

The Dynamics of Home-School Partnership and Young Learners' Performance: From the Lens of Kindergarten Teachers

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Abstract – This phenomenological study delves into the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers about home-school partnership and the young learners' performance. The study is anchored on Vygotsky's social learning theory and the zone of proximal development. The researchers conducted the study during the first semester of SY 2017-2018 with sixteen (16) kindergarten teacher participants coming from public and private schools in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines. They explained the research and its merits to the prospective participants and solicited their informed consent. Once granted, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. The data collected were analyzed using Colaizzi's approach. It generated the following themes: "Home-School partnership is fostered with the 5C's - Celebrations, Classroom Meetings, Conferences, Classroom Projects, Contributions"; Partnership is strengthened with the 3 R's: Rapport, Reaching Out, Recognition to Parents"; "Involved Parents beget confident, sociable, and active kids", "Less involved parents tend to have kids who are timid, withdrawn and perform less." The researchers recommend that a seminar/training on facilitating strong home-school partnership may be conducted for the teachers to be equipped with the needed knowledge, values and skills for this important noble task

Keywords - home-school partnership, parental engagement, kindergarten teachers, phenomenology, Colaizzi approach

INTRODUCTION

Children are a society's greatest asset; they are the future. Parents and schools, among others, share the societal responsibility to ensure that children have a warm, loving and safe environment in which to develop and achieve their full potential [1].

While parents will often be the most important influence on a child's early life, introducing them to a kindergarten environment provides them with a new perspective on the importance of education. As Mandela [2] puts it, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Moreover, researches confirmed that early childhood education has a tremendous impact on life outcomes. For when children are young, they are like 'learning sponges'. Every new experience, every word they learn, every behavior they adopt, is an investment in a more fruitful future [3].

Besides, early childhood education is about molding the holistic child, which will eventually form the basis of their lifelong journey. It helps build a strong foundation for a child's emotional, social, physical and mental

development [4]. Thus, an effective partnership between families and schools through authentic, respectful dialogue and collaboration is indeed essential for the children's good upbringing [5].

Home - school partnership aims to help create a positive atmosphere for parents and teachers to work together to improve the children's success. It refers to a wholesome relationship where activities done at home and school solidly support children's performance and learning [6].

Some studies on home-school partnership have been conducted focusing on the parents' and administrators' perspectives using quantitative research methods. Missing in the literature are researches using qualitative research methods, specifically the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers themselves- part of the significant people in the children's formative stage of development - about the dynamics of home-school partnership particularly in the Philippine context. Hence, to address this gap of knowledge which is deemed so relevant to children's effective development, the researchers wanted to conduct the study about kindergarten teachers' direct

experiences concerning home-school partnership which can serve as basis for some fine-tuning in educational policies to help create a positive environment that promotes a harmonious home-school partnership and children's development.

In addition, the findings of the study would be utilized to enhance the best practices done by parents and teachers in supporting children's progress. Hopefully, both parents and teachers would gain a better grasp of the unique and critical roles they specifically play in facilitating children's well-being and holistic development.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study is anchored on Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory and zone of proximal development (ZPD) which explains that the skills developed with the guidance and assistance [7] of a more knowledgeable adult *exceeds* what can be attained alone. Providing the appropriate assistance will give the learners a "boost" to achieve the task, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of home-school partnership and its impact on the young learners' performance based on the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following:

1. What are the highlights of the lived experiences of the kindergarten teachers concerning home-school partnership?
2. What kind of kids do highly engage parents usually have?
3. What kind of kids do less engage parents usually have?
4. What is the impact of home-school partnership on the young learners' development and academic performance?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The researchers used the phenomenological design for this study. They conducted the study in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines during the first semester, school year 2017-2018 with a population of thirty-nine (39) kindergarten teachers. The researchers used purposive sampling and had reached the saturation point with sixteen (16) kindergarten teachers - eight (8) Kindergarten teachers from public schools and another

eight (8) from private schools. The selection criteria for the participants are as follows: a) have to be graduates of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECE); b) with at least three (3) years of teaching experience to obtain a certain level of awareness about home-school partnership.

Table 1. Profile of the Kindergarten Teacher-Participants

Code	Age Range	Civil Status	Sex	Type of School	Years of Experience
P1	30-40	M	F	Public	8
P2	30-40	M	F	Public	5
P3	20-30	S	F	Public	5
P4	30-40	M	F	Public	5
P5	20-30	S	F	Public	3
P6	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P7	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P8	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P9	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P10	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P11	20-30	S	F	Public	3
P12	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P13	20-30	S	F	Public	3
P14	20-30	S	F	Private	3
P15	20-30	S	F	Public	3
P16	20-30	S	F	Private	3

The researchers conducted focus group discussions and face-to-face individual interviews in schools where the participants were working. The researchers explained to the prospective participants the rationale and the merits of the study, asking for their informed consent. Once granted, they started conducting the semi-structured interview. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researchers observed diligently the research ethics protocol. They asked the prospective participants' informed consent before conducting the interviews. Once granted, only then, did the interview or focus group discussion begin. The researchers likewise asked permission for the audio-taping of the conversation for greater accuracy of the data collection. The participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity that would be strictly followed. The interview questions were semi-structured questions. The participants were also asked to fill up a written form about their demographic data. The demographic data of the participants were stored separately from the transcripts of the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered, the following themes were extracted:

Theme 1: Fostering the home-school partnership through the 5C's: Celebrations, Classroom Meetings, Conferences, Classroom Projects, Contributions

Participants reported that parents' typical involvement takes on the forms of 5C's: *celebrations, classroom meetings, conferences, classroom projects, and contributions.*

A teacher participant narrated:

"When parents are encouraged to participate in the activities planned by the school, most of them would also do so. They usually attend to monthly celebrations like Nutrition Month, Buwan ng Wika, Science and Math Week, Reading Month and many more. They are also actively involved during family day celebrations." (P1)

Another participant added,

"Some parents do get involved during programs like Nutrition Month, Language Month, by providing their children with costumes or outfit for their presentations, dance numbers, or recital." (P7)

Many teachers noted that parents including guardians were generally responsive to children's programs at school. This was observed by how parents and guardians prepared for children's costumes or outfits during school celebrations. The children's costumes or outfits clearly manifested careful planning and preparation. This was shared by participant 13. She narrated:

"School celebrations and programs is one the annual events that we look forward to. These activities are really anticipated with pleasure by parents, guardians, teachers, including children. Everyone is in awe during these times because while children showcase their talents and skills; they also parade the costumes or outfits which do not only manifest beauty but parents' careful planning and preparation as well. On the teachers' side, these activities delight us because of the sheer evidence of parents' effort."

Another form of parent participation is through conferences to discuss children's performance and some related matters. The conferences are done by teachers individually or in small groups. Conferences in small groups are conducted for parents who share similar concerns. Conferences provide an avenue for relationship building, meaningful exchange of information and experiences. A participant highlighted the significance of setting the conference schedule with

the concerned parents instead of imposing a schedule that is only convenient to the teacher. Added to this is the value of reminding the parents of the agreed schedule too.

A participant noted,

"I understand that parents are working but that doesn't stop me from planning some conferences especially when needs arise. These face-to-face interactions are arranged purposely to discuss about children's performance and some issues concerning the children. I am glad because most parents have positive response when they are called for a conference. I think it helps a lot when you include them in setting the schedule instead of imposing the schedule to them. It's also helpful when they're constantly reminded about the set meeting or conference to ensure their attendance." (P5)

Moreover, teachers also mentioned that the relationship is facilitated through asking for parents' contributions. These contributions are not limited to the financial aspect but also on parents' voluntary services. Parents' voluntary services acknowledge the fact that they are unique. Hence, they vary in their skills set and abilities. Parents' diverse capacities can be maximized through putting them on use to meet various needs in the classroom and school. All these can be very beneficial to their children.

Participant 12 described,

"Sometimes, we conduct fund raising activities which are for classroom improvement and the parents really help and participate. They donate ceiling fans, brooms, dustpans, cabinets and food during celebrations at school. Other non-working parents contribute by volunteering their services through cleaning the classroom and repairing some classroom furniture."

The teachers suggested that although parents were involved at school in common ways as identified in this theme, the important thing that teachers need to bear in mind is that parents can't be equally involved in all school and classroom activities. It is for this reason that teachers have to be flexible and creative at the same time in order to help parents participate in their children's development in ways that they can possibly do.

Theme 2: Strengthening partnership through 3R's: Rapport, Reaching out and Recognition

Teachers realized that home-school partnership is all about strong partnership. It is strengthened by the **3Rs** (a) *establishing and maintaining good rapport*; (b) *reaching out to each other and constant communication*; (c) *giving recognition to parents, among others.*

Rapport

Many teachers affirmed that good rapport with the parents is the key to increase their involvement. Participant 3 described how she does it,

"I make sure that I am approachable and I ensure that parents feel welcomed when they visit the school."

Participant 2 spoke about sure success when there is synergy between parents and teachers' through good rapport. She narrated:

"I make sure to have good rapport with the parents from the very first day of school. I take advantage of the first homeroom Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meeting. I make them aware of the rules and other things they have to know as parents. Most importantly, I really tell them that parents and teachers are partners in their child's education. I do what I have to do at school and parents have to do their part at home. Of course, teachers can do great but it will be greater when there is parents' help. So, teachers should not hesitate to ask help from parents because we are not super humans. We cannot do everything and we definitely do not know everything about the child."

Furthermore, Participant 3 posited that

"Children's success is possible when both parents and teachers have a clear vision of how important parent-teacher partnership is."

Indeed, it is fundamental for teachers to act as facilitators in building the home-school team constituted by parents, teachers, and other school staff. This finding confirms the current literature on the significant role teachers have in the development of home-school relationships [8 10] & [9 11].

Reaching out to each other

The participants emphasized that both parents and teachers have to meet halfway by reaching out to one another as parents can't do it all, so teachers can't do it all either.

Participant 9 highlighted that

"Both teachers and parents need to reach out to each other because both play a significant role in the child's education."

Participant 15 pointed out,

"Parents must understand that they can't leave all aspects to the teachers only. They must reach out to the teacher in school, too. They must know what's the progress and performance of their children at school. Moreover, they need to know how they can help when it comes to parental guidance at home."

Participant 14 described how teachers can motivate parents to reach out,

"For parents to be motivated to reach out to us, we need to make parents feel that they are welcome and we are open to whatever concerns they have regarding their children, not only concerns about the negative aspects. Giving parents positive feedback about how they show support to their children is a great help. This way, parents won't build a barrier between them and the school. It's also important that we approach parents in a non-judgmental way. Teachers should strive to remain respectful of parents."

Participant 3 focused on the various ways that both teachers and parents can utilize in order to reach out to each other saying,

"It's given that parents are generally busy with their work. However, both teachers and parents need to reach out to one another. There are many ways of doing this. It could be a spontaneous personal interaction, phone calls, text messages or emails. There are just a lot of means to choose from."

Participant 6 noted that informing parents about the strengths of their children could be one way of motivating them,

"Telling parents more positive things about their children is one of the best ways to inspire parents."

This assertion was echoed by Participant 2 who said:

"Most parents know the concerns of their children and there are times that they seem not to know what to do especially when their children have some difficulties - academic, behavior, or social, etc. Thus, as teachers, we should not give any negative statement that will make parents more frustrated. We need to encourage them by telling them the strengths of their children and by assuring them as well that we are not giving up on their kids and for sure they're going to participate. They need to know that we are willing to push through with our partnership with them and that it's not just the teacher's job but theirs as well. They should be encouraged to reinforce (classroom) activities or lessons at home by serving as their children's facilitators."

Undoubtedly, the above theme confirms that teachers have a professional responsibility to mentor family-school relationship which leads to parental engagement and the fostering of successful students [10].

Besides, communication may be formal and informal, and take several forms. Most of the participants made use of written communication, such as letters or notes and communication notebooks. They considered it as the easiest ways of reaching out to parents especially

those who are working. These letters or notes sent to parents contained some reminders about school activities and some included information about their children's progress or behavior at school.

Because these letters or notes contain essential information, teachers made sure that parents received them. Participant 15, underscored the importance of follow up, saying,

"When I send letters to parents I always follow it up to ensure that they really have received and read the letters. Follow-up is important because there are instances that you've sent the letters already but parents have not read them at all."

Some teachers made use of their parent bulletin board outside their classroom. Participant 11 described it as follows:

"What I do is post letters in the bulletin board outside my classroom. Parents come to school to fetch the children so they can just read what is in the bulletin board located near the classroom's door..."

Several teachers also go for home visitation specifically for concerns that require immediate attention from parents. Participant 1 recalled,

"I do home visits especially for those who rarely involve themselves. By doing it, I am able to understand what's causing these parents not to participate with school or classroom activities. Home visits serve as a means of reaching out to parents and building a relationship with them. I observe that through home visits, parent participation has increased."

Speaking of face-to-face interactions, there are also teachers who took advantage of their vacant time by spontaneously talking to parents who wait for their children at school.

Participant 5 shared,

"When parents are at school, I always take this as opportunity to communicate with them personally. At times, some of the parents would have spontaneous conversation with me about their child. They would share about how the child applies what he or she has learned from school."

In addition, teachers also described their experiences of using technology to keep in touch with parents. Participant 7 stated,

"Some parents preferred to be texted or called especially during emergencies. So, I text or call those parents but I always make sure that I won't be disturbing them at all. A text message is fine when the matter doesn't need immediate attention from parents."

Another participant related,

"There are also parents who use messenger in raising their queries or concerns. And so, we both use messenger as a means of exchanging messages." (P9)

Participant 8 relayed that - *"Whenever there are classroom activities that are usually product or performance-based, I would take time to send some photos or videos of children to parents through messenger. Many parents appreciate this initiative because it serves as a form of feedback to parents and they can keep the photos and videos as remembrance as well."*

These findings are supported by some researches that explained the relevance of communication between home and school. Hindman and Morrison [5] underscored that the relationship between home and school may come in many forms and the key is in finding what will bring success to a chosen parental engagement program. Parental involvement can include various types of interactions including parents exchanging information among one another as well as parents and teachers exchanging information to strengthen parents' understanding of their role as advocate for their children's educational success [10].

Recognition to parents

The use of awards, tokens, and certificates were some ways done by the participants to express their appreciation for the efforts of the parents. This was succinctly expressed by Participant 6,

"I recognize active parents through giving awards, ribbons and certificates. Doing such makes the parents feel valued and appreciated for the efforts they have exerted for their children despite their busy schedules. I observed that it's very effective because recognizing parents' efforts makes parental involvement better."

These findings confirmed what McFarland-Piazza, Lord, Smith, & Downey [11] recommended to build a more successful home-school relationship. This is a result when both parties value the contribution of the other and collaborate for the success of the students.

Theme 3: Involved Parents Somehow Beget More Confident, Sociable, and Active Kids

Another theme that emerged from the participants' narratives was the experience that involved parents tend to have more confident, sociable, and active children. The teachers have experienced that parents with keen interest in their children's studies are likely to have children with good performance. Participant 5 remarked,

"I notice that usually active parents produce active children as well."

Many of the teachers maintained that children with involved parents displayed more positive behavior and have good performance across the various developmental domains. The teachers observed a connection between high parental involvement and higher academic achievement among children.

Participant 1 pointed out,

"Kids whose parents are involved are observed to be active in class participation and they have high scores in tests because they are closely monitored by their parents."

Participant 14 also shared that

"Most involved or supportive parents have kids who are very active in class and advanced in their learning. They also have better on-tasks behavior in the activities and tasks given to them."

Similarly, Participant 13 agreed,

"I have observed that the children of the parents who are more involved are fast learners and can easily understand instructions. Another thing is they are more independent in doing class activities like art works, because I can see that they can do most of it by themselves." [add]

The participants in the study agreed that children whose parents are actively involved in their children's education are those who are generally more academically competent. They exude better academic performance.

This is consistent with research findings indicating that academic performance is better when parents are involved in their children's education [12]. In addition, research has shown that students make significant academic gains as a result of parental involvement in schools [13]. Overall, a significant relationship exists between parental involvement and the academic success of students [12].

Aside from apparent better academic performance, teachers also suggested that high parental involvement helped in positive children's behavior. The research findings confirm what Deslandes [14] stressed that there is a link between home-school partnership and children's social interactions

Participant 1 described,

"Their children have better social skills with their classmates, including adults. They are confident in initiating conversation and even in responding to classmates or adults who interact with them."

This observation was affirmed by Participant 13, who mentioned,

"They are easy to deal with. They demonstrate behavior in proper turn-taking, sharing, and negotiating particularly in the use of toys during free play. As a result, they usually don't get into trouble with their playmates."

Parental involvement was observed to contribute to several positive outcomes, including but not limited to better academic achievement. Participant 8 also shared,

"As what I have observed, parents' involvement is related to their children's performance. Kids who are well-monitored by parents can be seen being more active, confident, smart and well-mannered. They exhibit positive attitude towards learning too."

Theme 4: Some Children with less Involved Parents Tend to be Timid and Withdrawn, Perform Low in Class and Misbehave

Parents' less involvement in school was viewed and experienced by teacher-participants to have a negative result to children. Participant 5 recounted,

"There are children with less involved parents who are withdrawn. They really have socialization challenges."

Participant 3 said that

"They lack self-confidence and are shy."

Moreover, Participant 10 confirmed,

"Most of the children are facing difficulties either in academics or behavior control."

Participant 14 said that it's challenging *"because the children are quite a lot to handle especially in their behavior. They are the ones who really need proximity and prompts in order to complete tasks."*

Participant 1 shared the same and remarked, *"Some kids with not so involved parents are not confident in terms of academics and are unable to finish given tasks."*

What's more, Participant 8 added,

"...they are behind in discussion because they are not guided to review their lessons or study in advance at home. These children also pass assignments late. Usually, they are less participative, very timid or always misbehave."

Participant 4 further shared,

"Sometimes, they are either withdrawn or are seeking attention through unnecessary behavior like tantrums. They also tend to get low in academics."

The negative results observed in children whose parents are less involved ranged from challenges in behavior, academic performance, and social-emotional skills. Based on the participants' narratives, it could be

hinted that behavioral problems may perhaps lead to academic problems as well. As Participant 6 suggested,

“Good academic performance will come if the children’s general behavior is in check.”

Indeed, the stories told by kindergarten teachers confirmed the current literatures attesting to the importance of strong home-school partnership as the foundation of children’s holistic development, the positive results of highly parental engagement and negative consequences of low parental involvement on their children’s performance and behavior [15]. Hence, parents’ guidance and assistance through their involvement and collaboration with the teachers are instrumental in improving children’s performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The essence of home-school partnership from the lens of the kindergarten teachers can be described as a partnership that is fostered by the big 5C’s: *Celebrations, Classroom Meetings, Conferences, Classroom Projects, Contributions*. This relationship can be strengthened with the 3R’s: Rapport with parents, Reaching out through formal and informal communications and Recognizing parents’ collaboration. Experience had shown that highly engaged parents somehow beget more confident, sociable, and active Kids; while most kids with less involved parents tend to be timid, withdrawn, perform low in class and misbehave.

Furthermore, the research findings support Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory and zone of proximal development (ZPD) which assert that guidance and assistance of more knowledgeable adults can help children boost their skills better as compared when they are left unaided.

The researchers recommend that training on facilitating strong home school partnership may be conducted to the teachers to equip them of the needed knowledge and skills for this task.

Based on the findings of this study, the following are hereby recommended: (1) School administrators may consider providing teachers with professional development programs and trainings in home-school partnership. Through these, teachers can learn how to reach out positively and get parents involved in their child’s education; (2) Future studies may be conducted exploring other factors that affect children’s performance like the media and information communication technology.

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