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# Partnering for Sustainability: Parent-Teacher-School (PTS) Interactions in the Qatar Education System

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**Abstract:** The interaction avenues, levels, and impacts between parents, schools and teachers have changed drastically due to the ever-increasing responsibilities, frequent and rapid changes in the curriculum, the invasive dominance of the internet and digital media in the lives of all stakeholders, and the digitization of learning materials, to name a few. This pilot study follows a design-thinking approach to investigate the current practices, needs, and challenges of parental involvement in public schools in Qatar to improve student achievements towards sustainable living and habits by identifying problems, developing solutions, and improving student achievement in conjunction with all local and relevant stakeholders. To this end, building on extensive and comparative studies on theories, models, and best practices within and outside the selected domain, a qualitative study is conducted to obtain insight from local teachers and parents in preparatory public schools. The grounded theory method is employed to analyze the data via the qualitative coding technique. The results indicate that parental involvement practices in Qatar public schools occur in different forms, including home-based and school-based learning. Furthermore, while almost all parents recognize the significance of parental involvement and show a high level of interest in being on the 'Board of Trustees', in reality, very few participate or volunteer in school activities, and they rarely visit classrooms or interact with teachers or schools, mainly due to their increasing job-related commitments. In addition, the majority of parents indicate the need for additional flexibility in communication with the school to increase their involvement. Meanwhile, the teachers highlight the significant lack of parental involvement in understanding, overcoming and improving student achievement in both academic subjects and sustainable living habits and actions. The study outlines a few key suggestions to overcome these challenges and improve the parent-teacher-school (PTS) partnership, including offering mandatory parenting classes, developing and implementing effective communication mechanisms to facilitate parent-school interactions, and involving parents in decision-making process relating to their children and other school-related activities. Despite the sampling limitation, this study's findings represent a starting point for understanding the needs of PTS partnerships, current practices of parental involvement, and mechanisms to improve their contribution to Qatar's schools.

**Keywords:** parental involvement; education for sustainable development (ESD); parent-teacher-school (PTS) partnership; Qatar education system (QES)

## 1. Introduction

*Quality Education*, one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizes the significance of education within human development [1]. Education plays a critical role in sustainable development as it enhances life quality, creativity, and innovation, promotes an educated, skilled, and participative citizenship and workforce, leads to equitable workplaces, as well as increases social awareness, tolerance, and justice [2]. Concepts such as Education for Sustainability (EfS) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) have been developed as guiding methodologies to outline the realization of

SDGs through education. ESD, in particular, seeks to gain knowledge of, and reflect on, the impacts of behaviors, fill competencies within academic work, and make decisions with responsibility towards a sustainable future [3]. The lack of a universal meaning and formula for sustainability result in making ESD to be globally interpreted in various ways [4]. Broadly, ESD aims to equip future generations with necessary skills and understanding of sustainability challenges to cultivate resilience and adopt the dramatic changes to social change that leads towards sustainable thinking and living [1]. Sustainability as an educational task is not clearly defined, consequently making sustainability learning outcomes not clear enough to be understood [5]. However, one of the key factors in ESD is the parent-teacher-school (PTS) partnership, along with teacher development, a progressive curriculum, and adaptive performance-based assessment throughout the education system.

The focus of this study is the involvement of parents, as the third main human element after students and teachers, in the overall education system and the quality of their children's learning. A growing body of literature shows that the involvement of parents in schools greatly impacts student performance [6,7]. Parental engagement with teachers and schools has several advantages: it improves the overall outcomes of education and student achievement in academics, enhances attendance, boosts self-confidence, and improves student behaviors and social skills [8]. Additionally, studies show that fewer behavioral issues occur when parents are more engaged with their child's school [9]. However, some challenges impact this involvement of parents, such as their motivation, working hours, priorities, and time management skills [10], as well as constraints stemming from unclear communication mechanisms between the school and parents and restrictive guidelines imposed by either schools or larger education systems, and/or ministries.

Parental involvement in learning is one of the most critical factors of the education system, along with teachers, school, environment, curriculum, performance assessment, etc. [11], and studies show that it is the most predictive factor for student academic performance [12,13]. The main reason for its significance and direct relevance to the education system's outcomes is that parents are the most important stakeholders for their children, and hence their education and learning. As is the case with teachers, parents are in continuous daily contact with the students and serve as support and reflection points for them. Therefore, the quality of parent-teacher interactions and healthy parental involvement directly affect the overall quality of student learning from multiple aspects, such as academic, social, and moral dimensions [14]. Consequently, any improvements in PTS partnership development will directly impact the education goals, system, and eventually the SDGs.

According to various studies, the relationship between parents, teachers, and schools has weakened over the years [10] particularly during the past few decades with the increasing dominance of "virtual life in a virtual society", thanks to the emergence of internet, digital and social media, social virtual networks and platforms. The delicate balance and cooperation between parents at home, teachers at school, physical and social environment at large to help nurturing the children has broken down by the invasive dominance of "virtual or digital society" (Figure 1). Teachers complain about parents' lack of appreciation for teaching as well as miscommunication and a lack of motivation and support for their children's learning [15]. Parents and teachers should cooperate in various aspects to boost students' development, socialization, and academic achievements [16]. A strong PTS partnership is characterized by having sustainable and effective communication with parents. PTS requires involving parents in community activities to contribute to their children's learning and providing them with frequent and comprehensive reports to inform them about their children's performance and need for home-learning support [17]. With the realization of the importance of sustainability and the ESD and EfS concepts, there is an emerging need to formulate, communicate and integrate sustainability knowledge, habits, actions, and living into the schools, curriculum, and learning materials using real examples. This requires a sophisticated and proactive level of PTS.
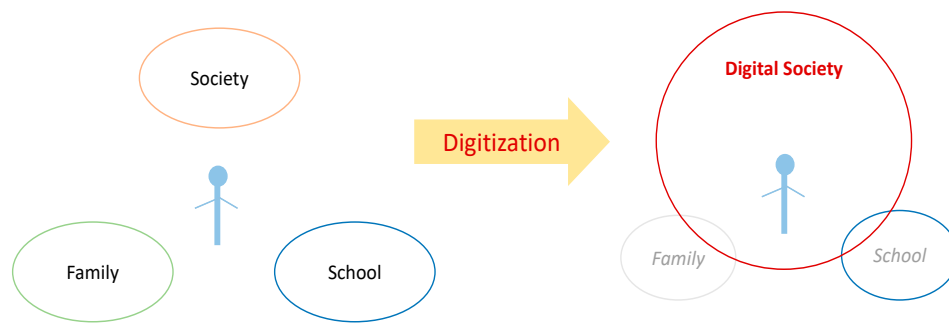
**Figure 1.** Challenges driven by the emergence and dominance of digital virtual society on tipping off the balance between Parents, School and Society for the healthy learning and growth of children.

The Qatar Education System (QES) has experienced a series of comprehensive reforms since 2001. Although Qatar has been investing a significant portion of its GDP in reforming and improving its education system, the outcomes, based on student achievement, are lower than expected and below world average [18]. Successful reform in education is characterized by having supportive and strong partnerships to adopt and embrace the changes and challenges together [19]. Additionally, to ensure successful reform, schools should take the risk of involving parents in decision-making processes to learn from their experience and feedback [20]. Qatar has initiated an educational policy to support the community partnership by involving parents in the school, stating that "*Effective involvement of parents in their children's learning process through collaboration with school and community members that reflect on their religion, culture, and tradition to achieve the balanced growth and learning of all children and young people*" [21].

Furthermore, to strengthen their partnership schools can support parents' involvement by publishing monthly newsletters, scheduling parents' interviews, and encouraging classroom visits [16]. The Supreme Education Council (SEC), renamed the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), introduced a policy in 2004 that emphasizes the role of PTS partnerships. This policy involves parents contributing to their children's learning process under the 'Classroom Visit' program, wherein parents are invited to visit classrooms and observe the teaching process [22]. Additionally, the SEC evaluates each school with regards to its success with parental involvement under the 'Partnerships with Parents' program, which focuses on three dimensions: (1) communication and feedback, (2) involvement and collaboration, and (3) support and reporting [17]. Finally, to foster parenting skills, the 'The Mother-Child Education Program' is implemented in Qatar to develop cognitive and social skills, particularly among low-income families [23].

Few researchers and educators have examined parental involvement in the QES [24], and the literature only explores the positive impacts of parental involvement in students' outcomes and motivation [25]. Meanwhile, parents' involvement in Qatar's schools is becoming more challenging, making these partnerships more difficult to maintain [16]. A study by Romanowski et al. on QES indicated that few parents are involved in these programs or the school settings, while fewer parents engage with children's assignments as they rely on private tutors instead [26]. Furthermore, most parents lack the motivation to support their child's education, while some also lack the communication skills to further the potential of PTS [26]. Al-Kuwari et al. emphasized that parents are getting less motivated in supporting their children' learning process, and they only expect their children to just pass to the next grade [27].

This study aims to, first, describe the practices of parental involvement in schools. Second, it determines the needs of PTS partnerships from a systems point of view using a multi-dimensional approach. Then, it develops and proposes a tailored set of solutions for improving PTS partnerships, that are appropriate for the local educational and cultural context, using a design thinking approach to achieve the overall aims of the SDGs and the Qatar National Vision (QNV 2030), which highlights that parents, like teachers, are obligated to be involved in the education system [28]. More specifically, the study intends to

answer the following questions: (1) What are the current practices of parental involvement in the current educational system of Qatari governmental schools? (2) What are the concerns and needs of local stakeholders (teachers and parents) regarding parental involvement in Qatar? (3) What ways and means exist to improve PTS interactions in QES?

To this end, building on an extensive and comparative literature review at the junction between education as a system, the UN's SDGs, and PTS partnerships, a qualitative study is conducted via interviews involving two types of stakeholders, namely teachers and parents in four preparatory government schools, to identify their needs, concerns, and suggestions to improve the QES, primarily from the PTS point of view. The needs and concerns are then analyzed, reviewed, combined, and further classified using manual coding analysis. The results from the conducted interview are then compared to the existing literature to provide clear answers and validate the findings. Hence, this study aims to reveal the real concerns and needs of the local stakeholders (teachers and parents) and provide suggestions for PTS in the context of Qatar. The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 summarizes the literature on parental involvement models and impacts through theories and best practices. Section 3 explains the methodology followed in this study. Section 4 presents the results and findings from the qualitative research. Section 5 compares the QES domain findings from the interview analysis findings with PTS models from the literature. Section 6 concludes by presenting recommendations for a more effective, impactful and sustainable PTS partnership.

## 2. Parental Involvement Models and Theories

In this section, an extensive literature review is conducted to, first, understand the models and theories of parental involvement in the education system, second, to learn from the past and others to justify the existence of such a problem and concerns regarding the participation of parents in school settings, and third, to examine how the involvement of parents in the education system can be managed and improved.

Researchers have developed several models to understand the practices and policies of PTS partnerships. Hoover-Dempsey constructed a model to measure student achievement and success based on parents' engagement in their children's education. The model involves five levels [29], with each level impacting the other levels: (1) parents' perspective and beliefs about their role in their children's educational life; (2) parental engagement behavior, support, and encouragement in home and at school; (3) children's perspective of parental engagement in school; (4) children's attributes and qualities for improving academic outcomes; and (5) children's achievement. This model does not, however, address the dimension of teachers' and schools' perspectives.

Epstein's model is the most commonly used model for parental involvement in the education system [30]. It describes the overlapping spheres of influence between family, school, and community in developing a successful child, with each sphere holding the capacity to support effective parent-school partnerships [31]. The model illustrates the social organization perception, whereby family and school overlap, and provides a holistic view of the relationship between the school, the community, and the family, whereby the child—placed at the center of the spheres—is the focal point. Epstein's framework outlined two major types of involvement, namely school-based and home-based, highlighting in-home learning and parental involvement as crucial to children's success [32]. Epstein introduced a framework that involves six types of parental involvement, namely parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Although Epstein's framework broadly encompasses many aspects of parental involvement (namely: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration), this model needs to be reconsidered to account for the increasing role of the virtual environment due to the increased use of the internet, social and digital media of all stakeholders (i.e., students, teachers, and parents).

The literature uses several terms to describe the PTS partnership, including parents' engagement, parents' intervention, parents' involvement, and parents' participation, yet re-

searchers and educators have found no universally agreed-upon definition of PTS partnership [33]. Most researchers believe that parental involvement embeds multi-dimensional concepts and meanings. Nevertheless, parental involvement is the term most commonly used to describe the different types of parental engagement in education [34]. PTS describes parents' and teachers' interactions with the legal framework characterized by norms, values, and beliefs that promote their shared responsibilities [35]. The PTS partnership should develop through intensive interactions based on mutual trust, respect, and understanding [36], and it is a critical factor in parent-school cooperation [37]. A growing body of literature indicates that parents and teachers believe that this partnership is useful for children's learning development [38], and a meaningful collaboration between parents and the school has been shown to enhance students' development and academic achievement [39].

Several review papers demonstrate that parents' meaningful involvement in schools has positive impacts and benefits all stakeholders [40], including improvements in students' academic performance, mental health, motivation, and attendance [41]. The parent-child-teacher relationship can improve mental health and psychological growth as well as reduce behavioral problems and difficulties [42]. Also, parental involvement fosters teachers' self-perception towards education and job satisfaction [43]. The relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement is positive, regardless of meaning of the parental involvement or extent of achievement [44]. A case study at Adukrom, based on teacher observations in one of the primary schools, indicates that parental involvement had a significant impact on students' outcomes and performance, leading to a 69.2% increase in the grade average when parents were involved [45]. The interactions between parents and the school can help determine the child's expected outcomes, reduce absenteeism, and improve grades [46].

Although parental involvement in the education system is critical and needs to be improved, few studies have investigated parental participation in Qatar, as indicated by Al-Thani et al. [22]. There are some concerns regarding parents' role and responsibilities in QES as they have become less involved in children's schooling [22]. Today, parents in Qatar tend to hold full-time jobs, causing them to leave their children with maids/nannies for long periods of time, impacting parents' roles and obligations in their children's education. The heavy dependency of Qatari parents on expatriate maids in raising their children has increased since the 2000s following rapid development, urbanization, and internationalization, with negative impacts on children's language skills and quality of learning [47]. The high dependency on domestic maids in Qatari households not only impacts children's language and behavior, but it also affects the role of parental involvement in school [22]. Parents in Qatari schools are getting less involved, and the students are becoming less motivated to study over the years [18]. In addition, parents in Qatar's school are not adequately aware of the value of education and thus, underestimate the efforts of teaching [26].

The impacts and challenges of the education reforms in Qatar as part of the 'Education for a New Era' were studied from the perspectives of different stakeholders, such as principals, teachers, and parents, by Romanowski et al. in 2013 through interviews in 18 independent (i.e., public or government) schools. The reform highlighted the significance of establishing a strong partnership between school and parents to achieve a shared goal and vision [26]. Teachers indicated that parents lacked motivation in supporting their children's education and were often too busy to attend progress meetings. The parents, meanwhile, reported that they depended on private tutors to help their children do their homework. Although the SEC (now the MoEHE) was developed to monitor the schools' quality assurance and ensure parental involvement, the authors reported that only 54% of the parents believed that schools allowed them to be involved in their settings. The study suggested that decision-makers should move away from models constructed by Western expertise and instead start initiating a local model by engaging expertise from local stakeholders and involving those factors vital to education, such as economic, political, and cultural factors, to enhance the curriculum and learning outcomes to meet the needs of the community [26].

A study by Ihmeideh et al. in 2018, on the parent-school relationship, explored parents and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools of Qatar. Drawing on a sample of 24 primary schools, the study concluded that among Epstein's six types model of parent involvement, 'Learning at home' had the highest mean scores compared to the other kinds of parental involvement, while the decision-making type was ranked the lowest [24]. 'Learning at home' was considered the easiest type of parental involvement as working parents did not necessarily need to be present in the school. Home-based learning consists of not only helping children with their assignments but also assisting them in developing their 21st century skills, behaviors, personality, and attitudes [48]. 'Communication' was rated the second-highest, indicating the significance of having such communications between parents and school staff. Parents stated that they did not usually have direct contact with teachers, contradicting the concept of "parents as partners". The school counselors needed to initiate the communication instead. Parents also highlighted "some lack of clear communication" as teachers and school counselors tended to use technical words that parents often misunderstood. Parents were less likely to be involved in the "Volunteering" type as they stated that schools had never invited them to participate in volunteering activities. The only volunteering form they knew about was the "classroom visit," where they only attended classrooms to observe "without participating" in classroom activities [24]. Some teachers emphasized that they were offered "parenting and child rearing" programs to parents using various social media platforms. Additionally, some parents indicated that they were rarely involved in the decision-making process. One teacher reported that the school-parent partnership should involve mutual trust and understanding and include parents in the decision-making process. Hence, the study highlighted the need to trust parents and both involve them in decision-making and give them a chance to volunteer.

## 3. Methodology

This study is conducted as a pilot for a long-term and multi-dimensional investigation on the QES. It intends to, first, describe the parental involvement and PTS interaction issues from a systems point of view using a multi-dimensional approach, and second, to develop and propose a tailored set of suggested solutions for developing a cohesive and interactive parent-teacher-school partnership model suitable for the local and cultural context and needs using the design-thinking approach to achieve the overall goals of the QNV2030 and SDGs.

The study hereby investigates stakeholders' needs and behaviors towards problems related to PTS partnerships through interviews, and the data is analyzed to generate meaningful theories. The generated data is mainly qualitative to obtain an in-depth understanding of the current issue of parental involvement in the education system in Qatar. Interviews are employed to reflect the objectives of this study, while explanatory research is conducted to address the problems associated with parent involvement, state the significance of parents' involvement in society, and develop solutions to the existing problem. The study is limited to one grade level (8th grade) in government schools. Access was also restricted to a number of selected schools. Within those schools, many preferred to keep their data confidential and withheld some school data/reports. Also, only female parents participated in this study due to cultural barriers.

To perform this study, relevant articles were studied by conducting an extensive literature review from databases including ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Sage Journals, and ResearchGate using selected keywords, which included Parental Involvement, PTS Partnership, QES, and ESD in different combinations, and referring to some studies that were suggested by expert in the field of education. The search resulted with around 150 documents. The documents were then was analyzed by reviewing the title, abstracts, main body, and references which resulted in reducing the number of relevant papers to around 100. Out of these, approximately 80 articles and reports were found to be addressing common theories of parental involvement and PTS partnership and the research process was conducted between March 2019 and October 2020.

The methodology used to conduct the study is depicted in Figure 2. Explanatory research is commonly conducted on a social problem that needs to be explored clearly with the use of qualitative data collection techniques [49]. A qualitative research approach is performed to analyze the data from interviews employed in the study. Qualitative research is also implemented to emphasize the meaning of the data and the resulting themes, facilitating a deep understanding of parental involvement in the education system. Then, a grounded theory methodology is used to conduct the qualitative research study. Grounded theory aims to generate theory from gathered data that is deeply studied and analyzed using inductive techniques to generate theories that emerge from the collected data [50]. It is used to build a theory to produce an inductive approach that promotes conceptual thinking [51]. The inductive approach aims to build generalizations of such phenomena and create theories that support the study based on the collected data [52]. Researchers use the grounded theory approach to highlight and explore perspectives on a specific existing problem using interviews or focus groups [53].
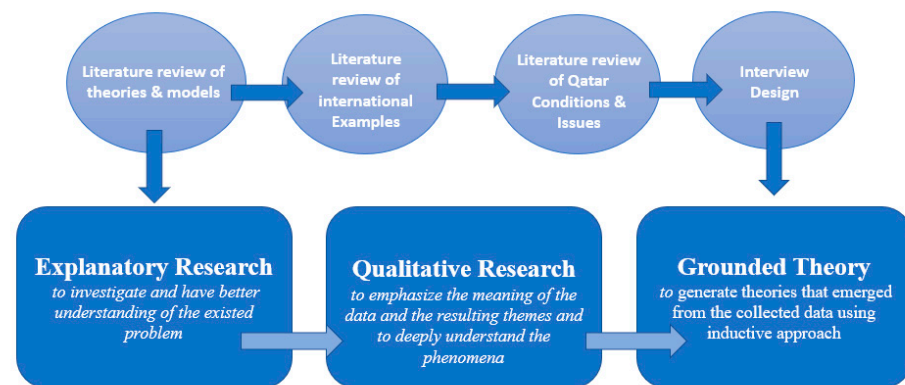


**Figure 2.** Research Methodology Approach.

The interviews were conducted to achieve the purposes of this study, and the interview questions aimed to be relevant and aligned with the research questions and objectives. The interviews allowed qualitative data to be obtained with in-depth understandings of the participants' (teachers and parents) perceptions of the phenomenon, clearly identifying the current needs with the support of evidence and ensuring alignment with the predicted information. Qualitative data was obtained from interviews based on planned and prepared semi-structured questions. The confidentiality of the participants was ensured by recording their responses in a "data notebook". The interviews consisted of one or a maximum of two participants to explore their perspective on the subject. Figure 3 illustrates the procedures used to achieve the purposes of the conducted interviews.

The study is restricted to government schools. The schools were selected based on their students' performance in the national exams, as published in MoEHE school card reports [54], demography (high percentage of Qatari teachers), and location (near Doha). In total, four preparatory government schools (two high-performance schools, two low-performance schools) were chosen to ensure a balance contribution between the participants and get a general sense and feedback of parental involvement issues. Coordination with MoEHE was needed to obtain access to the schools, which limited the number of selected schools and teachers for the study. After obtaining access from MoEHE, several schools were contacted to schedule the teachers' interviews according to their availability.

Teachers, administrators, and parents are the main stakeholders who play an important role in the education system and directly impact student outcomes. The participants in this study included parents, representing the first and foremost educators to their children, and teachers, who interact daily and continuously with the students, direct the teaching process, and improve their learning outcomes. The participants were divided into two groups, namely teachers and parents. The interviews were conducted in Arabic due to the language barrier for some participants, especially the parents. The interview transcripts

were translated into English according to the meaning instead of wording/literal translation to avoid a loss of the meaning of the data since all the participants had the same mother tongue [55].
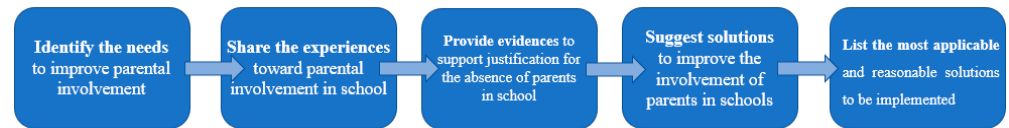


**Figure 3.** Objectives of the Interviews.

A total of 36 participants were interviewed (21 teachers and 15 parents) to understand their perceptions and experiences of the PTS partnership. To ensure effective and relevant feedback and data, all parents interviewed had at least one child in a public preparatory school. It can be noted from parents' demography that parents with higher educational level tend to send their children to high performance schools. This can be seen from the demographics since a total of seven parents with a Bachelor degree, and two parents with a Master degree have their children in high performance schools; whereas five parents with a high school degree have their children in low performance schools. The parents were interviewed individually and openly to produce sufficient results. It is important to highlight that only mothers were interviewed due to the cultural barrier and because mothers primarily interact with teachers and schools. Teachers who had experience teaching in public schools and were willing to share their experiences were interviewed. Table 1 and Figure 4 summarize the demography of the selected participants.
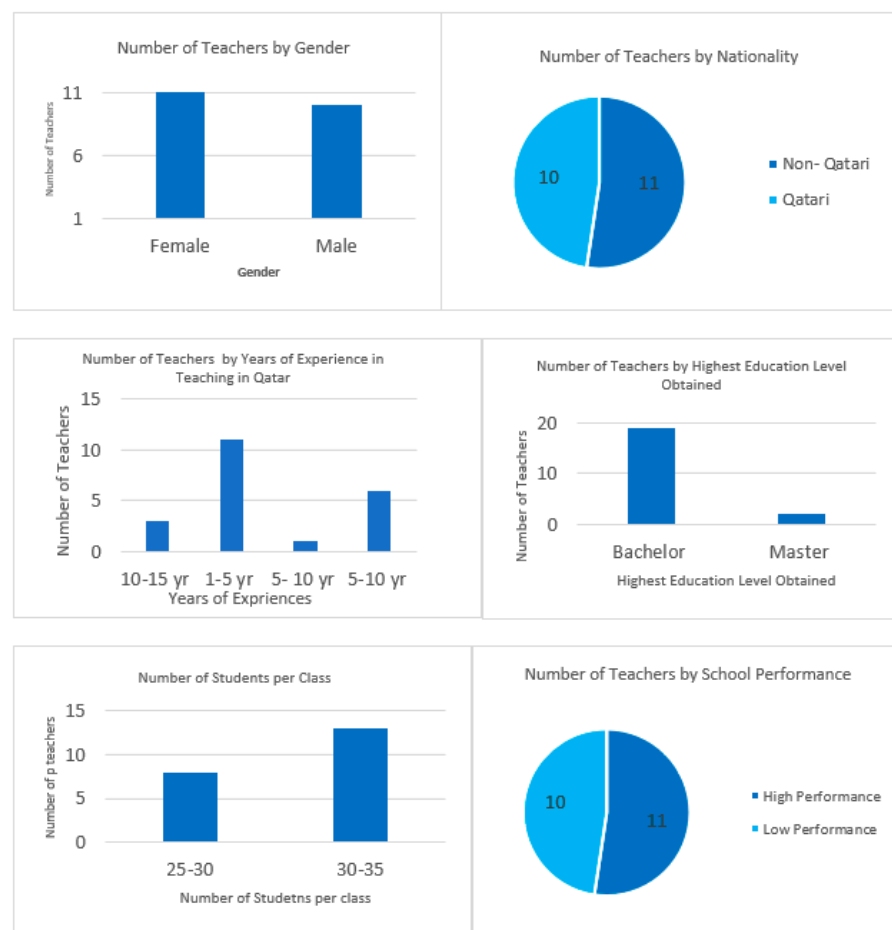


**Figure 4.** Participants' Demographic Characteristics: Teachers.

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic characteristics: Parents.

| Parents | Gender | Nationality | Age | Highest Education Level Obtained | Profession | Number of Child in Public School | Total Number of Children | Hours Spent Per Week in Supporting Children Learning | School Performance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | Female | Qatari | 35–40 | Bachelor | Coordinator | 2 | 4 | 3–4 | High |
| P2 | Female | Qatari | 30–35 | High School | Secretary | 3 | 3 | 3 | Low |
| P3 | Female | Non-Qatari | 40+ | Master | Analyst | 4 | 7 | 4 | High |
| P4 | Female | Non-Qatari | 35–40 | Bachelor | Engineer | 2 | 4 | 3–4 | High |
| P5 | Female | Qatari | 30–35 | High School | Designer | 2 | 5 | 3–4 | Low |
| P6 | Female | Qatari | 40+ | Bachelor | Engineer | 5 | 6 | 3 | High |
| P7 | Female | Non-Qatari | 40+ | Bachelor | Nurse | 4 | 4 | 3–4 | High |
| P8 | Female | Qatari | 35–40 | High School | Assistant | 3 | 5 | 3–4 | Low |
| P9 | Female | Qatari | 30–35 | Bachelor | Administrator | 1 | 3 | 4 | High |
| P10 | Female | Non-Qatari | 25–30 | High School | Coordinator | 2 | 4 | 4 | Low |
| P11 | Female | Qatari | 40+ | Bachelor | Designer | 4 | 7 | 3–4 | High |
| P12 | Female | Qatari | 35–40 | Bachelor | Coordinator | 3 | 5 | 3–4 | High |
| P13 | Female | Qatari | 40+ | High School | Assistant | 2 | 5 | 3 | Low |
| P14 | Female | Non-Qatari | | Master | Designer | 4 | 6 | 4 | High |
| P15 | Female | Qatari | 35–40 | High School | Assistant | 3 | 5 | 3–4 | Low |

Before answering the questions, a fact sheet questionnaire was distributed to the participants to identify their demography, age, nationality, years of experience, number of children in public school, current occupation, etc. A different fact sheet questionnaire was distributed to the teachers.

The interviews generally took place in a meeting room inside the school building and lasted between 30 and 45 min per participant. The participants' responses were recorded by taking notes using a "data notebook" to maintain their confidentiality.

The questions asked in the interviews were mostly open-ended to obtain detailed and in-depth information about the perceptions of the participants regarding the involvement of parents. The interview questions were different for the teachers, although both types of participants answered a total of around ten open-ended questions. The questions were numbered in series to gradually build up to the main objectives of the study.

The qualitative coding technique was used to derive the themes from the in-depth interviews to understand the PTS interaction, identify stakeholders' needs, and develop a set of suggestions to solve the issues related to parental involvement in the education system. Once the data was recorded with transcripts in the data notebook, the data was analyzed in three stages: deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction [56]. First, in the deconstruction stage, the data is broken down and classified into categories, grouping the similarities and differences among the collected data. Then in the interpterion stage, the categorized data is interpreted to fully understand the coded contents and then compared with the transcripts to ensure the alignments across the data. Additionally, the data is compared with the literature's findings to determine the relationships between the themes and explore the theories. After that, in the reconstruction stage, the codes are reframed and further explained by providing evidence to show the relationship between the themes and the existing theory.

For the data analysis, thematic analysis is used to interpret the qualitative data and recognize the common themes [57]. The interview transcripts were used to analyze and interpret the qualitative data. The steps of interpreting the data are achieved by first skimming the transcripts, and then frequently reading the text to have a better understanding of the collected data from interviewees. The participants demographic characteristics (parents and teachers) were performed using Excel to organize and distinguish the demography of the interviewees and get a general sense of the participants. The next step, called coding, is where the relevant and most frequent responses are highlighted to draw attention to these. Coding is a commonly used technique for interviews [50]. Coding is an essential part of data analysis as it links data collection with data exploration [58]. Primarily, the coding technique was used to categorize the texts and identify the relationships between them according to their meaning, frequency, similarities, and differences. Manual hand analysis is used to analyze, categorize, and code the texts using different colors to manually distinguish between the classified contents. There are several reasons behind using manual coding techniques: (1) small-sized database, (2) enhance familiarity and reliability of the data, (3) avoid bias due to computer interpretation [59]. Also, as mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted in Arabic, therefore human translation were performed to translate the text manually and avoid losing the meaning and the sense of the gathered data. Last step is reducing the number of codes by finding the relevant codes that address the research questions. After that, the comparable codes were grouped together to help create the categories and build the themes. Categories can be constructed from repetitive or similar codes that frequently occur to form an emerging pattern [60]. The categorized data was then interpreted to establish a thematic perception for each category. Then, the most relevant themes were labeled and selected to be compared with the findings in the literature and most importantly to serve the purpose of this study. Finally, a hierarchy of themes was developed to give a better understanding of the data.

## 4. Results and Findings

The categorized data from the conducted interview are interpreted to establish a thematic perception and are then further combined and reduced. Subsequently, the themes are generated from the coded contexts to analyze the perceptions of the stockholders. Figure 5 illustrates the main themes generated to understand the existing problems of parental involvement and find solutions to improve parents' involvement in the school settings. The following sections present a discussion of the findings from the interviews, both contextually and theoretically, with the support of the existing literature.
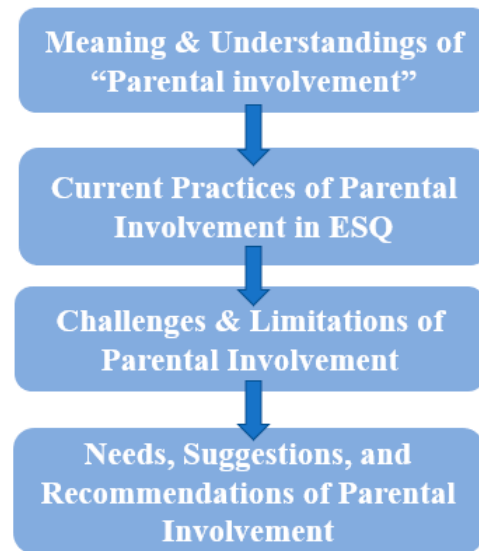


**Figure 5.** Themes of the Findings via Interviews.

### 4.1. Meanings & Understandings of Parental Involvement

First, the stakeholders define parental involvement based on their perceptions, thereby demonstrating that the stakeholders have different perceptions and meanings in terms of parental involvement. Figure 6 presents a diagram illustrating the meaning of "parental involvement" from both the teachers' and parents' perspectives, respectively. It hereby shows the common patterns at the center, while the other patterns are displayed separately according to the stakeholders' perceptions.
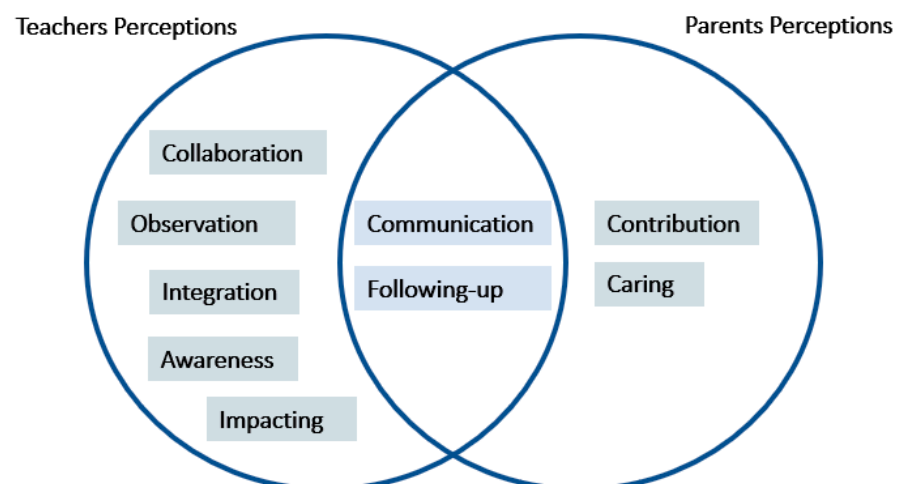


**Figure 6.** Parental Involvement—Meanings from the Perspectives of Teachers and Parents.

In line with the findings in existing literature, in this study, the teachers' and parents' perceptions differ regarding "parental involvement" [61]. A growing body of studies indicates that parental involvement encompasses broad terms such as *family engagement* [62] or *family-school relationship* [24]. Researchers and educators examining the definition of parental involvement conclude that there are several perceptions of the meanings of parental involvement in educational settings, with no universal definition [63]. Hence, the lack of a common understanding of parental involvement indicates that teachers and parents impact parent involvement differently in school settings [64].

### 4.2. Current Practices of Parental Involvement in the Education System

Next, the thematic analysis of the interviews leads to a list of current practices of parental involvement, which can be categorized at three levels: class, school, or society. The questions were asked to both groups of participants, i.e., teachers and parents, and their responses on the existing activities, practices, and policies that support partnerships between parents, teachers, and students, are found to be in line with each other. Based on this, the current practices are classified in Table 2.

Classroom visits are a current practice in Qatari schools to encourage parents' involvement at the class level. However, the conducted interviews indicate that none of the parents have visited the classroom. This is similar to the finding of Al-Fadala (2019) on the lessons learned from Education for a New Era, with one of the interviewed teachers mentioning that *"I have never had mothers in my classroom, I am used to my colleagues who attend and observe my lessons."* [65]. In line with these findings, a teacher (T4) indicates that *"We rarely see parents are involved in classroom activities or volunteer in giving a lesson in the classroom."*

Moreover, four teachers (T1, 2, 3, and 9) add that classroom visits allow parents to observe how their children behave in the classroom. In particular, as one teacher (T1) indicated: *"Parents' involvement in the classroom helps them to witness the student's behavior, interactions, and class participation, such as contributing and responding in-class activities, and it assures parents about the understanding of the materials for their child. It gives a clear picture of the teaching technique, making the students behave and respect the teachers"*.

This is also aligned with the findings of Al-Fadala, where the participating teachers suggest involving more parents in the classroom to decrease behavioral issues and enhance respect [65]. The study adds that classroom visits are considered a form of communication that helps parents to observe the school in action and participate in classroom activities. In the study by Ihmeideh et al., most of the parents interviewed (12 out of 15) mention that their current participation is restricted to classroom visits, whereby they only sit inside the classroom, observing what is going on and how children interact, without having the chance to participate in the lessons, share their ideas and beliefs, or evaluate the teaching methods [24]. Therefore, schools should clarify the purpose of classroom visits to enable parents to understand their role in the classroom.

Furthermore, at the school level, few parents participate in school activities, with only four parents (P2,5,6, and 13) indicating that they attend various school activities. Specifically, one parent (P2) declares that *"I have only attended two activities for the last two years, such as Qatar National Day and drawing competition. I am only encouraged to participate when my daughter participates"*. Meanwhile, five teachers (T3,6,15,17, and 18) assert that parents are invited to participate in school activities, such as handcrafting, drawing, cooking, and national events.

As indicated in the interviews, very few parents participate in or volunteer for school activities. As one teacher (T18) emphasizes, *"I see very few parents participate in activities such as cooking day and handcrafting as well . . . "* Parents in Qatar are not motivated to volunteer and participate in school activities due to limited time [26], and are therefore less involved in volunteering activities [24], as highlighted in a report by The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) stating that only 20% of parents attend and participate in school activities in Qatar [66].

**Table 2.** Current Practices of Parental Involvement according to the Conducted Interviews.

| Practice Levels | Current Practice | Number of Teacher Participants Who Reported the Practice (Out of 21) | Number of Parent Participants Who Reported the Practice (Out of 15) | Examples from Parent Participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class | Classroom visit | 12 teachers mentioned this (T1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 16, 19, 20, and 21) | Six parents reported this (P4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 13) | No one attended the classroom or participated in a "classroom visit." |
| School | Volunteering activities | Five teachers mentioned this (T3, 6, 15, 17, and 18) | Four parents reported this (P2, 5, 6, and 13) | Handcrafting, cooking, giving a speech, reading stories, attending Qatari national events |
| | General meetings & Individual meetings | All teachers mentioned general meetings & individual meetings | All parents reported attending general meetings. Six out of 15 reported attending individual meetings | General call for Parental Meeting Day, Orientation Day, School Reports Day Behavioral issues or academic performance |
| | e-learning portal | Seven teachers mentioned this (T5, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, and 21); | Four parents reported this (P1, 4, 13, and 15) | LMS application (Learning Management System) |
| Society | Board of trustees | Six teachers mentioned this (T3, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 20). | Six parents reported this (P2, 5, 7, 11, 13 and 15) | Shared concerns & suggestions |
| | Social media | Three teachers mentioned this (T5, 15, and 18) | Two parents reported this (P1 and P9) | Followed school accounts on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. |

At the school level, the parents indicate that they attend at least four general meetings per year, which corresponds to the number of annual parent meetings held by government schools in Qatar [65]. All parents indicate that they are present at the general parent meeting to acknowledge the school policies, pass the curriculums and be informed about exam dates and holidays. Furthermore, five parents (P3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10) state that they have each attended at least one individual meeting for a behavioral issue. Also, six more parents (P2, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 15) report that they have attended at least one individual academic performance discussion meeting per semester. The results show that almost all parents have attended at least one type of meeting throughout the academic year, demonstrating that most parents in Qatar perform their basic obligation of attending regular school meetings.

The regular parental meeting is the most common form of parental involvement [65,67]. In addition, the data from interviews shows that teachers have no direct communication with parents, and it is the responsibility of the counselors to call and invite parents to the school. For instance, T3 states that "*We don't have direct communication with parents; first, the counselor has to call the parent and arrange a meeting as per our request.*" Counselors are responsible for communicating with parents to arrange meetings, hold workshops to inform parents about the child's academic progress and notify them about school activities [22]. However, the interviewed parents expressed a need to have direct communication with teachers instead of receiving calls from counselors. This is also aligned with the finding that some parents in Qatar are dissatisfied with placing the responsibility for the communication process with the counselors and not the teachers as the latter know more about the students' academic progress and behavior [24].

At the school level, seven teachers (T5, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, and 21) state that parents can communicate with teachers using the Learning Management System (LMS) application provided by the MoEHE, which allows parents to track the child's attendance, assignments, reports, subject materials, announcements, and grades [68]. In particular, as one teacher (T14) declares, "*Parents can follow up with the student's daily reports, attendance, homework, exam dates, upcoming projects and communicate with the teacher by using the online application called: e-learning portal/LMS . . . *". Only four parents (P1, 4, 13, and 15) report using e-learning applications at the school level to follow up on their children's performance.

Al-Musawi indicated that the LMS application in Qatari schools helps to create technology-enhanced learning that establishes a link between teachers, students, and parents [69]. Such educational applications have been shown to make the learning process more effective and useful for students [70].

Furthermore, at the society level, six teachers (T3, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 20) highlight the parents' involvement in the Board of Trustees, including their roles and benefits. In particular, one teacher (T6) emphasizes that " ... *A selected number of representative parents are involved in the Board of Trustees, those parents are nominated and elected regarding their qualification along with school principal and teachers, to be part of the members, such policies are proactive, where parents tend to monitor student progress, oversee school performance and curriculum, share ideas, suggestions or recommendations if they have any concerns.*" Similarly, six parents (P2, 5, 7, 11, 13 and 15) also acknowledge the parents' role in the Board of Trustees. Specifically, one parent (P11) mentions that the "*Board of Trustees give us the chance to introduce some suggestions and talk about some concerns for a selected number of parents as I am one of them ... *" The interviewed parents show their interest in being involved on the Broad of Trustees to share their ideas. All such boards are regularly monitored by MoEHE authorities to ensure their commitment of attending meetings and meeting the purpose of staying informed about school issues. The elected parents usually discuss policies, objectives, student performance, school plans, self-reviews, student behavior, health and safety, participate in school activities and give evidence about parents' participations in such school activities [71].

Two parents (P1 and P9) also mention their engagement with school social media accounts with the aim of tracking and following up on schools' announcements and activities. In particular, as one parent (P9) says, " ... *Parent involvement is not only limited in presenting in school; it can be through social media where parents follow the school accounts in Twitter or Facebook, for example, to get updated with school news, achievements or activities*". Participating in social media accounts allows parents to share their ideas and receive notifications on school events and activities. Due to the broad use of social media, merging education into social media has become a necessity. Implementing education in social media in Qatar is a future goal for educational institutions to improve the learning outcomes for the new generation, which has the potential to use technology at a very early age [69].

*4.3. Challenges and Limitations of Parental Involvement*

Parents and teachers encounter several challenges and obstacles that restrict parental involvement in the school. Based on the collected data from the parents' and teachers' perspectives, common patterns emerge regarding the challenges of parental involvement, as presented in Figure 7.
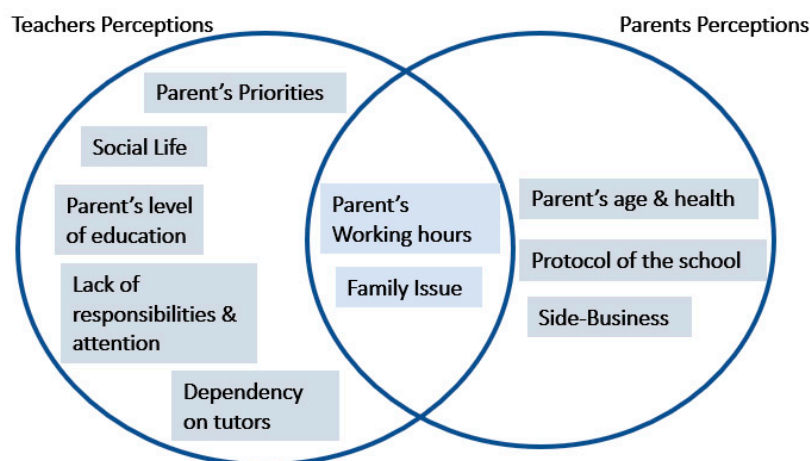


**Figure 7.** Challenges of Parental Involvement from the Perspectives of Teachers and Parents.

As can be seen in Figure 7, the most repetitive pattern from both the teacher and parent perspectives is parents' working hours. This is addressed by 14 teachers (T1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19 and 20), who emphasize that parents' working hours limit parents' effective, timely, and meaningful involvement in the school. In particular, one teacher (T3) states that *"Parents working hours is one of the most common challenges, as you know most parents nowadays are working . . . "* Similarly, 14 parents (P1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15) mention that their working hours conflict with school activities. This is in line with previous findings that parents' working hours and busy life prevent them from being involved in school settings [26].

Family issues, including separation, divorce, a second wife, and a large number of children, are also commonly mentioned by both teachers and parents. Nine teachers (T3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 16, 18, 20, and 21) claim that family issues create a barrier to parental involvement in schools. Specifically, one teacher (T21) indicates that *"I know some divorced mothers are not willing to communicate with the school, and they always say 'go call the father instead, it is his responsibility as well' . . . "*. Similarly, seven parents (P2, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15) confirm that family issues can restrict the involvement of parents in schools.

Some parents add that their *"age and health"* also limit their involvement. Other parents emphasize that the *"protocol of the school"* limits their presence. This is in contrast to the MOEHE report, which states that 97% of teachers indicate for the school's welcoming of parents in government public schools [53]. Additionally, it ensures that regardless of the school performance, parents' involvement in home-based learning is still the same for both low performance school and high-performance school. Parents state that some schools do not have an open-door policy and ask them to make an appointment before visiting. Six parents (P5, 6, 7, 8, 14 and 15) indicate that school protocol in communication can also impact their involvement in school. In particular, as one parent (P5) stated: *"School protocol should be improved. My daughter's school, for example, makes it hard to communicate, as when I arrived at her school to follow up with my daughter's academic performance, they told me, 'You should call and make an appointment before you visit!' I was shocked to hear such a response. I believe the school has to be flexible with parents' timing."*

Some parents highlight that the school's protocol of welcoming parents has a significant impact on their involvement. In their study on engaging parents, Rule and Kyle show that the school environment and the interactions between parents are other factors restricting parents' involvement in the school [72]. The authors suggest that communication between school faculty and staff needs to be enhanced to involve more parents in the school. Moreover, a study on welcoming parents to school in California by Siegel et al. highlights that to have more parents engaged in school activities, it is essential to have a welcoming and healthy school environment [73].

The term "side-business" is also addressed by five parents (P3, 4, 7, 13, and 15), who state that running a side-business makes parents very busy. In particular, one parent (P4) indicates that *"Side-business makes parents very engaged and busy such that they do not have enough time to attend school activities or communicate with their children's school effectively."*

Meanwhile, some challenges and limitations are mentioned only by teachers. For example, a *"lack of responsibility"* is addressed by 10 teachers (T2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, and 21), who mention that few parents are involved in the school due to a lack of responsibility and attention. In particular, one teacher (T15) indicates that *" . . . it is a lack of responsibility and attention toward the child and being careless toward the education that makes parents less involved"*. Besides, seven teachers (T4, 5, 11, 14, 16, 20 and 21) emphasize that the dependency on tutors has led to fewer parents being involved in school meetings. For instance, one teacher (T14) indicates that *"Some parents heavily depend on tutors when it comes to assignments and projects, which makes parents less responsible for their child."* Additionally, "parent's level of education" is highlighted by four teachers (T1, 5, 6 and 7). As one teacher (T13) indicates, *"Well-educated parents like parents with a Master degree, for example, are acting differently when talking about children behavior or grades, they seem like they understand and care more than other parents who only finish their high school."*

The conducted interviews reveal that the average number of hours that parents spend with their children per week to support their education is 3–4 h, which is similar to the 3 h per week reported by the MoEHE [53]. This may be primarily due to the fact that parents rely on tutors to ensure the best learning outcomes for their children. For example, the report by The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) in 2016 shows that 46% of Qatari students receive home-tutoring to help them do their assignments, which can lead to some students not paying attention in the classroom. This is often the result of the prosperous, wealthy, and luxurious lives of Qatari parents [66]. Hence, the current study finds that some parents in Qatar are not spending enough time with their children, particularly for assignments.

A "lack of motivation" is also addressed by five teachers (T5, 16, 18, 20 and 21), who claim that a lack of motivation toward education prevents parents from being involved in schools. In particular, one teacher (T21) says that *"parents are not encouraged to involve in school in all aspects due to lack of motivation . . . "*. Moreover, *"parents' priorities"* is noted by six teachers (T8, 9, 13, 16, 19 and 21), who highlight that these significantly impact on their involvement in school. In particular, one teacher (T8) states that *"It is all about priorities, I believe. Now parents have busy life associated with their own business, travel, and other interests! Parents have their priorities."*

*4.4. Needs, Suggestions, and Recommendations to Improve the Parental Involvement*

The selected participants were asked about their needs, suggestions, and recommendations to improve parental involvement in schools, to enhance student achievement, and to effectively realize education goals and SDGs. The obtained results were collected, coded, classified, and then organized based on the stakeholders' needs. The following presents a discussion of each need in comparison and reference to studies found in the literature. Suggestions and recommendations are also provided accordingly to achieve the objectives of the study.

4.4.1. Emphasize the Role of Parents in Schools to Enhance Awareness, Responsibility, and Accountability

Most teachers indicate the need to emphasize the role of parents in schools. For example, ten teachers (T2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 16, 18 and 19) state that parents need to realize their role and responsibilities and become aware of education's significance and value. For example, one teacher (T3) asserts that *"There is a need for parents to recognize their role in the school, such parent should be involved in classroom, homework, or in seminars to give a speech in such sustainability subject."*

It is significant to enrich parents with parenting skills to support their role in their children's education and raise their awareness of the schools' guidelines [22]. The MoEHE (2018) reports that family involvement in supporting children's homework is ranked at 2.3 out of 4, i.e., indicating that parents provide support for only *"some of the homework"* [54], emphasizing that parents need to be more involved in their children's homework. Dervarics and O'Brien examined parents' involvement in school using the Epstein method, supported by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) report [74]. The authors emphasized that *"learning at home"* has the most substantial impact on student achievement. The SEDL report concludes that providing parents with mandatory training programs to assess and support their children's learning at home positively impacts student achievement. One way to engage parents in school is by establishing a program that requires them to review their child's assignments via the learning-at-home type of involvement, thereby promoting a two-way knowledge exchange between home and school. Therefore, the school should implement learning-at-home activities by providing parent support, advisors, translators if needed, and clear instructions for solving homework in home-school knowledge activities.

### 4.4.2. Enhance Children's Morals and Values to Reduce Behavioral Issues

Some of the participant teachers assert that parents need to focus on morals and values as some students have behavioral issues. For instance, six teachers (T3, 5, 11, 13, 14 and 15) confirm that parents need to observe their children's behavior in schools. Notably, one teacher (T3) says that: "*Parents' involvement is essential when it comes to the behavioral issue! Most of the students disrespect the teacher; they tend to hit the teacher and say bad words.* ". To reduce the behavioral issues, one teacher (T2) suggests that "*Behavioral training is required to embrace respect and morals.*"

Additionally, schools are evaluated by teachers' relationship with students' parents, as indicated by the evaluation framework of the MoEHE Evaluations Affairs [54]. It has also been noted that parents benefit from intensive behavioral training classes to help them interact with their children and promote mutual understanding and respect [75]. Therefore, schools should offer mandatory parenting programs that enrich parents with parenting skills to improve their communication skills and enhance their children's social behavior.

### 4.4.3. Enhance Respect and Value and Appreciate Teaching as a Profession

Both teachers and parents claim that the teaching profession needs to be respected and appreciated by society. Some parents in Qatar's educational context do not appreciate the value of education, and thus underestimate the teaching efforts [26]. Some teachers indicate that the way that parents respond to teachers is not respectful. In particular, one teacher (T10) commented: "*Parents should appreciate and respect the teacher, as the majority of parents are not respecting nor appreciating the effort of the teacher to help the children succeed, that is why some students do not respect us.*"

Some students do not respect teachers due to ethnic and racial differences, as most teachers in Qatar are non-Qatari. For example, one teacher (T7) says that "*Some students only respect you when you are a Qatari teacher, and as you know, most of the teachers are non-Qatari*". According to the statistical data found by MDPS, most teachers (86%) in Qatar are non-Qatari [76]. Similarly, Al-Fadala mentions that in parental meetings in one school in Qatar, parents responded negatively to teachers [64]. UNESCO has published an implementation guidebook, titled "Teaching Respect for All", which highlights the significance of tolerance, values, and respect, especially when it comes to cultural and ethnic differences in schools [77].

### 4.4.4. Enhance Parents' Motivation and Encourage Them to Share Their Experience with Students in the Classroom

Some teachers indicate that parents should be more motivated and willing to share their job-related experience and present examples to sustain healthy living habits in the classroom. For example, seven teachers (T3, 5, 6, 15, 16, 19 and 20) state that parents should share their experience with students and teachers. In particular, one teacher (T16) says that "*Parents should observe the atmosphere of teaching by attending one day to the classroom and share their experiences and job-related subjects to students or perhaps explain for students how to gain sustainability habits.*" There is an extensive body of literature showing that parents in Qatar's school lack motivation in regards to education [20]. Engaging parents in the classroom is a way to motivate parents and enrich the classroom environment with new experiences, which can lead to improved literacy skills. One teacher (T15) suggests:"*Making classroom visit as a mandatory practice for the parent will help to share their knowledge.*" One benefit of involving parents in the classroom and implementing knowledge exchange activities between parents and teachers is that students' numeracy and literacy skills will significantly improve [78].

### 4.4.5. Promote Flexibility and Effectiveness in Communication (Meetings, Activities, Social Media) and Improve the School Climate to Welcome Parents

Both teachers and parents emphasize the need to promote flexibility and effectiveness in communication. For example, four parents (P3, 5, 8 and 15) report that using WebEx,

a videoconferencing platform, instead of showing up in school is easier for them as their circumstances and challenges reduce their chances of being present at school. In particular, one parent (P3) claims that there is a need to *"Make the communication mechanism more flexible by allowing parents to freely communicate with the school, such as attending the meetings according to parent's availability or using Skype/WebEx instead of going in person."*

In line with the study, the terms "lack of clear communication" [24] and "lack of communication" [20] appear frequently among parents in various studies as teachers and school counselors tend to use technical words that parents can misunderstand. Thus, the field of "*communication and social skills*" needs to be improved to create an effective parent-teacher partnership [22].

Four teachers (T6, 8, 10, and 14) address the need to shift the school meeting hours to the afternoon or evening. As one teacher (T8) indicates, *"Maybe shifting the meeting time to after-noon or perhaps evening will increase the chances of parent involvement in such activities or meetings . . . ".* Moreover, six parents (P2, 7, 8, 11, 14 and 15) state the need to schedule individual school meetings depending on each parent's availability. In particular, one parent (P8) suggests that *"It is better to schedule individual meetings for each parent to meet after working hours, depending on parents' availability, especially for older parents or those who have a health issue."*

The interviewed teachers also indicate that one way to engage parents in school is to ask them to follow the school's social media accounts to track the school's activities. Schools in Qatar can provide an additional way to communicate by using technology, such as holding meetings on videoconferencing platforms. Both parents and teachers highlight the need to provide parents with more sessions to teach them how to use the school applications, such as the LMS e-learning platform, as emphasized by three teachers (T5, 14, 17). Notably, one teacher (T5) claims that *"There is a need to proactive the e-learning portal as Qatari parents are less involved in the e-learning which indicates that they do not follow up with daily reports, assignments, attendance . . . Their involvement will improve the academic performance of the student".*

4.4.6. Involve More Parents in Community Services to Enhance Their Role in the Community Development Around the School Environment

Both teachers and parents emphasize the need to involve parents in community services. Six teachers (T3, 5, 11, 13, and 15 and 20) and five parents (P2, 5, 7, 13 and 15) suggest providing opportunities for parents to participate as Board of Trustee members and share their concerns and suggestions. In particular, one teacher (T5) suggests that *"Making more parents involved in Board of Trustees will help parents to give their opinions, suggestions, share their concerns."* Professional learning communities are significant for integrating parents within the community and giving them a proactive role in education [22]. Involving parents in the community will also strengthen the parent-school-community partnership, enrich parents with knowledge and skills, and encourage them to become leaders. Integrating community services and potential resources with school programs will strengthen the link between community and school and involving parents in the community helps to bridge the differences in the perceptions of parent involvement from both the perspectives of teachers and parents [79]. Moreover, the school should consider using those parents who are already engaged in school as ambassadors outside the schools, e.g., give them the chance to become members of the community as part of an authorized association [47].

Schools could also partner with community organizations to provide afterschool seminars for parents. This solution is linked to the use of community resources and services to strengthen the school-family-community partnership. An example of this could be the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), whose aims are to raise awareness of family policies in terms of children, education, work-family balance, family roles, and sustainable development.

### 4.4.7. Involve Parents in the Decision-Making Process and Take Their Opinions into Consideration

Twelve parents (P1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15) indicate a desire to be involved in the decision-making process. One parent (P1) stated that: *"Schools should take our considerations regarding best communication practices, for example, distributing a survey to examine the effective technique for communication, which is suitable to reach out to working parents such as using WhatsApp, WebEx, or Skype for example."*

Involving parents in the school decision-making process is beneficial for an effective educational system. Smith et al. (2011) examine the involvement of more parents in the decision-making process in urban charter schools across six U.S. states. Using surveys to invite parents, they find that hosting a parent focus group can help further discuss school concerns and develop solutions to improve children's academic outcomes [80]. Furthermore, involving parents in decision-making enhances parents' accountability and responsibility, endorses the empowerment of parents in schools, helps to gain their support in improving students' educational outcomes, and eventually increases their presence in the school.

### 5. Discussion and Recommendations

The aim of this case study was to understand the practices of "*parental involvement*," identify the issues and concerns related to PTS interaction from a system perspective using a multi-dimensional, comparative exploratory study, and develop and propose a tailored set of suggestions for developing an interactive and effective PTS partnership model that is suitable for local and cultural context and needs. It is important to highlight that regardless of the school performance, common issues and suggestions are addressed by both parents and teachers that indicates the necessity to improve the involvement of parents in QES.

From the interviews and literature review, it can be concluded that 'learning at home' is the most common type of involvement. In contrast, few parents are active in the 'volunteering' and 'community' types of involvement. Therefore, there is a need to develop an effective implementation plan that focuses on patterns associated with the decision-making type of involvement and provides a variety of volunteering opportunities to parents [24].

A critical component in strengthening the PTS partnership is the use of technology. Modern-day children are exposed to three main environments: their home, school, and digital environment, with the latter gaining dominance in recent years. Stakeholders can capitalize on this growing use of technology and digital media by utilizing both e-learning platforms, such as LMS, as well as e-communication platforms such as WebEx, to help increase PTS interactions. The use of technology in creating a virtual environment that can act as a medium to help students achieve academic goals and increase their performance, as well as initiate and foster the interactions between parents, teachers, and the school, can help realize the positive impacts of a strong PTS partnership. Collaboration between parents, teachers and the school, and commitment from all stakeholders to use these platforms can help strengthen this partnership and thereby improve children's wellbeing, academic performance and reduce behavioral problems.

Table 3 summarizes a list of recommendations for strengthening the PTS partnership using the design thinking approach and the Epstein parental involvement model. This model can be reconsidered to increase the role of the virtual environment positively impact the growth, learning and nurturing of the children with a strong sense, knowledge, thinking ad living habits of sustainability.

**Table 3.** Recommendations to improve the involvement of parents following the Epstein model of Types of Parental Involvement.

| Type of Parent Involvement | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Parenting classes and practices to support parenting skills | Provide parents with parenting classes to enrich them with parenting skills that help them improve their communication skills with their children, promote mental health growth, and enhance the social behavior of their children |
| School communication mechanism to facilitate parent-school interactions | Promote flexibility and effectiveness in communication by providing options for the form of communication, such as using technology to enable working parents to attend school meetings via videoconferencing, e.g., Skype/WebEx<br>Schedule individual meetings according to parents' availability (afternoons/evenings), especially for parents who are older or have health issues<br>Promote a welcoming and friendly environment for parents to foster more parental engagement in schools<br>Provide more sessions to train parents on the use of school e-learning applications, e.g., LMS, to track their children's progress and boost the use of ICT<br>Encourage parents to follow school social media accounts to be informed about school announcements and activities |
| Volunteering in school | Parents' interactions in the classroom (classroom visits) should be mandatory to help them share their knowledge and experience with students, contribute to the community through volunteering, and add a new learning resource, i.e., learning from parents<br>Provide more exciting activities for parents to participate in, such as "Parent Business Day", where each parent has the chance to present their side-business<br>Give credit to students whose parents are frequently involved in school volunteering activities to encourage others<br>Involve parents in school trips to build relationships with other parents and become closer to their children's friends. |
| Learning at home programs | Schools should provide parents with programs to help them monitor their children's assignments and ensure that parents spend time with children to support their educational lives and thereby reduce the dependence on tutors<br>Promote learning-at-home activities and programs to improve the learning skills of parents and enrich them with strategies to extend learning beyond the schools |
| School decision-making process | Consider parents in the school's decision-making process to promote parents' engagement in the school through governance and advocacy<br>Involve parents in school-related activities to decide which kind of activities the school should offer<br>Involve parents in a survey to determine the most effective communication mechanism for communicating with parents, e.g., SMS, WhatsApp, video calls, WebEx, or email<br>Involve parents in choosing which kind of school trip their children should experience |
| Collaborating with the community: Parental interventions in the community to improve the school-parent-community partnership | Free seminars should be provided for parents to enhance awareness of their role and responsibilities toward children's education with the support of local authorities and education provider services<br>Support parents in collaborating with the community by allowing them to participate in the Board of Trustees. |

The implementation strategy for the proposed recommendations should consider a comprehensive needs analysis from all stakeholders (MoEHE decision-makers, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, businesses, and industry circles) through the study of mutual priorities regarding which solutions to implement first (short/long term).

Therefore, the school should develop an effective plan in collaboration with community organizations to increase the parents' involvement. Importantly, an effective and sustainable strategic plan should include planning, leadership, and partnership. Finally, monitoring and evaluation will help to ensure the effectiveness to the programs developed to improve parental involvement.

## 6. Conclusions

This study used a design-thinking approach to: (1) explore the current practices of the parental educational system of Qatari governmental schools, (2) investigate the concerns and needs of local stakeholders (namely teachers and parents) regarding parental involvement in Schools in Qatar, and (3) provide solutions and suggestions to improve parental involvement in Qatar's educational system.

There is currently a variety of practices and forms for parental involvement in QES, each with varying levels of efficiency and impact. These practices and roles emerge at the class level, school level, and society level. At the class level, parents can visit the classroom to participate and share ideas and experiences during the lessons. At the school level, the parents can participate in school activities or attend and engage in general/individual parental meetings. Via technology, parents can participate in the Learning Management System (LMS) to ask questions and share their comments and concerns regarding posted materials or grades. At the society level, parents can follow the school's social media accounts for updates, and they can become members of the Board of Trustees to share their suggestions and serve the community to improve overall educational outcomes. These practices are aligned with Epstein's aspects of parent involvement.

The data and insights obtained from the interviews indicate that some perspectives and concerns are common in the two groups of teachers and parents. In summary, parental involvement in school is generally declining due to various challenges, which has led to lower students' academic outcomes. However, there are also different perceptions between teachers and parents of what "parental involvement" means. The definition of parental involvement ranges from attending school meetings and communicating with teachers to parents using their full potential to collaborate with the school to ensure their child's success. Parental involvement also varies between schools according to the school's environment and strategies. Schools and parents also have different perceptions of the meanings and forms of parental involvement. Therefore, there is a need to restructure the school-parent partnership to improve students' academic performance.

The interviewed stakeholders (both parents and teachers) highlighted their needs for strengthening the PTS partnership, which were then combined and summarized using a system design thinking approach. The following suggestions emerged: (1) emphasize the role of parents in schools to enhance awareness, responsibility, and accountability; (2) enhance children's morals and values to reduce behavioral issues; (3) improve respect by ensuring the appreciation of teaching as a profession; (4) increase parents' motivation for involvement with the school and encourage them to share their experience in classrooms; (5) promote flexibility and effectiveness in communication and improve the school climate in terms of welcoming parents; (6) involve more parents in the community and encourage them to become leaders; and (7) involve parents in the decision-making process and take their opinions into consideration.

Although this research represents a starting point for the understanding of PTS interactions, the current practices of parent involvement, and the mechanisms to improve their contribution to Qatar's preparatory public schools, some concerns remain unanswered due to the limitations of this study. The research should be expanded to include a larger number of stakeholders, at more schools and levels to measure and validate these findings according to the geographic distribution of parents in Qatar. Therefore, a survey/questionnaire instrument should be developed to (1) measure the satisfaction level of stakeholders regarding the involvement of parents in QES and its achievements, (2) rank the significance of parental involvement impacting the learning quality, (3) describe the relationship be-

tween "*parental involvement*" and "*student achievement*", and (4) determine the most effective communication method between schools and parents (emails/face-to-face meetings, video-conferencing via WebEx, etc . . . ). Moreover, conducting focus group discussions involving different stakeholders would be helpful to (1) gather personal feelings and perceptions toward the involvement of parents in schoolings, (2) seek clarifications of the obstacles preventing parents from being involved in their children's school, (3) determine the impacts of parental involvement on student achievement, and (4) provide a broader range of suggestions to improve the involvement of parents in QES.

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