

Parents Involvement in the Education of their Children: Indicators of Level of Involvement

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Parents have incessant interest in the education of their children. But, what makes some parents different is their ability to go beyond implicit and conventional norms of parental responsibility for the well being of their children. Parental involvement is subjective in nature and difficult to evaluate. However, in the present paper the author provides a mechanism through which parental involvement is evaluated from an ethnocentric approach. In this study, parents were selected by teachers and interviewed on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire. A brief note of case studies leading to a conceptual frame of parental involvement is presented in this paper. The parental involvement here is connotated as going beyond one's own capacity through perseverance and compromise of one's own interest for the education of children, which may have a positive impact on other children and parents.

Keywords: Parental involvement, Parental capacity, Parental responsibility, Parents and education, India.

Introduction.

The endeavour of government of India in the recent past to universalize education at the elementary and the secondary level has been a massive exercise. At the tertiary level, the market driven approach (Sreekanth, 2011) has provided a great fillip in attaining global standards. In its venture the government is not the only agency making a sustained progress on education of the masses. Parents, educated, semi-literate and illiterate are all part of this movement to bring about a silent revolution of educating their wards as a means for improving their life standards. Also, the parents' expectation of quality education for their children in the schools and colleges is on the rise with the increased income levels as it is evident from the growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per Capita Income in a developing Country like India.

The GDP has quantum-leaped by over 500 times since independence in 1947, and per capita income has increased from Rupees 255 in 1951 to 33,283 in 2008 (Verma, 2010). However, with huge variations in income i.e., with around 400 million people below poverty line (Verma, 2010), quality is a relative parameter for parents with varied income levels. While child going to a school is considered a great achievement bringing a qualitative change in life for an illiterate parent, studying abroad in developed countries like the USA or the UK may mean enhanced quality in education for a child of a well-to-do businessman or an Multi National Company executive.

The quest for education is ever increasing across the socio-economic sections of population with the kind of attention paid by parents for the education of their children. As parents become more influential stakeholders within the educational system, the recognition of parental attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and the influences will become increasingly important to the educational community (Bukhari & Randall, 2009).

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This is true even in the case of Asian ethnic students whose performance is remarkable (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Several studies have been conducted on parental involvement in their children's education, performance, and school improvement (Hill et al., 2004; Winters, 1993). Parental involvement is central to improving educational outcomes of children (Choi, 2003; Greene & Tichenor, 2003; Tillman, 2003). Parents seemed attracted to charter schools because they offered "a greater sense of community, fewer regulations, and the ongoing development, assessment, and maintenance of programs that actively foster parent involvement" (Yancey, 2000, p. 18). Ultimately parents wanted a good education, which meant their child was learning in a building that was safe, and that teachers could teach their subject matter, cared about and were fair with students, and were accessible (Tonso and Colombo, 2006).

Studies have also reported that low involvement of parents de-motivates students and negatively affect their performance (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). In some cases, parental interest does not merely confine to admitting a child in a good school or college, but they are also prepared to work immensely for educating their children, which needs careful observation and analysis and this is the theme of this study. It is opined that (Weiss et al., 1998) to obtain a clearer picture of the home-school relationship, it is essential to understand the mechanisms and processes that make up diverse parent involvement activities. This paper, through systematic selection of case studies of the nature of parental involvement deals with how parental involvement can be measured and how important it is in terms of children's achievement in education. Sacks has viewed that (1984, p.24) a detailed study of small phenomena may give an enormous understanding of the way humans do things and the kind of objects they use to construct and bring order to their affairs, was very significant from the present perspective of case studies.

Methodology.

The researcher was inspired to take up the present study while observing the parent-teacher interaction that was held in October 2008 at North School, New Delhi (all names used in this article are pseudonyms for protecting the interests of school, teachers, parents and the students as

desired by the school management). It was found that a few parents were very articulate, very concerned about their children and assertive in their interaction with the teachers. One parent particularly had an argument with the teacher that she was making an all-out effort for her only child to perform well, but the school is not providing adequate support for her child's progress in education. This was in contrast to the attitude of most of the parents, who were very moderate in their discussions, careful listeners' of teacher's observations, and accepted the school's evaluation of their children when it came to the review of progress of their wards largely through summative progress reports.

The above incident gave rise to a series of questions in the author's mind such as; whether some parents are more concerned about the education of their children than others? Are the highly concerned parents (demonstrating their concerns) more involved in reality in the education of their children? Whether parents can extend their support beyond their capacity for the education of their children? And whether parents compromise their own interests for the advancement of their children's education? etc.

With these questions as the subject of investigation the author requested the school authorities for permission to interact with the parents during November-2009 to January 2010 to understand the relationship of parental involvement and education of the children in the school. In this study a semi-structured interview was used during the first round of interviews with 35 parents and free-response approach was used during the second round of interview with three parents.

The findings presented here combine responses of both semi-structured interviews and free-response interviews. Case study approach was chosen (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) using a critical ethnographic perspective, according to which meaning is constituted within action, rather than employing an epistemology grounded in a representation theory of truth (Carspecken & Walford, 2001; Madison, 2005). Qualitative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) formed the basis for the data collection and analysis, though quantitative data relating to the parents' responses, and the marks (grades) obtained by students have also provided valuable information in support of the qualitative statements of the parents.

Conducting interviews for parents in a school of 1500 students studying in Grades (in India they are known as classes) I-XII was a gigantic task. The sample however had to be based on a rational selection and procedure. Hence, teachers teaching Grades VI-XII were requested to provide a list of five parents each, whom they considered as very keen about their children's education in the parent-teacher meetings or otherwise. The parents of students studying in lower Grades were not selected, as anecdotal and performance evidences (reported in table 2) of higher Grade students would be varied and substantial in nature. Instead of a single teacher providing the list of parents, which could have been highly subjective, a team of two teachers was asked to provide the list that would be fairly objective. A total of 35 parents were invited for one-to-one interview with the author. It was interesting to note that all the 35 parents attended the interaction sessions (interviews), at the specified time given to each of them, even though it was weekend at the school premises. The entire exercise was completed in three months and the interaction with each parent/s lasted between 60 – 90 minutes. A further probing was necessary to identify the level of involvement of the parents towards their children, who positively responded to items 12, 13 and 14 of table 1. These parents formed a very specific cluster: they answered positively to all the three items, and were the only ones to do so. I thought important to know whether they simply held distinctive views or really have had greater involvement in their children's education. For this reason, a second round of interviews have been organized. During the second round of interaction with the three parents, which lasted between 90-120 minutes (held as open-ended interviews), the incidents of high-level of parental involvement were recorded. The final summaries of each interview and observation were checked for validity and reliability through member checks (Stake, 1995). The parents were given the summaries and asked to comment on them. All the claims made and assertions provided were validated by the participants. Later, the three case studies were discussed with the teachers and parents during a parent-teacher meeting, for receiving their feedback. The Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, which addresses the issue of looking at how

people do the things, rather than what they say they do was also a very insightful technique, and for this purpose the data on performance of students was obtained. Also, Drew's (2001, p. 267) view of the need for fine-grained analysis to make comparisons across cases was taken into consideration. The interviewees were informed that this interaction would not in any way influence their children's education. Also, the progress cards of the children of the three parents reported as case studies were collected from the school for correlating parental involvement with the children's performance.

Analysis of the findings

The interviews recorded were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Table-1 provides quantitative information about the concerns of the parents in relation to their children's education. The responses to several questions in table-1 indicate that there is a wide variation among parents with regards to how they perceive the education of their children.

While most of the interviewees are committed to basic acts such as attending parent-teacher meeting, supporting the children in homework, being proactive with the teachers for the welfare of their children etc, there were very few positive responses of parents on a higher level of involvement. In particular, three parents appeared to be completely different from the rest of the interviewees, as it could be observed from their responses to serial number 12,13 and 14 of table-1. The questions on serial 12,13 and 14 required a higher level of involvement from the parents and also their ability to compromise their personal interest. During the second round of interviews with these three parents it was revealing that all of them had performed recognizable acts of involvement for their children's education. This sets them apart as unique case studies to be reported and interpreted.

Table 1.
Parents' views on their children's education

Parental thinking/concern/action	Resp.
1. Parent-teacher meetings missed at least once in the last one-year.	3
2. Regular support to the child's home work by parent/s.	31
3. Discuss seriously with teachers about their child's performance or non-performance.	26
4. School is yet to come up to their expectations in the child's progress.	29
5. Deeply worried about the children's progress.	31
6. Wish to see their children more successful in career than themselves.	35
7. Career goals of their children are mainly for better economic prospects.	32
8. Feel that not able to do justice to the job/profession due to special attention on children's education.	12
9. Wish to change the school for the betterment of the child, if required.	8
10. Low prioritizing of one's own interests/hobbies for the welfare/education of the child.	7
11. Low level of social interaction with the friends/relatives in view of child's education.	5
12. The top most priority in life is the education of the child.	3
13. Wish to forego well paying job and settle for lesser one for better education of child.	3
14. For the education of the children willing to live away from spouse, if required.	3

Insight into incidents of high-level of parental involvement

The following three case studies of parents as discussed above, give a picture of high level of parental involvement for the education of their children. They cannot be simply brushed aside as ordinary events or anecdotes as there is a great amount of personal loss of freedom, financial loss, physical suffering and even staking one's own career, as later observed by other parents of the school.

Case Study A.

Rajesh, a parent, works as a Financial Consultant to leading Corporate Companies. He took time out for regular dropping and picking up of daughter at school, though school bus and other private means of transport were available. The reason he gave was that the school bus/private vehicles picks up and drops large number of children and also takes a longer route so as to drop more number of children. Due to this, if he sent his child in the bus, a lot of his child's time would be wasted in travel. Though it is

convenient for him to drop his child in the morning as the school starts early, picking her up from the school was really a worrying concern. Since he was working as a consultant, he had greater control over his time. This facilitated in scheduling his activities in a way that he was free when the daughter's school gets over to pick her up. He said that there were instances when he would be highly concerned due to client-meetings and was not able to drop his child at home. However, he had to make last moment arrangements such as taking the help of neighbours or friends. But later he had a tie up with a taxi service which picked up his wife (a house-wife) first, who in turn went to school to bring the daughter home, as he felt it unsafe for his daughter to commute alone.

This arrangement worked well till the time when his child was studying in the primary (Grade I to V) in nearby reputed school. For upper-primary (Grade VI onwards) he had to take admission for his daughter in a school that was located far from his house. Though he had options to continue in some other not so reputed schools, he considered that teaching-learning in the school where he got his daughter admitted was very

good. Without weighing the pros and cons, he decided to sell the house he owned and bought a house nearby to the upper-primary private school. This he said also provided great solace to him as his daughter could commute to school, which was at a walking distance. However, he himself had to travel longer distances to his work and to meet clients. On asking as to "Did he ever feel bad in selling the house?" which also happens to be his ancestral property, he said "yes, but it is not more important than my daughter's education". If he wanted to buy that again, he could do, but could not compromise on the daughter's quality of education.

Case Study B.

Sraavya, working as a faculty in a higher education teaching institution is the mother of 17 year-old Prasanth studying in Grade-XII, a crucial stage for a student, as it is an exit point of schooling and entry-level to college. Career goals are largely dependent on the marks (grades) obtained at the year-end examination. Also, students need to appear for entrance examinations to various professional courses and for that preparation starts much before. As the examination has very high stakes in further education, it is not uncommon for parents to send their children to private tutors for tuition. Also, some parents hire the services of more than one tutor for each subject (such as physics, chemistry, mathematics etc.). This is in addition to the teaching that takes place in the school.

Sraavya however, not content with the idea of sending her child to the tuition, felt it wise to coach the child herself. She is a Post-Graduate in physics and she felt she could manage other subjects also. However, due to the hectic schedule at the office she felt that the time was insufficient to teach all the subjects. She tried for all other available means such as finding best tutors, having personal tutor (who would visit home and teach rather than teaching a larger group of children) and seeking the help of her colleagues in different subjects etc. But, nothing seemed to be a viable alternative to teaching all the subjects, herself. She also observed that earlier she had the experience of a personal tutor often looking at the time, rather than focusing on studies of her child. She found out from the administration of her institution that she could go on leave for personal reasons on loss of pay. In fact, she had planned for a research project for that particular academic year at her institution that she thought could be

deferred, even though it amounted to professional loss. Finally, with great difficulty and after having to make several explanations to superior officers she had her one-year leave approved. She now had sufficient time to spare for her child and literally re-learned the other subjects she was not very thorough with in order to teach her child. She is highly satisfied that her effort gave fruitful result and the child succeeded beyond her expectations.

Case Study C.

Sreenivas worked as a medical representative of a pharmaceutical company. He has two sons – Prakash and Praneeth who are studying in Grade X and XII respectively. He had worked very hard in his life and did not want his sons also to undergo similar hardship. Though he had options available to him to place his children in a government-run school where the fee is negligible, he thought it wise to send them to private schooling. This, according to him would give them better exposure in English language learning, etiquette and study in a competitive environment. As he himself had come from poor conditions, he felt that the only luxury he could give his children was good education.

But, the best education through private schooling did not come very easy or cheap for him. He had to spend almost 60 per cent of his monthly salary towards the school fee, books, uniform, transportation of the children to school and on private tuition. The expenditure did not however act as a deterrent to him. For this, both he and his wife had to make lots of compromises such as living in a small home, very low expenditure on food and clothing, little or no recreation with friends and relatives as it would be expensive entertaining them. They even had to obtain small hand-loans frequently, etc. In fact, he has also been aware of the fact that with less than 10 per cent of his income he could have educated his children in a government-run school.

Discussion.

All the three cases investigated and briefly reported above throw light on a very high level of parental involvement. Both teachers and parents of the school considered that these commendable acts of personal suffering for the welfare and education of the children as high-level of involvement on the part of parents. Parents and teachers supported the author's report on the three case studies that the involvement of parents

in these case studies go beyond one's capacity (physical, psychological, economic and social) to provide the best of education to their children. The determination to provide best of the opportunities through their own involvement before expecting anything from the educational institutions, government or society is a welcome and positive change that they said can influence their own children and other parents if highlighted during parent-teachers meetings. This way, they said, parents' efforts get recognized and appreciated and finally when the children succeed, the influence on other parents will be far more.

However, a high-level of involvement may require adoption of an unconventional approach as reported in the above case studies. The initial resistance for the initiative taken by the parent in the Case Study B, came not from the larger community but from home and the husband himself, who kept passing sarcastic comments on his wife that her's was an imprudent decision, led to financial loss and the child would study better under the guidance of an outsider, than a parent etc. Later when the daughter improved remarkably in studies and succeeded with good scores in Grade XII (see table 2) and passed the entrance examination for a professional course, he begged her to go on long leave for the second child also.

In all the three case studies, the concerned parents viewed that at the outset, their behaviour appeared strange and irrational to other people, whether it was immediate family members or others. But, they appreciated their level of involvement for the cause of their children, after the children succeeded. The case studies provide an understanding of not only the level of parental involvement, but also commitment to their children's education. Involvement and commitment are very difficult to measure and are highly subjective in nature. But, parental involvement can be evaluated, if not measured with the precision of science. Further, involvement is a relative term and also culture-dependent. What is considered as high involvement in one cultural setting may be merely viewed as responsibility by others. For instance, excessive parental control occurs largely with girls, as they are expected to be milder as part of the Indian cultural ethos (Srekanth, 2009). Also, parents may for example accompany a child to the school and bring him/her back from school when the classes get over. This may appear very casual in the Indian context, but may not be so in other

cultural context, for reasons such as freedom of individual and non-interference in the children's affairs etc. Though, these kinds of generalizations are improper to make, but still there are broad variations possible with respect to various issues, concerns and actions of parents in different parts of the world and even within the same country. Parental responsibility as outlined by one of the parents, Prasad during the interaction is one that amounts to 'pushing' the cause of children, whereas, high level of involvement leads to not only pushing, but also 'pulling down' one's personal interests.

However, there is always a level that is implicit and members of the community understand whether one is confining to the social norms or going beyond them. Further, it was most obvious from the interviews with the parents reported in the above case studies that they have demonstrated appreciable amount of care towards their children, as perceived by their peers in the school. Their other actions for the education of their children though have not found a special mention, but were found to be very positive too.

In the light of this discussion it may be viewed that parental involvement can have indicators, which can throw light on the parents' commitment for their children's education. It can also influence children in their performance in education. While a successful child does not always need a high-level parental involvement, positive parental involvement has made a remarkable impression on children's performance from self-referencing and peer-referencing points of view as it may be observed from the progress and performance of the children in the three case studies during the previous five years as given below. In Table 2, the rank of the students whose case studies have been previously reported is presented along with marks (grades) obtained by students as percentage (in a classroom there are, on average, 40-45 students). The rank obtained by the children indicates their position vis-à-vis other students in the class and the marks (grades) obtained indicate their performance during the academic year as percentage. Both have been presented for a period of five years, which also indicates consistency of performance. Largely the students have topped the class and have obtained a rank among the first five. Also, their scores in absolute terms are above 80 per cent, except in one academic year of one student.

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Table 2.
Academic performance of students during the past five years

	Case Study A (n=1)		Case Study B (n=1)		Case study C (n=2)			
	Rank in class	Tot. Marks (%)	Rank in class	Tot. Marks (%)	Rank in class	Tot. Marks (%)	Rank in class	Tot. Marks (%)
2004-2005	N.A.	78	3	82	6	92	1	95
2005-2006	4	85	4	91	2	89	1	94
2006-2007	3	82	2	93	1	95	2	96
2007-2008	3	88	2	95	3	90	2	92
2008-2009	2	86	3	95	2	93	1	97

A conceptual Frame.

The above description provides a backdrop for identifying a broad frame of reference through which the issue of parental involvement can be dealt with. The level of involvement varies from parent to parent within the same context, as there may not be similar conditions between any of them. However, a high-level of involvement is one, which is apparent to the members of the community. In this particular context, the parents of the school have considered the above case studies as ones that required high-level involvement.

High-level of Parental involvement = $f(\text{Capacity, Perseverance, Compromise})$

Alternately, high-level of parental involvement may also be equated to:

High-level of Parental involvement = $f(\text{What a parent is capable of doing, acting beyond capacity, what she/he is prepared to forego})$

The involvement of parents in the education per se is an undeniable fact. Every parent under normal circumstance is interested in the welfare of one's child, which is biological in nature and common to all living beings. It means that people fulfill their responsibilities meaningfully and to their capacity, which is a rationally accepted and expected behaviour. But, in the case of the parents who have high level of involvement, they go beyond their capacity and rational expectations

of the members of the community/society. This may be reflected through perseverance that includes physical, psychological, economic and social behaviour and action as described above. The perseverance can be observed through high-level of involvement.

However, if it is only a sporadic action, it may not help in the child's education in the long term. But, in the three case studies reported above through the interviews with the parents and performance of the children (see table 2) indicate that it was not a one-time concern. In addition to perseverance, another highlighting feature that these parents adopt is compromising one's personal interest. Compromise involves personal loss, as reported in the three case studies and agreed upon by the other parents in the school. Without the element of compromise, any act would look like a normal event. In Case Study C, the person may be spending a meager amount of money in absolute terms, but in terms of percentage to his overall earnings the parent was spending 60 per cent, which is a huge expenditure from the point of view of that particular parent. It is pertinent to note that the parents involvement as per the above study does not confine to any particular socio-economic category of parents, but pervades across as has been observed among parents of higher and lower socio-economic strata in the three case studies. While parent in the Case Study A belonged to a higher income group, parent in the Case Study C was from a lower socio-economic group.

Conclusions.

From the above study it may be concluded that parental involvement for the education of their children can be evaluated through indicators, which may not be absolute in nature, but relative and contextual to the setting of the study. Further, in the above case studies, the parents have observed that their high-level of involvement was mainly to facilitate a better quality of life for their children. Dedicated parents who change their own activities to accommodate their child's advancement to a higher educational goal are more likely to devote themselves to parental monitoring (Wu & Yi, 2008). Higher the involvement, reasonably better the success of the child in education, as it involves stretching their capacity for the well being of their children, which serves as a positive reinforcement in the children's education. The high-level of involvement does not simply mean that parents have to demonstrate their feelings to others. In the above three case studies, the teachers observed that parents of Case Study A and C surprised them for being chosen as parents with high-level of involvement, as they did not consider them very exemplary in comparison to some other parents selected by them at the outset.

As one can perceive from the above case studies, the methodology, findings and the conceptual frame does not in any way provide for generalizations either with regard to the involvement and commitment of parents or absence of it among other parents. A study of a single school and parents selected by teachers for sample study is a huge limitation of the study. The study only assumes that those parents who have the tendency of high-level of involvement are

committed for their children's education and this can influence the children's progress and performance, positively. Also, the terminologies such as capacity, perseverance are relative in nature as they are case specific and not universal in nature. They however, were recorded, analyzed and placed before the stakeholders (teachers and parents) for their observations. The acceptance of high-level of parental involvement by other parents in the school was considered a prerequisite for recognizing them as events of significance for reporting.

The educational goals achieved by the children depend on many other factors such as teaching, classroom environment, peer group support, teaching-learning material and infrastructure facilities etc. Hence it cannot be concluded that there is always one-to-one relation between high level of parental involvement and success of the children. Other factors being positive, a high level of parental involvement may result in the success of children's education as reported in the above case studies. There is however, a threat of high-level of parental involvement leading to high stress levels on the parents themselves and their children, leading to failure in education or suicides of the children. Undue parental pressure leads to changes in the pace of learning (Sreekanth & Tooley, 2011). These are perceived threats and were not found to be true in the above study. If there is a failure of students in spite of high-level of parental involvement, then parents may face criticism not only from the community, but even at home. Finally, high-level of parental involvement has possibility of influencing the environment at home and also the outlook of the children's education in school.

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