Perspectives of family–school relationships in Qatar based on Epstein's model of six types of parent involvement

Article *in* Early Years An International Journal of Research and Development · May 2020

DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2018.1438374

CITATIONS
41

READS
26,584

5 authors, including:

Fathi Mahmoud Ihmeideh
Hashemite University
62 PUBLICATIONS **1,090** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Maryam Alflasi
Qatar University
1 PUBLICATION **41** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Fatima Al-Maadadi
Qatar University
11 PUBLICATIONS **144** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Chris Coughlin
Qatar University
11 PUBLICATIONS **210** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Early Years
An International Research Journal

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceye20

Perspectives of family–school relationships in Qatar based on Epstein's model of six types of parent involvement

Fathi Ihmeideh , Maryam AlFlasi , Fatima Al-Maadadi , Chris Coughlin & Tamader Al-Thani

To cite this article: Fathi Ihmeideh , Maryam AlFlasi , Fatima Al-Maadadi , Chris Coughlin & Tamader Al-Thani (2020) Perspectives of family–school relationships in Qatar based on Epstein's model of six types of parent involvement, Early Years, 40:2, 188-204, DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2018.1438374

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2018.1438374

Published online: 21 Feb 2018.

EARLY YEARS
2020, VOL. 40, NO. 2, 188–204
https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2018.1438374

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Perspectives of family–school relationships in Qatar based on Epstein's model of six types of parent involvement

Fathi Ihmeideh[a,b], Maryam AlFlasi[b], Fatima Al-Maadadi[b], Chris Coughlin[b] and Tamader Al-Thani[b]

[a]Department of Child Education, Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, The Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan; [b]Department of Psychological Sciences – Early Childhood Program, College of Education, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

ABSTRACT

Establishing a collaborative relationship between family and school is associated with positive outcomes for children; however, little research exists, especially in the Arab Gulf region, on whether the perspectives of those who are involved in children's development and learning are similar regarding family–school relationships. Thus, the primary purpose of this research is to investigate how parents of children, early childhood teachers, subject coordinators, school administrators, and school counselors living in Qatar perceive family–school relationships. A survey was developed based on Epstein's six types of parent involvement and administrated to 552 participants in Doha city. To add more information and deepen the findings, the authors interviewed a subsample of the participants (n = 60). Overall, participants expressed high to moderate levels of family–school relationships. Learning at home exhibited the highest mean score among Epstein's six types model of parents involvement, while decision-making received the lowest level. Furthermore, school staff responded more positively regarding family–school relationships than did parents. Implications for school and family practices and policy development are discussed, together with directions for future research.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 25 September 2017
Accepted 6 February 2018

KEYWORDS
Family–school relationships; family involvement; Epstein's six-types model; early childhood education

Introduction

Family–school relationships (FSR) are considered to be one of the most important features of effective school programs across all grade levels (Epstein, Herrick, and Coates 1996). There is extensive research literature indicating that strong relationships between family and school are required for students' success in all educational stages (Cox 2005; Henderson and Mapp 2002), and particularly in early childhood education (Epstein 2001; Ihmeideh and Oliemat 2015).

After reviewing a growing body of research on parent involvement, Diss and Buckley (2005, 26) indicated that parent involvement in their children's education is the most accurate predictor of student achievement'. For instance, building a strong FSR through involving

CONTACT Fathi Ihmeideh fathi@hu.edu.jo, fathiihmeideh@hotmail.com

parents in children's learning increases children's achievement and performance (Galindo and Sheldon 2012), develops their social-emotional competency (Sheridan et al. 2012), helps them feel more satisfied with their learning (Kalin and Steh 2010), and decreases disruptive behaviors (Sheridan et al. 2012).

Qatar's educational reform initiative 'Education for a New Era' commenced in May 2001. The reform aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning process at all stages, including early years. Since the educational reform was initiated, early years education has grown vastly, resulting in a greater role for parents in children's development and learning (Al-Thani 2010).

In 2008, the Supreme Education Council (SEC) (now the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, MOEHE), introduced a new early years curriculum in all Qatari schools which supports building partnerships from pre-K2 through grade 3. This curriculum makes some suggestions for teachers to develop partnerships with parents such as inviting parents to play an active part in managing the transition from home to school and to participate in children's induction processes. It also provides a guide for teachers to build a strong link between home and school by encouraging parents to be partners in learning. Despite the importance of these reforms, only a few suggestions have been transferred into practice (SEC 2008).

Most of the FSR research in the Qatari educational context has focused on parental involvement in later schooling (Romanowski et al. 2013). There has been very little attention on family involvement with children in early childhood settings such as kindergarten and the early primary stage. This study, therefore, aims to fill this research gap. Much remains unknown about whether the internationally recognized types of family involvement are reflected in the Qatari educational system. The purpose of this research is to identify and explore the perspectives of parents, early childhood teachers, subject coordinators, school administrators, and school counselors regarding family–school relationships (FSR) based on six types of family involvement, as suggested by (Epstein 2001; Epstein et al. 1997) and accepted as the National Standards for parent/family involvement programs (Thomas-Carr 2005).

Models of family–school relationship

FSR is the shared responsibility of family and school in supporting children's educational engagement and achievements. The term FSR is defined as 'establishing and maintaining productive, working relationships between families and schools to facilitate children's learning' (Esler, Godber, and Christenson 2002, 389). This term was used to look at the cooperative efforts made by families and schools to support children's development and learning.

The most common forms of family involvement can be school-based or home-based (Hindman et al. 2012). Such involvement, whether it be home-based or school-based, could not be possible without establishing a strong and collaborative relationship between these two parties: home and school. An effective relationship between family and school requires mutual trust and respect (Epstein 2013). It needs schools to accept parents and/or family members as partners in their mutual collaboration. Schools that welcome families in their settings contribute to promoting teachers' competencies and improving children's achievement, as well as contributing to the school having a better reputation within the larger community, while parents who work closely with schools develop more confidence in the

schools and in themselves as partners and become more involved in their children's learning at home (Henderson and Berla 1994).

Various theoretical frameworks or models of FSR have emerged in the parental involvement literature to illustrate the multidimensional nature of family involvement. One example is Christenson and Sheridan's (2001) model which identified four key elements for enhancing family involvement in children's learning and development. These elements are: (1) approach; (2) attitudes; (3) atmosphere; and (4) actions. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) introduced another model of parental involvement. According to this model, parents' decisions concerning their involvement in their children's learning are the result of three factors: (1) parents' beliefs that participating in their children's learning is a part of their responsibility; (2) parents' perception of invitations from schools and teachers and from their children to be involved; and (3) demands on parents' time and energy that may conflict with involvement activities (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997).

In their Michigan *Childhood and Beyond Study*, Eccles and colleagues delineated a more family-initiated model for family involvement through five dimensions. These included: (1) monitoring; (2) volunteering; (3) involvement; (4) contacting the school about a child's progress and (5) contacting the school about how to give a child extra help (Eccles and Harold 1996).

One of the most widely used models of parental involvement is known as Epstein's (1992, 1995) typology. In this model, Joyce Epstein and colleagues conceptualized parental involvement in six types of collaborative relationship between family and school for the benefit of children (See Figure 1).

This model breaks down the idea of parental involvement into six different types as follows:

Type 1: *Parenting* – helping all families to develop parenting skills and to establish a home environment to support children as students.

Type 2: *Communicating* – establishing two-way communication channels between school and home about school programs and children's progress.

Type 3: *Volunteering* – improving recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences for school performances.

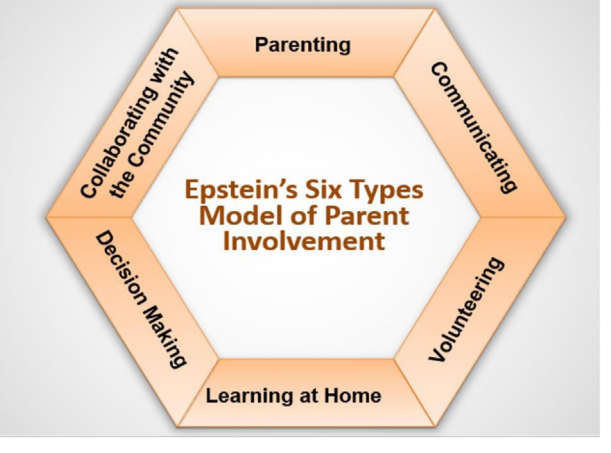

Figure 1. Epstein's six types model of parent involvement. Adopted from Epstein et al. (1997).

Type 4: *Learning at home* – providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related materials, decisions, and planning.

Type 5: *Decision-making* – including families as participants in school decisions, and developing parent leaders and representatives on school committees.

Type 6: *Collaborating with community* – identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, fostering a shared responsibility for children (adapted from Epstein 1995, 704).

In the above-mentioned models, the idea of the FSR was introduced from different perspectives. These models increase the awareness of the nature of FSR and advocate the role that family can play in promoting children's development and learning. Although researchers have suggested many models in FSR, the above-mentioned models share practical steps/domains to build a partnership between family and school. These steps can be used as a guide to help establish FSR. However, some of the models do not present a complete picture of how schools can provide families with specific activities that help them to get involved in their children's development. Among these models, Epstein's (1992, 1995) typology was found to outline a more comprehensive perspective of understanding family–school relationships. This model also provides schools with a structure to help organize specific activities to involve parents/families in their children's education (Winters 2002).

This typology has brought the significance of family partnerships to the forefront of educational research, policy, and practice (Nathans and Revelle 2013). Numerous studies conducted in the area of parental involvement explored FSR based on Epstein's six-types model of parent involvement because this model is considered a more school-centered model of parental involvement (Epstein 2001; Nathans and Revelle 2013). However, these studies lack focus on the involvement of parents/family in non-western cultural contexts.

Despite the importance of the FSR in children's development, as previously mentioned, we have to confront the fact that not all families are involved in their children's learning and development, whether it be home-based or school-based. Moreover, parents and/or family members may seldom, if ever, talk to their children's teacher, and further, they simply may not know how to provide a home environment that is supportive of school-related activities (Epstein 2001; Ihmeideh and Oliemat 2015). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school to call families' attention to the importance of their role in this regard.

Although awareness of getting families involved in school settings has increased in most Western countries, this awareness is still lacking in most Arab countries in general, and in Arab Gulf states in particular. For instance, in Qatar, where the present study was undertaken, only a basic level of family involvement could be observed. Schools lack comprehensive plans for partnership with families. Most Qatari schools still place the onus on individual parents to discover how to get involved in their children's learning. In the absence of systematic research it is difficult to examine FSR in the Qatari educational context. This was the reason for conducting this study.

The present study

The purpose of the present study is twofold: (1) to examine the perspectives of parents and school staff (i.e. administrators, coordinators, and school counselors) regarding FSR, and (2)

to determine whether significant differences exist among the types of FSR and those involved in such relationships.

The present study is important as it is in line with the Qatar National Development Strategies 2011–2016 which emphasize the importance of increased school communication with parents and increased parental involvement in schools (The Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning 2011). The Qatar National Vision 2030 also states precisely that parents, like teachers, are responsible for achieving success at all levels of the education system (The Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning 2011). Thus, the importance of improving parental participation in K-12 education is recognized as an important goal in addressing quality education in Qatar.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted in Doha, the capital of Qatar. Twenty-five primary schools were randomly selected to participate in the study, representing 24% from the population frame. There were five participant groups involved in the current study, including (1) parents of children aged 4–8 years enrolled in grades K-3, (2) early childhood teachers who teach children from kindergarten through grade three, (3) school administrators (i.e. school principals, vice-principals for academic affairs, vice-principals for administrative affairs, and vice-principals for kindergarten affairs), (4) school subject coordinators, and (5) school counselors. In the Qatari educational system, the role of school subject coordinators is to coordinate the development of a specific subject in the school (math, science, social studies, etc.) by reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating current practices. They support, motivate and advise teachers, and also work alongside them in the development of their subject and classroom practices. School counselors in Qatari schools help children understand and cope with social or behavioral problems through individual and group counseling. They also collaborate with teachers, administrators, and parents to help students succeed.

With the exception of parents, all participants were female. Their participation was voluntary. The resulting sample included 240 parents, 222 mothers (93%), 7 fathers (3%), 4 grandparents (2%) and 4 older sisters (2%). There were 72 (32%) parents of kindergartners, 51 (23%) of first grade children, 60 (27%) of second grade pupils, and 39 (18%) of third grade pupils. Among the 265 teachers who were invited to participate, 170 teachers agreed. The age of the participating teachers ranged from 24–40. Forty-two (19%) were diploma holders and 128 (58%) had a bachelor's degree. Their length of experience in teaching ranged from 2–14 years. If parents had more than one child, they were asked to respond about their oldest child.

Moreover, all school subject coordinators in the selected schools were participants in the study. There were 54 coordinators, with an age range of 32–53 years. Thirty-three school administrators, including principals and vice-principals, were participants in the study. All participating administrators had at least seven years' experience at administration level. Finally, all school counselors in these schools ($n = 25$) were participants in the study. In order to enrich the findings, a subsample of selected respondents was interviewed later. Altogether, follow-up interviews were conducted with 15 parents, 15 teachers, 10 subject coordinators, 10 school administrators, and 10 school counselors.

Survey instrument and measurement

The survey instrument used in this study was adapted from Epstein's (1992, 1995) typology of parent involvement. Two self-administered survey instruments were developed, one for parents and one for school staff. Both instruments consisted of the same items but were constructed to be appropriate to the different participant groups. The four-page survey instrument included two parts. The first part of each survey consisted of demographic questions. The next part focused on rating Epstein's six types of parent involvement by asking each participant to indicate to what extent they agreed with the items describing FSR. In the survey instrument, there were 33 Likert-type items.

English and Arabic versions of the survey instruments were created. The survey was first translated into Arabic by three of the authors of this study who are bilingual in English and Arabic. Then, six early childhood education experts were asked to determine the clarity of language and appropriateness for use with the target sample. In light of their feedback, the items were clarified or reworded. Next, the survey instruments were pilot-tested in three schools, with 30 participants from the study population outside the original study sample. They were asked to give their comments concerning the clarity of the items in the revised versions of the survey. After receiving their comments, the items were further refined. The reliability of the six typologies of parent involvement measured by the Cronbach alpha coefficient were satisfactory as follows: (parenting, $\alpha = 0.80$; communicating, $\alpha = 0.72$; volunteering, $\alpha = 0.76$; learning at home, $\alpha = 0.80$; decision-making, $\alpha = 0.83$; collaborating with community, $\alpha = 0.70$).

Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview schedule was utilized, as it is more flexible, reliable, and comparable to qualitative data. It also provides detailed, fascinating, contextual, or other information (Wisker 2001, 165). The interview schedule designed in this study included eight open-ended questions and focused on Epstein's six types of parent involvement.

Data analysis

Means and standard deviations were used to describe the data-set as well as to assess similarities and differences between participants' responses. In order to interpret the participants' responses, we set specific ranges for the mean as follows: from 1 to 2.33 = low; from 2.34 to 3.67 = moderate; and from 3.68 to 5.00 = high. Furthermore, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), followed by the eta^2 (η^2) was employed to examine whether responses differed significantly by responders. Scheffe's test was also utilized, as a *post hoc* test, when differences were detected. The α level was set at .05.

All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. We identified the topic areas related to the aim of the study. In order to reduce bias, two researchers read transcriptions. They then developed categories for the responses to each question. Relevant data were placed under each category, and quotes were utilized to illuminate responses. Quantitative and qualitative data were combined to enable confirmation and corroboration of each other and to elaborate analysis through providing a richer and more detailed picture (Rossman and Wilson 1991).

Results

Family–school relationships as perceived by the study participants

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean value and the mean values for five (out of the 6) types of Epstein's model were high (above 3.70), while one type of involvement (*decision-making*) showed a moderate mean value. The mean value of the overall score was 3.88 (SD = .57). *Learning at home* was the highest rated type of parental involvement as perceived by the study participants, with a mean score of 4.11 (SD = .82), followed by the *communicating* type which ranked second with a mean score of 4.00 (SD = .58). The *volunteering* type had a mean score of 3.81 (SD = .75). *Parenting* was ranked fourth with a mean value of 3.71 (SD = .91), while *collaborating with the community* had a mean score of 3.75 (SD = .81). *Decision-making* was the lowest rated type, with a mean score of 3.49 (SD = .94). These results indicate a high level of involvement according to the views of the study participants.

The section below describes Epstein's typology of parent involvement according to each respondent group which participated in the study.

Parenting type

All school staff expressed a high level of involvement regarding the parenting type, while parents perceived this type to have a moderate level. This is the first type of involvement according to Epstein's model and includes basic parenting skills such as provision for the children's health and safety and maintenance of home situations that support children's learning and behavior throughout their school attendance. Some administrators interviewed indicated that they hold different meetings/workshops for parents and share information with them on the children's development. One of the principals stated:

> Our role is to empower parents to have parenting skills. For this reason, we help parents establish a supportive home environment. We often invite all parents to attend our workshops/meetings that identify their role in child development.

Early childhood teachers indicated that they sometimes provide information on parenting and child rearing to families through social media applications (Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.). One first grade teacher was very keen to talk about this topic:

Table 1. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the perceptions of study participants toward family–school relationships.

Domains	Responders											
	Parents (*N* = 240)		Teachers (*N* = 170)		Coordinators (*N* = 63)		Administrators (*N* = 54)		Counselors (*N* = 25)		Overall (*N* = 552)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Parenting	3.11	.90	4.18	.55	4.13	.52	4.17	.81	4.33	.29	3.71	.91
Communicating	3.60	.54	4.30	.31	4.24	.39	4.40	.45	4.48	.55	4.00	.58
Volunteering	3.47	.74	3.96	.79	4.18	.43	4.27	.36	4.12	.35	3.81	.75
Learning at Home	3.82	.81	4.32	.70	4.28	.96	4.43	.84	4.30	.32	4.11	.82
Decision-Making	2.88	.93	3.82	.60	4.00	.68	4.30	.55	4.10	.44	3.49	.94
Collaborating with Community	3.24	.69	4.09	.61	4.18	.70	4.20	.80	4.28	.60	3.75	.81

> I provide information to all parents of children in my classroom via the WhatsApp application. In addition, I am always helpful to those who want information or who need it. However, I sometimes face some challenges when I provide information to parents because of cultural differences that are related to their parenting activities.

Parents also were aware of their role in this pattern of involvement although not to the same extent as the school staff. Their ratings for the parenting type were at a moderate level. School staff may not communicate effectively with parents or understand fully what parents' needs are. For this reason, parents may perceive what the school is doing in this respect as unbeneficial. This feeling was captured in the following parent's response:

> We never received anything important from parent-teacher meetings. They invite us just to hear what they want to say and request from us.

Communicating type

The mean value for the communicating type was high for all school staff. This is Epstein's second type of involvement which promotes school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's learning and progress. Communication may embrace varied methods such as conferences, regular memos, phone calls, emails, social media, daily or weekly newsletters, and other communications. It can include clear information on all school programs and policies. When interviewed, most teachers (10 out 15) reported that the schools leave this role (communicating) only to the school counselors. Thus, the majority of teachers do not communicate directly with families. If they want to communicate with families, they are expected to do it through the school counselors. One of the teachers contended that:

> After facing some problems with parents, the SEC suggested that teachers are not advised to communicate directly with parents. Our school does not allow me to establish any communication with parents. That is, I found SEC's decision is appropriate as teachers have a lot of work to do in and outside the classroom.

Counselors were found to be the staff most responsible for communicating with families. It was found that the majority of schools leave the responsibility of communicating with families to counselors who arrange meetings with families, use varied ways of communicating with families to keep them informed about their children's progress and encourage them to know more about what is happening in the school. One counselor responded in the following way:

> I am here at this school play in the role of moderator between teachers and parents. I sometimes send letters and announcements to parents. I know most parents in the school well and have good relations with most of them.

Parents expressed a moderate level of involvement in this type as the mean value for their responses was 3.60 (SD = .54). The communicating type is commonly noticed in most Qatari schools. When interviewed, parents indicated that the schools send home letters and notices. They also send children's folders home for parents to add their comments and signatures.

Almost half of the parents interviewed (7 out of 15) expressed their dissatisfaction with leaving the communication process to school counselors, as they want to communicate directly with their children's teachers and not with the counselors. Emphasizing this problem, one mother said:

> I really know just the name of my child's teacher. I have met her once or twice through an informal event in the school. Sometimes the counselor informs me about my child and when I want to reply to this information, I find the counselor unable to answer my concerns. I want my child's teacher to answer my queries.

Volunteering type

This is the third type of involvement in Epstein's model. Volunteering involves recruiting parents as volunteers in school programs to support teachers and school staff as well as children. As shown in Table 1, school staff's responses indicate a high level of involvement in this type. The highest mean value relating to the volunteering type of FSR was found in the administrators' responses, followed by school counselors, subject coordinators, and early childhood teachers, respectively. The interview results indicated that few parents want to be volunteers in school, particularly those who are well-educated. They mentioned that when volunteering, parents do well in their duty and receive basic training from the school. A sample of the school staff's responses reflects this:

School administrator:

> Before recruiting volunteers in my school, we provide them with training and make sure that they can be good assistants in our program. We support them in all steps and make flexible schedules for them.

School counselor:

> Due to limited time for families we do not have many volunteers in our program. The available partners who are willing to serve as volunteers become aware of their role and are able to understand the teachers' job.

Third-grade teacher:

> Children whose parents are volunteers in the school perform their school activities perfectly, more than those whose parents are not.

Subject coordinator:

> I encourage my teachers to invite parents to their classroom to observe lessons and participate in them. However, parents prefer to observe learning activities more than participate in them.

Against this background, most parents of children interviewed (12 out of 15) indicated that they have never been asked to be volunteers. Parents indicated that schools sometimes invite them to observe lessons during the school day. They explained that their participation is limited only to attendance without being participants in the school activities. One parent said:

> The maximum participation in school is to observe in classrooms. Simply, we sit in the classroom and do nothing except for watching what happened in the classroom and how teachers teach and how children learn.

Learning at home type

This type received high mean values from all study participants including parents. This is not surprising as families and school staff care about their children's success. According to Epstein's model of parent involvement, learning at home includes helping children with skills that they need to improve, engaging parents and their children in all decisions related

to the school curriculum, and implementing a regular routine of interactive homework to be completed between children and their families. As shown in Table 1, the school administrators exhibited the higher mean values among other study participants. This is also supported by the interview results as one administrator (vice-principal for academic affairs) stated:

> Homework is an essential part of our educational system in Qatar. We have scheduled homework to our students in all stages. Teachers are required to follow up students' efforts in doing their schoolwork at home. If children do not do their homework, the school counselor reports parents. In our meeting with teachers, we insisted on involving parents in their children's homework.

Although all participants indicated that this type of involvement is obviously noted in the Qatari educational context, school staff indicated that families need support and encouragement to get them involved in learning at home. One science subject coordinator explained:

> I encourage my teachers to inform parents of required skills that children need in each grade and the homework policies and how to guide, mentor, and discuss homework with their children at home.

More than half of parents indicated that the school has a fundamental role in clarifying some tasks and instructions to parents as well as reducing homework. Moreover, parents interviewed believe that children need support from their parents at home in order to achieve success at school. They help their children with the homework and during the exams. One of the parents' responses reflects this:

> I help my children do homework with pleasure. I felt happy when we designed a mat hat with our child. I always check my child's bag and do our tasks as required by the school.

Decision-making type

This is the fifth type of involvement in Epstein's model. This type includes families' engagement in school decisions, school councils, committees, and/or other parent organizations. This type received the lowest mean values from most participants compared to other patterns in Epstein's model. Despite that, school staff ratings for this type were high, while parents' ratings weremoderate. One mother stated:

> One of the most important reasons that explain why we do not attend school meetings is that the school does not listen to the parents' voice. They just invite us to let us listen to what they say and want us to listen; even if parents suggested any idea, they will not listen.

Administrators indicated that advisory councils, which include parents as members, make important decisions in the school. One administrator said:

> Parents play an active role in our advisory board. Based on suggestions made by parents we have changed many activities and events in our school; for example, we shifted mealtime to be introduced to children earlier, and we reduced homework to be sent to children twice a week instead of three times.

Most teachers mentioned that schools need to work with families in order to make effective decisions and involve all parents to make significant decisions. One teacher suggested that in order to spread the culture of decision-making in the school, parents and school need to build trust and a mutual partnership. She explained:

> Decision-making is a shared view to achieve the school's goals. We really need parents' inputs to develop our aims and we need to establish a trusted environment in which both parents and school staff respect and trust each other.

Collaborating with community

The collaborating with community type received high mean scores from all school staff, while parents' ratings for this type were moderate. This is the last type of involvement according to Epstein's model and includes coordinating resources and services for families, children, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and providing services to the community. Schools, as small communities within the larger community, are required to work with the community in different ways; to serve it (recycling projects, art and drama activities, etc.) and/or benefit from its services (health, sport, summer programs, etc.). Principals and teachers interviewed indicated that they always provide children and families with community activities that could develop children's learning and skills. This is well illustrated by the following comment by one teacher:

> Some parents are not aware of the community activities around them. For example, I was surprised when I heard that many parents of children in my school know nothing of the activities of the Cultural Childhood Center. Our role is to let families be aware what is happening regarding the community activities.

Moreover, working with the community was noted in some teachers' interviews, revealing that they collaborate with the community by inviting professionals (dentists, carpenters, nurses, farmers. etc.) to participate in the school programs for children.

Counselors were found to play a linking role between parents and community. Some counselors provided parents with newsletters or brochures about community health, social support, and other services. One counselor said:

> I invite parents to participate in the community services and encourage them to be part of their society. This is one of my roles here in this school. I always keep parents posted when I found something that is beneficial for their children.

Parents appreciate the role of the school in providing them with information about community programs and services. One parent said:

> Through my children's school, I have registered my child in the summer activities program. The school also often connects us with community services. Last year, they invited us to read with our children in the Qatar National Public Library.

Differences among respondent groups regarding family–school relationships

To determine whether significant differences existed among the study participants' perspectives of FSR, One-Way ANOVA was utilized followed by η^2. Figure 2 illustrates the differences among participants in all of Epstein's types of parent involvement, and overall. There were significant differences on pattern related to parenting F (4, 547)=70.66, p = .000, η^2 = .34, communicating F (4, 547)=86.19, p = .000, η^2 = .38; volunteering F (4, 547)=27.76, p = .000, η^2 = .16; learning at home F (4, 547)=14.24, p = .000, η^2 = .09; decision-making F (4, 547)=71.52, p = .000, η^2 = .34; collaborating with the community F (4, 547)=60.16, p = .000, η^2 = .30; and the overall F (4, 547)=87.59, p = .000, η^2 = .39.

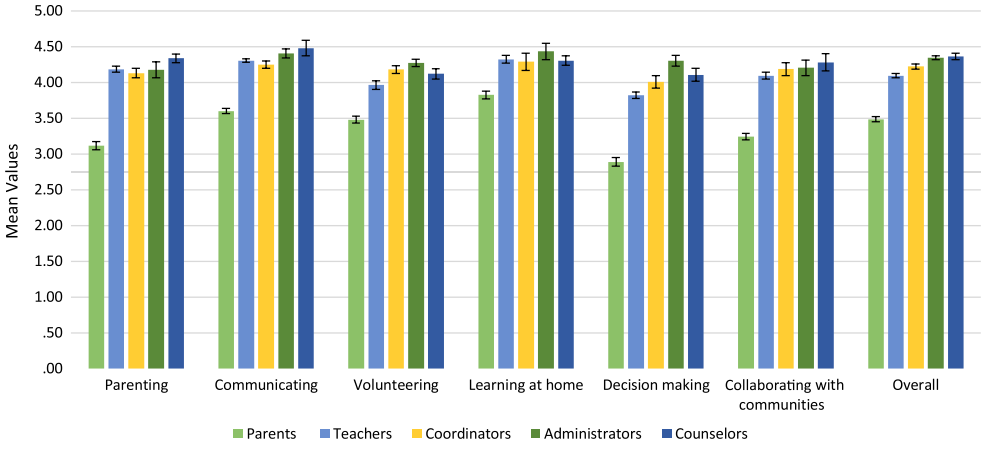

Figure 2. The mean values for the perceptions of study participants toward family–school relations. Error bars represent SEs.

Based on the analysis of Scheffe's post hoc test, the differences were significant between school staff on the one hand and parents on the other, with the school staff providing higher ratings in all six of Epstein's types of parent involvement and also overall (see Figure 2). This means that school staff were more positive about FSR based on Epstein's model.

However, significant differences were also noticed regarding the decision-making type between administrators on the one hand and teachers and coordinators on the other, with the administrators giving higher ratings. Moreover, significant differences were found overall between administrators and teachers with the administrators responding more positively about FSR.

Discussion

The overall results indicated a high to moderate level rating of involvement among the study participants.

This is because family-school relationships in the Qatari context have recently seen a significant improvement due to the MOEHE's efforts in encouraging schools to involve families in their programs as well as increased awareness that responders have regarding this initiative. It is obvious that parents, teachers, and other school members have a shared goal as they all want their children to have the best learning possible. As pointed out by Epstein (2001), one of the fundamental reasons why a positive relationship between home and school is needed is to help the child succeed in school and life.

Results indicated that the 'learning at home' type was the highest rated type of parental involvement as perceived by the study participants since this pattern had the highest mean score. According to Singh et al. (1995), parents are the most pervasive socializing influence on children's academic competence and school-related functioning. Without this type, schools could find it difficult to achieve their goal. In general, parents may find this type the easiest one as they do not need to come to school, particularly for those employed parents who may have difficulty finding time to come to school. However, supporting parents to help their children at home does not mean that parents need to work alone with their

children without the school's help. Learning at home includes helping children with homework and subject skills, and may involve other skills and talents, attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011). This might work well if parents are aware of a teacher's instructional goals because they may then provide resources and support for addressing those learning aims at home.

The communicating type was ranked second among study participants. Although school staff expressed a high level of involvement in this type, parents gave it a moderate rating. This is because communicating with families is the main role of early childhood teachers as most of them have received training on how to communicate with parents and thus, they become aware of their role in partnerships, serving as communicators. Furthermore, parents may feel that they are not really able to communicate with the right individuals – the teachers. Counselors were found to be the only people in the school in charge of establishing communication with parents. The explanation for this, as indicated by several school staff, is because some schools witnessed previous poor communication experiences between parents and teachers, and, hence, this caused trouble for the schools. This led the SEC to issue a circular to schools telling them not to involve teachers in direct communication with parents and to assign counselors to perform this task. It is worth mentioning that this appears to be at odds with the idea of 'parents as partners' and is an immense hindrance to the development of the kind of parental involvement approaches advocated by Epstein. Although teachers do not communicate directly with parents, counselors were found to employ different ways of communication as highlighted in the National Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEEWR 2008). However, lack of clear communication was reported by the parents participating in this study; this is, as manifest in the interview results, because some teachers and counselors use technical terms when communicating with parents. This result is supported by the work of Caplan (2000) who found that some barriers were due to a mismatch in the communication between family and school because of cultural and language differences.

Moreover, the parenting type was found to be highly evident in most schools. It is obvious that school staff are aware of the importance of providing parents with parenting skills to support the role of schools. Meeting with families on different occasions and providing them with information related to their children's learning can make families aware of the school routine and instruction used in the schools. Such meetings/workshops could help parents gain confidence in their parenting in relation to their child's learning (Zellman and Rand Corp 1998). Indeed, parents need better information from schools to become involved in their children's development and learning (Morrow 2012). As found in the interview results, some parents did not feel that the information provided by schools was beneficial as this information was limited to those who attended meetings and those interested in such information. Thus, as Davis (2000) urged, schools should try to reach all families by providing improved and important information to all, not simply to those who attend meetings at school.

The volunteering type was ranked fourth among Epstein's types of parental involvement. School staff's ratings were high for this type. This is because school staff may recognize the importance of involving families in this type for the benefit of children's development and learning. They may also see the advantages of recruiting families as volunteers. Parents' ratings were moderate because they may like to participate in school programs if they have the opportunities. Although schools did try to involve parents in volunteering activities,

these activities were not sufficient. That is why parents interviewed indicated that these volunteering activities were futile.

The collaborating with the community type received high to moderate mean scores from study participants. This result is supported by the results of Nathans and Revelle (2013) who indicated that participants stressed building relationships with community leaders, persistence, and appreciation as more significant to fostering partnerships with community organizations and groups than other skills, such as consistency in contacting community leaders. Finally, the decision-making type was the lowest rated type of parental involvement. This may be due to the lack of school staff's trust in parents' opinions (Epstein 2013).

Regarding differences among respondents, the results indicated they were significant between school staff and parents of children, with school staff scoring all types of parent involvement more highly. The reason for these differences may be because parents may not know how to participate in their children's learning and development and their awareness of the importance of their role may remain limited. In addition, administrators responded more positively about FSR than teachers and school coordinators. This could be because teachers and coordinators are less involved in establishing a school–home relationship as they were sometimes discouraged from contacting and dealing with families.

Implications

It appears that school staff implement a variety of strategies to facilitate communication with parents and/or family members. Despite this, results obtained from the interviews indicate that the picture was not as positive as in the questionnaire results. In other words, school staff should play an important role in building a strong relationship between the two parties. This could be done by building mutual trust and working collaboratively with parents to understand the families holistically. School administrators also need to empower all school staff to keep parents productively involved in their children's learning. Perhaps there is a need for more effective implementation of the FSR, by focusing on patterns that are related to decision-making and providing a variety of volunteering opportunities. These opportunities may include, and not be limited to, encouraging parents to serve as mentors and coaching assistants. The MOEHE should also rethink its policy and regulations on giving counselors responsibility for direct communication with parents, instead of teachers. This will not support the idea of 'parents as partners' which is advocated by Epstein and will negatively affect the development of the relationship between school and home. Indeed, parents should be viewed as partners and should be involved in direct communication with teachers.

The results illustrated that the decision-making type of FSR was not implemented in a way which would build trust between parents and school. Establishing formal school initiatives which encourage parents to make decisions regarding children's learning and development would also be beneficial. Possible strategies may include, but not be limited to, regular communication with parents regarding the most important decisions that need to be taken in school and seeking parents' inputs, and regular meetings with parents to listen to their views and discuss ideas about their children's development and learning as well as their academic success. It is hoped that this study will enable the decision makers to develop existing national policy, plans, and strategies for FSR. Finally, maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship between the two parties in all types of involvement is crucially required.

Future research

Future research is necessary to expand our knowledge of the nature of the relationships found in the present study. Some topics that were limited in the current study can be considered; for instance, parental involvement in Epstein's six types of involvement according to particular subject matter. Experimental studies that examine the effect of Epstein's types of parent involvement could also be explored in more depth. Additional research that examines children's perspectives of FSR could be considered. Finally, the findings of this research may encourage other researchers from different contexts to conduct comparative studies based on Epstein's six types of parent involvement.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express deepest gratitude and appreciation to the parents of children and school staff (early childhood teachers, administrators, coordinators, and school counselors) whose generous participation made this study possible.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Fathi Ihmeideh http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8164-8121
Maryam AlFlasi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4849-7883
Fatima Al-Maadadi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7098-5349
Chris Coughlin http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2234-9599
Tamader Al-Thani http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0682-5540

References

Al-Thani, T. 2010. "Investigating Teachers' Practices of Creative Thinking Skills in Qatari Preschoolers." *The International Journal of Learning* 17 (5): 221–230.

Caplan, J. 2000. *Building Strong Family-school Partnerships to Support High Student Achievement. The Informed Educator Series*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Christenson, S., and S. Sheridan. 2001. *Schools and Families: Creating Essential Connections for Learning*. New York: The Guildford Press.

Cox, D. 2005. "Evidence-based Interventions Using Home-school Collaboration." *School Psychology Quarterly* 20 (4): 473–497.

Davis, D. 2000. *Supporting Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in Your School*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Accessed March 2 2017. http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/index.html

Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWR). 2009. *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Diss, R., and P. Buckley. 2005. *Developing Family and Community Involvement Skills Through Case Studies and Field Experiences*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.

Eccles, J., and R. Harold. 1996. "Family Involvement in Children's and Adolescents' Schooling." In *Familyschool Links: How Do They Affect Educational Outcomes?*, edited by A. Booth and J. F. Dunn, 3–34. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Epstein, J. 1992. *School and Family Partnerships.* Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD: Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 343 715).

Epstein, J. 1995. "School/Family /Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share." *Phi Delta Kappan* 76 (9): 701–712.

Epstein, J. 2001. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Epstein, J. 2013. ""Ready or Not?" *Preparing Future Educators for School, Family, and Community Partnerships Teaching Education* 24 (2): 115–118.

Epstein, J., L. Coates, K. Salinas, M. Sanders, and B. Simon. 1997. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Epstein, J., S. Herrick, and L. Coates. 1996. "Effects of Summer Home Learning Packets on Student Achievement in Language Arts in the Middle Grades." *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 7 (4): 383–410.

Esler, A., Y. Godber, and S. Christenson. 2002. "Best Practices in Supporting Home School Collaborations." In *Best Practices in School Psychology IV*, edited by A. Thomas and J. Grimes, 389–411. Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychology.

Galindo, C., and S. Sheldon. 2012. "School Efforts to Improve Parental Involvement and Effects on Students' Achievement in Kindergarten." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 27: 90–103.

Goodall, J., and J. Vorhaus. 2011. "Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement." *Research Report, Department for Education, UK*. Accessed February 8 2016. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182508/DFE-RR156.pdf

Henderson, A., and N. Berla. 1994. *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Henderson, A., and K. Mapp. 2002. *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hindman, A., A. Miller, L. Froyen, and L. Skibbe. 2012. "A Portrait of Family Involvement during Head Start: Nature, Extent, and Predictors." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 27: 654–667.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., and H. Sandler. 1997. "Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education?" *Review of Educational Research* 67: 3–42.

Ihmeideh, F., and E. Oliemat. 2015. "The Effectiveness of Family Involvement in Early Childhood Programmes: Perceptions of Kindergarten Principals and Teachers." *Early Child Development and Care* 185 (2): 181–197.

Kalin, J., and B. Steh. 2010. "Advantages and Conditions for Effective Teacher-parent Co-operation." *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2: 4923–4927.

Morrow, L. 2012. *Literacy Development in the Early Years: Helping Children Read and Write*. 7th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Nathans, L., and C. Revelle. 2013. "An Analysis of Cultural Diversity and Recurring Themes in Preservice Teachers' Online Discussions of Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement." *Teaching Education* 24 (2): 164–180.

Romanowski, M., M. Cherif, B. Al Ammari, and A. Al Attiyah. 2013. "Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents." *International Journal of Education* 5 (3): 119–146.

Rossman, G., and B. Wilson. 1991. "Numbers and Words Revisited: Being 'Shamelessly Eclectic'." *Evaluation Review* 9 (5): 627–643.

Sheridan, S., J. Bovaird, T. Glover, S. Garbacz, A. Witte, and K. Kwon. 2012. "A Randomized Trial Examining the Effects of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation and the Mediating Role of the Parent Teacher Relationship." *School Psychology Review* 41: 23–46.

Singh, K., P. Bickly, P. Trivette, T. Keith, P. Keith, and E. Anderson. 1995. "The Effects of Four Components of Parental Involvement on Eighth-grade Student Achievement: Structural Analysis of NELS-88 Data." *School Psychology Review* 299–317.

Supreme Education Council. 2008. *The Early Years Education Good Practice Guide*. Doha: Education Institute, SEC.

The Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning. 2011. *Qatar National Development Strategy 2011–2016*. Doha: Gulf Publishing and Printing Company.

Thomas-Carr, L. 2005. "An Exploration of Parental Involvement of Parents of African American High School Students." Unpublished Masters of Social Work, Long Beach, CA: California State University.

Winters, W. 2002. "Book Review of School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools, by Joyce Epstein." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 7 (4): 449–451.

Wisker, G. 2001. *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*. New York: Palgrave Houndmills.

Zellman, G., and S. Rand Corp. 1998. "Understanding the Impact of Parent School Involvement on Children's Educational outcomes." *The Journal of Educational Research* 91 (6): 370–380.