

Parent's Commitment is the Gateway to a Child's Academic Success

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Abstract

The author sought for information about parents of predominantly illiterate communities in relation to their perceptions and involvement toward their children's academic performance and success, but found very little literature. However, the literature reviewed showed that success in school among children of all family types or background depend on commitment and deliberate efforts on the part of parents to inculcate discipline and good study habits in their children. The startling numbers of illiterate parents in the world today, necessitate efforts to get them involved in their children's academic performance. The literature reviewed revealed that illiterate parents are capable of supporting their children to succeed in school by: establishing high expectations for their children; communicating with teachers when they have a question or concern; insisting on good attendance; providing a quiet time and place in their home for study; insisting that their students accept responsibility for their learning and conduct. In addition, parents should attend school meetings and events; discuss school activities at home and; be a source of guidance and counseling for their children that may lead them to achieve their aspirations. In this regard, no parent should be left behind. All should be encouraged to get involved in the success of their children's education. This material hopes to be relevant to parents, teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders of education, who have the mandate to build human capital in the society.

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1. Introduction

According to a study by [Wilson, Cordry, Notar, and Friery \(2004\)](#) teachers concur that they cannot do it alone. For effective educational processes to occur in classrooms, parental help in partnership with educators is needed. There are two categories of parents to consider in addressing issues of parental involvement in children's education. These include literate and illiterate parents. The focus here is to highlight what illiterate parent's can do to enhance the academic success of their children. Innately, a child's educational performance is probably greater if he or she has greatly educated parents, and poorer if the child has less educated or illiterate parents ([Goodall, 2013](#)). Thus, illiterate parents are regarded as liabilities to their children's academic success. This is in relation to their inability to read to or assist their children in reading and writing. According to [Goodall \(2017\)](#) illiterate parents provide thorough independence to whatsoever their children want to do with their lives, they seldom rebuke them, and as they cannot direct them much on profession, the only foundation of direction will originate from their school teachers or if they have family friends who are literate, they will request their children to consider their guidance and stay in adjacent connection of friends who have literate parents. Illiteracy keeps people chained to ignorance, slavery, inaction and exploitation in a number of ways, and illiterate people are classified as the inferior segment of the society of which the underdeveloped countries are mostly in the bond of illiteracy ([Adepoju, 2013](#)). Illiterate parents have been blamed for school dropouts in India. A national-level survey has revealed that illiteracy of parents is one of the main reasons behind school dropouts in Chandigarh. A total of 1,090 children, all Dalits, have been reported as school dropouts in the survey and all have illiterate parents ([Nikhil, 2015](#)).

Nonetheless, it is obvious that much attention is not given to illiterate parents with regards to their support for their children's education. According to [Menheere and Hooge \(2010\)](#) remarkably, the result of

literature search on the topic of parental involvement of illiterate parents in their children's academic achievement appeared to be limited. [Dei \(2004\)](#) asserts that it is important not to limit the involvement and influence of parents who have not gone to school. He said that illiterate parents could be a source of guidance and counseling for their children that may lead them to achieve their aspirations. A study conducted by the World Statistics Institute (WSI) shows that over 27% of the world population are illiterates. Another study by the same institute shows that the speed at which illiteracy rate rises is 32% ([Adepoju, 2013](#)). These rates are relatively important, as illiteracy has negative effects on the society at large. Thus this segment of parents' population should be given the needed attention in order to minimize their negative effects on their children's education. There is a belief that illiteracy has a hereditary effect if it is not abolished early. Children of illiterate parents are more likely to be illiterate compared to literate parents.

A lot of attention is given to statistics related to children's ability to read. However, much attention is not given to adult illiteracy, though it is known to exist. There is a startling statistic which says that one out of every five adult residents, in some parts of developed countries have difficulty reading or cannot read at all ([James, 2017](#)). According to [Menheere and Hooge \(2010\)](#) about 800 million people are not or not sufficiently able to read and write. That is about 15% of the world's population. If students leave school unable to read and do not seek further assistance, chances are that they will become illiterate adults. Despite the unfortunate situation, there is no frequent discussion on the impact this may have on their children and how they will help them navigate through school. In order for children to become good readers or do well in education it is important not to ignore parents who are unable to read or illiterate ([James, 2017](#)). If illiterate parents are equipped with knowledge and skills on how to support their children's education apart from being literate it can increase the academic interaction between parents and children, which will benefit both. No parent should be left behind. All should be involved or encouraged to get involved in the success of their children's education.

Recently, ethnographers have been concerned with children who, against the odds, manage to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Their evidence indicates that success in school among poor children of all family types is related to deliberate efforts on the part of parents to inculcate discipline and good study habits in their children ([Astone & McLanahan, 1991](#)). It is established that parental practices are related to all of the school achievement indicators, including grades, attendance, attitudes, expectations, school retention, and degree completion. It is what parents do to support learning in the school and in the home that makes the difference to achievement ([Goodall, 2017](#)).

2. Review of Literature

According to [Trotman \(2001\)](#) many parents are aware of the disparity between themselves and school staff and choose to stay away. The faculty and staff may also fail to involve parents with their perceived inadequate level of expertise coupled with the parents' own past negative educational experiences may further intimidate parents. Consequently, it becomes difficult to build an educational partnership. Accordingly, educators must reach out to these parents and demonstrate a visible concern for their children.

Research has found that, before parents could participate in their child's education in a meaningful way, their social, economic, and physical needs had to be addressed ([Perna & Titus, 2005](#)). [Kerbow and Bernhardt \(1993\)](#) showed, however, that after controlling for socioeconomic status, African-American and Hispanic parents are actually more likely to contact their children's school and attend Parent-Teacher-Organization (PTO) meetings. Such efforts serve to build social capital of benefit to disadvantaged children ([Goddard, 2003](#)).

A new study shows that parental involvement matters more for performance than schools, but that does not mean going to PTA meetings ([Paul, 2012](#)). She said given all the roiling debates about how America's children should be taught, it may come as a surprise to learn that students spend less than 15% of their time in school. While there is no doubt that school is important, a clutch of recent studies reminds us that parents are even more so. The effort put forth by parents; reading stories aloud, meeting with teachers, has a bigger impact on their children's educational achievement than the effort expended by either teachers or the students themselves ([Goodall, 2017](#)). In addition, Checking homework, attending school meetings and events and discussing school activities at home has a more powerful influence on students' academic performance than anything about the school the students attend.

Furthermore, contemporary research states that parents, of all backgrounds, do not need to buy expensive educational toys or digital devices for their children in order to give them an edge. They do not need to chauffeur their children to enrichment classes or test-prep courses. What they need to do with their children is much simpler: talk. But not just any talk. The content of parents' conversations with children matters, too. For example, children who hear talk about counting and numbers at home start school with much more extensive mathematical knowledge that predicts future achievement in the subject. Psychologist Susan Levine, who led the study on number words, has also found that the amount of talk young children hear about the spatial properties of the physical world — how big or small or round or sharp objects are — predicts children's problem-solving abilities as they prepare to enter kindergarten ([Paul, 2012](#)).

While the conversations parents have with their children change as they grow older, the effect of these exchanges on academic achievement remains strong. Research by Nancy Hill, a professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, finds that parents play an important role in what Hill calls "academic socialization" — setting expectations and making connections between current behavior and future goals (going to college, getting a good job). Engaging in these sorts of conversations, Hill reports, has a greater impact on educational accomplishment than volunteering at a child's school or going to PTA meetings, or even taking children to libraries and museums. When it comes to fostering students' success, it seems, it is not so much what parents do as what they say (Goodall, 2013).

Even as schools strive to provide the best reading instruction, educators are aware that factors outside the school influence their students' success in learning to read. Research confirms the importance of such factors as children's home environments and preschool literacy experiences. The positive relationship between a home literacy environment and children's reading knowledge and skills held true regardless of the family's economic status (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Each new school year hundreds of thousands of students start school unprepared to face the new venture in their lives, and teachers cry for an increase in parental involvement.

Although there is no question about the influence of family socialization patterns on children's cognitive characteristics, there seems to be a general belief that these habits are more relevant in shaping certain attitudes, self-concept, beliefs, competence, and causal attributions (Gonzalez-Pienda, 2002). There are many factors that constrain parental participation in schools: narrow vision of parental involvement, school personnel's negative proclivity, lack of teacher training, pressing employment issues, and cultural differences (Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005).

The National Household Education Survey found a correlation between family poverty and literacy activities: 87 % of non-poor children were frequently read to by a family member, compared with 74 % of poor children. Race/ethnicity was also a factor. White children were more likely than black or Hispanic children to be frequently read to or told a story (Holloway, 2004). An analysis of NCEES Survey data (Holloway, 2004) confirmed that children whose family members read to them three times a week were more likely to know their alphabets than children whose family members read to them less frequently. In addition, their research found that children whose family members read to them frequently were more likely to be able to count to 20 or higher, write their own names, and read or mimic reading behaviors.

Yarosz and Barnett (2001) found that the mother's education was one of the factors most strongly associated with reading frequency. They also found that when the number of siblings increased, the frequency of reading to children decreased. In addition, they report that families with a home language other than English also tended to read to their children less frequently. These findings underscore the importance of parents reading to children at an early age.

It is evident that, the academic success of individual students is influenced by their personal characteristics and dispositions. Equally true, however, is that as members of schools, families, and communities, students may have access to various forms of social support that can facilitate their success in school. Indeed, researchers have increasingly recognized the importance of social support for students' academic success. For example, research has shown a connection between strong relationships and student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). In addition, Steinberg (1996) reports that parental involvement in the form of school visits has positive effects on student academic performance. These findings support Coleman (1990) social theory that posits that strong relationships between schools and parents can have positive effects because they constitute a form of social capital that is of value to children's academic success (Goddard, 2003). Trotman (2001) also found a significant inverse correlation between parent involvement and suspension levels namely, when the level of parental involvement increased, the number of student suspensions decreased. In addition, an increase in parent involvement correlates with an increase in student achievement

Common sense and the large amount of available data indicate that the family is one of the most important contexts in which a child forges his or her self, developing a system of attitudes toward various environments to relate to school and learning, enhancing motivation, interest (or lack thereof) in learning, among other things. Without family support for their children's learning, it is hard for teachers to devise academic experiences to help students learn meaningful content. Trotman (2001) asserts that not only do children perform better academically and behaviorally when parents are involved, teachers' behaviors have been affected as well. That when parents become involved, teachers normally exhibited positive attitude changes as well as improved their personal work habits.

Parental involvement in school activities as well as direct communication with teachers and administrators is associated with greater achievement in mathematics and reading (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004). In addition, higher levels of parent involvement in their children's educational experiences at home (e.g., supervision and monitoring, daily conversations about school) have been associated with children's higher achievement scores in reading and writing, as well as higher report card grades (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). Other research has shown that parental beliefs and expectations about their children's learning are strongly related to children's beliefs about their own competencies, as well as their achievement (Goodall, 2013). A report of research findings by Fantuzzo et al. (2004) indicate that Home-Based involvement

dimension was regarded superior to other dimensions in its relationship to preschool competencies for children participating in urban Head Start programs.

There is a general belief that parents' lack of value of education is responsible for students' deficient academic achievement. The work of [Lawrence-Lightfoot \(1978\)](#) suggests that a myth exists about black and poor parents not caring about their children's education. She notes that the myth is that African-American parents, "do not care about the education of their children, are passive and unresponsive to attempts to get them involved, and are ignorant naïve about the intellectual and social needs of their children" (p.36). Her work suggests that this myth may be misleading. [Trotman \(2001\)](#) argued that like other ethnic groups, African-American parents want their children to achieve academically. However, some of these parents may lack the knowledge and resources to assist their child with academic success. Furthermore, she states that most parents care deeply about their children's education, but their involvement can be limited for a variety of reasons including: busy schedules, they have babies or younger children at home, both parents work or the belief that teaching is the teacher's job. She therefore cautions educators to realize that the familial life is very busy and although education may be top of the educator's priority list, many parents prioritize quality time with their family differently.

The perspective toward education among the fishing communities in Ghana is embedded in cultural issues. It differs in its value of education. [Mensah, Koranteng, Bortey, and Yeboah \(2006\)](#) state that educational levels among fishers have been found to be low, as consistently documented in several publications on Ghana. The literacy level estimated among fishermen through group discussions was between 5 and 50 %. Even then, a greater proportion of those that had been through first-cycle institutions had dropped out of school and were unable to read or write. Among processors and fish traders, the picture is quite grim. Most of them had never been to school, and educational level was expressed between 0 and 20 %. Lack of appreciation of the value for education, high demands for unskilled labor and lack of finances were cited as the main constraints that tended to discourage fishers from sending their children to school, even though most coastal towns are icons of education in Ghana. The aptitude for traditional skills is gradually recognized and established in the household ([Blakemore, 1975](#)).

[Dufour and Eaker \(1998\)](#) offered a guiding principle to help parents fulfill their commitments. They posit that if parents recognize that they are their children's first and most influential teachers, they can promote their success and contribute to an excellent school. Parents also need to make and fulfill commitments including: (1) they should establish high expectations for their children and not accept minimum effort or indifference to quality work; (2) they should know what is expected in each of their children's classes and communicate with teachers when they have a question or concern; (3) they should insist on good attendance; (4) they should provide a quiet time and place in their home for study; (5) they should insist that their students accept responsibility for their learning and conduct; and (6) they should model the importance of life-long learning. [Dufour and Eaker \(1998\)](#) contend that if parents embrace these education beliefs and practices, student learning would improve.

A most comprehensive survey of research on parental involvement in a series of publications developed by [Henderson \(1987\)](#) states that when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's education level. That the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement. When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to attend post-secondary education. Henderson's findings have helped in dealing with some assumptions on why most parents seem to not value education. For instance, the assumption or thought that poverty was the reason why some parents do not value education was taken care of. He said that when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's education level. His work dissipated the beliefs held by some educators in ([Trotman, 2001](#)) that poverty leads to deficiencies in acquiring academic skills and that many poor urban students are often forced to deal with adverse conditions, which in turn lowers their self-esteem as they begin to internalize the notion that they cannot achieve. It is understandable that an acceptance of schooling would be found in most households regardless of distinctions in wealth. [Blakemore \(1975\)](#) contends that in terms of instrumental attitude towards education, it is not possible to conclude that the better-off Ghanaians use their income to invest in education. He claims that at the level of subsidized village schooling the initial encouragement to attend exists in the home generally independently of wealth.

3. Methodology

Literature was reviewed based on parental involvement on their children's education, with emphasis on illiterate parents' support towards the achievement of their children's academic success in education. It was a systematic critical assessment of literature. There was a search in databases and search engines such as Google scholar, ERIC and other websites, with key words such as: parental involvement in children's education in general and illiterate parents and children's education to be specific. Books, journals and other materials were consulted. Results were obtained for discussion to arrive at conclusion and recommendations.

4. Results

It is crystal clear that the result of literature search on parental involvement of illiterate parents in their children's education is limited (Menheere & Hooge, 2010). Nonetheless, there are still startled numbers of illiterate parents in existence in the world, especially in the developing countries. Thus, the impact of adverse effects of illiteracy on children's academic performance is largely felt in those parts of the world. For example, illiterate parents have been blamed for school dropouts in India. A national-level survey has revealed that illiteracy of parents is one of the main reasons behind school dropouts in Chandigarh. A total of 1,090 children, all Dalits, have been reported as school dropouts in the survey and all have illiterate parents (Nikhil, 2015).

Although the illiterate parents appear to be handicapped in areas such as being unable to read to their children like their literate counterparts do, they still have the potential to contribute towards the success of their children's education. They could do so by advising, talking to or counseling their children. In addition, they could also prepare the learning environment for their children, especially for home study. Parents of all types have the option to fulfill at least some of the commitments put forth by Dufour and Eaker (1998) if they want their children to succeed in school. These include: Establishing high expectations for their children and not accepting minimum effort or indifference to quality work; knowing what is expected in each of their children's classes and communicating with teachers when they have a question or concern; insisting on good attendance; providing a quiet time and place in their home for study; insisting that their students accept responsibility for their learning and conduct; and modeling the importance of life-long learning. Dufour and Eaker (1998) contend that if parents embrace these education beliefs and practices, student learning would improve.

Differences between parents should be considered in addressing issues of parental involvement in children's education (Menheere & Hooge, 2010).

5. Discussions

Many of the articles reviewed revealed that parents' showed their interest and support for their children's education by reading to them at home during preschool and early childhood years. This is not a common phenomenon among illiterate parents. It is not because they do not want to do it, but because they cannot do it. These circumstances may be unusual in developed nations however they may be more prevalent in developing countries. In these contexts, the lack of education among parents may have a negative impact on advancing the literacy and numeracy of their children. Dei (2004) asserts that it is important not to limit the involvement and influence of parents who have not gone to school. He said that illiterate parents could be a source of guidance and counseling for their children that may lead them to achieve their aspirations.

Though illiterate parents are regarded as liabilities to their children's academic success as a result of their inability to read to their children, they still have the potential to support their children to obtain academic success. For example, illiterate parents who may implement guidelines provided by Dufour and Eaker (1998) have equal chances as their literate counterparts. Illiterate parents may be able to fulfill commitments such as: establishment of high expectations for their children and not accepting minimum effort or indifference to quality work; they should know what is expected in each of their children's classes and communicate with teachers when they have a question or concern; they should insist on good attendance; they should provide a quiet time and place in their home for study and; they should insist that their students accept responsibility for their learning and conduct. It is obvious that if parents embrace these education beliefs and practices, student learning would improve.

It is obvious that illiterate parents may not be completely helpless in supporting their children's education. They may also have some things to offer, such as important roles to play or contributions to make towards the academic success of their children. These include, attending school meetings and events and discussing school activities at home has a more powerful influence on students' academic performance than anything about the school the students attend. Though they need to talk to their children, it should not be just any talk. The content of parents' conversations with children matters. For example, children who hear talk about counting and numbers at home start school with much more extensive mathematical knowledge that predicts future achievement in the subject. Psychologist Susan Levine, who led the study on number words, has also found that the amount of talk young children hear about the spatial properties of the physical world — how big or small or round or sharp objects are — predicts children's problem-solving abilities as they prepare to enter kindergarten (Paul, 2012).

Illiterate parents can also set expectations and make connections between current behavior and future goals (going to college, getting a good job) as their counterparts do. But the need to take note of the fact that engaging in these sorts of conversations, have a greater impact on educational accomplishment than volunteering at a child's school or going to PTA meetings, or even taking children to libraries and museums. When it comes to fostering students' success, it seems, it is not so much what parents do as what they say (Goodall, 2013). It is clear that some illiterate parents are smarter when it comes to conversations and storytelling. Thus, they have to make use of the tool of conversing and talking with their children about school issues.

Research findings however show a relationship between parent involvement and their children's self-concept as it relates to academic achievement. There are some conflicting ideas among researchers over the issue of direct relationship between self-concept and student achievement. Some researchers have established an indirect relationship between self-concept and students' school experience and goals. They posit that the more parents are involved, the lower was children's tendency to ascribe their academic failure to external causes. Thus, parental involvement has a positive effect on children's academic aptitudes and performance.

Several researchers have looked at the relationship between parents involvement and student academic achievement among pre-school children in vulnerable groups, such as low-income children. Research findings from students on these group indicate that parent involvement programs focusing on improving the home learning environment (through parent education, provision of materials, etc) increases children's motivation and self-efficacy (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). In addition, some researchers examined the effects of parent behavior on academic achievement particularly with regard to the effects of parental perception, aspiration, and expectation on children's academic achievement (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001).

Although these studies are informative, few have been conducted in communities characterized by abject poverty; high rate of illiteracy; lower levels of educational background; fragile economy; low level of technology; poor or lack of facilities like telephones; lack of educational mentors, or role models etc. According to Menheere and Hooge (2010) literature search on the topic of parental involvement of illiterate parents appeared to be limited. However, understanding the relationship between parent perception of education, participation, and student achievement in developing nations is as much of a challenge as it is in filling a gap in the research literature.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research papers reviewed depict that educationists and others continue to blame parents, especially those from low-income, illiterate and minority backgrounds, for the academic failures of children. Teachers complain that children are failing in schools because those parents never read to them. Underlying such comments is the assumption that poor, illiterate and minority parents do not care about supporting their children's academic progress. Many teachers tend to believe that parents in those communities neither value education highly nor provide their children with the intellectual and motivational prerequisites for learning in school (Ascher, 1988). This assumption is narrow and largely inaccurate. Parents, by and large, care very much about the educational needs of their children. These negative perceptions of parents and parent involvement persist because schools of education have not adequately educated teachers to understand parents and to network with them.

It is obvious that there is an abundance of research establishing the fact that parents' involvement in education of their children is highly desirable. However, parents and educators continue to struggle in their efforts to define exactly what that role should be. According to Dufour and Eaker (1998) the best model for the relationship between the school and parent is the model of business partnership, a relationship in which each party is expected to bring specific skills and expertise to the enterprise, to offer a different perspective on issues, to offer support of mutual goals. This would help develop, maintain and sustain a learning community. It would also bring in its trail a laudable improvement in children's academic achievement, and the improvement in the living conditions of everyone.

The study was based on efforts to seek for ideas about parents of predominantly illiterate communities; their perceptions and involvement toward their children's education. The literature reviewed showed that success in school among children of all family types is related to deliberate efforts on the part of parents to inculcate discipline and good study habits in their children. Thus, there is the need to educate parents on their role and prowess in the academic performance of their children. Though, education and socio-economic backgrounds of parents may influence children's academic performance they are not the ultimate determining factors for a child's academic success. Rather parents' commitment and deliberate effort toward their children's education are the important and paramount contributory factors that promote a child's success in school. In addition, they have the ability to break any form of intergenerational poverty cycle in a family, community and society.

No parent should be left behind. All should be encouraged to get involved in the success of their children's education.

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