extracurricular activities. Parents learn from other parents how to navigate the school and its demands and how difficult situations have been handled successfully. In turn, when parents and teachers interact, teachers learn about parents' expectations for their children and their children's teachers. For example, Baker and Stevenson (1986) found that compared with parents who were not involved, involved parents developed more complex strategies for working with schools and their children to promote school achievements.

Social capital is a second mechanism through which parental school involvement enhances achievement. Social control occurs when families and schools work together to build a consensus about appropriate behavior that can be effectively communicated to children at both home and school (McNeal, 1999). At school, parents are coming to know one another and agree on goals-both behavioral and academic-which serve as a form of social constraint that reduces problem behaviors. Consequently, when children and their peers receive similar messages about these appropriate behaviors across settings and from different sources, the messages become clear and salient and reduce confusion about expectations. Gaining both social capital and social control, children receive messages about the importance of schooling, and these messages increase children's competence, motivation to learn, and engagement in school (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

Overall, the main reason for a strong partnership between school, families and children is to aid children in succeeding at school. Other reasons include improving school climate and school programs, developing parental skills and leadership, assisting families in connecting with others in the school and the community, and assisting teachers in their work. All these reasons emphasize the importance of parents playing an active role in their children's education and keeping a strong and positive connection with schools.

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