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PARENTAL ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN'S ONLINE CLASSES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract
This study explored parental attendance of elementary school children's online classes from the perspective of parents and schoolteachers in Saudi Arabia. Results of a survey showed that more parents (54%) than teachers (46%) are in favor of parental attendance of children's online classes especially if the children are in the lower grades, but more teachers (54%) than parents (46%) disapprove of parental attendance of online course. Both parents and teachers reported that parents play several academic roles in online classes for elementary school children which include organizing, facilitating, monitoring children's attention in classes, motivating, nurturing, and supporting online learning. Those who do not prefer parental attendance indicated that traditionally, parents do not attend face-to-face classes and rules for online class attendance should be the same as face-to-face class attendance by parents. Children should be given the opportunity to adjust to online learning, face challenges, develop self-discipline, a sense of responsibility and autonomy. Both teachers and parents declared that parents should interfere if the child is having an internet connectivity, platform problem, difficulty submitting an assignment, is new to the platform or has a learning disability. The study reports teachers are parents' views in details with some recommendations for better online learning and parental involvement.

Keywords: online classes, online teaching, distance learning, parental involvement, attending children's classes, parental attendance, COVID-19 pandemic.

I. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement[1] refers to a situation where parents are directly involved in the learning process of their children such as talking with the children about what they are learning in school and helping with homework[2]. Parental involvement helps improve students' schoolwork and performance, models desired behavior, provides ongoing encouragement, monitors homework completion, creates a time and space for study, reduces absenteeism, and restores parents' confidence in their children's education. It also helps students earn better test scores and get higher grades, develop better social skills, and show improved behaviour. Children benefit more from reading with their parents, receiving help with math and science experiments. Parents can help their children by participating in school functions or obligations, communicating with teachers, volunteering for school activities, attending parent-teacher conferences, and helping with the governance of a school council[3].

There has been a greater need for parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic, because of the abrupt shift from face to face to remote learning in all countries. Students of all ages had to study online. In Saudi Arabia, elementary school children were studying online via the Ministry of

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[1] www.bing.com/search?q=parent+involvement+in+children%27s+education&form=ANNTH1&refig=2c25350dfe5745408018efacbc3f364c

[2] www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/parenting-and-culture/202008/parents-involvement-in-children-s-education

[3] www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/parental-involvement-in-education/

Education's Madrasati platform [1] and [2]. Parents' involvement in their children's online courses have become even more important than face-to-face instruction as this mode of learning is new for the teachers, students, and parents. Online learning is more challenging as parents are more directly responsible for aspects of children's online education that were handled at school before the Pandemic.

A review of the literature showed several studies that investigated parental involvement in children's distance education during the Pandemic. For example, in the USA, **[3]** surveyed American parents to find out the types of distance learning activities they engaged in with their children during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The researchers found that most parents engaged in monitoring, teaching or technology support activities with their children. However, these activities varied by child's age. Parents who reported engaging in distance learning activities experienced higher stress levels.

In Turkey, [4] reported that parents carried out educational activities such as preparing, supporting students, monitoring, and conducting activities during the Pandemic. Parents provided and participated in the students' online learning environment. They evaluated educational activities during the Pandemic. The parents encountered problems with infrastructure, participation, planning and with the EIN platform in distance education activities. The researchers proposed distance education activities related to the infrastructure of the EIN platform, preparing for the process, planning the process, and implementing the content and activities used. Another study in Turkey by [5] investigated parents' views of the Education Information Network platform, TRT EBA-TV and EBA live lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic. During distance education, the parents ensured that their children followed the lessons and motivated them. Students' motivation was negatively affected because of connection problems and staying at home. Parents added that their awareness of their children's education increased, and they had a chance to better understood the value of the teacher and school.

In Portugal, [6] analyzed Portuguese parents' perceptions of their home-based parental involvement in their children's online learning during the lockdown and school closure in 2020 due to the Pandemic. Findings revealed that Portuguese parents supported their children through monitoring their attention in class and through full task awareness.

In the Philippines, parents played six academic roles: organizing, facilitating, monitoring, motivating, nurturing, and supporting learning. Because teachers were less prepared for online teaching, parents assumed an instructor's role and performed activities related to students' needs. They also served as digital classroom managers who organized schedules, assisted with assignments and projects and participated in online chat groups. They repurposed living spaces and furniture for reorganization of study and work areas. They helped the children develop an online learning mindset. However, parents faced challenges such as motivating children to focus and finding the right mix of screen-time. Parents valued children's well-being, bonding time, socialization, and life skills [7].

In addition, [8] found positive associations between parents and teachers' ratings of all engagement types. Higher levels of parent-teacher trust predicted lower levels of parent and teacher-reported externalizing behavior, i.e., negative behavior. Discrepancies in parents' and teachers' ratings of school-based involvement predicted lower internalizing symptoms in children such as feeling sad, lonely, afraid, unwanted, or unloved; being withdrawn and not wanting to socialize; becoming irritable or nervous, especially when stressed or being emotional; not wanting to talk or communicate with anyone; or having difficulty concentrating or focusing on important tasks[4]. Findings suggested positive associations between parental engagement and children's behavioral and academic functioning.

A second group of studies in the literature focused on parents' roles in helping students with online learning in certain courses during the Pandemic. [9] assessed the effect of parental involvement in three virtual schools' LMS on grade K-12 mathematics achievement. Parental involvement - as measured by LMS logins - had a small, but positive, impact on elementary, middle, and high school students' performance in mathematics. These results suggest that parental involvement is just as critical in virtual learning as in traditional classroom settings. In addition, parental involvement in early language learning projects, in school activities and meetings, and utilization of digital educational materials at home was important for effective foreign language learning in younger school children [10]. Similarly, involving parents in their children's school-based English language was beneficial to their academic achievement, and language and literacy development. Parental involvement enabled them to view, like and comment in response to their children's English work [11].

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[4] www.betterhelp.com/advice/behavior/what-are-internalizing-behaviors/

Furthermore, a third group of studies in the literature showed some negative aspects of parental involvement in children's online learning. In Germany, [12] found more negative parent-child interactions, lower parental and child positive affect, and higher negative affect on days when parents were more heavily involved in learning, i.e., when children worked less independently. In South Africa, lack of parental involvement affected parent-teacher partnerships in township schools. Lack of understanding of the sociocultural and economic circumstances constrained parental involvement, resulting in a gap between teachers and parents on how to collaboratively support children's learning at school and at home [13]. In the Philippines, parents faced numerous challenges such as availability of technology, struggle using technology, the new virtual mode of learning, delivery of instruction, unsatisfactory learning outcomes, financial difficulties while working for the family during the lockdown, and personal problems of stress, health, and learning style [14].

In addition, distance teaching has been challenging for both Turkish students and parents. Parents considered it unsuitable for young children and students with special needs. They complained about lack of interactivity, social isolation, and increased screen time. Distance teaching has placed a heavy burden on parents [15].

In Hong Kong, most children lacked learning interests, encountered difficulties in completing distance learning tasks, and home-related limitations. Parents wanted interactive online learning to facilitate children's learning, better learning support from schools, flexible work arrangements, and government subsidies. There was a high usage of electronic devices without parental mediation during class suspension [16].

In Greece, both mothers and fathers showed a high fear of COVID-19 and a low sense of resilience. Their involvement in homework was limited to parental control. Parents' emotional state affected their involvement in the homework of children with learning disabilities. The findings emphasized the need for parental counselling during the pandemic, feeling more resilient and being more supportive to their children's learning [17].

The above literature review reported studies about parental involvement in children's online learning during the Pandemic in numerous countries such as the USA, Hong Kong, Turkey, Greece, Germany, the Philippines, and South Africa. However, it showed lack of studies in Saudi Arabia that investigate the issue of parental involvement in children's online learning during the Pandemic and post-Pandemic eras. Therefore, this study aims to find out how a sample of parents and teachers in Saudi Arabia view parental involvement in elementary school children's online learning. Specifically, it aims to find out the following: (i) whether parents in Saudi Arabia prefer to attend their children's online classes; whether parents think they should make comments, provide information, or correct the teacher while attending online class; and to give justifications for their point of view; (ii) whether elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia think parents should be allowed to attend online classes with their children; whether parents should be allowed to give comments, provide information, or correct the teacher while attending online class with their children; and to give justifications for their views; (iii) whether there are any directives or guidelines from the Saudi Ministry of Education regarding parental attendance of children's online classes. The study does not aim to compare mothers and fathers, or male and female teachers' views, compare private and public elementary schools, or compare parental attendance of different school subjects such as reading, math, science, social studies, and others. It does not aim to explore the challenges that parents, teachers and students face in online learning. It does not aim to compare the views of working vs unworking mothers or compare the views of parents and teachers according to college degree. The study does not focus on parental attendance of online classes for children with special needs or disabilities.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

A total of 265 parents (47%) and elementary school teachers (53%) were randomly selected from the author's followers on social media. 8% were fathers and 92% were mothers. Some of the mothers are working, others are not. 32% of the parents have a Ph.D. degree; 20% have an M.A. and 48% have a B.A. degree. Parents have different areas of specialties such as literature, linguistics,

business, education, IT, and others. They are all skilled in using computers and the Ministry of Education's Madrasati platform. Parents in the sample have at least one child in elementary school. Some children in the sample go to private schools, but the majority go to public schools.

As for the elementary school teachers in the sample, they are all female. 21% have an M.A. degree and 79% have a B.A. They are all skilled in using computers and the Madrasati Platform. The teachers have taught/are currently teaching different online courses for elementary school students and they teach different subjects to different elementary grade levels. Some work in private schools but the majority work in public schools. Parents and teachers live and/or work in different cities in Saudi Arabia: Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, Tabuk, Dammam, Abha and Taif. Focus of the current study is on normal children.

2.2   Instrument

All the parents in the sample responded to a survey that asked them to provide some demographic data such college degree, area of specialization, whether they work or not, whether their children go to a private/public school, and their computer skill level. They were also asked to answer the following open-ended question:

As a parent, do you think parents should attend their children's online classes? Do you think parents should comment on, provide information, or correct the teachers while the online class is in progress? Give at least three justifications for your point of view.

Similarly, all the teachers in the sample responded to an open-ended survey that asked them to provide some demographic data such college degree, area of specialization, whether they work in a private or public school, and their computer skills. They were also asked to answer the following open-ended questions:

As a teacher, do you think parents should be allowed to attend their children's online classes? Do you think parents may give comment on, provide information, or correct the teacher while the online class is in progress? Give at least three justifications for your point of view. Are there any directives or guidelines from the Saudi Ministry of Education regarding parental attendance of their children's online classes?

2.3   Data Analysis

Parents' and teachers' responses to the surveys were compiled separately and each group was then divided into 2 subgroups: those who agree to parents' attendance of children's online courses and those who do not. Then the justifications given for each point of view were sorted out. Results are reported quantitatively (in percentages) and qualitatively.

3.   RESULTS

3.1   Parents' Views of Online Class Attendance with their Children

Analysis of the responses to the survey showed that 56% of the parent said that they prefer to attend their children's online courses to supervise them and follow them up and make sure they are attending the online class on time, they are attentive and are not busy with something else during the online class session. Parents can find out the concentration level of their children, make sure they are not bored, they are participating, interacting with and responding to the teacher. The parents can benefit from the information given by the teacher. This will enable them help the student retrieve what was taught in class. They would be able to clarify points that are difficult for the child and remind the child with the tasks given by the teacher. Parents can make sure the students are doing their homework. Parents' attendance of classes can improve the students' academic performance and skill in using technology. Some parents added that some students concentrate better when their parents are attending with them. However, if the student does not have a close relationship with the parent, the parent's presence will make the student nervous and uncomfortable. Few mentioned that it is the parents' right to attend the online class to be able to follow up the teaching-learning process of their children. Some parents wrote:

> *Maha: When I attend my son's online classes, he feels they are important and I am following him up.*
> *Sana: It is important for parents to attend their children's online classes to help the children with information and skills that cannot be taught online such as penmanship skills. To guide the student in starting a new line, cutting something with the scissors in art classes, locate a page or exercise.*
> *Sameera: Some children need technical help such as clicking links, changing from the platform to an application, and changing some settings.*
> *Muneera: Parental attendance stops disruptive behavior such as stopping the child from interrupting the teacher and saying irrelevant things during the class session.*
> *Nadia: to help the student highlight a paragraph, work on a particular exercise or problem.*
> *Dalal: helping children submit an assignment. Some children forget or have trouble submitting their assignments through the platform.*

On the other hand, 44% of the parents asserted that they do not recommend parental attendance of children's online courses. They gave numerous reasons for their viewpoint. They said that traditionally, in face-to-face instruction, parents do not attend classes and rules for online class attendance by parents should be the same, i.e., parents should not attend. However, they indicated that parents can monitor their children from a distance to make sure they are not busy playing games or watching cartoons. Parents may interfere if there is a technical problem, internet connection problem, or if the child has trouble submitting an assignment. Some parents added that teachers should have privacy with their students in their online classes as it is the case in face-to-face classes and that parents should respect that. When parents attend online classes, the children will learn to depend on their parents, become lazy, may skip class since their parents are attending on their behalf. Others mentioned that it is a waste of time for the parents to attend online classes especially if the parent is working, have other responsibilities or house chores. The students should develop self-confidence, self-reliance, self-discipline, and should develop problem-solving skills if a problem emerges. When parents attend, the children learn to psychologically depend on them. Some added that children should have space and the opportunity to explore online learning. Some parents gave further justifications such as:

> *Mona: If a teacher has 20 parents attending with her 20 students, this might make her nervous, and feel that she is being watched. This is distracting for the teacher and other students in class.*
> *Moodie: Students will develop the feeling that they are helpless and cannot depend on themselves.*
> *Aisha: Parents may attend if the student has a learning disability and needs help in a particular course.*
> *Nada: Students need to know that it is serious, and they have to concentrate on what the teacher is saying and doing.*
> *Rula: Originally, students study face to face without the parents' presence, and this should be the case in online courses.*
> *Fatima: Students should learn to be assertive and should be able to express themselves and tell the teacher if he/she is having a problem or does not understand a point. But when parents attend, the parents would act on behalf of the student.*

3.2 Teachers' Views of Parents' Attendance of Children's Online Classes

Analysis of the responses to the survey showed that 46% of the teachers in the sample do mind parental attendance of their children's online courses. Many indicated that when parents attend classes, they encourage their children will not miss classes. Children will not browse internet websites. They added that in the early grades of elementary school, children learn better when parents attend with them. But in the upper grades, parents should only remind their children of the class time, create a home atmosphere conducive to online learning and make sure the children are connected and logged in. The parent should be a facilitator especially if the child has technical and connectivity problems, slow browsing, crowded house, no special room for studying online, some distractions around him/her at home, has a learning disability, is a slow learner, is shy, has poor communication skills, or an Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). They explained that in the first three grades, parental attendance helps maintain class discipline because some children cannot sit still for a very long time. Parental attendance will help the children focus better and they will know the tasks required of them. Sometime, students in the first

three grades need someone to read the question for them, show then the lesson title, page number, or exercise number. They also need someone to show them how to use their devices, login, logout, how and where to enter the username and password, how to work with apps and platforms they are using. When mothers attend, they will know what was covered in class and will be able to help the child review the material later on. Some teachers added:

> *Hanoof: I feel so happy when I receive letters from parents telling me that they have learnt a lot from my digital skills classes. I feel that that I am educating members of the society.*
> *Salwa: The whole family attends my classes and they now realize how much effort teachers exert and how hard they work.*
> *Muneera: It is a kind of moral support and motivation for the children. Parents would know how the learning process is going on and how the child is interacting.*
> *Fahda: I do not have the authority to prevent parents from attending my online classes.*
> *Dina: It is a kind of quality control for the teachers and online instruction.*

On the contrary, 54% of the teachers said that they do not prefer parental attendance of children's online courses. Many teachers believe that the teachers, themselves, should have control over their classes, should attract students' attention without interference from the parents. When parents attend classes, the students become dependent on their parents in doing assignments, concentrating, understanding, and completing the tasks. They might entertain themselves and do something else while the parent is attending.

Parental attendance reduces students' self-awareness, self-discipline and sense of responsibility and may not accept guidance from the teacher. When parents are attending, the teacher may feel uncomfortable, nervous and might make mistakes. Similarly, some children feel nervous, apprehensive, uncomfortable, uninteractive and unresponsive in the presence of their parents. Many teachers in the sample declared that it is O.K. for the parents to watch the children from a distance without the children being aware of that. They can check on the children for a short time, once in a while. Some parents commented:

> *Lamia: Children will hesitate to participate in class in the presence of their parents.*
> *Abeda: Mothers may contact me if their children have not understood something in my class.*
> *Karam: The students need to get used to all kinds of learning situations away from the parents.*
> *Abeer: I do not mind parental attendance few times only.*

3.3 Parents Interference While Instruction is in Progress

All the parents and teachers in the present study indicated that when parents attend their children's online classes, they should not interfere in the teaching process, should not correct the teacher, should not make comments on the teacher's performance, teaching technique, assignments or tests given as interference in the class progress will waste class time, disrupt class, and embarrass the teacher in front of the students. The students will lose confidence in the teacher's ability and knowledge. The students will be exposed to two points of views: the teacher's and parent's. If parents want to make comments, they can do that privately (via WhatsApp), they can talk to the principal or subject supervisor appointed by the Ministry. Sometimes a teacher makes mistakes intentionally as a comprehension check and to keep the students focused and attentive. Some parents indicated:

> *Sara: Some parents do not know teaching techniques and their interference is not justified. The teacher knows how to present the information in different ways due to her experience. Only the Ministry's supervisor is the one entitled to make comments on how she is teaching.*
> *Layla: The class session is for students only who are expected to ask questions, make comments on what is being taught, and inform the teacher of what is difficult for them.*
> *Suna: Parental attendance might teach the children helplessness. They will often say "please help me, I cannot do it, where are you, I cannot understand."*
> *Rawda: Parents' interference in class may create tension and conflict between teachers and parents.*

3.4 Availability of Ministry Regulations Regarding Parental Attendance

Principals and teachers in the present study reported that there are no rules and regulations set by the Saudi Ministry of Education regarding parental attendance of their children's online classes. However, few teachers mentioned that at the beginning of the semester or class session, they inform

parents who are interested in attending their children's online classes of what is expected of them and that they can make comments regarding the class session privately after class.

4.   DISCUSSION

Like Saudi teachers in the presents study, the majority of Turkish teachers' think that parental involvement is very high in their classrooms, and that they have a significant role in the classroom because they are very intent in informing parents or organizing the activities [18].

In addition, Saudi parents' involvement in children's online classes is similar to parental involvement in Turkey, Portugal, and the Philippines. As in the present study, [3], [4], [5], [6], [7] parents played six academic roles: organizing, facilitating, monitoring children's attention in classes, motivating, nurturing, and supporting learning. They organized schedules and assisted with assignments and projects. They participated in technology support activities with their children. Parents ensured that their children followed the lessons, carried out educational activities such as preparing and conducting activities. Their awareness of their children's education increased, and they better understood the value of the teacher and school.

In addition, results of the current study are partially consistent with [19] and [17] who reported teachers' views on student' misbehaviors encountered in online courses such as students' not attending classes, not caring about online courses, distractibility, absenteeism, making noise, turning their webcam off and slanging.

Furthermore, the negative aspects of parental involvement in Germany, South Africa and the Philippines revealed by [12], [13], [14]; [16] were not reported by parents and teachers in the current study such effect of lack of parental involvement on parent-teacher partnerships in township schools, lack of understanding of the sociocultural and economic circumstances, higher parental and children's negative affect on days when parents were more heavily involved in learning, the gap between teachers and parents on how to support children's learning at school and at home collaboratively. Parents in Germany, South Africa and the Philippines faced further challenges in delivering instruction, unsatisfactory learning outcomes, unfamiliarity with the new virtual mode of learning, financial difficulties, availability of technology at home, struggle using technology and platform used, and problems of stress, health, and learning style. Turkish parents referred to obstacles such as having multiple children in the family, parents' education level, fathers' absence in classroom activities, parents not participating in seminars, parents' unwillingness to do the homework, lack of space and crowded classrooms [18]. In Hong Kong, most children lacked learning interests, encountered difficulties in completing distance learning tasks, and home-related limitations. Parents wanted better learning support from schools, interactive online learning to facilitate children's learning, flexible work arrangements, and government subsidies. There was a high usage of electronic devices without parental mediation during class suspension [16]. In Greece, parents showed high fear of the COVID-19 Pandemic and a low sense of resilience. Parents' emotional state affected their involvement in the homework of children with learning disabilities. The findings showed a need for parental counselling during the pandemic, to feel more resilient and be more supportive to their children's learning [17]. These emotional obstacles were not mentioned by Saudi parents and teachers.

Finally, few teachers and parents in the present study and many Turkish parents consider distance learning unsuitable for young children and students with special needs. Turkish parents complained about lack of interactivity, social isolation, and increased screen time. Distance teaching has placed a heavy burden on parents [15].

5.   CONCLUSION

Parents' involvement in children's education is indispensable whether the children study face-to-face or online, whether they browse the internet, watch YouTube videos, use mobile apps and mobile devices for educational or entertainment purposes, whether they are learning a foreign language, developing literacy skills, practicing a hobby or extracurricular activities [20]; [21]; [22]; [23]; [24].

However, this involvement depends on the child's age, grade level, number of children in the household, number of devices available, amount of time available for the parents, or whether the student is having an academic problem in one of the subjects such as reading, spelling, writing or math [25]. It also depends on whether the child is having a problem with technology, have a learning disability, is a slow learner, is shy, has poor communication skills, or an attention deficit disorder (ADD).

The issue of parental attendance of online classes can be discussed with the schoolteachers and principals in advance and guidelines can be set by both parents and teachers. As the children get older, they should become less dependent on their parents in performing their academic tasks. Whatever is applied in the face-to-face learning environment should be applied in the online learning environment unless there is a technical or internet connectivity problem, or if the child is having difficulty with the tools of the platform. Parental attendance and involvement should be reduced gradually. As in face-to-face instruction, parents can talk with their children about their homework and other issues after the online class session.

If the case of problems or frustrations, parents should try to speak positively with children about their school experience, whether it is online or face to face. Since children often absorb the attitudes of their parents, parent should have a positive attitude towards remote learning because it is a necessity due to the Pandemic. The children should know that the school principal, teachers, and other staff are doing their best to teach the children and keep them safe at the same time. Parents should help children be flexible, accept and adjust to the different modes of learning. In distance learning, the parents' role should be supportive and complementary to the teachers' educational role. Children should be trained and encourages to be more competent in engaging in online learning independently. Parents can be invited by school principals and teachers to be volunteers in online instruction and to take part in the decision-making at school [26] and [27].

As for teachers' views on student' misbehaviors encountered during online courses such as not attending the courses, indifference to course, distractibility, absenteeism, making noise, turning off webcam and slanging, parents can help in promoting student expectations, student autonomous motivation, and academic engagement [26] and [27].

Finally, the forms of parents' involvement that promotes student expectations, academic engagement and autonomous motivation, parents' beliefs, expectations, parent-school relationships, parent autonomy and relatedness support, the psychological aspects of parental involvement that promote engagement, intrinsic motivation, and psychological wellbeing for students of all ages, parental attendance of high school students' online courses and parental attendance of their children's online exams in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of teachers and parents are still open for further investigation by future research.

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