Contribution of Un scho oled Parents in the Education of their Children: An Analysis

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Abstract
There is general perception that only educated and well off parents can contribute to the education of their children. This study challenges such perceptions and beliefs. It explores the ways unschooled parents, particularly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, contribute to the education of their children, the impact of their support on the children's learning outcomes and the challenges they face in supporting their children's education.

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that unschooled parents support their children in many ways. They provide financial, emotional and moral support and monitor their children's activities. Parents have high aspirations of their children. Contrary to general expectations, their support encourages their children, and the children perform well at school. With their parents' support and interest, children also seem to be motivated to work harder. This study has implications for both public and private schools in Pakistan where majority of parents are unschooled and underprivileged, particularly in the rural areas. If the schools are able to capitalize in this bank of parental goodwill and enthusiasm, they together with parents can provide quality education to their children.

Keywords: Un schooled; parental support; Moral development; Learning outcomes; Emotional support; Parental involvement; Academic achievements; Socio-economic status

I. Introduction
Many Less Developing Countries (LDCs) face multiple problems of schooling. The pathetic situation of education in many LDCs, including Pakistan, is due to many reasons: lack of vision, policies, teacher education, and lack of parental involvement. Although all these problems have their own share in contributing to underperformance of the children, lack of parental involvement is seen as one of the major factor. Many researches have argued that if parents are well educated and economically sound, their children are likely to perform better in their education (Jacobs and Harvey, 2005). But, in the developing countries like Pakistan (particularly in the rural areas), where most of the parents are unschooled, it poses a major problem to schools. There are hardly any studies which explore the contribution of less educated or even unschooled parents, their aspirations, worries, problems, and what they could do to improve their children's learning. This study intends to explore some of the ways unschooled parents contribute to the education of their children and the challenges they face in this regard. This paper first gives an overview of the literature about the parental involvement in the education of
their children, methodology for this study, the analysis of data, discussions on key findings, and implications and recommendations followed by conclusion.

II. Literature Review

Parental involvement in the education of their children refers to all those actions and initiatives taken by parents both at home and in school to secure their children's academic success, their moral and intellectual development, develop positive social skills and self-esteem, and protect them from evils of the society to ensure a safe and bright future (Gillies, 2006; Bandura, 2006; Wilson, 2005; and Cooper, 1989). Highlighting the significance of parents in the lives of their children, Dean (2001) asserts that parents are their children's first teachers; they have knowledge about their children. Therefore, they should be regarded as a partner in their children's education. Keeping in view the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children, their contribution both at school and in home is seen critical.

Literature on parental involvement argues that schools are social institutions; they cannot live in isolation. Involving parents in helping the school activities is seen as an important part of good home-school relationships, which benefits their children (Stacey, 1991). Pang and Watkins (2000) also suggest that the relationship between schools and parents must be improved if children's education is to be optimized. The participation of families in school activities positively affects students' outcomes such as academic achievements, cognitive and social development of the children (Driessen, Smit and Sleegers, 2005, & Werf, 2001).

Educational researchers argue that parental involvement in the education of their children at home is equally important (Cordry and Wilson, 2005). They can support their children in many ways. Parent's support at home does not necessarily mean that they should teach textbooks at home (Safdar, 2006). If parents are unschooled or less educated, they can still do a lot of help to their children educationally. Parental involvement involvement, as literature informs appear in many forms such as, teaching moral values and social skills (Shaw et al, 2004), emotional and moral support, and monitoring children's activities.

Literature also indicates that parents have natural feelings of love and attachment with their children, which motivates them to devote themselves to secure their children's success. Gillies (2006) termed this emotional attachment and love as 'emotional capital which is related to educational success. By providing such emotional support, parents can establish a foundation for socialization and motivation to their children's learning (Gonzalez-DeHass, William and Doan-Holbein, 2005). A warm, supportive and loving relationship between parents and their children positively affects the development of the child (Smetana, 1999). Stacey (1991) also supports the fact that this emotional support becomes strength in supporting their children both at school and home. They are concerned with their children's development and welfare, and they have the ability to provide the type of interaction that helps their children in developing moral values (Smetana, 1999). Moral values, as Berkowitz cited in Kohlberg (1994) has mentioned, are "Evaluations of actions generally believed by the members of a given society to be either right or wrong"(p.3). It is important to support the child in developing morality because young children are unable to act morally in social practices by themselves. Acting morally, according to Wardekker (1994) is related to morality, which means taking the responsibility of ones' actions and his or her participation in social practices.
Of course, moral development is one of the specific objectives of education (Venkateswaran, 1997), and is crucial for their holistic development (Noble, 1996).

Apart from providing emotional and moral support parents can also support their children by monitoring their activities to protect them from the harmful influences of the modern society. "Keeping harmful influences away from children these days is about as easy as poking your finger into several hundred leaks in a dam at the same time, somewhere, somehow, the water is going to get through"(Carroll, 1990; p.269). But, researchers argue that if parents are interested in their children, they can protect their children from certain destructive activities which otherwise can have negative influences on their children. Less involvement of parents through monitoring their children's activities, as Cordry and Wilson (2005) have warned, can have negative implications.

Many research studies have consistently stated that there is a close relationship between parental support and their children's learning outcomes such as, academic achievements, self-esteem and sense of wellbeing, social, moral and cognitive development. For instance, the study by Gonzalez-DeHass, William and Doan-Holbein (2005) explored that there is a close relationship between parental involvement and students' variables such as academic achievements, sense of wellbeing, attendance, students' attitudes, homework readiness, grades and educational aspirations, time spent on homework, reduced dropouts, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-regulation. Likewise, the research by Sartor and Youniss (2002) also came up with similar results that, parental involvement and their emotional support and control positively affect the identity achievement and also facilitates their social development. Parents' support also boosts up the self-concept and self-esteem (Flouri, 2006; Hungs and Marjoribanks, 2005; & Irving, 1994). Self-concept, according to Irving (2004) is related to children's cognitive abilities.

It is accepted that the degree and quality of parental involvement in the education of their children depends on parents' variables such as parental Socio-Economic Status (SES) and their level of education, and their aspirations for their children. Most research studies support that these parental variables have profound effects on their children's outcomes such as children's academic success, self-esteem, moral and intellectual development, and higher achievements in tests and exams (Lee & Bowen 2006; Casanova et al, 2005; Hungs & Majoribanks, 2005; Drissen, Smit and Sleegers, 2005; and Jacobs and Harvey, 2005). The bulk of literature on this theme focuses on educated parents with better SES, but sadly, hardly any refined study to my knowledge, is available in this area. My study thus aims to fill in this gap of our knowledge in this much needed area.

III. Methodology

This small-scale qualitative case study intended to explore the contribution of unschooled parents in the education of their children. Qualitative study, as Creswell (1996) argues, allows multiple ways of gathering data within a specific limit of time. The study was focused on small group of selected participants and tried to do ‘an intensive holistic description and analysis (Merriam, 1998; p.34) of unschooled parents’ contribution to the education of their children.
The study was set in the context of a private coeducation secondary school in Karachi, Pakistan. The participants included two couples and one single parent, their children studying in this school, four concerned teachers and the principal of the school. For this study, a small sample of parent participants was selected to do more in-depth investigation of the phenomenon, that is, the ways less educated parents contribute in the education of their children with the challenges they face in supporting their children. The participant parents came from low socio-economic status, that is, their income level was very low and did not have formal schooling.

The central research question for the study was: how do unschooled parents of the students of a secondary school in Karachi contribute to the education of their children?

Four specific questions guided the data collection:
(1) In what ways do unschooled parents support their children in education both at home and in school?
(2) What is the impact of parental support on their children?
(3) What are the challenges and dilemmas they face in the process of providing support to their children?
(4) What are the perceptions of the principal and teachers about the contribution of unschooled parents?

The major tool for data collection was interview. However, the researcher also used observation to obtain data from different dimensions in order to minimize the personal bias and for triangulation purpose. The participants were interviewed in Urdu and carefully translated into English. Pseudo names were used in this study to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The researcher observed the participant children in their classes with particular focus on how they participate and interact with their teachers and classmates, and their involvement and enthusiasm in learning activities in the classrooms. For obtaining more data, the researcher studied the important relevant documents such as, progress reports, and homework diaries. The purpose of analyzing these documents was to see the academic progress of the children as reported by the school. The data was systematically analyzed.

IV. Data Analysis and Findings
The extensive data analysis led the researcher to a number of themes. In this article, I present them under the following categories: nature of parental support to their children, children's learning outcomes, and parents' challenges and constraints.

Nature of Parental Support
The data from interviews and observations revealed that the unschooled and poor parents support their children's education in multiple ways. These include financial support, academic support, emotional support, moral support, and monitoring children activities.

As mentioned earlier, these parents are not only less educated, but also belong to low-income group. They work in overtime and earn some extra money. In this way they save each penny to help their children get good education. Referring to these difficulties, Fatima and Kausar's mother said, “I am not educated, but I do my best to support my children. So, we want our children should study; we will and we do our best to provide
all that which is needed for their education” Thus, it seems, for uneducated and poor parents, it is not easy job to send their children to a school where they could get better education. For this, these parents put more energy and time in order to provide financial resources to fulfill the needs of their children, both at home and in school. These parents put a lot of efforts to generate enough resources, so that their children could continue their education.

The participant parents also provide academic support to their children. This does not mean that they actually teach at home. What this means is that they send their children to tuitions for which they pay extra fee. Parent-D said, "We send our children to tuitions because we cannot teach them. We want our children should get good grades. We send them to tuition so that they could get more education". For most parents interviewed, the purpose of sending their children to the tuitions was to provide extra academic support to their children. They wish their children should be academically sound and they should get good grades in tests and exams. In this regard, Amina's father said, “In schools, children get homework but individual attention on each child is very difficult. We want more time for our children's education. So, we send our children to tuitions”. In addition to sending their children to tuitions, parents also keep a vigilant eye on their children's activities at home. Almost all participant parents reported that they engaged their children at home in reading and writing activities. For example, Fatima and Kausar's mother said, “I see whether they (children) are doing some reading or writing activities. I ask them to do their homework. I do ask about their school, and homework. I often tell my children to study more and more”. This means that these parents reflect a high sense of responsibility towards their children. The analysis of data also reflected that despite parents themselves not being literate, they reflected very serious responsibility towards their children's education.

The participant parents also provide emotional support to their children. They reported that they loved their children more than their own lives. They do not hesitate to sacrifice all their desires and energies for their children's wellbeing. A mother expressed her emotions in these words:

I love my children to the extent that I cannot express in words. I have noticed that some mothers engage their daughters in household work. I am surprised how such parents expose their lovely children to household work (Interview: Parents).

Being with their children gives their parents the feelings of attachment and love. The father of Fatima and Kausar said that he loved his children to the extent that he could not live without them. He added that his elder child stayed in their grand mother's home for only two days. In those two days, reportedly, he could not sleep. Their children also reported similar feelings. For instance, Kausar said, "My father loves us very much. He cannot live without my sister and me. When he enters home, we receive him and sit together, talk, and take our dinner. These data reflect that these parents have emotional feelings of love for their children, which has become the strength for them to support their children. This emotional attachment seems to become emotional capital for their children. This is why parents keep no stone unturned in struggling to support their children and sacrifice their energies, time and desires for their beloved children.
Moreover, parents take great pains to teach their children moral values and try to develop them as sound individuals. They help their children to develop healthy habits and social skills. They send their children to religious schools where they learn moral values, social skills, and good manners. All the parents interviewed reported that they teach their children how to talk to others, respect elders and love and care for young children. Amina's mother, for example, stated:

We often tell our children to respect elders and obey them. We tell them never to tell a lie and should always speak truth and take care of others. If anybody needs help, if you can, help him or her. We often tell them not to misbehave with anybody. I am happy that my children are doing this (Interview: Parents).

Parents also teach their children how to distinguish between good and bad, and make them realize the potential consequences of their behaviors and actions. For instance, Fatima's mother said, "I try my best to help my children realize that whatever mistake they have committed, they should accept that and try to avoid that". Her father said that he treated his children with love and respected them so that they could also learn to respect others. Another parent said, "We also advise our children to learn good manners from elders. We tell them to be patient even if someone hurts them and not to get angry". This data reflected that parents were very conscious of moral development of their children, which according to Venkateswaran (1997) is one of the objectives of education.

The participating parents also reported that they had set up routines for different activities for their children and monitor regularly their routines, so that their children's time could be productively used. All the parents interviewed reported more or less similar routines for their children. Parent-C reported the routine that she had set for her daughter in these words:

She gets to school early in the morning. Then she comes home and after having a bath, takes her lunch. Then we talk and sit together to watch television. After some time, we start with the homework. At 4:30, she goes to tuition. Then, she goes to Night School from where she returns at 7:30. At night, she also studies and watches TV (Interview: Parents).

So far as monitoring the children’s activities is concerned, the participant parents reported that they monitored their children for two reasons: to protect their children from bad influences of the society and to ensure the positive impact of their support on their children's outcomes. For this, they try to protect them from bad company and negative influences of media such as television and videos. Parent-A stated, "The environment around us is not good. Here, we find more destructive people than constructive ones. We try our best to monitor our children to save them from those destructive people". The participant parents also reported that they do not let their children go outside alone nor they allow them speaking to strangers. In this regard, Razia's mother said, “Within the home she enjoys freedom. I do monitor her activities, but not necessarily interfere in her choices. I interfere only when I think it is important and in the benefit of my child". Thus, this data analysis leads us to conclude that parents undertake two types of responsibilities in caring for their children. Firstly, they provide support to their children in acquiring good education and right moral attitudes. Secondly, they protect their children from the bad influences of the society.
These unschooled parents not only monitor their children at home, but they also keep a close eye on their children's academic progress and overall development. They pay frequent visits to school to meet the class teachers to ask about their children's progress. Parent-A and parent-D told that they come to school to meet principal and the teachers to get information about their children's progress. The participant teachers also agreed that the parents came to school to attend meetings, and to discuss about their children's progress and their needs. Ms. Suman, a class teacher, while discussing about Amina's parents said:

Parents are paying attention. I remember, her father and mother, whenever we call them, they do come to sit with us and discuss about their children's education...and they want to know something more about their children's progress. They also attend meetings of PTA (Interview: Teachers).

Thus, these less educated and poor parents support their children in many ways by involving themselves with their children both at home and in school. They, in spite of their limited income fulfill all the educational needs of their children. They themselves are not educated, but they compensate this by sending their children to tuitions for which they have to bear extra financial burden. They also provide emotional and moral support for the balance development of the personalites of their children. They care for their children by regulating their daily activities, and monitoring their children to protect them from harmful influences of the society. At school, they attend meetings, meet with teachers and seek all the possible ways which could help them to promote even better support to their children. This parental support has, so it seems, given rise to children's positive outcomes, which are discussed, in the following section.

Children's Learning Outcomes

Children under study, despite belonging to low socio-economic milieu, are not under performing, as often studies tell us, but in fact, well perform in this school. They are confident and seem to be growing well academically morally and socially. The following paragraphs discuss, in the light of my data, the overall achievements in academic and non-academic areas.

All the interviewees—parents, teachers and the principal mentioned that the children of the participant parents get positions in their classes and score higher marks in tests and exams. The principal of the school also acknowledged that these children of the uneducated and poor parents perform well in their classes. Razia's mother, for example, said, "She (Razia) always stands first in her class". The analysis of Razia's progress report from the school also revealed that this child has been able to maintain her first position since when she was admitted in the nursery class". Razia has been getting A-plus grades in all subjects in all term exams. In the last term exam, she got 97 percent overall marks and stood first, not only in the class, but also in the whole school. She got very good remarks from her teachers. Similarly, the parents of Fatima and Kausar said that their children always took first or second position in their classes. Their daughter Kausar said, "I always stand first in my class. I have been studying in this school from nursery. Since then, I have been getting first position, except in class two, where I got second position". The analysis of her progress report also confirms that this child has been a position holder in her class. In the last examination at school, she got 'A-plus' grade with overall 84 percent marks. This reflects that if parents support their children, then their children from
even uneducated and poor families can perform well by scoring excellent marks in exams and tests, and getting positions in their classes. Thus, these findings question the assumption that only the children of highly educated parents or academically well-off parents can better achieve academically. Part of the reason seems to be parents' attention and overall care for all aspects of their children that seem to help children do better in schools.

The children of these unschooled parents are not only academically sound but they have also developed moral values largely by virtue of the support from their parents. For example, these children are motivated towards hard work, help their parents at homes, and develop positive relations with others. They have good relations with their teachers, relatives, siblings, and they are enthusiastic in helping others. In this regard Amina stated, “I want to become a nurse; I love to care patients, and also love to talk to elders. If I will serve patients, they will pray for me and I will succeed. God will bless my parents and they will live longer” (Interview Children). These children help their mother in doing household work. Kausar mentioned that her mother had to do lots of work at home and she shared some of her mother’s burden. Thus, the data reflect that these children do not under perform just because their parents are uneducated and economically less privileged, but they fully excel in the school. The conclusion is that the children of less educated parents can equally perform well, given the kind of support and encouragement they need.

**Parents’ Challenges and Constraints**

The participant parents face many challenges and problems in the way to support their children in their education. Some of these challenges are concerned with their own economic conditions, but some are directly or indirectly associated with the school. These problems included financial problem, lack of education and awareness, problems at school, and demands by the school.

All the parents interviewed reported that the major problem they face is financial problem. For example, parent-B mentioned the financial problems that his family faces. He said, “We are facing problems, as our income is not sufficient to meet our needs. If we consider all these difficulties, life will become miserable for us”. These parents, as they reported, and as my observation informed me, are lacking resources. For instance, describing her problems, parent-A said:

> The biggest problem we are facing is the lack of resources. We are living in a rented house. We send our children to school; there are other expenditures like school fee, uniform, tuition fee and household expenditures. You imagine what is left with us. We usually borrow from where we work (Interview: Parents).

The participating parents also admitted that they also faced problems regarding their children in homework and other reading and writing activities of their children, because they are uneducated or less educated. They also feel that they would be in better position to support their children if they were educated. Parent-C expressed her feelings of grief in these words, “If I had been educated, I would be able to teach my children at home and save tuition fees”.
The participant parents reported two types of problems they usually face whenever they come to school. Firstly, most of the parents either do not come to parent-teacher on time. The principal of the school also reported this. She said, "Most of the parents come to meetings very late. They even do not realize it that they are wasting other people's time". Secondly, they reported that there was no welcoming environment for fathers. For instance, Amina's father mentioned that there was no respect for male parents in the school. He said, “Whenever I visit the school, I feel that they are ignoring us. They do not give any importance to gents. I do not enjoy whenever I come over here, so I try to escape as soon as possible”.

Similarly, some parents feel that school places unnecessary and unrealistic demands on parents. For example, they sell books and copies in the school at higher prices than available in the market. The parents reported that, everyday school demanded new things and asked their children to bring money. In this regard, parent-D showing her concerns said, “People have made the schools as a source of business. Please, they should stop this! … The problem is that they sell these things at higher prices than we can get from the market” These strong comments reflect parents’ frustration with regard to the schools polices.

V. Discussions

The participant parents though are uneducated and underprivileged, yet they try their best to support their children, both at home and in school. They love their children and sacrifice their own desires for the education of their children. This emotional attachment has become an emotional capital for their children, which motivates them to do better in the school. Emotional capital as Gillies (2006) mentions is a resource for parents to invest in their children's future. Emotional support, as McGonial et al (2007) mentions, is a form of social capital, which is an intrinsic form of energy that exists within relationships between parents and their children that facilitates certain actions such as, supporting their children.

The participant parents also encourage their children to behave well with others, and teach them moral values by helping them to distinguish between good and bad. They provide their children with opportunities to reflect on their actions and behaviors. They have developed strong emotional bonds with their children. Smatana (1999) also argues "The quality of the parent-child bond and the degree of parent-child relationship affects many different facets of child development…. [It] may enhance the likelihood that children are motivated and listen to and respond to parental messages"(p.315). In addition to financial, academic and moral support, parents also set routines for their children's work and play. Providing regular routines for daily activities helps children develop self-discipline that leads to positive self-esteem (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998). Moreover, parents realize the importance of monitoring their children in the after school hours so as to protect them from harmful influences of the society. Mandara (2006) argues that when parents support their children in their academic efforts by monitoring their academic pursuits, limiting other destructive activities, then children succeed in their academic life.

Parents not only support their children at home, but also provide indirect support by meeting with teachers of their children and regularly monitor their progress in school. They also seek information about their children and the ways they could better support
their children from the teachers. They attend meetings and events at school and also try to fulfill the demands of the school at any cost. Hills and Taylor (2004) argue that parents' attendance at school meetings and events, and meetings with teachers is referred as their involvement in school, which increases their skills to better help their children at home and enhance the achievements of their children.

The result of parents' support is that their children perform well in school. The children of these parents obtain high scores in tests and exams. All participant children are position holders in their respective classes. They also participate in extra and co-curricular activities and win prizes. These children have developed strong moral sense as the interview data reflects. They are motivated, confident and interested in their studies. The participant children are very much conscious of their parents' support, and they clearly attribute their success first to their parents and then their own interest. The research by González-DeHass, Willem and Doan-Holbein (2005) also found that, when parents take keen interest in the education of their children, their children perform well in school. These researchers further argue that when parents take interest in their children's activities, they (children) feel more responsible for their learning and become more motivated towards their studies.

Thus the data revealed that two factors are important in the case of children learning outcomes—parental interest and children's own motivation and interest in studies. If parents take interest in their children's education, their children will perform better. Feinstein and Symons cited in Flouri (2006) also argue that parental interest in their children's education through motivation and support positively influences the outcomes of their children.

These case studies from my small scale research lead us to an optimistic view of the fact that even unschooled parents' children can excel, provided the parents take keen interest and also the children are motivated to excel. This has implications for schools. Schools can inspire those less educated parents that their children can also perform well.

This study also found that parents face enormous challenges to educate their children. The first challenge they face is the financial problems. They cut their other household expenditure and spend a substantial part of their incomes on their children's education. Some parents feel reluctant in coming to school due to the absence of a welcoming environment for the male parents. Parents feel that they are not given that much importance at school. Whereas, Fruchter, Galleta and White (1992) argue that, social class and education level (of parents) become less important when school commit themselves to parental involvement and work to improve"(p.34). Similarly, some parents have concerns about school policies, which cause frustration to them.

VI. Conclusion

This case study aimed to explore some of the ways unschooled parents support their children both at school and in school. The analysis of qualitative data leads us to conclude that parents contribute to the education of their children by providing them direct and indirect support both at home and in school. At home, they provide all possible support to their children for their holistic development. Despite their limited financial and material resources, they fulfill the educational needs of the children. They themselves are not educated, but they compensate this by sending their children to tuitions for which they have to bear extra financial burdens. They also provide emotional and moral support
for the balance development of their children's personalities. At school, they attend meetings, meet teachers and seek all the possible ways, which could help them to provide even better support their children. This parental support has, so it seems, given rise to children's positive outcomes.

The study findings inform that children of the participant parents perform relatively better in their school. The children of these unschooled and underprivileged parents score high grades in tests and exams, and hold positions in their respective classes. Their parent's support helped the children maintain their positions in their respective classes. These children not only developed academically, but also morally. These children do not under perform just because their parents are unschooled and economically less privileged, but fully excel in school. The children of less educated parents can equally perform well, given the kind of support and encouragement children need.

References


