INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT ON PUPILS' LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT MOSALAHA & MOHAMED BOUDHIAF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This research work measures the impact of parents' involvement and literacy on their children's linguistic background in foreign languages at school. Parents' education, awareness and involvement are very important to help children in boosting their achievement in the classroom. In this perspective, the main issue of this survey is to examine whether parental involvement and education would raise learners' achievement in the classroom. In order to conduct this study, a questionnaire for pupils and an interview for teachers were employed. Our participants are 131 pupils from Mosalaha and 80 pupils from Mohamed Boudhiaf secondary schools and seven teachers of English in the state of Tissemsilt, Algeria. The findings reveal the absence of parents' involvement in their children's studies besides the deficiency of pupils' linguistic background in foreign languages.

Key words*: Foreign languages, learners' achievement, linguistic background, parental involvement, parents' literacy*

1. Introduction

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In the school context, many factors might intervene in young learners' educational success. These factors involve teachers, pupils' background, family problems, and so forth, in addition to this, each factor could have a temporary or a permanent impact. Actually, parents are one of these factors who could represent a great support or discouragement in their children's lifelong learning. In fact, their education, involvement and caring could be visualized through their children's performance and behavior in the classroom. In this regard, our main objective investigates the extent to which their support motivates pupils in learning in general, and in learning languages in particular, and vice versa. More specifically, our major question enquires for the positive or negative involvement of parents in the learning process of their children. To answer this question, we hypothesize that probably their illiteracy and lack of interest would impact pupils' performance at school and make them misbehave as well.

Parental education is one of the key factors which would have an impact on children's educational success. There is a relationship between parents' educational degree and pupils' performance in the English language subject (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). It is observed and analyzed, through different researches, that the educational level of parents affects the performance of their children (Khan, 1996; Sabates & Duckworth, 2009; Bakar, Mamat & Ibrahim, 2017). In fact, parents who have a good level in languages will have various expectations and they encourage their children to learn languages, as Gooding (2001) states "Highly-educated parents provide more or higher-quality teaching input for their children. A child with less-educated parents does not have access to alternative skilled teaching inputs" (p. 21). Parents impact is perceived in their children when good parenting is manifested through direct involvement, helping children in their activities and home works, talking to educators, attending school meetings and be aware of all the school programs (Steinberg et al., 1992; Moon & Ivins, 2004). However, studies put evidence that the majority of parents show little interest in the school program (Khan, 1996). It is conventional that educated parents are role models for their children and hence have a positive impact over the way their children perceive the world (Feinstein, Duckworth, & Sabates, 2008). However, pupils with parents who have a low educational level perform less than those with parents who have a high educational level. "Pupils with parents who did not finish primary or just primary performed worse than pupils with parents who finished university degree, which means that the education of parents has a veritable impact on the performance of the children" (Salameh, 2012, p. 15-16)

As far as parents are concerned, the mother has a significant role in her children's lives and has an effect as well on their educational level. Several studies (Menheere & Hooge, 2010; Moon & Ivins, 2004; Sabates & Duckworth, 2009; Salameh, 2012; Wulandary & Herlisa, 2017) have

revealed that, unlike uneducated mothers, educated ones dedicate more time to their children's learning than to housework; their second shift work does not affect greatly their responsibility towards their children. Thus, the mothers' academic degree strongly affects the pupils' academic performance and this is due to their active involvement at school and home, additionally, a parent who realizes the importance of English would transmit its significance to their children and raise their motivation in this respect. Thus, they are the first educators, and are capable of playing the role of a guide the child always needs.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Parents' participation vs. Parental involvement

Scholars such as Wolfendale (1983) used the terms 'parental participation' and 'involvement' interchangeably; though she was biased to parental participation. According to her definition, parental involvement refers to all the types of connection that link parents to school or any other institution to which their children belong, and through this involvement, the parents are treated as clients, they have no role in changing or interfering in the school decisions. By contrast, parental participation entails treating parents as partners in decision making whereby their children are concerned; appropriate decisions upon pupils' misbehavior or failure are taken only after their parents' consultation (cited in Khan, 1996).

2.2. Absence of parental involvement

Evans (2017), in his study, claims that there are many barriers that minimize parental involvement at school. Teachers, parents and even schools, intentionally or unintentionally, reinforce these barriers. One of the main reasons of the parents' absence of involvement is the "cultural difference between parents and educators" (Evans, 2017, p. 7) In fact, Ludicke & Kortman (2012), as cited in Evans (2017), state that teachers believe that all parents are the same, they do not assume that they are individuals who come from distinct linguistic backgrounds, cultural beliefs and even their educational level vary from one parent to another, thus parents involvement is "greatly influenced by educators' ability to acknowledge, respect, and embrace the diverse backgrounds of parents" (ibid. 7-8). Smith et al. (2011), as cited in Evans (2017), claim that most teachers perceive parents' absence of participation at school as a proof of their lack of interest in their children's learning. Some educators disregard the factors which hinder parents' participation in school meetings or involvement in their children learning, like working in multiple shifts, being a single parent, divorced parents, or living in poverty.

Wulandary & Herlisa (2017, p. 11) argue that parents have a double role at home, the role of "parenting and learning at home". First, learners need to be comfortable in their houses to perform better at school, the mission of the parents is to set up a home which is suitable to do home works and make research. The house that is full of family problems is unstable and not appropriate to study. Second, the participation of parents in their children's learning is seen in their help at home. Parents can assist in the child's learning at home through their constant involvement in their control and support (Campbell, 2011). Parents' control of learning is when they ask their children, regularly, whether they have home works, assignments, and presentations or explain for them what is ambiguous (Gonida & Cortina, 2014). On the other hand, parents' support is when the necessary tools and facilities of learning are provided at home, like having access to Internet, laptop or dictionaries to help them understand the assignments and do them correctly (Wulandary & Herlisa, 2017).

2.3. Teacher-parent relationship

One of the examples of parents' school involvement is the contact between teachers and parents. Throughout communication, parents are able to understand their children's attitudes, behavior, performance and learning in the classroom. Further, teachers, in return, can be familiar with the behavior of learners at home, the kind of problems they are facing in order to encourage them. In this prospect, parents-teachers communication help in being familiar with the gap that learners have and will be able to guide them for their progress in their learning process at school. It is noteworthy to mention that the psychology of learners is quite important, thus the parents' involvement promotes motivation and self-confidence of the pupil (Wulandary & Herlisa, 2017). Besides this, Epstein's (2006) model suggests other types of parental involvement which could help in raising their participation as parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (cited in Evans, 2017).

2.4. Epstein's involvement framework

One of the objectives of schools and educators is to know how to communicate with families positively, with no problems or repulsion and how to integrate the community to foster pupils' success at school (Epstein, 2002). Actually, families should be interested in the kind of education schools are offering to pupils, the topics tackled and ways to help motivate their children and support teachers as well. Given that pupils in middle or secondary schools are aware that they need regular orientation from their parents, their teachers, and the community. Epstein et al. (2002, p. 12) proposed a framework of involvement which is an attempt to develop and "promote a variety of opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work together; and an Action

Team for Partnerships (ATP) to coordinate each school's work and progress". Table 1 below clarifies the six types of involvement which could help parents and schools work together to promote pupils' educational success.

Table 1. Epstein's framework of parental involvement (Epstein et al. 2002, p. 14)

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating with the Community
Help all families establish home environments to support children as students	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress	Recruit and organize parent help and support	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development

The school, family and community partnerships are the first step towards school achievement. These partnerships can enhance school programs and environment of learning, support families, develop parents' skills, leadership and decision making, and help educators with their work. Although, the major purpose of partnerships is to aid learners perform better in their schools and in their life careers, because they are the center of concern and are the reason behind the creation of partnerships. In this perspective, when families, educators, schools, and others perceive that they are partners not separate individuals in education, the youngsters will feel they are in an appropriate atmosphere where everybody is interested and expects him/her to achieve good results. Gooding (2001, p. 28) cites that "adolescence is marked by variations in interaction and modes of communication." In fact, adolescents undergo a myriad of biological and personal changes by this they turn to be more independent, and confront the morals of their society. The different phases that they go through (young adolescent, middle adolescent, and late adolescent) are three steps that generate the evolution of the self and the significance of adulthood and this includes all learners, no exception.

3. Methodology

3.1. Context

In order to conduct this research, a multi cluster sampling was used to select schools and pupils from the state of Tissemsilt-Algeria. In this prospect, two secondary schools were chosen, Mosalaha and Mohamed Boudhiaf secondary schools. We have selected the pupils who are in their third-year degree, whereby they are required to sit for a national exam (baccalaureate exam) to join university or college according to their average.

3.2. Procedures and instruments

Our research work involves applying a mixed method approach; a qualitative approach in which behaviors towards parents are highlighted and a quantitative approach by which certain percentages are provided. The data collection instruments used in this investigation are a questionnaire and an interview to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire is a set of open-ended and close-ended questions highlighting numeral and ordinal variables which revolve around the parental impact on children' academic achievement and how they embrace success and perceive failure respectively. As for the semi-structured interview, it is comprised of ten questions revolving around the pupils' behavior, interest in learning and their parents' regular contact with them and the school.

3.3. Participants

In our qualitative investigation, a sample of 131 pupils has been selected from the secondary school of Mosalaha and 80 pupils have been selected from Mohamed Boudhiaf secondary school, in the state of Tissemsilt, Algeria. Our population is selected from four school streams; in Mohamed Boudhiaf we have, 26% in foreign languages, 28% philosophy, 31% sciences and 15% mathematics. Whereas, in Mosalaha secondary school we have 11% from foreign languages, 22% mathematics, 30% philosophy and 37% from sciences. In both schools, the pupils' age ranges between 16 and 18. It is noteworthy to mention that male pupils' number is lower than females' number in both schools, since 76% are females and 24% are males in Mosalaha; by contrast, 41% are males and 59% are females in Mohamed Boudhiaf secondary school. As for the teachers, we have interviewed seven experienced EFL teachers from these schools, only who are in charge of teaching final classes. All of them are females; coordination and responsibility are what characterize them in these schools.

3.4. Data Analysis

After having collected the responses of our participants, we have deduced that though parents have a significant role in encouraging or discouraging their children, all teachers agree about the fact the parents' role in these institutions is absent to a great extent claiming that since the majority of parents are not educated, they show no interest in their children's performance at school and behavior in the classroom; there is an exception only for parents who are educated whereby they show great interest in their children's learning. Likewise, though our sample of pupils articulates that their parents are educated, especially from the side of their fathers. Yet, the teachers' answers confirm that these parents show up only at the end of the semester or the year and claim about bad marks and not how the overall behavior was during the school year.

4. Results and discussion

Results show that parents' involvement is absent in the selected schools; their absence reflects their lack of interest about their children's learning and behavior as well. From the sample responses, 41% claims that their parents are educated; 18% argues that only the father is educated, while 4% claims that only their mothers are; moreover, 37% of parents are both illiterate. Though the majority state that they come from an educated background, but, first, the percentage is not that increased and, second, they do not participate or attend school meetings. There is a possibility that, for this reason, the majority of pupils do not show any interest or enthusiasm in the classroom; de-motivation and indifference is what they reveal towards all the school subjects in general and foreign languages in particular. Table 2 and figure 1 below clarify the rate of parents' literacy of the pupils of Mosalaha secondary school.

Table 2. Parental education of pupils in Mosalaha School

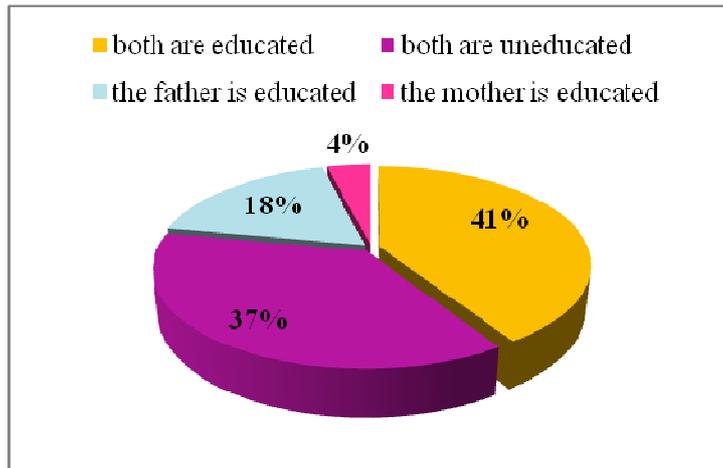| Options	Parents' education	Percentage
Both are educated	122	41 %
Both are uneducated	48	37 %
The father is educated	24	18 %
The mother is educated	5	4 %
Total	131	100%

Figure 1. Graphic representation of percentages of parents' literacy

In comparison to Mosalaha school, 69% of our parents' sample is educated, for 17% neither the mother nor the father are educated, 10% states that only the father is educated, whereas 4% argues that only the mother is educated at Mohamed Boudhiaf. Though the majority argues that both parents have a certain educational level, still few parents come and ask about their children's performance at school. It is noteworthy to recall that the only parent who asks about their children is the father; the mothers rarely show up or come to school for their children in the secondary school; this is due to the conservative vision of the community where the father is the only one who should handle school problems with the administration in case his child misbehaves in school. Table 3 and figure 2 below indicate the rate of parents' education in the second school.

Table 3. Parents' literacy of Mohamed Boudhiaf pupils

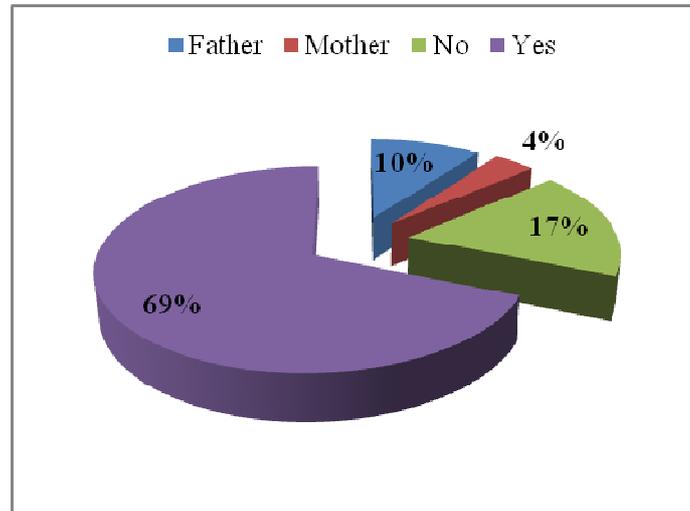| Options	Number	Percentage
The Father is educated	8	10%
The Mother is educated	3	4%
Both are uneducated	14	17%
Both are educated	55	69%
Total	80	100%

Figure 2. Graphic representation of percentages of parents' schooling

In fact, an educated parent does not necessarily mean an involved parent. The population of teachers that we have selected expresses negative attitudes towards parents stating that parents believe that all teachers are educators. All of them declare that parents are disconnected from school as stated by an interviewee: *"The majority [of parents] are passive. Too few of them share their children's interest and motivate them"*. Nevertheless, parents' education matters, but not all educated parents inquire about their children on a regular basis. Actually, they argue that, however, most of the time we require their attendance to school when the pupil misbehaves, but they do not show up most of the time as one of the teachers said, *"in the rural area I teach in, they rarely come to ask about their kids; they come to school only when asked to attend meetings... and even when they do come they show dissatisfaction because they were called"*. Even during semesters, it is rare that parents ask after their children performance in the languages like English or French, they seem concerned only about the grade in which they approach the school once the final average is not above the scale, as clarified by another instructor, *"when there is a serious problem; very rare parents come voluntarily to ask about their performance, and particularly after giving the average if it is below 10"*. One teacher expressed her vision angrily and articulates that:

> *"The majority of parents come to fight with teachers... 'why did you say that to him' even if their kids were at fault they defend their kids... They come to school to fight not to ask about their child level... Even when we send them to the administration they tell us we can do anything"*.

Our selected population of instructors express their awareness about the teacher-parent relationship which helps in promoting pupils' abilities and learning outcomes; however, they blame themselves too, claiming that neither parents nor teachers communicate with each other regarding pupils' problems in learning or classroom behaviour, both count on each other in terms of education and learning. As a matter of fact, teachers, parents and school authorities are also responsible, if schools do not organize social activities or invite parents to participate in the pupils' school life, we cannot guarantee their involvement at all; thus, a teacher argues that:

"Parents are not involved in this relationship, they don't communicate sufficiently with teachers, they don't know them well, and they don't discuss their kids' interests or concerns except when their kids misbehave or have a real issue... Parents expect teachers to instruct their students and to guide their learning and teachers expect parents to support the instruction and learning that happens in school, at home. Neither of them works hard to establish a regular means of parent-teacher communication".

We cannot discuss parents' impact on pupils' learning outcomes without shedding light on the school subjects that are taught in these secondary schools. Among the languages that pupils study in secondary school there are: Arabic, French (as second foreign language), English (as third foreign language), and Spanish. Though these languages are taught to pupils for different educational and national objectives, the Arabic language is what most learners are biased to. 53% of pupils choose Arabic; 15% choose French; 13% opt for English while 19% choose Spanish in Mosalaha secondary school. Contrarily, in Mohamed Boudhiaf, 46% of pupils opted for Arabic to be their preferred language. 22% of pupils chose French; English is the third language that is selected by learners with a percentage of 21% and Spanish with a rate of 10%. Figures 3 and 4 below indicate the rate of each school subject in terms of preference in both schools.

Apparently, foreign languages are not preferred by our population as they show their weaknesses in oral and written communication using these languages. First and foremost, at home, pupils' confirm that the majority of their parents does not communicate using French or English with them, they use only Arabic (the mother tongue), for this English and French are used only in the classroom, they are not used among pupils and even teachers, all of them communicate in Arabic; the mother tongue of the speech community.
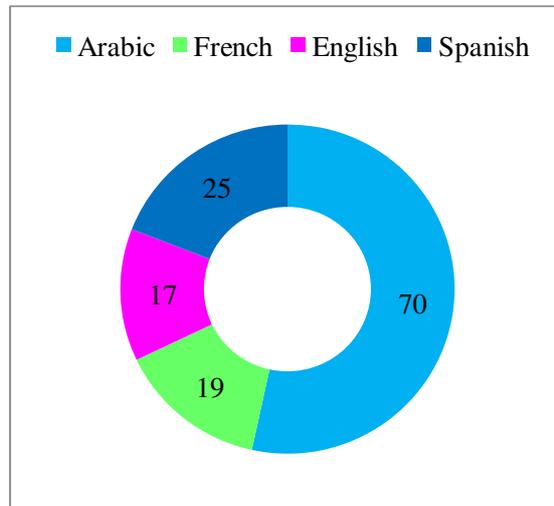
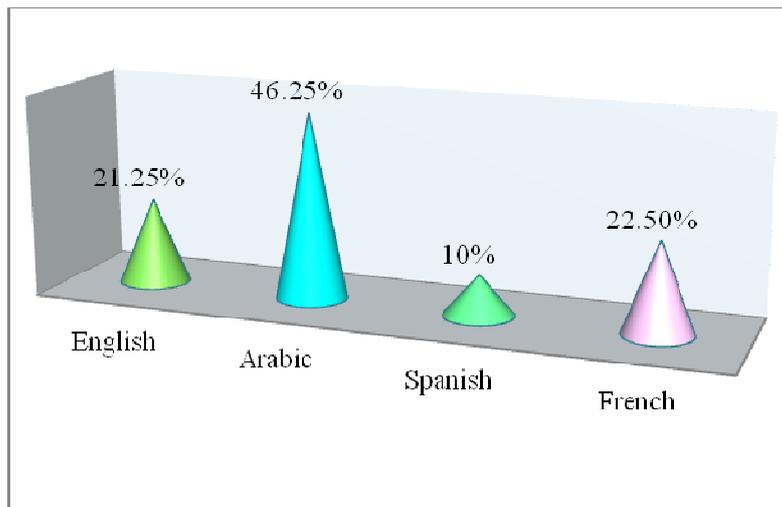Figure 3. Pupils' prioritized school subject in MOSALAHA Secondary School

Figure 4. Pupils' language subject preference in Boudhiaf Secondary School

Besides this, the coefficient of these foreign languages is low in comparison to other subjects like Mathematics and Sciences, thus they intend to show no interest. Hence, one of the teachers points out that,

> "*I have taught in secondary school for five years, only three parents came to ask about their children...Languages are not important... Education is free, that is why they don't care, but if they paid for their children's tuition they would care much more; actually, languages have low coefficient so students would not care about*

them... They care about Math, Physics, Arabic, Biology, and Philosophy... If parents are educated, things would be extremely different".

If a pupil is not encouraged to use the language or if s/he is not intrinsically motivated to speak it, it will never be his/her preferred communicative code. In our context, neither French nor English are used outside the classroom; they are kept aside as different foreign languages; pupils believe that they are difficult to understand and write at the secondary school level and this reveals the lack of the linguistic background in both varieties.

All teachers express their disappointment towards the parents' absence of involvement in school, the reasons for their disregard is owing to the following proposed factors:

- Subtle disputes between parents and teachers: both blame each other for the low performance of the pupil.
- Parents blindly side with their children: they defend their child and believe that teachers are responsible for all misbehavior.
- Parents send their children to school because they have no control over them: parents feel ashamed for their child's bad behavior and do not dare to be faced with teachers.
- Parents are not close to their children: parents do not communicate the school life or performance of their children at school.
- Parents are poorly educated: some parents prompt their children (males) to abandon school early and find a job while others believe that female pupils should stay home and get married.
- Some parents, because of their own school experiences, do not feel confident in school settings; hence, they prevent school meetings on purpose.

In this vein, the lack of parents' interest indicates their unawareness about the learning progress, or denial of the fact that pupils are doing poorly at school. Parents, at an early level, should motivate their children to master and use the languages regularly, especially, if they are literate in English or French, this would help them use the languages effectively. We cannot disregard the impact of being fluent and accurate in French or other foreign languages like English; if a learner is weak in French, s/he might not be a good user of English as well. This is due to the short linguistic distance between French and English, besides the large linguistic gap between Arabic and English. That is to say, English could never be grasped by means of Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic or the Mother Tongue). In a nutshell, parents' involvement is crucial in their children's educational and professional life to check on the progress their children are

making in their studies besides their support and guidance to make pupils love their studies and raise their interest in learning foreign languages as well. One of the teachers highlighted a very interesting point, she asserts that, *"parents and children never talk, parents don't know their children's interests, parents don't know their feelings… To build generations, we should teach parents how to deal with their children…"* for this reason, a teacher-parent relationship could never be established unless a parent-child relationship is constructed.

5. Conclusion

Parents' involvement is an important parameter which helps students succeed at school. Though intrinsic motivation matters, extrinsic motivation could also aid to boost achievement. Besides teachers, parents' role is quite inclusive, their help to do home works, their interest in their children's school performance in tests or exams, attending school meetings and contacting teachers are all positive steps of encouragement; additionally, their education is important as well because it shapes their awareness about how to raise a child and prepare him/ her in a competitive world, where efforts and persistency are crucial to achieve better and be autonomous. In our context, parents show little interest in their children's learning, thus it is necessary to make parents aware of the importance of building a liaison or partnership between them, their children, the school and teachers to help build an autonomous generation.

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