

## Chapter 42: Teacher and Parent Perceptions of the Home-School Connection in Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the nature of Home-School connection in Saudi Arabia. First, it reviews the literature on this topic, covering the reasons behind the lack of communication between the parent and the school. The data was collected through two surveys. The first one given to 40 Saudi teachers, and the other given to 40 Saudi parents. The results collected shows that the Saudi teachers and schools try in so many ways to communicate with parents, but unfortunately there is still a lack of awareness from some parents about their role in their children school life. This paper concludes some suggestions that may help in solving or at least alleviating this problem, and recommends further research in the topic.

### 1 Introduction

It is known that there are more than one factors that affect the results of the educational achievement to the students. One of the most essential factors is home or parental connection, which basically means “the parents’ or caregivers’ investment in the education of their children (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling ,2011, p. 116). Particularly, it is participating in their child’s school and to team up with teachers to develop the children’s academic level.

Home-school connections could be following up on the student’s homework and help them to find appropriate solutions. It could be checking with the teacher on the child’s level and discussing the feasible educational methods for the students. In addition, parents should inform the school with any home events or problems that may affect the student’s performance at school.

Another important concern with teachers is the differences on home school connection effectiveness. Some educators think that it is important and positive, while others think that it has a negative influence on students.

In any case, the significant importance of the home school connection is well- known by the school. The parents, as well, believe that home school connection is important to the students’ academic performance. However, there is still a flaw in the relationship between school and home as there is still a big gap between them. There are so many economic, social, and cultural reasons for this (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). For example, having more than one job could be one reason that blocks the parent from connecting with the school. It is necessary to determine the nature of the home school connection effectiveness.

In Saudi Arabia, it is common that there is a gap on communication between home and school. This may be due to a lack of awareness from parents of the importance of their role in the

educational process. Also, parents believe that the teacher is the only person authorized in the educational decisions concerning the students and they should not interfere. Researchers believe in the importance of the home school connection and its role in the success of the educational process and outcomes for children, so it is must to find solutions after listing the reasons why there is lack on the home school connection.

Furthermore, this paper meant to answer basic question: what solutions would strengthen the home school connection? Or how can schools increase the home school connection? This research hopes to find solutions to attract parents to their child school and increase their interactions with the school community because finding solutions will have a significant positive impact on the level of the student achievement and this is the goal of this paper.

## **2 Literature Review**

When it comes to the topic of home-school connection, most of us will readily agree that it's important for student academic success, which include student's physical and mental behavior, attendance and achievement (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, (N.D.). Schools that have successful and effective school-to-home connections begin with a "belief that student success is a shared interest of both school and family, envision parents as partners in the learning process, and then identify concrete ways that partnerships can be activated," (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, (p. 2).

However, there are several challenges when it comes to reaching out to parents. Often schools struggle with significant and purposeful parental involvement and they do not feel they are implementing successful home-school connection. I will discuss what a successful home-school connection looks like and how to overcome the challenges in building these connections.

According to Project Appleseed (N.D.), volunteering is one way to reach out to parents. A school's goal should be to recruit and organize parents to help and support in the many and varied daily and annual activities. To begin, schools could survey parents to identify the talents, times and locations of parents. The authors, Project Appleseed also state some other best practices to recruit and organize parents is to create a parent room or center for volunteer work, family resources and meetings. Having class parents, telephone trees, or other structures to support family involvement and offer all families with needed and valued information. The challenges with parent volunteers are that many may feel inadequate and not welcome. Therefore, schools should provide trainings and recognize efforts of volunteer parents (Reading Rockets, N.D.) Also, create flexible schedules and events for volunteers who may have conflicting schedules.

Reading Rockets (N.D.) state that schools who have a successful home-school connection have "effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications with all families each year about school programs and their children's progress," (p. 3). Examples of successful home-school connection are conferences with every parent at least once a year. Teachers should have follow-up conferences as needed. A barrier for successful conferences is language because parents don't speak fluent English, so schools with effective home-school connections have language translators to assist families. Additionally, schools could reach out to churches, mosques and other community members for parental support.

### **Effective Strategies**

According to the American Federations of Teachers (N.D) they suggest some highly effective strategies that are necessary in promoting a healthy relationship between families and schools. These strategies need to be varied to meet the needs of diverse parents and their diverse schedules. They also state that good two-way communication between parent and teacher will better equip each other to support the student in their learning and behavior

outcomes. Ways to open the two-way communication and share important information about the student are by phone calls, which should be positive and informative. Emails or school-wide websites can also bridge the gap of home-to-school connection especially for parents with schedules that don't allow for volunteering at their child's school or work during their child's school day. Schools should send home weekly or monthly folders of student work for parents to review.

Additionally, schools should send home notes of areas of concern such as bullying. The American Federations of Teachers (N.D) believes that effective communication strategies involve 5 components. First, communication should be initiated by the teacher at the beginning of the year. Second, is timeliness; adults should make contact as soon concerns are identified. The problem or issues can grow bigger the longer a teacher or parent waits. Third, communication should be consistent and frequent, so parents are aware of their child's academic work and situation. Forth, it's important to follow-through with what you said you will do. Lastly, teachers must use clear language that makes sense to the diverse academic and language levels.

“While teachers may feel unprepared to effectively involve parents,” (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, (p 2.) It is of utmost importance that they receive training in effective strategies, like the ones mentioned above, to implement a successful home-school connection, because our purpose in teaching is to improve our student's knowledge and skills. Ultimately, what is at stake here is the student, and their overall success and well-being.

### **3 Methodologies**

To answer the research question, “What type of parent and school communication do schools use in Saudi Arabia?” and “How do parents feel about home-school connection?”

The researcher created two online surveys one for teachers and one parents in Saudi Arabia.

#### **Participants**

##### ***Educators***

A total of 40 teachers, counselors, and Directors in grades 1st-12th were invited to participate in this study. Of these teacher, counselors, and Directors, 13 taught first grade and 8 taught second grade, and 10 taught third grade and 9 taught in other grades or another were counselors or directors. This sampling of teachers, counselors, and Directors were selected from the Khbrat Program-USA in Orlando, Florida, and educators from different regions in Saudi Arabia. These participants were chosen as the researcher has access to communication through WhatsApp. The researcher is also in the Khbrat-USA program. The Khbrat Program is also known as Building Leadership for Change through School immersion (BLCSI) at University of Central Florida (UCF).

##### ***Parents***

A total of 38 parents whose children attend school in Saudi Arabia were invited to participate in this study. Ten parents had high school education level, 8 parents have a Diploma, which is two years of study at Community College, 14 parents with Bachelor's Degrees, and 4 parents with Master's degree. The researcher selected the participants in WhatsApp group of parents who have children attending elementary school in Saudi Arabia

## Instruments

### *Instrument One*

The first questionnaire was constructed for educators in Arabic language and contained 5 demographic questions about their teaching experience, and 4 questions dealing with home-school connection (See Appendix A). There is an English version of the same questionnaire (See Appendix B).

### *Instrument Two*

The second questionnaire was constructed for parents whose children attend school in Saudi Arabia, and contained 1 demographic questions related to educational level and 8 questions dealing with home-school connection (See Appendix C). There is an English version of the same questionnaire (See Appendix D).

## Procedures

The researcher sent a text through WhatsApp for an online survey on Survey Monkey of 10 questions for educators and 9 questions for parents. The WhatsApp text informed educators on his initiative regarding relationship between the teacher and parents (Home-School Connection) in Saudi Arabia for his research in the KHEBRAT program. The text asked educators to complete the survey and share it with other educators in Saudi Arabia.

Survey Monkey software was used to analyze the participant's response.

## 4 Results and Interpretation

The main purpose of this study is to deliver teacher and parent insights on the home-school connection in Saudi Arabia. This chapter discusses the results from two surveys on Survey Monkey©. The first survey was to look for educators' insights and contained 10 questions. The second survey I wanted to know the parent insights on the home-school connections and that survey had 9 questions.

### Parent Perceptions of the Home-School Connection in Saudi Arabia

#### *Education Background*

Forty participants responded to the survey. I asked 5 questions to gain an understanding of the educational background of the participants. Out of 40 participants 39 taught in a city school and 1 taught in a village. The participants who taught in a public were 37 and 3 taught in private school. Thirteen teachers taught First grade, 8 teachers taught Second grade, 10 teachers taught Third grade, and lastly 9 teachers taught Fourth, through Sixth grade. See Table below for the length of time the teachers have been teaching.

**Table 1: Years of Teaching Experience.**

Answer Choices	Responses
اقل من سنة (less than 1 year)	0.00% 0
١-١٠ . (1-10year)	55.00%

Answer Choices	Responses
	22
اكتر من 10 سنوات. (More than 10 year)	42.50% 17
<b>Responses</b>	2.50%
Other (please specify)	1
TOTAL	40

### ***Home-School Connection***

I asked 5 questions related to find out how teachers develop relationship and cooperation with parents. Question 1 asked about the form of communication teachers use with parents, the majority, 19, used WhatsApp, and 12 used regular text messages, 17 teachers send notes or letters, and 1 teacher used their School Website, 13 teachers made phone calls. There were zero teachers who used email. This was not surprising as most Saudi Arabians educators do not communicate do not use email or have School Website. Questions 2 asked, "How often do you communicate with parents?" See Table 2 for teacher response.

**Table 2: Teacher Communication with Parents.**

Answer Choices	Responses
اسبوعياً. (Weekly)	33.33% 13
شهرياً. (Monthly)	30.77% 12
مرة في السنة الدراسية. (Once a year)	10.26% 4
مرتان في السنة الدراسية. (Twice a year)	7.69% 3
ثلاث مرات في السنة الدراسية. (Three times a year)	15.38% 6
<b>Responses</b>	2.56%
Other (please specify)	1

Answer Choices	Responses
TOTAL	39

Question 8 asked, “Does your school have a plan for volunteers?” Thirteen teachers said yes, and twenty-seven responded no. Question 9 asked, “Does your School Implement a Home-School Connection Plan?” Twenty-nine teachers said yes, eleven teachers said no. Only 18 participants responded to Question 10, “When you communicate with parents in the above-mentioned ways, and when the school communicates executes the plan effectively. Do parents respond positively or negatively? 6 teachers said yes, and 12 teachers said no.

### Parent Perceptions of the Home-School Connection in Saudi Arabia

Forty participants responded to the survey. The first question was a demographic question, which asked, “What is your highest degree?” The majority of 40% of parent’s participants have Bachelor’s degrees. See Table 3 for additional responses.

**Table 3: Education Level of Parents.**

Answer Choices	Responses
ثانوي (High school)	25.00% 10
دبلوم (Diploma)	25.00% 10
بكالوريوس (Bachelor degree)	40.00% 16
ماجستير (Master degree)	10.00% 4
دكتورة (Ph.D.)	0.00% 0
TOTAL	40

Question 2 asked parents, “How often do you contact your child’s teacher?” The results show that most participants 35% contact parents once a year. The second highest type of contact, 27.5% is after reports, which is four times a year.

### Volunteering

Questions 3 and 4 and 7 were about volunteering at your child’s school, and the barriers to volunteering. All parent participants responded to this question, and 80% said they do not volunteer at their children’s school. Questions 4 asked participants, “If your answer to the previous question is No, what are the barriers preventing you from volunteering at your child’s

school?" The majority of respondents said they could not volunteer due to their job. Questions 7 asked, "Would you like to help out at your child's school?" Table 2. this shows an overwhelming response to parents have a high interest in sometimes of support and volunteering at their children's' school.

**Table 4: Parents Interested in Volunteering.**

Answer Choices	Responses
نعم. (Yes)	30.00% 12
لا. (No)	7.50% 3
ممکن. (Maybe)	62.50% 25
TOTAL	40

### *Communicating*

Questions 5 and 6 asked about communication with your child's school and teacher. Questions 5 asked participants, "Do you feel the communication between you and your child's school is supportive?" Unfortunately, 25 out of 40 participants, 62.5%, responded no. Questions 6 responded said the best way to communicate with their child's teacher through WhatsApp and Phone calls.

### *After-School Program*

Question 8 asked participants, "If the school provided an After-School Program for homework help, would you be interested? 80% of participants responded in favor of schools to provide an after-school program to support homework help for their children.

## **5 Summaries of Results/Findings**

### **Teachers**

Through the teachers' answers to some of the questions asked in the survey, it became clear that the Saudi's teachers are aware of the importance of the Home-School connection. For example in question 2 (How often do you communicate with parents? "). Most teachers periodically contact parents. Also, some schools try to attract the parent to the school by implementing a Home-School connection plan, but unfortunately, the parents do not respond positively to these plans, as it is a clear in the teachers' answers to the question 10, "When you communicate with parents in the above-mentioned ways, and when the school communicates executes the plan effectively. Do parents respond positively or negatively?"

### **Parents**

In the Parents' Survey, most parents communicate with their children's teachers once a year or after each report. According to the parents' answers to question 3, they do not

volunteer in their children's schools. Question 4 was ("If your answer to the previous question is No, what are the barriers preventing you from volunteering at your child's school?"), most of the answers to this question were due to work or lack of knowledge of the appropriate way to volunteer. Question 7 ("Would you like to help out at your child's school?") The answers were joyfully surprising as most parents have the desire to volunteer in their children's schools. Because according to most Educators, they state that when parents are highly involved in their child's school student learning improves, there were gains in student test scores, and the child's behavior improves. Sadly, most parents feel that communication between them and the school is not supportive. In the last question, 80% of the parents prefer a program to help their children with homework.

### **Recommendations**

While Saudi Arabia schools are doing many great things. One big difference to American schools is how they implement parent volunteer's training and plans. Therefore, I recommend our schools do the following.

First, It is very important that the school have an official website. This site should include the school calendar and all the events during the school year. It helps parents to be informed and updated. Returning to the survey, we find that 98% of the parents, that is, a very large number, wish for their child's school to have an official website or an email. As we have seen in American schools, each school has its own official website that makes it easier for parents to get the information they need, such as important events at school and many other services.

Second, carefully managing a Home-School connection volunteering plan. The method has to be well explained in detail for parents, and it should be in a flexible times. The plan should include: Volunteers section or handbook, which includes screenings with background checks to ensure the safety of our children, descriptions of volunteer position because their success depends on how well they are trained and supported by the school or school district.

Additionally, schools need to develop a plan to track and report volunteers. Try and find a way to recognize volunteers and provide feedback. The plan should have the teachers complete a needs assessment. Because one of the reasons that prevented parents from volunteering in their children's schools, according to the survey, is not knowing the correct method or because of their job's time. Therefore, having a clear program and flexible times, we have overcome difficulties for parents who wish to volunteer.

Finally, Establishing officially supported programs from the school that allow parents to participate actively in the school, as is the case in American schools. An example of some of these programs in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, FL are PTA (Parent Teacher Association ) or (volunteer) program. We need such programs in the Saudi Arabia's schools to give parents the opportunity to share their children the educational experience and the positive return that the student will earn as a result.

### **5 Conclusions**

Although the Saudi parents realize the great importance of the Home-School connection, there is still a gap in communication between the parents and the school. According to the survey, the school and the teachers are trying in various ways to communicate with parents, but unfortunately there is still a lack of awareness from some parents about their role in their

children school life. This may be due to parents not knowing the correct methods as we saw in the answers to some of the questions in the survey. Or because of their work times that conflict with school time. The reason may also be that parents believe that the teacher is the only one authorized to make decisions about the student. Therefore, teachers and the school must change

this perception by conducting awareness sessions for parents and informing them of the importance of their participation and their active role in educating their children.

All of these, along with the suggestions in the previous section, may help in solving or alleviating this problem. Since, this study was conducted on a small sample of only 40 people, it could be circulated in all Saudi Arabia with greater sample in order to obtain more accurate and useful data.

### Appendix A: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE IN ARABIC

١- ما الصف الذي تقوم بتدريسه؟

- الصف الأول
- الصف الثاني
- الصف الثالث
- اخرى

٢- منذ متى وأنت معلم؟

- أقل من سنه
- ١-١٠ أكثر من سنوات
- أكثر من ١٠ سنوات
- أخرى

٣- منذ متى وأنت تدرس في صفك الحالي؟

- أقل من سنه
- ١-١٠ سنوات
- أكثر من ١٠ سنوات
- أخرى

٤- هل تُدرس في مدرسه حكومية أو خاصة؟

- مدرسة حكومية
- مدرسة خاصة

٥- هل تُدرس في مدينة أو قرية؟

- مدينة
- قرية

٦- ما نوع الاتصال الذي تستخدمه مع أولياء الأمور؟ اختر كل ما ينطبق

- ايميل
- واتسب
- رسائل نصية
- رسائل ورقية
- الموقع الإلكتروني
- مكالمات هاتفية