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Parental involvement: Is it worthwhile to invest in family-faculty coalition for primary level EFL learning?

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the significance of parental involvement in students' English learning. It centres its focus primarily on the students and tries to explore their take on their parents' participation regarding L2 learning and also wishes to uncover some effective methods that might be used by parents to facilitate children's English language learning. The findings indicate that students viewed the support from their family while learning English as something nonexpendable. Not only did parents' active involvement leave a mark on students' academic achievement, but also it seemed to affect the students' psychology positively. Students with a higher degree of parental involvement, in the study, displayed greater self-confidence while interacting in the target language and also were appreciative of the support that they received from home. Contrarily, their counterparts, who did not have any noteworthy assistance from their parents, regretted not having it and saw it as an obvious drawback in their L2 learning. The study also shows that parents simply reading storybooks, watching English movies, or playing word games with their children aids English learning. Hence, recommendations were made to introduce parental involvement more extensively and as an academic and instructional mechanism for more productive L2 learning.

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1. Introduction

The very first teachers that a child encounters in his lifetime are his own parents. They teach their children to walk, talk and also introduce them to the basics of education, such as alphabets and numbers and are quite successful at that too. Although, once parents confer the responsibilities of their children's education to formal schooling, they become somewhat distant in the process. By the time the students are in primary school, the parents are almost completely estranged from their child's

education. What contributes more to this issue is the current view of the education system. As indicated by Kalayci and Ergül (2020) where teachers regard themselves as the frontrunners in their pupils' English learning, the parents, however, are looked upon as only a single supporting feature. This outlook is ill-suited, and parents should be viewed as teaching partners rather than a passive element in respect to primary level English language teaching. According to Caspe et al. (2007), "As in the period of early childhood, family involvement processes are critical for elementary-school-age children's learning and development" (p. 1). The cooperation between both these entities is what can prove to be more fruitful in L2 learning for primary schoolers. With assistance of the current study, it is hoped that a revolutionary understanding on parental involvement would emerge in the Bangladeshi EFL context.

Evidently, the role of parents in students' English learning is a well-regarded fact in the teachers' community. Despite, more or less unequivocally recognizing the part played by parents in respect to their child's L2 learning, the educational institutions and educators alike are not taking any obvious measures to put this opportunity to good use (Kalayci & Ergül, 2020). As Harji et al. (2017) found that when teachers and parents made mutual effort for collaboration and traded information among themselves to develop students' ESL reading literacy, the teachers ended up recognizing the partnership with parents as something valuable. When educational institutions venture on the mission to expand parent's involvement in a structured and strategic fashion, it can magnify the degree of their participation (George & Mensah, 2010). Hence, the purpose of this study would be to determine the benefits of parental involvement in primary level English learning and to endeavor a practical and plausible course of action to infuse parental involvement in L2 learning as a routine.

This study aims to ascertain to what extent children's academic achievements are indeed affected by the involvement of their parents in connection with English language learning, and whether this has a positive psychological influence on the students. Moreover, for those students whose parents are facilitating their L2 learning in the present scenario, this paper intends to explore what activities they may be performing at home already and hopes to come up with some efficient techniques to yield even better results in that regard. Thus, the major questions that this study would be trying to answer are:

1. What are the academic and psychological impacts of proper parental involvement for primary level L2 learning?
2. What are some of the best methods and approaches that parents could practice at home to expedite the learning process?

A review of the past literature on parental involvement in second or foreign language acquisition showed that previous studies were conducted primarily from either the teachers' or parents' point-of-view. It was found in earlier studies that teachers viewed parental participation as the support during activities such as homework or projects provided by parents at home, whereas parents wanted to have a say in educational decisions (Göktürk & Dinçkal, 2017). Meanwhile, Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) argued parental participation is conceived by parents as indispensable, yet they consider that primary accountability of the education of their children lies with the schools. The

current study, for once, intends to hear the students' side of the story, and whether they perceive the home-environment to be a key factor in their journey of English language learning.

As for the areas of parents' contribution, the prior studies have largely focused on either reading comprehension and/or assisting with homework. As per Nye et al. (2006), "reading-related activities" between parents and children can act as a positive facet when it comes to the reading accomplishment of those children. Also, according to Griva and Chouvarda (2012), parental involvement can prove to be helpful in regard to the reading achievement of the students. Brouillard et al. (2022) discussed the advantage of shared storybook reading in an interactive manner with young bilingual children, which introduces new words and reinforces word learning. Previous studies similarly discussed that when children receive help and support from the parents during their homework, their accomplishments in the classroom are greater (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Walker et al., 2004). Likewise, Kam Tse et al. (2017) explored the effects of early home reading activities (EHRA) and home reading activities (HRA) in accordance with the reading proficiency of 4th graders in their study. Karabacak and Erdem's (2015) study unveiled the effect of incorporating storybooks in L2 learning on young pupil's minds, which inspires them to think. The current study aims to focus on the varied range of undertakings by the parents, which are instrumental in their child's L2 learning, such as reading storybooks, telling bedtime stories, playing scrabbles, assisting with homework, as well as conversing in the target language with their young ones.

Ashcroft et al. (2018) investigated vocabulary acquisition of L2 learners by using English movies and highlighted that "From television and video, students can grasp how a language is actually used in real-life situations and gain a valuable awareness of the culture in which the language is spoken" (p. 2). Analogous studies also revealed favorable outcomes of using English movies (authentic input) as a pedagogical tool to improve the learners' L2 speaking proficiency (Hoinbala, 2022). Abdullah and Rahman (2017), meanwhile, have found a positive link between students' listening skill and their practice of watching English movies.

Bakhsh (2016) advocated that in teaching lexicon, games may serve to attain the course objectives effectively and make it less tedious for young learners. Vossoughi and Zargar (2009), on the other hand, inspected the utilization of word games as an instrument of learning English as a foreign language. The previous literatures such as these disprove the clichéd view of memorizing vocabulary to learn it, but they do so while remaining in the periphery of a classroom. The current study intends to explore the feasibility of utilizing this unorthodox method of learning English vocabulary at a home setting, which may be even better suited.

Christianakis (2011) used the term "Help Labor" for parents and argued that teachers viewed "helping, practicing, reinforcing, and supporting school learning at home" as parental involvement. Kalayci & Ergül (2020) mentioned in their study that the participating English teachers admitted that their teaching practices and motivation as well as the parent's involvement were key factors that affected a child's English learning. Although, the effort to include parents in an effective way by the school and the teachers were negligible as evident in that particular research. The current study hopes to shed a more important light on the parents' role in their child's L2 learning than typically attributed to them, and as discussed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) in their study that with collaborative work of parents and teachers can children be expected to prosper.

As per Cooper et al. (2001), children are more prone to think of homework as a device for acquiring knowledge when parents convey an optimistic frame of mind about homework, and it is used by them as a medium for imparting “study skills and time management” to their children. In spite of the fact that parents might not be familiar with apt pedagogic stratagem or may not even have inclusive content knowledge, they at times have the upper hand in teaching over the teachers as they have the ability to cater to their child’s distinctive learning needs and MO and may deal in a more fitting manner considering their child’s capacities and level of understanding (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Miller & Davis, 1992, as cited in Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

A multitude of research has been conducted previously regarding the three-way partnership between teachers, family, and learners. Per Epstein et al. (2002), “Partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work.” Caspe et al. (2007) mentioned that an array of research backs the inevitability of family participation of elementary school children and beneficial outcomes in student’s educational achievement when reinforced, keeping in mind the developmental requirements of the young ones, outlooks as well as practices of their parents, and the support from the educational institutions and their expectations regarding family’s contribution. If the students are seen as children by their teachers, it can be expected that family and community would be viewed as school partners in children’s education and development (Epstein et al., 2002). Community organizing has been recognized by Caspe et al. (2007) as an advantageous although overlooked arena of family involvement especially as a way of connecting the underprivileged parents and community members of heterogeneous cultural backgrounds to develop underperforming children’s education.

The current study largely discusses the students’ perception about whether they recognize involvement from their parents as fundamental in their L2 learning, if it is truly beneficial in terms of educational achievement, and the parents’ ingenuity in furthering their child’s English language learning.

2. Method

The data for this study have been accrued chiefly through the use of primary sources with the help of a survey question and discussions with the participants, and secondary data sources such as, ERIC, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and so on have also been utilized. The questionnaire contained 11 multiple choice questions which provided quantitative data and also an open-ended question which was effective in collecting qualitative data (see Appendix A). The students who participated in this study were mostly from sub-urban English Medium school at the primary level. A total of 38 responses could be obtained from the students. Along with the survey, first-hand interviews with 11 of the students were conducted, which was semi-structured to acquire more in-depth information and insights (see Appendix B). Thus, the study was essentially done embracing the mixed method approach. The face-to-face interviews also aided in assessing the students’ speaking and communicative competence holistically. The language proficiency for those 11 students was further evaluated with the help of a reading skill test to determine if there was indeed a correlation between the degree of parental involvement for different students and their English language proficiency.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Data analysis

3.1.1 Quantitative data

As discussed earlier, the survey questionnaire contained 12 questions in total. Save the last one, the other questions were focused on gathering quantitative data about the parents' direct or indirect contribution to their child's English language learning. It tried to discover if the parents were making sure their children got exposure to the English language through activities which are critical for acquiring an L2 such as reading books, watching movies or cartoons, playing word games, conversing in the target language and also how frequently they did those. Moreover, it investigated if the students were getting any assistance from their parents regarding their English studies and homework and whether these activities were regarded as helpful or not by the students.

The first survey question inquired about the degrees of early reading habits of different students with their parents such as reading English storybooks and sharing bedtime stories. Out of the 38 respondents 22 said that their parents performed the mentioned activities with them sometimes as kids, while 4 students said that their parents did it regularly, and for the rest of the 12, they mentioned their parents never did any such activities at home when they were younger. The next question was about the current reading-related habits of the students with their parents. Here, 31 out of 38 students responded that they were sometimes doing reading activities at home with their parents at present, whereas 4 said they did it always, and 3 students mentioned they were not doing it. The survey also investigated the frequency of English reading materials being provided by their parents apart from textbooks. 14 students out of total 38 said their parents regularly bought them English reading materials (i.e. storybooks, science books, comics, encyclopedia, etc.), 18 of the students noted that their parents sometimes did, while 6 said that their parents never did.

Regarding how frequently the students' parents were helping them with homework, 5 out of the total 38 students claimed, unfortunately, that their parents never helped them with their English homework, 7 students reported they got some help from their parents, 13 students mentioned getting moderate amount of help, 9 noted that they were getting it quite often, while 4 students stated that their parents helped them all the time. The survey also asked about the regularity of the students' exposure to the English language at home through English movies, cartoons, or shows by means of YouTube or TV. Out of 38, 29 students said that they got more than an hour of screen time a day for watching English cartoons, movies or shows, 7 said they were allowed to watch only on weekends or special occasions, whereas 2 of the students said that they were not allowed to watch them by their parents at all. The survey also made inquiries about how often the students played word games with their parents to help learn English vocabulary, if at all. Here, 19 students reported that they sometimes played word games (e.g. scrabble, quiddler, or dabble) with their parents, only 2 said they did it regularly, while almost half of the students 17 out of 38 said they never played any word games with their parents.

The students were further asked about how frequently they were playing online word games on the phone, laptop, or the computer. 23 students mentioned that they sometimes played word games by themselves on electronic devices or online, 12 reported that they regularly did it, but 3 of the students

informed they never played any word games this way. When asked about how often their parents were conversing with them in English at home, 3 students reported their parents regularly did, while 27 said their parents did it sometimes, however, 8 of the students mentioned they never spoke to their parents using English. As for the parents helping the students with their studies, 26 students believed they did better in exams or in class when their parents helped them with their English studies, 10 thought it may be helpful, and unfortunately 2 students did not seem to think it made any significant difference in their case. Concerning whether the students perceived parental participation as something valuable in their English learning, surprisingly enough, none of the students disagreed with the importance of parental involvement. Majority of the students, 25 out of 38 strongly agreed while 10 reported they agreed. Finally, only 3 students noted they were on the fence about this.

3.1.2 Qualitative data

The final question of the survey aided in the accumulation of qualitative data that explored which other stratagems were being implemented by the parents to encourage students' L2 learning. Besides, the interview was especially beneficial as it delved into the psychological reasoning behind the students' view about the importance of parental involvement and why they deemed it as something necessary or unnecessary in their English learning.

Other activities at home to facilitate L2 learning

An open-ended question was included at the end of the survey, which asked "What other activities do you do at home with your parents that you think help you with your English learning and why?" This provided further insights regarding the diverse practices at different homes, be they deliberate or not, eventually assisting in better acquisition of the English language for students. For instance, some of the students mentioned watching English movies or series and then discussing those with their parents as a way of practicing their English speaking. Here, this single activity seems to be doing a three-fold job. By watching English movies and shows not only are the students getting exposed to new vocabularies in a meaningful context, but also they are getting exposure to the very underrated skill of "listening" while doing so, which is hardly ever practiced inside the classrooms. Not to mention, when the students discuss with their parents regarding what they have watched, they are at the same time practicing their English speaking.

One of the students talked about making up stories herself and telling them to her parents. Yet another reported crafting her own presentations and speeches and performing in front of her father, and she also recounted summarizing English books with him. Through enterprises such as these, children are actively producing contents in English themselves and on top of that practicing oral production in English while sharing their creative works with their parents. Moreover, summarizing books may also be seen as being involved in a process of critical thinking by utilizing the target language.

A student noted asking the meaning of random English words to her parents that she comes across and then checking if the meanings were correct or not. Thus, she is frequently learning new

vocabulary with her parents, which may not have been possible or as effective if she were to ask her teacher the meaning of all those words, who she does not have a constant access to. Correspondingly, a few of the students mentioned that traveling with their parents contributed to their L2 learning, and some talked about listening to English songs. Traveling and songs may be instrumental in providing exposure to the English language and opportunities for learning it in a more meaningful and natural context as opposed to textbooks.

Interview

As discussed already, 11 of the 38 students took part in the interview and reading skill assessment. During the interview, the students were asked questions about their position on the notion of parent's influence on students' English learning, the reasoning behind their standpoint, if they were satisfied with their English grades, whether the students thought the degree of their own parents' participation in their English learning were consequential to their academic achievement, also if they believed more involvement from their parents would be beneficial (see Appendix B).

During the interviews with these 11 students, which were conducted in person, the same question relating to whether the students perceived parental participation as something valuable in their English learning was posed to them once again. Only this time, they were asked to explain their stance depending on the responses that they chose during the survey earlier. 2 of the 3 students who mentioned in the survey that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the importance of parental involvement were among the 11 students who were later interviewed. 1 of them revealed among other things that his parents were in no way involved in his English learning and believed that they could not contribute to his learning of English. When probed further, he reported that he was not satisfied with his English grades. Another of these 3 students, who was divided about this issue on the survey, noted during the interview that he did recognize the value of parental involvement in L2 learning. Particularly in his case, though, as his parents were from Bengali medium backgrounds, he seemed to think that they did not quite understand the homework that was provided from his school and as a result, could not help him with his studies. This student also reported he believed that if his parents could lend a hand in his studies, his English grades would have been better.

Thus, in depth discussion and further insight from the interview made it clear that the majority of the students who neither agreed nor disagreed with the significance of parental involvement during the survey only were referring to the fact that their own parents' English proficiency was not good enough to contribute to their English learning. They were not disregarding the worth of parents' input in L2 learning of students in general. On the contrary, these students were conscious of the value of parents' involvement as a beneficial aspect of English learning.

Proficiency evaluation

Using this semi-structured interview with the students, their overall communicative ability was assessed as well. For instance, whether the students could understand questions in English when asked during the interview acted as a tool for evaluating their listening skill. Whether they could formulate

an answer at the spur-of-the-moment using their competence in the language also was effective in determining their true communicative aptitude as the replies were impromptu. Additionally, the students' use of vocabulary, correct grammar, and their pronunciation in the course of the discussion provided the means for a thorough understanding of the students' speaking skill as well as their general language proficiency.

For the reading proficiency test, the focus was primarily on measuring the students' reading fluency which is directly correlated to reading competence (Fuchs et al., 2001). The students were given a short passage and were asked to read aloud while they were recorded (see Appendix C). The recording was referred back to later on during the data analysis process, and the students' reading proficiency was deduced from their speed, accuracy, and prosody (stress, tone, pitch, etc.).

Table 1 - Speaking and reading proficiency assessment

Serial No.	Reading Skill	Speaking Skill
Student 1	Good	Okay
Student 2	Okay	Okay
Student 3	Excellent	Excellent
Serial No.	Reading Skill	Speaking Skill
Student 4	Very good	Very good
Student 5	Excellent	Good
Student 6	Good	Very good
Student 7	Excellent	Excellent
Student 8	Excellent	Excellent
Student 9	Very good	Good
Student 10	Good	Very good
Student 11	Good	Okay

The students have been identified with numbers instead of names according to the sequence in which their interviews were conducted. Each of the students first read aloud the passage that was provided and then the survey was reviewed with them which led the rest of the conversation along with the interview prompts. After an examination of the evidence obtained for the students' reading and speaking proficiency, they were placed in 4 categories, namely okay, good, very good, and excellent according to their performance.

3.2 Recommendation

The semi-structured interview held with the 11 students helped in gaining a great deal of insights regarding the psychological effect on them because of their parents' participation or due to the absence of it in their English learning. One thing was clear during the interview; all the students who thought their parents did not or could not help with their studies or did not have the proper means to contribute to their English learning, were somewhat frustrated about it. They believed that not having the support from their parents in regard to English learning put them at a disadvantage, and this was not entirely baseless as it would seem. When weighed against their classmates who claimed their parents were greatly involved in their L2 learning, it was apparent in the language

aptitude test that the students with more support from their parents outperformed the students whose parents were not that involved.

After comparing the students' speaking and reading proficiency with the degree of their parental involvement (based on the data collected through the questionnaire), a direct correlation for most of the students could be appreciated. For example, the students who had more exposure to the English language at home either directly (by practicing speaking with their parents) or indirectly (by being allowed to watch English movies, cartoons, or shows) were more or less comfortable with speaking in English during the interview and were not making many pronunciation or grammatical mistakes (student 3, student 7, and student 8); whereas, those who lacked exposure to English at home (either by not being allowed to watch English shows on a regular basis or by not being able to practice English speaking with their parents) seemed to struggle more with their speaking (student 2 and student 11). All the students who excelled at their reading aptitude test (student 3, student 5, student 7, and student 8) reported early reading habits accompanied by current reading activities as well as being provided English reading materials by their parents at home in the survey.

Many of the students also brought up an important point about getting "encouragement" from their parents to practice English at home, and those of whom who did, appeared to be better communicators in English. Remarkably, almost all the young learners were hyper-aware of the influence that their parents exercised in their acquisition of the English language. As discussed previously, even those who appeared not to completely recognize the value of parental involvement in the survey, were in fact very much aware of it and even felt deprived due to the lack of it as revealed during the interview.

The resounding evidence from this study suggests that parental involvement is an indispensable part of a child's L2 learning journey. Even the participants in this research, who were barely reaching adolescence, recognized this crucial element. In light of the positive psychological impact that parents' participation has on the students and also on their academic achievement, the first recommendation would be for the policy makers and the educational institutions alike to make a systematic effort in introducing family involvement as a pedagogical tool for better L2 learning of their students. These simple yet impactful tasks performed by parents should be reinforced and adopted by the parents who are not practicing them already to facilitate their child's English learning. Such as playing word games to enrich children's vocabulary, reading storybooks with children's for reading proficiency development, watching movies or English shows with them for developing better listening skill and learning of English lexicon, or perhaps just conversing with them in English once in a while so children become more comfortable while speaking in English even outside the perimeter of their homes. The application of all these practices may not be entirely feasible in the periphery of a classroom, at least not as frequently as necessary, and thus should seriously be considered by schools as an extended part of schoolwork and at the same time be recommended to be performed at student's home as a routine.

4. Conclusion

Where educational institutions can teach children the rules and contents of a second language, the desire for learning essentially comes from home. Young children from primary level often are

reluctant to communicate in their second language in the classroom out of anxiety, fear, and inhibition. For most children, home is another word for “safe haven”, and their parents are their “white knights.” Students are less concerned about making a mistake and being laughed at when they attempt to converse in a second or foreign language at home as opposed to at school. Moreover, schools can hardly provide enough exposure to the language, and this is where students’ homes come in handy. Parents are able to provide the means for spontaneous acquisition of the language through simple activities at home. The current study hopes to accentuate the veiled efforts made by the parents to promote L2 learning at home and in addition, anticipates that schools and teachers alike will recognize and utilize this added advantage delivered by the parents and also would incorporate parental involvement formally and more systematically down the road. The current study is limited to suburban schools, and it does not look into the situation going on in the rural areas. It also does not probe the issue of parents with little proficiency in the English language or none and how they may be of assistance in their children’s second language acquisition. Thus, future implications of this study may include using the insights from this study to tackle researches on the hurdle of parental involvement of illiterate parents or parents with little literacy in their children’s L2 learning and coming up with sustainable solutions to overcome these issues, such as parent-training, arranging workshops, and creating modules to help teachers in involving parents more in school activities.

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