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Research Article

Parental Involvement or Interference? Rural Teachers' Perceptions

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This research explored rural state school teachers' perceptions concerning parental involvement in children's education in a developing country context. The data were collected through thematic interviews with teachers of public schools situated in the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. The study findings revealed teachers' frustration and disappointment regarding parental involvement. Teachers believed that susceptible socioeconomic circumstances and adherence to local customs hindered many parents from participating in their children's education. In line with this, teachers frequently held negative perceptions regarding children's parents, and these perceptions have the potential to adversely affect parent–teacher communion and children's learning. We offered several policy implications for enhancing parents' roles and teachers' competency in supporting parental involvement, which could also be practical in other developing countries sharing similar impediments, such as widespread illiteracy, poverty, and a lack of qualified teachers.

1. Introduction

Previous research has shown that children's educational interests are best served when parents and teachers cooperate [1–3]. Their joint efforts bring a variety of benefits to both home and school. For instance, well-functioning cooperation increases families' confidence, extends trust, builds a positive image of the school, and ultimately helps children's learning [4, 5]. However, in Pakistan, the idea of parental involvement is relatively unknown owing to parents' socioeconomic situations and the negligence of schools in motivating parents [6]. In many developing countries, there is no policy regarding parental involvement in child education [7, 8], and Pakistan is no exception. Likewise, lack of necessary school facilities and teacher's cynical attitude are putting parents off from being involved in children's education [9]. Studies acknowledge that unprofessional teachers are among the major reasons behind poor education [10, 11]. In Pakistan, teachers' professional development has not been given appropriate consideration [12]. Different factors are responsible for the lack of quality teachers, including political considerations in the posting of teacher trainers, lack of a school monitoring system, less emphasis on teaching practices [13], and inappropriate mechanisms to assess teachers' aptitude [14]. The teaching profession is typified with low competence and poor performance due to a lack of training, lack of motivation, old teaching methods (e.g., focus on memorization rather than pragmatism), and overcrowded classes [15]. Consequently, teachers are considered weak and passive in solving children's learning problems and engaging parental involvement [6, 10]. Studies acknowledge that parental involvement and cooperation, as well as communication between home and school, could contribute to children's learning [4, 16]. The cooperation benefits the school, family, and children. For instance, it enhances children's learning, gives parents access to children's education, and encourages classroom teachers [17]. However, when parents and teachers do not cooperate, they are stuck in a dilemma of distrust and build a wall of their own by saying "your child" or "my child" instead of "our

child" [18]. Research suggests that teacher's views are essential in understanding different parental involvement practices [19, 20]. Therefore, this study's rationale is to explore teachers' perceptions of parental involvement from the context of a rural developing country and to add new knowledge to the existing research body, which is mainly from the developed world.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teachers' Views on Parental Involvement. Teachers in different cultures hold different perceptions regarding home–school cooperation [21, 22]. Their perceptions play a vital role in encouraging or discouraging parents from being involved in their children's education [23, 24]. For instance, when teachers have a high regard for parents, they most likely encourage them to participate [2, 25]. However, teachers' unpleasant and uncaring attitudes discourage parents [10], which results in communication breakdown, and both start blaming each other, especially when the child seems passive in learning [26, 27]. According to [28], teachers' views about parents' involvement are closely linked to their professionalism. Professionally competent teachers are likely to show welcoming gestures [29]. However, those who are not prepared to correspond with parents fail to establish good relationships, affecting home–school communion [27]. In Pakistan, school teachers are not professionally well trained [10]. They perceive that parents play a limited role in children's education; thus, they are not treated as equal partners in the educational process of their children [6, 7].

2.2. Obstacles to Parental Involvement. Studies on parental involvement reveal variations in the level of involvement, and variations mainly depend upon the parents' ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds [30, 31]. In Pakistan, less involvement, which reduces children's learning progress, is attributed to barriers such as poverty and parents' low educational level [13]. Similarly, in rural Indonesia, parents with inadequate knowledge and limited material resources consider themselves unconcerned and less willing to be involved in children's schooling [3]. Moreover, in rural Pakistan, the poor quality of education in state schools (e.g., poor teaching and learning) often deters parents from sending their children to them. Nevertheless, educating children in private schools is beyond the means of low-income families, who can hardly manage their lives [32]. In Pakistan, neither do state schools take considerable steps to encourage children nor are parents motivated to do so [7, 33]. According to [34], some parents do not have time for involvement owing to challenging working conditions, while others do not feel at ease if they are uneducated [35]. Research suggests that education has long-term benefits for children [36] and short-term expenses for underprivileged parents [9]. Financially and academically privileged families tend to provide feasible support to their children [37]. However, in rural Pakistan, the socioeconomic situation is one of the major reasons; families cannot spare sufficient time and resources for children [38]. Research shows that teachers' role is crucial in promoting or preventing parental involvement. It can fail due to teachers' lack of competence and off-putting attitudes [10, 39]. Hence, the present study investigates rural school teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in children's education.

3. Methods

Qualitative research is an appropriate technique for studying individuals' experiences or viewpoints [40]. This qualitative study employed a thematic interview procedure to investigate teachers' perceptions of parental involvement. Teachers' views helped us understand different involvement practices in rural Pakistan.

3.1. Data Collection. The data collection was carried out through thematic interviews with state school teachers. Ten teachers were interviewed from six state schools situated in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. We intended to gather both genders' perceptions; thus, the participants included five male and five female teachers. All interviews with teachers were conducted on the school premises during their free or less busy hours. Schools were randomly selected in low-income and rural neighborhoods of KPK. State schools with coeducation are less common in rural Pakistan, and being a male researcher interviewing female teachers was not easy, especially given remote sites. Therefore, district education officers' and school principals' permission was acquired to access girls' schools and to interview female teachers. Likewise, to consider cultural sensitivity and make the environment more conducive, the interviewer brought his adult niece with him during the interviews with female teachers.

The participants were provided with a consent form and detailed information about the study. They were also assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. We have fulfilled the technical requirements necessary to demonstrate the use of ethical procedures in researching human participants. The research has been carried out following the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity and the Responsible Conduct of Research and Research Ethics at the University of Jyväskylä. Based on previous research studies [4, 20, 26], we developed interview guidelines. It included teachers' views of parental involvement, parental participation in the parent–teacher meeting (PTM) helping children do homework, and factors obstructing parental involvement. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The first author was fluent in the Urdu language and conducted all interviews. In addition, demographic information and field notes were taken during the interviews.

3.2. Data Analysis. Data-driven thematic analysis was used to analyze the data [41]. The recordings of all interviews were transcribed, and to check the transcripts' correctness, the interviews were listened to and read again. The first author transcribed the interviews, and personal transcription

Table 1: Themes, subthemes, and excerpts from participant's interviews.

Data excerpts	Subthemes	Themes
Children, who do not study at home, cannot participate well in classroom activities.	Children's absenteeism Incomplete homework Lack of contact with school	Teachers blaming parents
I had a very competent student.... Her father has not paid her vehicle fare...the driver does not pick her for school.	Poor nourishment Parental ignorance	Poverty and lack of parental education
Many parents feel that if someone follows their daughter, their family honour will be compromised.	Gender role Parental insecurity Social events	Parental interference caused by settled local practices
Parents do not value education and do not understand that education is children's right.	Teachers impolite attitude Parents' lack of trust	Teachers preconceived perceptions

helped to improve the reliability of the data. After becoming familiar with the data, initial codes were identified. All codes were organized and then categorized to identify subthemes and main themes. The excerpts used in the findings have been translated from Urdu into English. The data analysis enabled the construction of 4 main themes and 10 subthemes.

4. Findings

We explored how state school teachers perceived and experienced parental involvement in rural Pakistan. Interviewed teachers were aware that parental involvement could undoubtedly be of great help in children's education. For instance, Pola and Babli said "In my opinion, parents play a central role in children's education (Pola). Without parental involvement, children cannot proceed well in their learning process (Babli)." However, most teachers' account elucidate and uncovered that various factors, such as low parental education, unstable financial conditions, local customs, and teachers blaming parents, adversely affect parental involvement in children's education. In addition, female teachers were more aware of such parental interference and discriminatory roles in their daughters' education. Through the data analysis, four themes were established regarding teachers' perceptions of parental involvement: (a) teachers blaming parents, (b) poverty and lack of parental education, (c) parental interference caused by settled local practices, (d) teachers' preconceived perceptions (Table 1).

4.1. Teachers Blaming Parents. The interviewed teachers tended to criticize parents and held them responsible for children's absenteeism, incomplete homework, and lack of contact with the school. Teachers complained that parents were not fulfilling their responsibilities regarding children's education. They explained that parents' noninvolvement negatively influences children's education. For instance, most teachers pointed out that many children come to school from their homes, yet spend the whole day outside the school. In response, teachers sent notices to the children's parents but barely received any response. Teachers believed that parents' disinclination and indifferent behaviours indicate that they do not value their children's learning but rather consider it an option. The following interview quote explains the teachers' concerns.

"For many years, we are trying to maintain school discipline, but many children do not come to school on time. Children's parents do not cooperate with us. I would say that it is parents who are developing such habits in children (Kaka, M)."

According to teachers, children's homework is one of the areas where parents' cooperation and involvement are essential, given that parental support at home encourages children to learn. Nevertheless, teachers voiced their concerns that many children suffered in their learning process because neither did the parents visit their children's school nor help the children to do homework, which results in poor learning outcomes or school dropouts. They believed that most parents think they have played their part once they send their children to school. Teachers expressed parents' lack of participation in the following manner:

"Some parents do not even know the given homework. When we call parents, first they do not come, and if any of them comes, he says that the child sits at home with books in his hands. If he does not learn the lesson, then it is your responsibility (Nori, F)."

In addition, teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with parents who merely send their children to school. According to teachers, a vast majority of rural parents believe that they have fulfilled their obligation of educating their children by simply enrolling them in schools and the rest is up to the teachers. Interviewees believed that educating children was a mutual responsibility of both teachers and parents. However, they revealed that parents' absence from parent–teacher meetings (PTM) is a significant hurdle, as it hinders the discussion about students' conduct and learning progress. They expressed their discontent that when parents are called to visit school, they mostly respond that they are busy with chores. However, when children fail, parents say that the fault lies at the teachers' court, as they do not teach them properly. The following interview excerpt explains this problem.

"Many parents spare no time for their kids at all. Parents neither visit their children's schools nor help them in their studies at home. I would say, are parents to earn their livelihood only? Children are their parents' futures, and their parents are not as concerned as they should be (Pola, M)."

4.2. Poverty and Lack of Parental Education. The second theme is concerned with parents' low education levels and economic hardships, which make rural parents' involvement difficult. According to teachers, providing food and clothing for children is also considered a parental responsibility, and it is such a salient feature in rural Pakistan. Teachers explained that most of the children are not provided with a balanced diet by their parents, and they are often sent to school without breakfast, which results in poor listening and weak concentration in class during the lesson. One of the interviewees explained how poverty influences children's health and learning.

"I often found many children physically present in class but mentally absent. I sometimes tried to investigate why they are not attentive in class activities and found that most children come to school without breakfast (Raja, M)."

The teachers explained that education at public schools is free. However, the expenditures associated with children's school education, such as notebooks, writing equipment, school uniforms, and transport, are additional expenses putting more pressure on underprivileged parents in sending their children to school. Teachers also revealed that many parents induce their children to work when they are meant to be at school. This, in turn, has an adverse effect on children's interest in learning. Nori and Nomi explained the impact of parents' hardships.

"I had a very competent student, and suddenly, she stopped coming to school. After some days, I asked her fellows why she was not coming to school, but no one answered. I then asked her best friend, who was studying in the same school. She said Mam, she comes far from school, and her father has not paid her vehicle fare for the last six months, and now the driver does not pick her for school (Nori, F)."

Moreover, according to the teachers, most rural parents are less educated. Parental ignorance usually leaves children uninstructed and unguided, which results in poor academic performance. Teachers believe that illiterate or less informed parents show a careless attitude, and thus, brilliant students often get exploited and lose their passion for learning. The following excerpt explains the parents' unawareness about their children's education.

"A father came to school and asked for a short leave for his son. I asked him in which grade his son was enrolled. His father was not able to tell the grade in which his son was enrolled. Imagine how we expect his father to help him learn at home (Kaka, M)."

4.3. Parental Interference Caused by Settled Local Practices. The third theme of the teachers' talks dealt with settled local practices, which may sometimes be harmful to children's learning. Rural parents tend to obey local traditions, which could interfere in children's learning possibilities. For example, teachers said that most uneducated parents in rural areas perceive no sense in educating their daughters. Such parents' attitude is due to the prevailing local traditions, where parents often prioritize boys over girls. Most parents send their girls to state schools and boys to private schools because parents believe that a male child with a prosperous future is the family's asset. In addition, the teachers explained that parents often compel girls to get married at an early age. Those immature and uneducated girls/mothers cannot bring up their children in a way the teachers consider desirable. Thus, due to the young mother's inability, a chain of ignorance extends to future generations. Noori and Babli shared their experiences.

"I had a student in 9th grade. She said her mother wanted her to get married after 9th grade. She wanted me to talk to her mother to wait until she completed her 10th grade. I contacted her mother and asked her, but her mother said we could not get a better proposal, and after all, she could not bear the burden anymore (Babli, F)."

Teachers also talked about parents' worries regarding their children's safety. They explained that the school being far away from home was a reason many parents were not educating their daughters. Teachers explained that if a girl has to go to school on foot, she must be accompanied by a male family member who could also lose wages for that day. The participants believed that parents often educate their daughters up to the primary level. After that, they seldom send their daughters to school due to a lack of social trust and threats of harassment. Hence, many girls are deprived of the right to education in the name of "family reputation."

"Sometimes, family honour becomes a hurdle in the way of girls' education. Parents do not let their girls go to cities for further education. Many parents feel that if someone follows their daughter or she faces harassment, their family honour will be compromised (Sheelo, F)."

In addition, teachers explained that children's absence from school during community social events has both instant and long-term adverse effects on their education. They explained that convincing rural parents to ensure their children's school attendance was complicated during social events. Children remain absent without permission, especially during funeral observations and marriages, which ultimately diverts their attention from studies. Interviewees explained that school personnel sometimes fined them or struck them off the register for being absent without permission. Consequently, many parents withdraw their children from school.

"Children's attendance is one of the major problems. Sometimes children remain absent for many days without any notice. When they are asked about their absence, they often say we went to attend a marriage with our parents (Raja, M)."

4.4. Teachers' Preconceived Perceptions. The fourth theme addressed teachers' preconceived perceptions, indicating a negative attitude towards parental involvement in children's education. Teachers' views seemed to signal that they

undermine parents and consider them problematic and less than others in society owing to their various characteristics, such as illiteracy, poverty, and low social status. Teachers believed that rural parents do not appreciate teachers' work and role in their children's education. The following lines explain this dilemma.

"This is a side area (remote site), and people here are not qualified. Parents do not value education and do not understand that education is children's right. They send their children to school but do not sense that he/she will learn (Munni, F)."

Moreover, teachers brought to light parents' discontent over rural state schools. They explained that parents generally perceive that teachers are not well qualified and that school facilities are inadequate, which will impede their children's learning endeavours. The fact that state school teachers send their children to private schools justifies rural parents' concerns. Eventhough they understand the situation, many rural parents, due to poverty, send their children to state schools. Thus, a lack of trust in teachers and state schools discourages parents from being involved in their children's education.

"I know many state school teachers (colleagues) who are educating their children in a private school. Many poor parents feel bad about this situation because they cannot educate their children in private schools (Pola, M)."

The teachers expressed a worry that they bear the sole responsibility for children's learning. Parents do not perform their duties, and without parents' cooperation, teachers cannot adequately handle the issues in children's education. In the end, uninvolved or less involved parents hold teachers responsible for children's shortcomings, further damaging the home–school relationship. Accordingly, the teachers added that very few parents perceive children's education as a joint responsibility of home and school.

"Parents here (in rural areas) are not informed about the value of education. They think that the only responsibility they have is to send a child to school. What a child has learned at school is no concern of theirs. I think parents do not know their commitment at all (Raja, M)."

In addition, teachers highlighted that in a society where the rate of unemployed educated adults is high, it is difficult to see the value of education. They argued that many parents think that education will not make a difference in their children's lives. According to the teachers, parents anticipate that their son will also become a laborer like them. Thus, parents often give up the hope of receiving a reward from their children when they complete their education. This approach prevents parents from being involved in children's education. The following lines explain this concern.

"I must say that in our society, many educated and intellectual adults are unemployed. This is also one of the reasons parents are demotivated and do not look after their children's educational activities (Kaka, M)."

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study manifested teachers' frustration and disappointment regarding parental involvement in rural Pakistan against the issues impeding parent–teacher cooperation in children's education. Teachers sensed parents as either demotivated or reluctant, hence lacking interest in their children's learning. Teachers also alleged that rural parents' susceptible socioeconomic circumstances are adversely affecting parental involvement. Besides, teachers' indifferent attitudes towards poor parents resulted in their reluctance to consider parents equal partners in their children's learning. Hence, teachers were also found to be inactive and unresponsive in engaging children's parents, which widened the gap between home and school. The findings uncovered that teachers lacked trust in parents and perceived parents as not playing their essential role, affecting home–school cooperation and reducing children's attainments.

In line with what Lawson [42] argues, we believe that parental involvement cannot be solely explained in relation to teachers' or parents' willingness to be involved. The term parental involvement is too subjective to be objectified. It depends on society's socioeconomic structure because factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and teachers' professionalism determine any community's level of priority. Considering these circumstances, the present study contributes to a new dimension of understanding parental involvement in children's education. Teachers demonstrated some features that do not fall into the "definitions" of the term "parental involvement," "parental participation," or "parental engagement" [4, 16, 42]. According to teachers, the provision of food and clothes, sparing children from domestic chores, and letting them go to school should also be considered parental responsibilities. Teachers explained that it often becomes imperative for parents to provide bread and butter for children as a top priority. This unsound economic structure in rural KPK is perhaps one of the major barriers to parental involvement. While, in the advanced world, parental involvement means cooperating with teachers and participating in children's education at both school and home [16, 29]. Moreover, the findings revealed that in the case of girls' education, the involvement often turns to interference that disrupts girls' schooling. Interviewees explained that gender disparity exists in rural Pakistan, adversely affecting girls' education. The concept of gender inequality is widespread in many developing countries. Teachers revealed that even if parents send their daughters to school, they are not guided appropriately, and their education is interrupted, as they are married off in their teens. Hence in this context, letting the girls go to school, especially beyond the primary level, is considered a great step for parents regarding girls' schooling [44].

In addition to this context, teachers also seem reluctant and pensive regarding their coordination with parents. They often do less than their duty and obligation by not putting extra effort into making their students learn. They usually blame parents for not educating their children. Most of the teachers expect parents to be equally responsible for children's learning, neglecting the fact that most parents are both illiterate and poor. These parents hardly manage the bread and butter for the family and hence have neither the capacity to provide recourses nor the spare time for their

children's learning activities. Their substantial economic burden and illiteracy make it more difficult for these parents to play a considerable role in their children's education. Thus, parental poverty and illiteracy are the foremost reasons keeping millions of children out of schools and eventually coerce parents to assign their children laboring for family income. As a result, ambitious children with big dreams often cannot continue their education due to their parent's vulnerable socioeconomic circumstances [45]. Parental involvement, in other words, is significantly linked to the teachers because if teachers coordinate with parents, then parents would be able to participate in their children's learning [19, 25]. Thus, teachers should consider barriers concerning parental involvement and work extra by considering the children as their own [13, 46]. Such a cooperative push by teachers can motivate parents and guarantee productive learning outcomes for children.

5.1. Policy Implications. This study indicates challenges in home–school cooperation regarding children's education in rural Pakistan. To improve the situation and improve schooling outcomes, more rigorous policies and investments are recommended towards the quality of teachers, parents' awareness of their liability, and material support for the schooling of low-income families' children. The findings show that rural area teachers considered poor parents inferior to others in society and blamed them in various situations. The solution would be for the state to provide quality entry and in-service training facilities that help teachers gain competence in cooperation and communication with children's parents. Moreover, teachers need to be taught their ethical and moral responsibility towards the parents as equal partners in the learning process of children, and they should be offered administrative support, so that parents can channel their concerns [27]. The state should also provide essential financial support to low-income families because a hungry child without books, notebooks, and writing equipment cannot learn. A state subsidy can solve this issue. In a nutshell, teachers and parents need to be aware of following children's learning and be held equally responsible for the outcome.

5.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research. The study has a few limitations that have to be taken into account. The results of this small-scale qualitative study cannot be generalized due to the small sample size and the possibility that the teachers in this study were selected. Nevertheless, findings from a sample of 10 teachers from rural state schools raised some questions that need further studies in the future. The present study focused on teachers' views regarding socioeconomically disadvantaged parents in a rural area setting. To capture the broader picture, there is a need to find the perception of urban school teachers working with children from middle- and high-class families. Likewise, some study findings indicate that teachers blame both parents and children for lack of parental involvement and interest in education. Thus, one research focus would be solely to explore teachers' perceptions about the engagement of children of low socioeconomic classes in a classroom environment. In addition, this study pointed out that parental interference hinders children's education, especially in the case of girls, and creates problems for teachers in the classroom. Thus, to address this problem, research needs to be extended to broaden the understanding of rural families' perceptions of settled practices. Moreover, further research could investigate parents' perceptions of parental involvement in their children's education and how they view teachers' invitations to be involved. Last, due to the small sample size of this study, the research findings need to be tested through survey research.

Data Availability

The data of this study were conducted in Urdu language from school teachers in rural KPK, Pakistan, through semistructured interviews. The study participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, the data are transcribed in (Urdu) handwritten form, and the written text does not exist in the soft copy form. Therefore, the data are not publically available.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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