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To what extent does parents' involvement in middle school influence children's educational progress?

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Abstract

Parents and teachers are the main two educators in majority of children's life. Parental involvement means not only control children's educational progress but also, participating in school meetings and events, contacting with teachers and helping children at home. Parental involvement is the crucial factor during the school life of children, especially in primary and middle schools. Scientists found that parental involvement can affect children's academic progress, behaviour, language abilities, social skills, and generally perception of life. These days more parents are becoming less engaged in educational process of their children. Despite the fact that most parents want to be involved more, there are a lot of barriers for parental involvement such as parents' education, lack of time and work commitments, not enough money or families belonging to the lower social classes and big schools with different teachers. All these issues can be solved by parents' willingness and understandings of importance of their involvement. If parents find that middle schools are less comprehensive and bigger than primary schools they should be given guidance book or leaflets and may be sent letters. However, whether they will find time to read them or not, probably these methods cannot be a good solution for involvement. In addition, if schools can organise some courses or training programmes for parents, this might be the best solutions to guide parents and provide them with vital information. But, this approach may have some difficulties with finance, therefore organising courses will also depend on types of school. After parents building a good relationship with teachers, it may also positively effect on children's education so, they might be motivated to learn and participate in school activities as well.

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1. Introduction

Ever since schools have been existed, parents and teachers started working together. Since then the cooperation types and forms have developed (Epstein and Sanders, 2002 cited in Hill and Taylor, 2004). Parents had control over the school, at the beginning, by deciding whether to hire a teacher or not. In the 20th century, the role of the schools and parents separated. Teachers were responsible for a learning process only. Parents were responsible for children's knowledge of morality, culture and religion. Therefore, parents had great responsibilities for preparing their offspring for future life. However, these days they both share the responsibilities for children's educational achievements (Hill and Taylor 2004). Parental involvement can be defined as participating in various kinds of activities such as negotiation with teachers and other school staff, being a volunteer at school activities, helping with homework and attending school meetings, conferences and events (B. Williams, J. Williams and Ullman, 2001; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Park and Holloway, 2013).

The National Child Development Study (NCDS) investigated the effect of parent involvement on children's achievements, and found that students whose parents are very highly interested in their education have better exam results compared to their peers whose parents did not interested at all. Parents' involvement especially affect young children's language abilities, social skills and early school achievements (Hill, 2001; Hill and Craft, 2003; Hill and Taylor, 2004).

As a teacher, who has some background of teaching experience in a school, we believe that parental involvement is essential for child development, especially for children in primary and middle schools. This essay will examine parental involvement issues and their consequences in the U.S and the UK schools. It will also provide some possible solutions and will finally evaluate them.

2. The current situation of less parental involvement and their effects

As Ghazi, Ali, Shahzad and Khan (2010) argue most parents are not involved until their children have problems at school and they have to meet school officials. In addition, they do not help with homework, do not interest in the school curriculum and the whole educational process. Hence, children may not take education seriously and might even ignore it or have a negative attitude toward school (Ghazi, Ali, Shahzad and Khan 2010 cited in Trung and Ducreux, 2013).

Mellon and Moutavelis (2009) mentioned in their research parents' interest help to form students' self-confidence, self-perception and general sense of psychological well-being. Students who have low psychological well-being prone to have low self-confidence and self-perception, and it may affect their emotional state of being happy and satisfied (Cripps and Zyromski, 2009 cited in Trung and Ducreux, 2013). Students whose parents support and motivate them tend to have a great sense of coping with academic challenge (Fan and William, 2010). So if children feel lack of support from parents they might not have a motivation to study or not be able to reach academic success. For instance, during middle and high school students tend to have more homework, approximately 1,5-2,5 hours per night while in the primary schools children should spend between 1-2 hours. Due to parental involvement children may do their homework regularly (Hill and Taylor, 2004). If parents are actively engaged in their children's studies, students will realise that their parents value education and they will try to complete homework more carefully.

Chen and Gregory (2010) argue that if parents have good attitudes toward teachers, it may beneficially affect student teacher relationships as well as academic excellence. Involvement of parents may improve children's behaviour, social abilities, relationship to society in general (Regner, Loose and Dumas, 2009; Trung and Ducreux, 2013). According to research conducted in 2009 by You, Chhuon and Hudley, high parental involvement reduces the amount of disobedience and students' aggressive behaviour (Trung and Ducreux, 2013).

3. Problems of less parental engagement and possible solutions

In 2007 Department for Children, Schools and Families surveyed parents of 6-14 year old children. Research found that majority of parents want to be involved more, however, educational background, job responsibilities, family life, childcare and other reasons tend to be barriers of more involvement (DCSF-00924-2008).

British Cohort Study and National Child Development Study analyse how parental literacy and numeracy levels might have an effect on their offspring. The research found that children whose parents have good literacy and numeracy levels show better reading and math abilities, than children who have parents with poor functional skills (DCF-00924-2008) such as practical skills in Math, English and ICT. Therefore, children whose parents do not spend enough time on broadening of children's knowledge seem to have difficulties during elementary school as well as middle school. Also throughout the middle school the amount of parents' academic support decreases because of their educational background. As the subjects become more complicated, parents feel that they cannot facilitate in advancing their children's knowledge (Hill and Taylor, 2004; Hill and Tyson, 2009; Trung and Ducreux, 2013). Hong et al. (2010) mentioned that generally during the school years parental involvement in education lessens as their children become older. Thus, parents' influence that helped to achieve high results when children were younger might diminish throughout the middle school (Hill and Tyson, 2009).

In order to solve these problems, schools may organize some courses for parents. Course curriculum can include different subjects about parenting and activities that focus on difficulties of family involvement and education programs. Parents can have different educational backgrounds, so they might not know important things about parenting and how to deal with various issues regarding to children. As teachers have knowledge of educating children and their psychological development, which can be important factor during educating children, so, they can share information with parents. However, these solutions seems challenging for schools as they might face with tough problems such as financial issues, hiring new teachers, finding new rooms in the school building and parents unwillingness to join the courses because of time limitations. Hence, this solution may be suitable for private schools or in other schools but, with government support and very few parents perhaps will attend courses.

Apart from parents' educational background, research shows that 44% of respondents indicate career and their obligations at work to be the foremost barrier of involvement in children's school life. Other obstacles that parents chose are other children's demands and lack of time (DCF-00924-2008).

One thing that teachers can do is to send letters to parents. This could give parents chance to be aware of their offspring's school life. For example, test results, general progress, their behaviour or any other issues regarding to their children. On the other hand, this may not work if parents have no time to read the letters, they won't do it. Parents might not show interest, unless they will not understand the significance of educational involvement.

The next reason as Hill and Taylor (2004) highlighted the fact that families with low income are less likely to engage in the education of their children than wealthier families. Parents in impoverished societies are mostly trying to overcome their negative school experiences and are likely to need more guidance about their children's educational achievements (Hill and Taylor 2004). Although, social class and size of the family have a slight effect on children, involvement of parents appears to have beneficial effect on offspring's success (DCSF-00924-2008). Characteristics of surroundings also affect parents' educational involvement. For instance, if their neighborhood is disorganized and have disadvantages such as high rate of unemployment and crime, degree of poverty and lack of housing conditions might influence parent involvement (Furstenberg et al. 1999 cited in Crosnoe, 2001).

In order to overcome this kind of problems, schools should organize more meetings, events and free courses to encourage parents to come to school. There are plenty of activities to increase connection between teachers and families and training programmes for parents with the purpose of enhancing psychological health and relationship abilities (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). To empirically test these solutions, again as it mentioned above, depend on the fact whether the school can tackle with financial problems and if teachers can have an extra time for encouraging parents to be more involved in educational process also, parents' intentions important as well. However, organising activities probably could be the best solutions in order to involve parents in educational process.

4. Involvement benefits

According to Hill and Taylor (2004) there are two mechanisms to boost achievement of parental school involvement. Promoting social capital is the first way. By engaging in school life parents will enhance abilities to work better with their children and help in school activities. As parents establish good relationship with school, it could help them to get information like school's behavioural expectations and other useful guidelines. When parents

participate in school activities, events and conferences they meet other parents so, they might exchange information or experiences. Second mechanism is social control, which could affect parental participation success. Social control is well-organised work of parents and teachers and general agreement about proper behaviour which can be explained to children in the classroom and outside (McNeal, 1999 cited in Abouchar, 2003). When children receive identical rules or information from both parents and teachers, they will clearly follow the instructions. Thus, pupils get information about school importance, social capital and social control and it promote children's capability, motivate to learn and take part in different activities (Grolnik and Slowiaczek, 1994 cited in Hill and Taylor, 2004).

5. Conclusion

Parents and teachers are the main two educators in majority of children's life. Parental involvement means not only control children's educational progress but also, participating in school meetings and events, contacting with teachers and helping children at home. Parental involvement is the crucial factor during the school life of children, especially in primary and middle schools. Scientists found that parental involvement can affect children's academic progress, behaviour, language abilities, social skills, and generally perception of life.

These days more parents are becoming less engaged in educational process of their children. Despite the fact that most parents want to be involved more, there are a lot of barriers for parental involvement such as parents' education, lack of time and work commitments, not enough money or families belonging to the lower social classes and big schools with different teachers. All these issues can be solved by parents' willingness and understandings of importance of their involvement. If parents find that middle schools are less comprehensive and bigger than primary schools they should be given guidance book or leaflets and may be sent letters. However, whether they will find time to read them or not, probably these methods cannot be a good solution for involvement. In addition, if schools can organise some courses or training programmes for parents, this might be the best solutions to guide parents and provide them with vital information. But, this approach may have some difficulties with finance, therefore organising courses will also depend on types of school. After parents building a good relationship with teachers, it may also positively effect on children's education so, they might be motivated to learn and participate in school activities as well.

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