

Parent involvement according to education level, socio-economic situation, and number of family members

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Abstract

Parents are one of the most influential factors on the lives of their children. They have the ability to shape, sustain and develop pupils who will be active, interested, diligent, creative and tolerant, through their positive involvement in the learning process and educational activities. On the other hand parents are also capable of repressing and destroying the motivation and ability of their children through neglect and indifference to their achievements.

This study examines the personal characteristics that may explain the involvement of parents with their sons and daughters through a research project in which 408 parents of 408 pupils participated. They were asked to fill in a questionnaire to measure their involvement, and the results pointed to a clear correlation between the educational level and socio-economic status of the parents and the degree of their involvement. In addition, a new characteristic that had not been previously examined was included among the factors to be measured, which was the number of children in the family. The findings showed a negative correlation between the number of children in the family and parental involvement, but which existed only among parents of boys and not those of girls.

During the past decade, the issue of parent involvement focused on four main aspects: definition of involvement; the processes implied by it; the causes for its creation; and the measurement of its level (Friedman & Fisher, 2003). Wherry (2002) stresses that the involvement of parents is important since it leads to the support and higher evaluation of the school by its staff and by the community. Parental involvement tends to improve the quality of education by taking the viewpoint of the parents into consideration (Friedman & Bendes-Ya'akov, 1990).

In recent years the ties between parents and schools have broadened and deepened, resulting in greater involvement and influence of parents. Participation by parents becomes a necessary and vital element, and every self-respecting school seems to have adopted the motto of 'Parent Participation' (Uziel, 2001).

In view of the importance of this issue, and considering the paucity of data and findings that could clarify and describe the situation regarding this issue in the Arab sector in Israel, I decided to investigate the matter and to attack it empirically from various aspects with reference to cultural and gender-related characteristics. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between background factors and the involvement of parents in the education of their children.

Introduction

During the past three decades, the desire of parents to take an active part in the educational system has increased (Friedman & Fisher, 2003). Beginning with the 1990s, attempts were made to understand the reasons that led to parents' involvement (Friedman & Fisher, 2002), and there was an increased demand for expanding the involvement of parents in creating models for the relations between the parents and the school (Toran-Kaplan, 2004). In addition, the Education Ministry's policy has encouraged co-parents, and increased their involvement, by establishing community schools. Educational laws have been enacted, which allow parents to intervene in the curriculum of the school, in addition to activities already taking place within the school. Starting with choosing a school and classroom; becoming involved with parent committees; escorting/accompanying students on trips; to the declaration of strikes to protect the rights of their children to study.

The Arabs in Israel

The Arabs in Israel constitute approximately 20% of Israeli citizens, this population suffers from enormous difficulties and serious educational problems as a result of a policy of continual negligence and discrimination, a dearth of resources, and the general implications this has for the process of teaching and education. Non-Jewish schools are underprivileged in the allocation of resources (Golan-Agnon, 2005; Jabareen, 2005).

The Arab-Palestinian minority living in the State of Israel is considered as lacking the resources that would provide its children with socio-economic mobility such as means of production, education, and professional skills (Jiryis, 1976). Various minorities in the world found themselves without a basis for their traditional form of existence have turned to new horizons in order to establish their future. In the modern period, when many states developed educational systems open to all, minorities regarded education as an alternative route for collective advancement. For example, the Jews in many countries around the world made use of education as a most successful strategy for mobility. In the United States in which the Jews are one of the smallest minorities, they can be found today in the highest social and economic ranks thanks to the adoption of this strategy (Rinawi, 1996).

The Palestinians in Jordan can serve as another example of a collective entity that adopted education as a strategy for group mobility. Jordanian residents of Palestinian origin have succeeded in surviving as a collective body and in attaining high positions in the state, whether in the government or in the Jordanian economy, by virtue of education and their awareness of its importance as the main means to achieve personal and group mobility, especially in a non-democratic regime such as the Jordanian Kingdom (Hallaj, 1980).

Other researchers have attempted to claim that the Palestinian minority in Israel has moved in this direction as well. For example, Mari' (1978), the first Palestinian researcher to examine Palestinian education in Israel, claims that the Palestinian citizens of Israel regarded education as an alternative to the land they lost after the establishment of the state, and turned it into a means for mobility and for social and economic prestige. In agreement with this view, Al-Haj (1991) claims that 'The deprivation of Arabs from their economic base (land) and their limited access to the

opportunity structure have eventually increased the importance of education for the competition over local and national resources . . . In the new system, education has replaced land as a major element of the individual's socio-economic status.'

However, the data on the low achievement of the Palestinian citizens of Israel in high schools and universities does not indicate that state education has become a means for mobility for most of the members of this group. The level of education of the Arab minority is very low in comparison with the Jewish majority.

Parent involvement

The involvement of parents is multi-dimensional, and is composed of various types of behavior, attitudes, and parental expectations (Torah-Kaplan, 2004). Involvement implies the dedication of resources by parents for the benefit of the child, and the total number of activities in which the parents can participate, so as to contribute either directly or indirectly towards the education of their children (Ginsburg, 2008).

Epstein (1996) emphasized term partnership as an expression for parental involvement, which means the identification of interests by parents as participants in taking responsibility for their children and working together to create better educational programs.

The more educators allow parents and children to participate realistically in the important decisions concerning them, the greater the chances they will become allies in changing and improving family functioning (Slonim-Nevo & Wallender, 2004).

The basis for parent involvement in the educational system is their right to influence the education of their children. This right derives from the principles of a democratic regime, and such involvement in the educational process is a realization of that right and allows parents to experience democratic processes. The assumption is that parental involvement is liable to improve the quality of education through taking their viewpoints into consideration and exposing the school to criticism and supervision by its clients.

In an age when the school is part of the community, and in the competitive market in which schools vie for the support of parents, the involvement of parents is the highest importance (Wherry, 2002). Without the cooperation of parents, the educational system today would not only be unsuccessful but would also find it difficult to function (Glick, 2007). The decision of the parents to participate and become involved is influenced by the wider context of their social environment (Jessor, 1995). The extent of parental influence in the school depends on the degree of their involvement (Ginsburg, 2008).

Parent involvement and the socio-economic situation

It was found that the higher the income of the parent the greater was their participation and involvement (Goldberger, 1991). Parents with a low income found it more difficult to obtain a position of influence than those with a higher income (Goldring, 1993). It may therefore be said that the higher the income and the socio-economic status the more parents will participate and become involved (Friedman, 1990). Moreover, financially well-established parents can also contribute to the school (Hodtuv, 2001).

Parent involvement varies from school to school with lower income schools having a difficult time getting parents involved, especially at the secondary level. The NPTA (1998) cited three reasons for parents not participating: a) a lack of time due to employment, b) parents not making themselves available for involvement, and c) inability to obtain a babysitter. In a survey completed by the NPTA (1998), 91% of the parents agreed that parental involvement was important for academic success.

African-American parents also have a hard time with involving themselves with their children's schooling (Koonce & Harper, 2005). Nevertheless, involving African-American parents in their child's school is an important factor for academic progress. When African-American parents are academically involved in their children's schooling, behavior problems decrease and academic achievement increases (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Parent involvement and level of education

A positive correlation was found between the level of education of the parents and the extent of their involvement (Cooper et al., 2002). The higher the education level of the parents the greater their involvement in the educational framework (Goldberger, 1991). Even the OECD (2000) findings indicate a positive correlation between the education level of the parents and their involvement, while the research done by Levi (1997) shows contrary findings.

Parents with low levels of education often exhibit ambitious attitudes about educational achievement for their children. Although many parents lack an extensive academic background, which places their children at risk for educational success, their positive attitude manifested in daily pro-educational behaviors. This overcame their low education level because they both motivated their children to pursue academic success and participated in their children's learning (Schaller, Rocha & Barshinger, 2007). On the other hand, some parents with low educational levels did not tend to regard learning as a value, and as a result of their attitudes and low self-esteem they left the education of their children to the 'experts', the teaching staff (Bauch & Goldring, 1998).

The present study will examine the following assumptions:

1. There exists a correlation between the education level of the parents and their involvement with their children.
2. There exists a correlation between the socio-economic situation of the parents and parental involvement.
3. There exists a correlation between the number of children in a family and the involvement of parents with their sons and daughters.

Research method

Surveys were used in this study as they are designed to obtain information about the performance, attitudes, habits and interest of a particular group of people, in this case parents of school age children (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Surveys are also a quick and easy method of obtaining data. Researchers argue that the quantitative approach is more objective, structured and has high reliability and validity (Coolican, 1999). However, when using self-reporting questionnaires, there is no way to verify that the answers are correct; it is unclear whether some respondents exaggerate in describing their actions, or vice versa. The kind of people who agree to answer these

questionnaires can be fundamentally different from those who refuse to answer interrogatories.

In this study, the response rate was very high, reaching more than 95%. We also found that the reliability of the questionnaire data was around 0.76. In addition, there are several advantages when using a questionnaire rather than observations (Fraser, 1986):

1. The use of paper and pencil is more economical than the training of skilled manpower to carry out observations and interviews, especially if the number of participants is large.
2. Perceptual measures reflect the joint judgment of all the participants, while in the observation method, there is only one opinion of one observer. Perception of the participants (in this case, parents) is important.

Based on that, I decided to examine the issue of parental involvement in the quantitative method, using self-reporting questionnaire, but with a direct personal appeal to parents to be reliable and realistic as much as they could.

Population and test case

A random test was carried out of 408 parents of pupils of various ages from a number of schools. The parents filled out a questionnaire on involvement. 49.8% were parents of boys, and 50.3% were parents of girls, 12.5% had elementary education, 59.8% had secondary education, 21.1% had an academic education, 32.6% were professionals, 31.4% were salaried employees, 20% had a private business, and 10% were unemployed. With regard to mothers, more than 60% were not working, and about 30% were salaried employees. 70% of the parents had three to five children in the family, and about 20% had six or more children, and only 8% had less than three children.

Research tool

In this research, a multi-choice questionnaire was used (Seginer & Vermulst, 2002). The questionnaire was anonymous, and was meant to be a personal account for measuring the level of parental involvement and its aspects according to the perception of the parents themselves. The scale of answers was constructed according to the Likert scale of five levels (1 – very seldom to 5 – always), in which there are 35 statements describing parent involvement.

A factor analysis was carried out for a population of Arab parents, such that the 35 items examining parental involvement underwent a factor analysis by the Principal Axis Factoring method according to Direct Oblimin Rotation. After an analysis by this method, six significant factors were constructed. The criterion for the number of factors was on the value basis of Eigenvalue according to a rotation that would be above 1. For each factor, the items that were chosen were those in which had a loading higher than 0.4. The analysis yielded the following factors:

- (1) Monitoring (participation of the parent in the initiative of the child) items like: My child tells me what he learnt at school, My child involves me in his homework;

(2) Support and belief in the importance of studies, items like: I think that education is a very important part of life, I think that it is very important to advance in life;

(3) Participation in group activities in the school and contact with the teachers, items like: When there are programs for parents in the school I attend them, I initiate talks with teachers;

(4) Involvement when a problem arises concerning the child, items like: When my child returns from school unhappy because the teacher was angry with him, I immediately call the school, When the teacher gives my child a mark that he does not deserve, I immediately call or go to the school to speak to the teacher;

(5) Participation in personal activities, items like: I accompany trips that the school organizes, I volunteer at the school;

(6) Indifference to the achievements of the son or daughter, items like: I hardly ever see the school tests and assignments of my child, I don't really care about the marks that my child receives. The reliability of the questionnaire data was around 0.76.

The 3rd and 5th factors involved: activities that required participation of a group of parents working collectively; tasks that one parent could participate in them by themselves; and in some tasks, parents participated or refrained from participating depending on its nature, time, or interest.

First assumption

There exists a correlation between the education level of the parents and their involvement with their children.

The variable in the education level of the parents was constructed as a summary of the variables of the education level of the father and the mother.

Table 1 presents the averages and standard deviations for the education level of the parents and their involvement with their son and daughter. Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficient between the education level of the parents and their involvement with their son and daughter.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations for the factors of involvement and Parent Education among Sons and Daughters

Factor	Daughters		Sons	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Monitoring	4.22	0.80	3.91	0.88
Support and belief in the importance of studies	4.68	0.56	4.47	0.76
Participation in group activities and contact with the teachers	3.97	0.84	3.86	0.91
Involvement when a problem arises	3.65	1.06	3.65	1.08
Participation in personal activities	1.99	0.97	2.25	1.17
Indifference to the achievements of the son or daughter	2.12	1.34	2.49	1.41
General Parent Involvement	3.95	0.53	3.80	0.61
Parent Education	4.31	0.98	4.28	1.06

Table 2
Pearson correlation between the factors of parental involvement and learning achievements in the various subjects among boys and girls

Factor	Parent Education	
	Daughters	Sons
Monitoring	0.186*	0.248**
Support and belief in the importance of studies	0.222**	0.251**
Participation in group activities and contact with the teachers	0.197**	0.107
Involvement when a problem arises	0.163*	0.219**
Participation in personal activities	0.110	0.054
Indifference to the achievements of the son or daughter	-0.205**	-0.012
General Parent Involvement	0.296**	0.262**

A significant and positive correlation was found between the education level of the parents and the factors of monitoring, support and encouragement, involvement when a problem arises, and general involvement among parents of boys and parents of girls. It was found that the coefficient between these variable factors and the education level of the parents was higher among boys than among girls except for general involvement. There was also a significant and positive correlation between the factor of participation in group activities and contact with teachers among girls only. A clearly negative correlation was found between the education level of parents and the factor of indifference to achievements among girls only.

Second assumption

There exists a correlation between the socio-economic situation of the parents and parental involvement.

In order to examine whether there exists a difference in the level of parental involvement between parents on the basis of their socio-economic situation, a One Way MANOVA analysis was conducted. Table 3 presents the averages and the standard deviations of parental involvement according to their socio-economic situation. Table 4 presents the Sum and Mean square for the source of the variance.

Table 3

Averages and standard deviations of parental involvement according to their socio-economic situation

Factor	socio-economic situation	N	M (5 – 1)	S.D.
Monitoring	low	261	4.05	0.88
	medium	128	4.09	0.79
Support and belief in the importance of studies	low	261	4.57	0.69
	medium	128	4.56	0.66
Participation in group activities and contact with the teachers	low	261	3.87	0.90
	medium	128	4.00	0.86
Involvement when a problem arises	low	261	3.58	1.10
	medium	128	3.72	0.99
Participation in personal activities	low	261	2.02	1.05
	medium	128	2.29	1.11
Indifference to the achievements of the son or daughter	low	261	2.41	1.40
	medium	128	2.11	1.33
General Parent Involvement	low	261	3.84	0.59
	medium	128	3.94	0.56

Table 4: Summary of the different multi-variable one-directional analyses for comparing the factors of involvement according to gender

Sours of variance	Dependent variable	SS	D.F.	MS	F
socio-economic situation	Monitoring	0.13	1	0.13	0.17
	Support and belief in the importance of studies	0.005	1	0.005	0.01
	Participation in group activities and contact with the teachers	1.59	1	1.59	1.99
	Involvement when a problem arises	1.43	1	1.43	1.25
	Participation in personal activities	4.82	1	4.82	4.21*
	Indifference to the achievements of the son or	5.45	1	5.45	2.93*

	daughter				
	General Parent				
	Involvement	0.83	1	0.83	2.44
	Monitoring	272.08	371	0.73	
	Support and belief in the				
	importance of studies	176.16	371	0.48	
	Participation in group				
	activities and contact with the	296.82	371	0.80	
	teachers				
	Involvement when a problem				
	arises	425.54	371	1.15	
	Participation in personal				
	activities	424.63	371	1.15	
	Indifference to the				
	achievements of the son or	690.07	371	1.86	
	daughter				
	General Parent				
	Involvement	126.75	371	0.34	
	Monitoring	6388.30	373		
	Support and belief in the				
	importance of studies	7914.28	373		
	Participation in group				
	activities and contact with the	5967.84	373		
	teachers				
	Involvement when a problem				
	arises	5352.92	373		
	Participation in personal				
	activities	2084.33	373		
	Indifference to the				
	achievements of the son or	2662.25	373		
	daughter				
	General Parent				
	Involvement	5673.30	373		
Error					
Total					

It was found that there exists a significant different in the factor of participation in personal activities between parents of a low socio-economic situation and parents of a medium socio-economic situation ($F_{(1,373)} = 4.21$, $p > 0.05$). This factor is higher among parents of a medium socio-economic situation. It was also found that there exists a significant difference in the factor of indifference to achievements between parents of a low socio-economic situation and parents of a medium socio-economic situation ($F_{(1,373)} = 2.44$, $p > 0.05$). This factor is higher among parents of a low economic situation.

Third assumption

There exists a correlation between the number of children in a family and the involvement of parents with their sons and daughters.

In order to examine the correlation between the factors of parental involvement and the number of children in a family, Pearson-coefficient tests were conducted between the variables among boys and girls separately. Table 5 presents the averages, standard deviations for the factors of involvement, and the number of children **in a family**

among parents for boys and parents of girls. Table 6 presents the coefficient between the factors of involvement and the number of children in a family.

Table 5

Means and standard deviations for the involvement factors and for the number of children in a family among parents for boys and parents of girls.

Factor	Parents for girls		Parents for boys	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Monitoring	4.22	0.80	3.91	0.88
Support and belief in the importance of studies	4.68	0.56	4.47	0.76
Participation in group activities and contact with the teachers	3.97	0.84	3.86	0.91
Involvement when a problem arises	3.65	1.06	3.65	1.08
Participation in personal activities	1.99	0.97	2.25	1.17
Indifference to the achievements of the son or daughter	2.12	1.34	2.49	1.41
General Parent Involvement	3.95	0.53	3.80	0.61
Number of children in a family	6.10	1.75	5.87	1.86

Table 6

Correlations between the factors of parental involvement and the number of children in a family among boys and girls.

Factor	number of children in a family	
	Parents for girls r_p	Parents for boys r_p
Monitoring	-0.136	-0.317***
Support and belief in the importance of studies	-0.129	-0.295***
Participation in group activities and contact with the teachers	-0.132	-0.245**
Involvement when a problem arises	-0.081	-0.234**
Participation in personal activities	-0.45	-0.144
Indifference to the achievements of the son or daughter	0.001	-0.003
General Parent Involvement	-0.171*	-0.370***

Significant negative correlations were found between the number of children in a family and the factors of monitoring, support and encouragement, participation in group activities and contact with teachers, involvement when a problem arises, and general parental involvement among boys, in comparison with one negative correlation between the number of children in a family and general involvement among girls.

Discussion

Parent involvement and their level of education:

This study has shown that the higher the education level of parents, the higher is the rise in the levels of monitoring, support and encouragement, the importance of learning, involvement when problems arise, and general involvement among parents of boys as well as parents of girls. It was also found that the higher the level of education of the parents of girls, the greater is their participation in group activities and contact with teachers, and the less is their indifference to the achievement of their daughters.

These findings support those of other studies (Cooper et al., 2002; OECD, 2000), which showed that there was a positive correlation between the level of education and the degree of involvement of parents. The higher the level, the greater was their involvement in the educational framework. It was also found that, relatively speaking, parents of a low educational level do not tend to consider learning as a value (Bauch & Goldring, 1998), which may explain the low level of encouragement, support, and belief in the importance of learning among parents with a low level of education.

Parents of a high educational level attribute great value to education, which is expressed through their higher demands and expectations of their children with regard to their studies. These demands and expectations contribute to the development of higher aspirations in education and in learning achievements.

Bandura (1991) defined learning aspirations as an educational goal that the pupil sets for himself through self-estimation of his abilities in the sphere of the school or in the learning process. The researchers, Fejgin (1995) and Kfir (1998) found that the learning aspirations of pupils were influenced by the social background of their families. The more educated and well established the family, the higher were the educational aspirations of their children.

It may therefore be said that the higher the educational level of the parent the more familiar he would be with the studies and process of learning of his children and have more to offer them (Seginer & Vermulst, 2002).

Parent involvement and their socio-economic status:

Serious economic difficulties may delay the involvement of parents in the education of their children and may even suppress it. This study has found that the higher the income of the parent the greater was his involvement in the education of his children. Parents that have a low level of income find it more difficult to attain a position of influence than parents of a higher income level (Goldring, 1993). It was also found that parents of a medium socio-economic situation participate more in personal activities than parents of a low socio-economic situation, and the latter are more indifferent to the achievements of their children than parents of a better socio-economic situation.

The education system in Israel declares its intentions to give equal opportunities to the children of all the population in the country, to narrow the gaps, and to advance the weaker population sectors (Weissbly, 2006). In actual fact, there exists a significant amount of inequality and social and economic differences between the different population groups, mainly between Jews and Arabs. These socio-economic gaps

create gaps in education and learning achievements between those of a lower socio-economic background and those of a higher socio-economic background (see Adler & Balas, 2003; Ben Bassat, 2003 and Dovrat, 2005 cited in: Gazit, 2006; Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007).

The Israeli educational system has been unequal from the day it was established. The initial inequality between Jews and Arabs was created as part of the attitude of the state towards its Arab citizens as 'second class citizens' for whom low-grade services could be supplied in all spheres of life. And this was not all. From the very beginning the education system in Israel directed pupils to theoretical or practical studies on the basis of their socio-economic status.

In the passage of time, when the depth of the gap in education became evident, the Ministry of Education adopted various measures to 'narrow the gaps', mainly through reinforcement, enrichment, and affirmative action programs for schools in development towns and Arab settlements. However, no attempt was made to make any fundamental changes in the structure of the education system.

Even the report of the Organization for Education in Neighborhoods and Development Towns (2009) found significant gaps between pupils in schools with a high or medium socio-economic background and those in schools with a low socio-economic background (in the Arab sector there are hardly any schools that are defined as having a high socio-economic background).

We can sum up by saying that the higher the income and socio-economic status of the parents, the more they participate and become involved (Friedman, 1990).

Parent involvement and the number of children in the family:

According to the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics (2007), the Arab population is characterized by a high birth rate. The proportion of children under the age of 14 in the year 2006 was 40.4% of the total Arabic-speaking population (as compared with 26% among the Jews). The Arabic-speaking population in the State of Israel is also characterized by a larger number of men than of women.

I found in the course of my research that the higher the number of children in a family the lower were the factors of monitoring, support and encouragement. Participation in group activities, contact with teachers, as well as involvement when a problem arises, and general parental involvement became less. This was the case with parents and their sons, but I found there was an even greater negative correlation between the number of children in a family and general involvement of parents and their daughters.

When the economic situation is difficult, the father of the family finds it hard to provide the learning needs of all his children, and this is one of the aspects that Epstein (1986) defined for parental involvement: the basic commitment of the parent to provide for essential learning requirements. He therefore begins to neglect and even to take some of them, especially the boys, out of the school framework so that they can take up available jobs (in agriculture or building). About 15,000 Arab children and youth between the ages of 11-15 were working during the year 2008 in Israel. Most of them worked during the long summer vacation, but a significant number also

worked during the school year (Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, 2009). The number of children in a family and its economic situation is therefore one of the factors for the low involvement of parents in the education of their children.

Implications for schools and suggestions for further research

This study examined a very important issue that has practical and fateful implications for the education system and the degree of parental involvement according to the characteristics of the parents. The results indicated a clear correlation between the education level and socio-economic situation of the parents and the degree of their involvement. A new characteristic was also examined that had not previously been taken into account, which is the number of children in a family. The results indicated a negative correlation between the number of children in a family and parental involvement. However, this finding is valid only for parents of boys but not for parents of girls.

Parents can have a strong influence over the education of their children. They have the ability to shape, nurture, and develop them as pupils who are active, interested, diligent, creative and tolerant by showing their positive involvement in their studies and in their educational activities in general. On the other hand, they can destroy motivation and learning capabilities by negligence and indifference towards their children's achievements.

Therefore, it is important that schools act decisively in order to get the parents to participate in the educational process. This creates a continuity of the education process, which should not stop at school but continues to take place in the parents' home or vice versa. This continuity with full coordination between the two vital institutions to the student life (home and school) can shape a healthy personality, learning to cope with modern life in this new era.

Thus, I recommend this issue to be studied more intensively quantitatively as well as qualitatively. I also recommend the performance of confirmatory factor analysis, and applying sophisticated statistical techniques in researching this topic, such as structural equation modeling.

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